

UN-TAMED by Oma Holly.

CHAPTER ONE

{Men groan from out of the city, and the soul of the wounded crieth out : yet God layeth not folly to them.}

He had once hated the unbearable pain and rage that came from seeing her dead body every night. He had stayed up most nights for fear of sleeping and seeing Abigail's body on the floor with blood seeping out of a hole in her forehead. He had always woken up screaming her name. Over and over again, the nightmares were exactly the same. Some days, he would find himself driving as fast as he could to get to her on time, but the car would be running backwards, then he would see himself looking at her dead body, screaming her name, hoping his screams would take away the reality of her death. But now, he

was yearning for those days. Then, he could feel pains of loss, he could wake up with the feeling of his heart being sliced with a razor blade, he could feel the rage that pushed him to wipe out the existence of those involved, then he could still miss her.

Now the rage was gone, the pain was no longer there. What was left was a bottomless dark hole, it was as if the part of the heart which produced feelings had been sliced out and had been replaced with emptiness. There was nothing there, only a taste like a drug addict remained. That part of his heart that escaped the blade hungered to shed blood. There was a thrill that came with it, it was the only feeling he had. And somehow he craved for it, he was craving for that opportunity to feel something.

There was no point to existence if someone could not feel at all. The short thrill killing gave him was something he could not do without. The fear his victims exhibited before they died made him high. He had enjoyed watching Lord Nero beg for his life

before he sliced his throat. He had participated in the fight to prevent another Nigerian Civil war. He had felt again as he watched his opponents die. He had felt something as he sliced through a defector's throat. Then, the fight had ended and that was months ago.

After the feelings stopped, he had lived his life reading his mother's diary. He had lived his life with a sense of duty. He had sought out criminals on wanted list and killed them. But at the moment, he was not sure he would be able to differentiate the good from the bad if he was given a gun.

He had held in his taste but the beast in him was becoming too pronounced. He was losing himself. It took remembering so many short notes on his mother's diary to spare the life of a woman he had almost killed. He had followed the trail of a known criminal almost three days back and had discovered he

had a wife and two children. After killing the man, the wife who from her expression knew the husband was an armed robber rushed at him to pull off his hood. He had thrown her to the wall and held her throat with the intent of strangling her, he could hear the voices of their children begging him not to kill their mummy but he was enjoying the thrill of watching someone die. Suddenly, he had remembered many quotes from his mum's diary and had stopped.

That day was when he decided he was too far gone. There was no redemption for him and he would prefer going against his mother's belief than to kill an innocent person. He had made up his mind to end his life. All he needed to do was put a pistol on his head and pull the trigger. Maybe one day, a Circle member would have the boldness to visit with the hope of convincing him to come back, then his body would be discovered. He knew

it was an abomination to take one's life but somehow, God would have to understand his case. The Circle would never come for him except he killed an innocent. But he would rather be dead than let himself to get to that stage. He had been using the past two days to apologize to his mum. He was now ready to end his life's journey. He just had one more thing he wanted to do. He wanted to feel his mum's presence again. Somehow, when things got tough during missions, when he was still with The Circle, he had prepared a bush meat pepper soup, his mum's favorite meal, then he would turn some into the small native pot his mum had bought for him fourteen years ago, when he had just been accepted into Nigerian Defense Academy at Kaduna, after easily passing the zonal exercise in Benin. His mum had a lot of those native pots. According to her, soup tasted better when warmed with a native pot. Preparing and eating his mum's favorite soup, using his personal native pot had always made

him feel his mum was watching him like other times when she was still alive. They had always eaten in the same native pot all the time, from his childhood till he travelled to Kaduna.

He was going to use that to make his final appeal, he was going to prepare her favorite food and he would imagine his mum sitting down and laughing while he consumed almost everything, then he would beg her for forgiveness, he was going to go against her principles. He hoped his mum would understand that Abigail was a balm after he had lost her, but now that Abigail was gone, he could not find any reason to live.

Within an hour, the pepper soup was ready, it was not difficult to shoot down a squirrel running around the palm tree not too far from the back of his house. He set the food on the table he had always eaten with his mum, then later Abigail. He then placed his customized Ruger LCP pistol on the table. Since that was

going to be his last meal, he switched on the radio and tuned it to Delta Broadcasting Service. They were playing country music. He looked at his time, it was 11:15AM. That was the time they normally played country music every week days. 'I will always love you' by Dolly Parton was on play. It was as if the radio station knew what was happening to him. The song had all the speeches he wanted to give his mum and Abigail. He just ate and listened to the song and thought himself the one saying the lyrics. The song ended and just when he was about making his goodbye speech to his mum and Abigail, the next music started. He did not know the musician but the lyrics were too off. It was as if the singer was mocking him.

'Some broken hearts never mend, some memories never end, some tears will dry.....'

He did allow the next lyric as he suddenly felt rage he had not felt for long. Before he knew what he was doing, he had sent the native pot containing his last food flying towards the radio. It had already left his hand before he knew what he did. He watched in horror as the small pot crashed on the radio. It destroyed the radio and separated into two. He was on his feet almost immediately. He rushed towards the radio and for a long time he just stood watching the broken pot. That was the last gift he got from his mum. His mum had never lived to see him become a soldier. She had prayed and advised him to channel his gifted strength for good. That was after she had returned from prison for a sin he had committed. That had somehow sobered him and he had applied to join the Nigerian army. His mum had shed tears of joy the day he travelled to Kaduna.

“Take this, use it to cook pepper soup anytime you miss me. Just know I’m eating it also like we use to do” his mum had said giving him the native pot a day before he travelled.

How was he supposed to know that his mum was seriously sick? She did not even wait for him to come back and show her that her son had fulfilled her desires. Now he was staring at the broken remains of her last gift. He bent down to pick up the broken pot but something caught his attention. There was something that looked like a steel wire dangling out of the edge of one of the broken parts. He tried pulling it out but it was too strong. He became inquisitive. He hit the broken part on the floor and watched as the pot disintegrated. The steel wire was now very visible but it was not put there by accident. The steel wire was bent and sealed together to form a word. ‘HELP’

It might have been difficult for someone to create such word, fire would have been involved. He studied the steel wire, it must be galvanized steel wire for it to have lasted so long without disintegrating. He wondered if the person was playing a game, but then he shook his head. This was no game. Then why would someone go through the pain of heating wires together with heat of about 2,750 degree F when making a native pot just needed about 1,400 degree F? Because from the way the steel wire was sealed together, the person must have heated it almost to a melting point. He knew this because he and Wild, his former partner during his time with The Circle, had done things a sane person would not be able to conceive. There was no doubt the person who put it there made the pot, but why?

He carried the steel wire and placed it on the dining table. He tried remembering the day his mum had bought three small

native pots a day before he travelled. She had travelled to Ologbo a community not far from Benin to purchase palm kernels in large quantities. She usually distributed it in wholesale to retailers who sold in the market. She had said that was the last set the company was producing.

“They had put it on display and the seller was shouting that the chief was selling out the last set because the Chief is going to be focusing on his other business. I had to stop the pick-up and I could only hustle three out. People were rushing and pushing to buy. I almost got injured” his mum had said.

“But mum you could have ignored them now. You can get clay pots somewhere else. I don’t like the idea that you were almost injured” he had responded.

“Obinna you don’t know about the famous Ologbo chief and his wife who made clay pots? He is the best, his clay pots are durable. I heard he has a boy with gifted hands.”

“I still do not like the idea of you getting injured.”

“I was going to buy a native pot for you any way. Here, take this one.”

“Mum like seriously?”

“What is wrong?”

“You want me to carry a native clay pot to military training?”

“What is wrong with that? You can use it to warm your food before eating, it adds...”

“A special taste to it. I know that, but people would find me funny. And I don’t think they will allow it.”

His mum had still ended up convincing him to take it with him. He never used it until her death. What was now clear was where the clay pot came from. Ologbo was a very small community with fishing and farming as their means of livelihood. It took about two hours to get there from Asaba. He had followed his mum a couple of times to help load bunches of palm kernels on the pick-up van she normally hired.

His interest was already piqued and there was no harm in going to find out if that boy was still around. The message with the steel wire had a kind of pull he could not resist. It would not be hard, he just needed to ask around. Villagers always knew something about one another.

Within thirty minutes, he had cleaned up the mess from the native pot and was already on his pick-up van, on his way to Ologbo.

CHAPTER TWO

*[Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went
through fire and through water]*

The drive to Ologbo was supposed to take about two hours but he made it in about one hour thirty minutes. The time was 1:26PM. The palm plantation was almost at the outskirts of the town which was closer to Benin City than Sapele. He parked his pickup van close to a provision store and looked around before coming out of the Pickup. There was no time to waste. If the native pot company was popular fourteen years ago, then someone above thirty would know much about the owner, then Ologbo was not developed the way it was at that moment. The provision store owner was looking old enough. He pulled off his

hood and sunshade glasses. He tried not to look menacing as he approached the store owner. He asked for a plastic coke bottle and sat down at the only empty plastic chairs. The other two were occupied by two men who were drinking a bottle of Chelsea alcoholic drink. One of them was about lightening a cigarette when he sat down with his bottle of coke. He looked at him but turned the other way after their eyes met. He was afraid of him which was good. The other also stared at him but did not immediately turn the other way. He was looking at him inquisitively. If he were to interpret the second man's expression, he was worried he was bringing trouble to a peaceful community. It was true the community was not that large and those that have been living there from birth would be able to identify a new comer but there was also the fact that there was an NNPC power plant which has attracted foreign workers. But he understood the second man's worry. Even an uneducated man would know the

possibility of him being one of NNPC worker was zero. He was still on his black jacket although not wearing the hood. He was wearing a black jean trousers and a black T-shirt with a picture of a human skull covering almost all the front of the T-shirt.

There was also his size. The store owner had entered the store after giving him the plastic coke. It was clear the woman was afraid of him, if his size was not scary, his voice was. He had already gotten used to people feeling intimidated by him.

Abigail was never afraid of him. The thought of Abigail made his left hand to automatically rob his chest, not that he felt any pain, he just felt empty, like something in his chest needed to be filled up.

No one spoke as each concentrated on what they were drinking. The one with the cigarette must have forgotten he wanted to light it after looking at him.

“You are new here” the second man stated after emptying the small Chelsea bottle.

He nodded and at the same time, he changed his mind about disturbing the elderly lady. The two men opposite him were looking old enough.

“Do you have any idea if the native pot company from years ago have resumed production?” he asked trying his best to make his voice a bit friendly.

“Oh you mean honorable Esigie’s former business?” the first man stammered.

“Honorable?”

“You don’t know? He won last year’s Oredo House of Representative election after serving as Edo State House of

Assembly member for eight years. He is the pride of our town”

The first man continued.

The second man used his right leg to push the left leg of the first man.

“But why are you asking. He stopped making native pots fourteen years ago? That is a long time” the second man said.

There were so many things he had learnt from Wild but the most important was telling the truth. People most times would believe a stranger was lying or keeping something, so even when the truth was being spoken, they sometimes took it as a lie. There was another reason he wanted to be straight forward but he hoped it would not be needed.

“My mum told me about a gifted boy who used to make some of the pots. I really want to find him, I need his help” he said studying their expressions.

“You want to start a native pot company?” It was the woman who asked.

“Not really, I need him to fix a pot my late mum gave to me, it is the only gift I have from her.”

“No one ever saw him, we just heard about him. But Chief’s house is not far from here. You can go and ask, he visits once in a while and there are people taking care of the house. Doh. Sorry for your mum” the woman said.

He listened to the woman, and only spared a few glances her way, he was more focused on the two men opposite him, especially the second man. He was shaking his head at the woman when she was speaking. But the woman had ignored him. The emotional blackmail worked on the woman and he had somewhere to go to. But that meant he would need to ask around. But there was another way.

“What do you say about showing me the house?” he asked the first man.

“Oh but it’s not far...” he stammered but stopped midway when he waved a thousand naira at him.

“Okay” he answered ignoring the furious kicks from his partner.

He stood up and gave the woman a thousand naira note.

“I don’t have eight hundred and fifty naira, don’t you have two hundred naira so I can give you fifty naira?” she asked with expectancy visible on her face.

“Keep the change ma” he said already leaving.

“God bless you my son. Good son” the woman shouted after him.

As he entered the driver’s seat, he checked to see if the first man was coming but saw an interesting scene being displayed

by the second man. He could not hear what he was saying but part of The Circle training was the study of non-verbal communication. The course was added after Jason, an autistic soldier joined The Circle, in fact, so many things had been changed since Jason entered. That was because Jason's conviction on anything was never based on pride or personal opinion, it was based on what was right, logical, probable and what made sense, and arguing about right and wrong with someone with autism was a complete waste of time. Instead of losing someone like Jason, Major Ahmed their overall leader had allowed and disallowed some things. The second man was showing his displeasure at the first man. He was angry and he wanted the man to give him back his money and ignore him. It was obvious the man thought he was lying, that he had ulterior motives. He could be an assassin and the two of them had sold their conscious for a thousand naira. He waited to see if the first

man would listen to him. He came to the passenger seat, opened it and sat down.

“Sorry, my friend is just worried about Chief. He doesn’t trust you” he said closing the door.

He nodded and ignited the pickup. It was not far just as the woman had pointed out. It took just four minutes to get to the compound. It was fenced and very large. The only thing one could see inside the compound were tall masquerade trees. The gate was black and also tall.

“This is the Chief’s house. Thanks for the money” the man said coming down from the car.

He started running immediately his foot touched the ground.

That was sending the wrong signal because it was either he was afraid of him or afraid of the house.

He parked at the front of the gate and blew his horn twice before coming down. He did not have to knock because his horn had brought someone to the gate. He was wearing a security uniform but not the army nor police. It was the normal security blue shirt and black trousers. He had a rifle which he hanged on his shoulders and he was smoking a cigarette which was half gone.

“Yes?” The man asked blowing the smoke towards him before raising his head to see who was standing by the gate.

He jolted when their eyes collided but he quickly regained his composure. He must have opened the gate after just seeing the old pickup van from the peephole.

“Yes?” he asked again adding more depth to his voice to make him sound scary.

“I came to inquire about the famous boy who used to make native pot for Chief.” He went straight to the point.

He should be in his early twenties and wouldn't have knowledge of events of fourteen years ago. He only wanted to see the man's reaction. And he got exactly what he was looking for.

“What? Are you drunk? Who told you the boy would still be around after all this years? Young man I think you must have missed your way.”

“No. I don't think so and the person who told me he is still around is not necessary. I just want to ask him few questions” he responded and watched the shock on the man's face.

“How dare.... I better don't find the informant out because he is.....” He stopped to look at him.

“Anyway you can’t see him without Chief’s permission and Chief will never permit it. No one is permitted to see him. We are done here. You can go.”

It was absolutely absurd that the boy was still around. Although the man just confirmed it, it did not make sense. Fourteen years was a long time. He could not fathom why the boy would still be around except there was something he had not yet understood.

“Wait” he called to the man who was almost closing the gate.

“Can I ask one more question?”

“What?” the man asked blowing another smoke towards him, testing his patient and testing the beast in him.

“Why can’t I see him without Chief’s permission?”

“Because that is the instruction, no one can see him.”

“Wrong answer.”

“What?”

“Ask him, he is a man, he should be able to decide who sees him or not even if he is Chief’s son.”

“Are you now telling me how to carry out my duties? This is my last warning. Leave” the man said almost closing the gate.

He held the man’s hand and before the man could protest, he pushed the man into the compound. It was not that he was not expecting more security guards like two more but he was surprised to see more than ten armed men, some sitting down, some standing at different positions.

“Osas wetin dey happen?” one of them asked cocking his gun and pointing it at him. The others did the same.

“This man say he won meet Chief boy” Osas said pulling out his rifle from his shoulder and struggling to cock it.

“Mr man, you have ten seconds to vamoose before I blow your head. Nor come back again. Chief nor dey allow anybody see him boy. Nor come again” the man said with a Hausa accent.

He looked at the man and the man’s hand. He was serious about blowing his head off and that was piquing his interest. The guns being pointed at him was waking up the killing beast in him and he was getting excited. But his confusion was the only thing keeping his excitement at bay. Why would a group of armed men want to shoot him for inquiring about a boy from fourteen years ago? He looked at the men pointing guns at him, many were amateurs only about two knew how to handle guns. There were two buildings in the compound, one was a duplex, the other was the boy’s quarter. The houses were opposite each other. The duplex was by his right while the boy’s quarter was by his left. There was a car park directly opposite him, many

cars were covered except a black Hilux. The security men all had their back on the boy's quarter, some were glancing towards it as they pointed their guns at him. He now knew where the boy was.

“You have four seconds more to leave here alive” the Hausa man said.

He was actually not interested before, he just wanted to find out what prompted someone to carve ‘HELP’ with a steel wire, but now he had just confirmed the boy was not playing, the message meant the way it was written. Someone carved that word because he actually needed help and what disturbed him most was that even after fourteen years, this person still needed help. But the most confusing thing was what kind of help? If he was held captive, why would he still be kept alive? He was no longer

needed but somehow he was still kept alive. Something was definitely wrong.

“I’m going, but I will be back” he said leaving.

As he entered his pickup and started his journey back to Asaba, he just knew one thing, if this boy was really being held captive, enough to kill someone making an inquiry, they would definitely take the bait he had just thrown. They will definitely come after him and it wouldn’t be him who gave the first punch.

CHAPTER THREE

{Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble.}

It did not take long before he saw the effect of his threat. He had just left Ologbo and was about entering Benin when he saw the Hilux with the same registration number he had seen when he had forcefully entered the compound. They must have called Chief and had gotten the go ahead, now it was very clear something was definitely wrong. In another few minutes, he allowed the Hilux to close up the gap, and from the review mirror, he saw one of them cocking his gun, he ignored him and waited for them to fire the first shot. He had not prepared any weapon because he had no idea looking for the boy would put his life in danger. But a soldier must be always ready to defend

himself anytime. That was one rule of The Circle. Even though he had left The Circle more than a year ago, he was already used to all their habits. His white pickup van had been same pickup his mum had hired to load the palm fruits she had always purchased. He had bought it from the owner few years after his mum's death. Everything was okay with it except what he called the shell. He left the outside to still look same way it was when his mother had used it but also, it was a form of deception, most people only gave a glance to his pickup van but what they didn't know was he had done a lot of work on it and with the help of George, he was able to build and install some weapons in the pickup van. It was not difficult because he had studied mechanical engineering. George was one of The Circle fallen soldiers, he was killed by a defector who was one of their own during the fight to stop another civil war. Jason had helped install upgraded computers and software he could use to operate

his hidden weapons. He was not planning to fight the people tailing him. He had hunted men soldiers dreaded fighting and these men were a complete joke. Although he would have really welcomed a fight because it gave him more excitement, there was no time to waste. He was going to make do with just killing them. He needed to get to Asaba as fast as possible. The first shot he had been waiting for hit the windscreen of the back of his pickup van and fell off. It had already been replaced with a bullet proof windscreen.

He opened up the weapons hidden under the trunk of the pickup using the small computer installed where the radio was supposed to be. As more bullets were released on him, he opened up his mini tracking point and with the system, he released loads of bullets at the driver of the Hilux. ‘Cut off the head and the body is useless’ was his favorite quote. The Hilux

crashed into a ditch few seconds later. Other vehicles started reversing to Benin. He bent down and brought out two Ruger pistols from under the driver's seat. Then one by one, he shot those struggling to come out after surviving the crash. He was not counting, he just shot at anything still breathing firing with both hands. As he was about to shoot the last one, he stopped. That was the Hausa man who gave him ultimatum, he could actually get something from him. He opened the back door of the passenger's seat and dragged him out. He raised his head to observe his environment. There were no vehicles, none was going towards Ologbo and none was going towards Benin.

“Please nor kill me, I beg” the man pleaded.

He had a tear at his right arm and he was losing blood. He did not have to kill him because he was going to die except he got help.

“Let’s make a deal, I will let you live if you answer my questions.”

“Ask anything, I swear I go answer.”

He was hysterical and was not aware he wouldn’t be the death of him but his bleeding arm, but his fear had clouded the pain he was supposed to be feeling.

“Deal. Is there a man being held captive by Chief?”

The man nodded.

“Do you know why?”

“No”

“What about rumors?”

“Wetin I mean?”

“What do you think is the reason the man is being held captive?”

“I swear I nor know.”

“What have you heard people say?”

The man opened his mouth but closed it. There was definitely something. He pushed his personalized Ruger pistol on the man’s forehead.

“Okay I go tell you. Some people say I fit be Chief son but I nor well and Chief dey hide am make people nor know say I get mad son.”

His pidgin was quite different from the normal Nigerian pidgin. He could understand him because he had carried out a mission with Ghost, a Circle member who was Hausa and who most times was paired with another Circle member whenever a mission concerned Hausas and Fulanis. The interior region had many villagers who could not utter any English word and when they met some who could speak Pidgin English, they had always

addressed anyone they were talking about as themselves and Ghost had helped him out. This one was easier to understand because he did not personalize every word. He was speaking out of fear.

“And?” he asked knowing the second opinion would be the information he needed.

“Some say Chief na man wen dey sleep with man. Them say Chief capture am keep for there.”

“What!”

“I swear nor be me talk am na hear I hear. Na somebody when work for there, when hand over him job to me na him tell me say I fit be dey sleep with am because of the way Chief dey behave anytime I enter go see am and anytime I come out, I too don see the way I dey behave, I nor resemble who go see him son” the man said in a rush.

He was on his pickup in less than ten seconds and was at Asaba within an hour. He drove as fast as he could. He had left the Hausa man to fate. He started gathering his weapons as soon as he entered his house. He could not explain what he was feeling, he had not felt for long and the emotions he was having was confusing but it felt like anger. As he packed his weapons, he tried running through the information he had gotten. The boy was definitely not crazy. No insane person would carve that word with a steel wire. Then could it be true that Chief was gay and not just that, but one with a twisted mind? There was always a truth in every rumor and if the second rumor was true, then that boy had been abused for more than fourteen years. He needed to hurry.

There were few things he was already sure of. First, Chief was going to increase security, and second, he would try to

move the boy because the people he had sent to kill him had not come back, and by now, news of the people he had killed must have spread to Ologbo and to Chief. If Chief increased security while thinking of a way to move the boy, it meant he needed help. If it was just an extermination mission, he would go himself but this was a rescue mission and there was no way he could handle it on his own.

He had left the The Circle after Abigail's death and had threatened to shoot the next Circle member who would dare visit him again to convince him to come back, but Jason had been bold. First, he had asked for his help in delivering a document to stop another civil war. Then later, Jason had visited to invite him to his wedding. He had also come with a huge bag full of weapons as a gift for saving his Cindy who was now his wife. He did not attend the wedding neither did he check what was in

the bag. Wild had also tried convincing him after the war was over, that was before he went back to Asaba. He had made him know although his name was no longer in The Circle classified file, he was still a member because Major Ahmed had not officially accepted his resignation and that explained while he was still being paid. Right now, he needed their help. He looked for his Circle android phone and switched it on. The other members' phone were recently hacked except his own but they now had new ones and The Circle was now totally independent of The Special Force. It was no longer a sub-unit. He got to know through Jason. This was because the defectors who had worked with the enemy were Special Force soldiers. The Circle were a team of Special Force soldiers known as the best of the best. They were very few in number because the criteria for becoming a member were very difficult. First, the Special Force soldier must be able to beat up to thirteen soldiers in face to face

combat, then must be able to beat up to six U.S marines also in face to face combat. Then he or she must have ninety percent and above score in any training, then they were made to perfect what they were naturally good at. Most importantly, they must pass the character test. Many Special Force soldiers failed in the character test even after passing all the other criteria. So they were not accepted by Wild, the Circle team leader. Some of them had shown their anger by defecting during the fight to stop another civil war. He remembered his face to face combat with U.S marines. He was among the first ever Circle team. One had told him that size didn't matter and he found it ridiculous that he was told to fight a Nigerian soldier with five others. But the soldier had forgotten that five among the best U.S marines were black men and some of the best boxers in the world were also black men. He had believed they had the upper hand because of their training. Unfortunately for the six marines he had to fight,

he was marking his mum's death anniversary that day. He had beaten the number to ten and was later offered a chance to become a U.S citizen.

Immediately the phone powered up, he saw many texts from Wild. He had messaged him with his new line.

‘The Circle will never give up on you’ Wild

‘I won't give up on you Tamed’ Wild

‘If you need me for any crazy activity, I'm available’ Wild

‘Why are you taking all our show, that's not fair’ Ghost

‘You know you are a good man’ Major

‘Gosh I still need to learn more about cars from you’ Fast

‘Contact me if you need help on the weapons I sent’ Jason

He stopped reading. He switched on the internet, logged in into their Chat app, 'CIRCLE.' Jason had installed it the day he visited with his wedding card and weapons. He had to switch on his android phone to talk with Jason. That was how Jason wanted to communicate that day. You never know with Jason. Some days he could mutter a few words, some days he used sign language while on other days he insisted on using chats. He had gotten to know about the new change in The Circle that day. The app demanded for his finger print and a code known only to the Circle as username. He just had to spell the Circle backwards with his code name following it after a space. He was in after two seconds.

'I need help' he wrote and waited for a response which he got almost immediately.

'What can the Circle do for you?' Wild replied.

‘Like seriously? Is this Tamed or have we been hacked again?

Jason say something?’ Ghost wrote.

‘Except someone killed him and used his finger print after forcing him to say the code’ Jason wrote.

‘What do you need?’ Finally Major answered.

‘A backup. I’m going on a rescue mission.’

‘You’ve never asked for backup with all the fun you took from us’ Doc wrote.

‘You know backup means making it official and we can’t make it official except mission has been cleared’ Wild wrote.

‘I don’t have time. I need an unofficial back up. You need to trust me that the mission is legit.’

‘Tamed what the heck did you get yourself involved in?’ Mark wrote.

‘Okay brief us’ Major wrote

One thing with Circle was truth. It was a code they valued more than any rule. He did not keep anything out, he told them about all the events that led to that particular moment. They all knew him and his native pot so he did not need to explain the story of his mother and the native pot.

‘Now I’m operating with time. If I don’t get to that boy, either Chief will kill him or he will transfer him. I need to carry out this final mission before I join Abigail’ he wrote his last explanation.

‘Let’s talk about your suicide later. What do you guys think? It’s the mission valid. Remember we are dealing with house of rep member here. And Jason is it same Chief?’ Major Ahmed wrote.

‘Definitely’ Jason responded.

‘What do you mean?’ he asked.

‘I have been on the trail of some arms dealers whose network spread to both Delta and Edo state. The second leader’s trail is always leading me back to a certain Chief Esigie who is now House of Rep Member’ Jason answered.

‘Then there is no need for approval. Since the mission had already been approved’ Fast wrote.

‘We have not been approved to exterminate and neutralize’ Doc wrote.

‘There is no time to get approval, we can never be caught. We can state it as emergency after the operation just like the last time we stopped the war. The President is still happy with what happened’ Wild wrote.

‘We may face soldiers since the man is house of rep’ Mark wrote.

‘No, he has personal guards guarding the house and we all know the reason.’

‘Major your call’ Wild wrote.

‘I will get approval while you guys can be on the move. It’s a hostage situation and the president don’t need to know who is involved. It’s going to be an undercover rescue because Chief will not officially report the truth. So we must be unknown but there is a condition Tamed’ Major wrote

‘I will come back.’

‘What a wrong math Major, he is on the verge of suicide and he won’t come back’ Jason wrote.

‘Then let him die a Circle member’ Wild wrote.

‘Wild?’ Major wrote.

‘Apart from Jason in Benin, Doc and Mark in Lagos, we are in Abuja. Ghost is already on a mission. So Jason is closest to you and he will be your back-up. Wild you are now officially Jason’s partner on the arms dealer case. My guess is Chief will report it as attempted kidnapping or robbery. Jason pick up the rescue Van at the underground house. Tamed will meet up with you there. Jason look up everything about Honorable Esegie. Let’s know him more’ Wild wrote.

‘There is another issue. Tamed has been declared wanted. I was going to report it in our 11: pm meeting’ Jason wrote.

‘Explain’ he wrote.

‘Three days ago, you killed an armed robber linked up with Ojogolo, the arms dealers I’m trailing. Your identity had been described for the first time’ Jason wrote.

‘Tamed did you spare someone?’ Major wrote.

‘No. She is the wife of the armed robber. Although she was aware of her husband activities, it was not enough for extermination according to the rules she is still an innocent’ he wrote.

‘If these dealers are intelligent enough, you will be their number one suspect after killing Chief’s men. From your story, that second man would be able to give a description of you which will fit with the woman’s description even though you were not on hood and glasses’ Jason wrote

‘I’m not going to ask how you knew about the activities of three days ago but I will need update of everything you’ve done and discovered’ he wrote.

‘Roger that’ Jason wrote.

‘So right now, there is a possibility that Chief Esigie is an arms dealer. Keep that in mind. Mark will be in the control room. You and Jason will be carrying out an open mission. Wild you have to be careful. Do you copy?’

‘Copy. I need to move now because we need to do a survey’ he wrote.

‘Do that and send us the numbers or expected numbers’ Major wrote

‘Jason?’ Wild wrote.

‘I will be there waiting for Tamed’ Jason replied.

‘Wait, what of the aftermath of the rescue mission? The boy must stay hidden until mission is complete’ Doc wrote.

‘I have a plan?’ Wild wrote.

‘I’m off’ he wrote

He left the chat room immediately but left his phone on. Jason had said he was declared wanted by the arms dealers and it was making him excited. He was feeling the thrill and he struggled to curtail the beast in him. One thing that he had discovered that was common among the Circle team was they liked going on the offensive. They didn't wait for someone, they would rather go after their targets. He would never allow himself to be hunted, he was the predator and not the prey. He would hold his beast down until the rescue mission was over. Then he would hunt down the Ojogolos one by one. He would join Abigail after that.

He searched his Circle bag and brought out his hand band. He switched it on. They could now track his location. He carried everything he needed to the passenger seat of his pickup van, including the bag Jason brought. Few minutes later, he was on his way to Benin to meet up with Jason.

CHAPTER FOUR

{For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me}

There was still light coming from the tiny window which was close to the roof of the room. Chief would come very soon. She had a chalk which she always used to mark the day Chief would come. Day meant light coming from the tiny window, night meant darkness and once darkness came, she drew a small vertical line on the wall, the seventh line meant Chief was coming. Every day, food was brought in when the light from the window started disappearing but on the days of Chief's visits,

food came along with darkness and darkness came along with Chief. That was the only time she saw light when light was no longer coming out from the tiny window. Her eyes left where she had left the seventh mark and travelled towards another mark close to the wardrobe. She had not drawn with chalk because Chief would see it and she would be punished. She only used the spoons she was served with to scrap a tiny mark to indicate how long she had been in the room and to know what year it was. It was long she stopped because somehow she had told Chief. She had to, because even if she didn't, Chief would have known and he would have punished her more. She only suffered few chalk marks without food and few lashes on her back and that was the only light punishment she had ever received for misbehaving.

As she stared at the tiny marks, she wondered how long it must have been after she had stopped marking. She remembered she had told Chief her secret four years after being locked up in the room. That was when she finally loved Chief. That was after she did not receive food for seven markings. She was also whipped twenty times on her back. She remembered it was because of her failed attempt to escape. No guard was allowed to see her. There was a locker outside connected to the room where her food was always placed, she was supposed to take the food after the guard had closed the locker, but she had shown her face to the guard and pleaded for help, she could not take the pain of feeling Chief all over her body, that was after he had whipped her buttocks. The guard had nodded and told her he was going to help rescue her. That night, the door was opened and she had followed the guard outside. The guard had told her to follow him inside the other big house because there was an escape route but he had

actually walked her to Chief. She should have known something was off because there were no other guards outside.

She had watched in horror as Chief burst into laughter. Chief gave the guard a large sum of money and thanked him for telling him her plan. But before the guard could get to the door, he was shot on the head.

Chief had dragged her back to the room and had whipped all over her body till she had collapsed. The pain was too unbearable but Chief did not stop, he had tied her hands to a rope which was hanging from two nails on the wall. Her hands were up and her clothes were pulled off and Chief had whipped her twenty strokes on her back. He had refused her food until after seven markings. She had wished for death but it did not come. Chief had told her that there was no way of escape and she must never trust anyone but him. He was the only one she

could trust. And as time flew by, she had discovered Chief was right, he had always given her food even if it was just once a day, he had only punished her because she disobeyed him. The guard had taught her never to trust anybody but Chief. She had accepted that there was no way of escape and she had given up hope of escaping. Even if it were possible for her to escape, there was nowhere to go to, no one to give her food like Chief and she was going to meet people like the guard. She should be grateful Chief still took care of her. Chief had said everybody was like that guard and if that guard had not come to him, the guard would have killed her. Humans behaved like that. Chief said she must avoid humans but him, because he was the only good person. He always said it during his visits. He was the good man and everyone was like that guard. Last time he came to visit, he had reminded her that he had picked her from a far place where she was about to be killed and eaten by people like that guard.

Chief said he had rescued her and gave her a place and food to eat. He always said that and it must be the truth. Chief had always been right. All the punishment she had received had always been her fault. Chief had said he would never hurt her except she disobeyed or except he had a bad time because she was thinking badly of him. Anytime that happened, Chief had always whipped her back. Last two visits, Chief had entered with anger on his face. He had complained that someone had insulted him in a meeting and disregarded his suggestions and it must have been because she was thinking bad things about him. She had tried to deny it but had stopped because Chief was always right, even if she could not remember she must have thought badly about him. She was lucky it was only two markings without food Chief gave her.

She used her right hand to run through the mark and wondered what time had passed, how many years she must have been in the room. She wondered how the outside world looked like, she wondered about her family, did she have one? Where they looking for her? Apart from her name, Halima, she could remember nothing else. She stopped remembering after that guard deceived her and after her punishment. But she could not fathom why she was thinking about who she was, after such a long time.

A memory flashed through her mind as her hand touched the last mark, it was the image of a little girl heating and bending a wire, there were clay soils around her, she was creating a word with the wire. Suddenly, the image vanished.

That was her, she remembered that event. That was when she was a house help for Chief and family, she tried remembering

her age but could not. It was few months after Chief had put his body on her and had warned her never to disclose what happened to anybody or he would kill her. It was so painful and she had bled for days. At first, she had thought Chief would stop but he had continued and it was almost every night. He had always tied her mouth to prevent people from hearing her wails from the pain he was inflicting on her. She was still free to move around the boy's quarter where she and the gate man had always stayed. She had been taught on how to make native pots and had enjoyed making it but after what Chief did to her and continued doing to her, she thought of a way to escape; She had finally opened up to the gate man who had promised to tell Madam about it. The next day became the first time Chief whipped her back, he told her he was going to kill the gate man and it was because of her. She never saw the gate man after that day.

Madam had beaten her for lying against Chief and she had kept

everything to herself from that day. Sometime later, Chief had said they would be producing the last native pot because he and Madam were leaving and starting a bigger business in the city. He was also rebuilding his bigger house and she had somehow come across some wires. An idea had come to her mind. Chief's wife and the gate man were the only ones who produced the native pot before she had joined them. Chief was into another business she could no longer remember, some days he had joined them. After some time, she was forced to do the last production herself. They were about five new ones she had produced to add to the old ones yet to be sold. Because she was left alone, she had heated the wire and formed 'HELP' with it and fixed it in one of the clay pot she was making. She had been excited after Chief said the last pots had been sold out. She had hoped someone would find her message and come to her aid like some of the story books she had read.

Chief and his wife, with their two boys had moved out few weeks later and Chief had promised his wife he was going to sell her to one of his friends which he never did. He had pushed her into this room with a tiny hole covered with wires as the only way to see light from the outside world. No savior came, no one saw her message. Someone might have seen it and had thrown it away, there was no hope, there was no escape and she had accepted her fate four years into captivity.

She slapped her cheek with her right hand and hit her head on the wall.

‘What is happening, why all of a sudden am I remembering all that’ she thought.

She hit her head on the wall again, hoping it would stop her foolishness. Chief was coming and her memory had to choose that moment to remind her of that event. What if Chief found

out what she had thought of? How was she going to keep it from Chief? If Chief found out what she had done and that she remembered it, she would not get food until another seven marking, and she would be whipped again. She hit her head on the wall again. She was a bad girl, which was why her memory wanted her to be punished. She looked at the tiny window and discovered light was disappearing.

‘Ha! And I’m not ready’ she said.

She immediately pulled off her gown and sat down on the bed naked. That was how Chief always wanted to meet her. She quickly checked if her hair was well combed and her makeup was the way Chief always wanted it. From what she was seeing through the wardrobe mirror, it was not. She quickly picked up a comb and combed her hair to straighten up, she added an extra

red lipstick exactly the way Chief liked it. She was about dropping the lipstick when the door was opened.

“How dare you?” she heard Chief’s angry voice before she saw him.

She turned, the lipstick falling from her hand. He came too early, he was not holding any food, nor torch but on his right hand was a whip. He was very angry. At last Chief had known what she was thinking, she was going to be punished and it was her fault. She opened her mouth to explain to Chief that she did not want to think of what she had thought about, that the memory just popped up but stopped when the first whip hit her on her shoulder.

“Who was he? Who was the man I was told came looking for you? Halima I told you not to show your face to the guard who brought food, what did you discuss and plan with him? The

guard has refused to confess. He keeps saying he never saw you and he does not know the man who came looking for you but you must tell me the truth” he shouted as the whip landed on her body.

The pain was too much, the whip was cutting through her skin, it was like a fire was being passed through her body.

“Please it hurts. I will never plan with any one, I will never leave you for the evil ones. I swear I do not know. I cannot leave you please. I’m sorry I do not know” she begged.

“Good to know you still know you must not leave me. Do you remember that guard that deceived you?”

She nodded.

He had stopped whipping her.

“Good” Chief said moving round the room like he was thinking about something.

“He had asked after the boy who molded native pots years ago. This means he is not aware you are a girl, but how did he know to come here? And why would someone ask after you after fourteen years? I just don’t get it. And the men I sent after him have been reported dead. I’m very confused.”

A music started playing in his trouser pocket, it happened sometimes and Chief had always put the music box on his ears and spoke to himself. Although he had called it a phone, it looked like a small music box with a glass at the front.

“Yes, what do you have to tell me?”

He paused as if waiting for someone to respond.

“Are you sure he is the same man that has been hunting our men.
The same person we’ve placed a bounty on his head?”

He paused again.

“I don’t know how he got to know about my boy but I think he
is not the real enemy, I’m suspecting some of my political
opponents.”

Another pause.

“Okay, make sure you keep watch, I will try find out who wants
to bring me down and cut him off, that is our bigger problem.”

He paused again.

“Yes, I will be moving him out tomorrow night, I’m sure my
enemy will want to plan before coming to attack this place
because of the many security guards. I don’t think they will

come here for now. Make sure every guard is alert, he would not dare show his face now.”

She just listened to him talk and tried as much to bear the piercing pain that was all over her body.

“I am going to prepare another place and move you from here.

Tomorrow night, I will move you out, then I can sort out that intruder later. You will not plan anything silly when I move you tomorrow, will you?”

She shook her head vigorously.

“And if someone tries to take you away what will you do?”

“I will say no. I will not go with the person.”

“Good girl. No one can enter here anyway, I have many guards outside and this door is bulletproof and can only be opened with a card. So if you don’t want to be punished, be a good girl and

don't talk to the guard that will bring your food from the box.

And you will wear your men's clothes and cover your face

before I come for you tomorrow. Okay?"

She nodded. A miracle had happened. Chief would still give her food even after what happened.

"Now lie down on the bed, I have to leave soon to start preparing where you will stay."

She nodded and moved over to the bed. As she climbed the bed, she wished Chief would be fast although she was grateful the punishment only ended with a whip.

Chief was out few minutes later, after warning her never to think of escaping. She ran to the bathroom and emptied her bowels like she had always done anytime Chief visited. She was hungry but she knew there would be no food that night until the

next day and she could bear it because she had faced worse and she should be grateful Chief was lenient with her.

CHAPTER FIVE

{....we spend our years as a tale that is told.}

He got to Benin in less than an hour, he was at the underground house few minutes later and Jason was already waiting for him. He was on his sun shade glasses which was not ordinary but could be used as camera and other things he did not know. He was on his normal black shirt and black trousers and he had his gloves which he sometimes wore to prevent body contact. The most important thing was his android wrist watch

with small buttons. He could use it to send a targeted missile. He was looking different from the Jason he knew, he was looking human and he did not need someone to tell him Cindy was responsible for Jason's recent human behavior. He was resting his back on the driver side of their black rescue van and looking up when he packed his pickup van at the side of the single room that led to the underground house. The Nigerian Special Force consisted of the Nigerian army, navy and air force but they had more of Nigerian army. The Circle members belonged to all because they were made to undergo all the armed forces' trainings. They had underground houses in every state capital including Abuja.

Jason saluted just as he got to where he was standing. Of course he had known he was around. That was one of the few military activities Jason participated in. He had not seen anything wrong

with military salute if not he wouldn't salute. He acknowledged his greeting and he gave him the permission to be at ease. He opened the back of the van and dropped his bags.

“We need to move now and I need to drive, we must get to Ologbo in thirty minutes” he said opening the driver's door but Jason blocked him shaking his head.

“What?”

He did not answer but gave him a signal to wait. Late George was the only one who understood Jason and they were partners in most duet missions. It was not easy working with someone who could hardly communicate verbally.

Few seconds later, a bird flew towards Jason who caught it with his hands and patted its head. He nodded towards him but entered the driver's seat before he could enter.

“Jason is not a suggestion, it’s a command. I’m the one driving.”

Jason started typing something with his android phone and some seconds later, his android vibrated in his pocket.

‘You need to activate some of the gadgets in that bag and you need to study the Ojogolo arms dealers. You cannot do that while driving. I will drive as fast as possible’ Jason wrote.

He had a point, there was no arguing with Jason most times because he always had a point. His actions were always calculative. He moved over to the passenger's seat and they were on their way almost immediately.

Jason handed over a tab to him. He did not bother asking what it was because he would find out. The first things he saw were different flight gadgets. He dragged the bag Jason gave him from the back and opened it. There was a box with the picture of a bird. Jason was pointing at something on his ears and pocket.

At least he understood that. He picked out the small box with his own and activated it. Theirs came with a camera spectacle. He inserted the sound in his left ear and pinned the mic inside his T-shirt.

“Good. I’ve been waiting for yours to be active” he heard Mark’s voice.

“I will be following your movements and will help out with enemies’ position once there is visual” Mark continued.

“Roger that” he responded.

He scrolled the tab and saw Chief Esigie and the Ojogolo arms dealers. Jason had done a good work. There were even records of those he had killed. He did not know about the clan, he just followed a lead from the crime scene and hunted them. Chief Esigie had up to fifty filling stations which he started with only about five far back as sixteen years ago. As he read more details

of the enemy he was facing, he knew something was not right. A native pot producer would not have that much money to start up five filling stations at once and also would not be able to have that much money to build a fenced house back then. He must have been in this arms business far back as seventeen years ago. Jason had captured so many faces of the Ojogolo arms dealers and their customers. He noticed he had seen some of them at Chief's compound and he had killed some earlier in the day. Jason slowed the speed of the van making him raise his head up. They were almost entering Ologbo. They were at a palm plantation.

“Drive into the plantation, the house is not far from here” he said and went back to reading the last part of Jason's report.

“What are you doing?” he heard Jason's voice which was rare.

He raised his head to ask what he meant but saw him smiling.

His spectacle was still on his face.

“No, you are a terrible dancer, just give up. I will be back soon”

he said chuckling.

He should have asked after Cindy.

“Jason” he called.

“Bye. Love you too” he responded to Cindy and turned to him.

“You need to activate your flight bird and learn how to use other gadgets” Jason responded to him.

He could count how many times he had heard Jason speak and they had always called it a miracle. It was actually Ghost who called it a miracle while Fast had always said an Angel of voice had walked by. But he was beginning to think Cindy was the miracle, he remembered he had spoken without sign language

the day he had come with Cindy to ask for his help in delivering a document that would stop a civil war.

Jason took the bag from him and brought out another box. He opened it and brought out an android watch like his own.

“You need to wear this. Every Circle member now has this and you need to take this” Jason said handing over a new android phone.

“What’s it for?”

“It’s the new Circle android phone. The sim card has been registered as yours. There is a calculator app but it’s used as the portal to enter the Circle chat room. The password to enter the portal is Circle written backwards but in numbers. You need to be online twenty four hours. That’s why we could respond to you immediately. Once there is a new message, your phone will vibrate twice.”

He took the phone but studied Jason.

“Anything?”

“You are talking. I have never heard you speak so many words at a go.”

“It won’t last long.”

“How is Cindy?” he asked as he wore the android watch.

“Your concern came late” Was his response.

“We need to do a survey of the compound, it’s not far from here.”

“I’m waiting for you to activate your flight bird. I need you to navigate it to the compound. Flight 10 will follow you.”

“How?”

He did not answer but brought out another box that had a spectacle and gave it to him.

“I need to operate something on your watch.”

He gave him his left hand with the wrist watch. He pressed some of the buttons and tapped the screen, it was definitely a screen touch. The bird suddenly came alive. It flew out through Jason’s opened windscreen. He wore the glasses. Suddenly, he could see the top of the palms as if it were rotating.

“You will soon get used to the sensation. Now you have to direct the bird to the compound. I will follow suit with my bird.”

“How do I do that?”

“Your spectacle, the right side of your spectacle has a button you can rotate and press.”

“Okay” he said his right hand already on the button. It was like driving. He directed the bird out of the plantation, the bird flew

past the store he had visited, he directed it till it flew into the compound.

“Direct it to the tallest masquerade tree and press the button” Jason said.

He did as he was told and the bird’s movement stopped.

“Okay it’s now on my map. I will send a copy to your bird, you won’t need to navigate it yourself. Its software is an intelligent AI software.

“This is bad” he said after seeing the crowd in the compound.

“Mark?” Jason said.

“On it” he heard marks voice.

Before he could ask what Mark was going to do, Jason pressed a button on his android watch and images of people started

appearing. Mark was scanning the faces as the birds captured them.

“They are all matching with the pictures of Ojogolo arms dealers we have with us” Mark said.

Mark did not need to say anything for him to figure it out. He had spent the whole drive to Ologbo reading Jason’s report. He was good at memorizing faces.

“Thirty in total” Mark said.

“Scan their weapons” he instructed.

“Roger that” Mark said.

“That Toyota Camry was not there when I came here this afternoon.”

“Bingo” Mark said.

A picture was zoomed into his spectacle. The man was resting his back on the driver's door of the Camry. Some writings appeared at the left spectacle.

‘Name: John

Title: Killer.

Position: Second in command.

“Chief is around” Jason said

“Can these be connected to Wild?” he asked.

“Yes, any Circle member can be connected” Mark responded.

“Do that now” he commanded.

“Roger that. I’m sending a message to the chat room before connecting it” Mark said.

“We need to know if we are cleared to attack with Chief around especially if he is going to transfer the boy now” he said.

Just when he had completed his last statement, the door to the boys’ quarter was opened and Chief came out. He knew it was Chief because he had already seen his picture from Jason’s report.

“What’s the obstacle? Over” he heard Wild’s voice.

“I don’t think we have one anymore. Over” he answered.

“Mark has updated me on what is going on” Wild responded.

“I thought Chief was already on the plan of moving the boy but he just came out alone” he said.

“What are the odds? Over” Wild asked.

“Thirty arms dealers to two soldiers” he answered

“That is not the odd Tamed and you know it” Jason responded.

“Their weapons are mostly AK-47, AK-74 rifle and some are with desert pistol and Mossberg 500 Tactical Pump. I saw one with Galil. Over” Mark said.

“Okay, so it’s two against six” he said.

“Right” Jason said.

John opened the passenger’s seat for Chief. He entered the front seat of the car while another entered the driver’s seat. The gate was opened and the car was driven out.

“Now they are twenty eight” Mark said.

“What’s the plan? Over” Wild ask.

“Jason, you find your favorite place and back me up. I will go in through the back fence. Mark is there a chance the barb wires are electrified? Over.”

“Yes. Over” Mark responded.

“Jason we need to blow up that pole connected to the compound and also the generator. Mark can you control my bird? I need you to locate their generator.”

“Roger that” Mark said.

He removed his spectacle to watch what Jason was doing. He was operating his tool box. A weapon appeared on the screen, it had the shape of a cruise missile but small. It opened up to loads of installed bullets. These were no ordinary bullets. They were laser bullets. George and Jason had just succeeded in recreating a suitable one before he left The Circle. The screen of his tool box split into two, one still showed the image of Jason’s weapon while the other showed the image of the electric pole.

“First target confirmed. Permission to launch”

“Permission granted” he said and watched as Jason hit a button.

“A laser bullet left the jet and he saw five minutes countdown.”

“Why that long time? I thought it’s at the speed of light.”

“It’s coming all the way from Benin. And it’s not exactly at the speed of light.

“Generator located. Over” he heard Mark’s voice and immediately wore his spectacle. The generator was at the back of the duplex, and if he could remember well, to get to the back, one needed to go through the car park.

“Jason activate and launch” he said.

“Roger that” Jason responded.

“From what I’m seeing, they are not well trained. What you need most is a distraction that will give them a false position of the enemy then you can enter” Wild stated.

“Let’s show them something they’ve never seen.” That was Ghost.

CHAPTER SIX

{For all our days are passed away in thy wrath:}

He had tried not to show his surprise at the new gadgets Jason had been throwing to his face but hearing Ghost's voice was different.

“How come I can hear Ghost?”

“Remember it's an open mission. We are now connected through Circle app. Everybody can also see what is going on” Mark said.

“But how?”

“You are really outdated Tamed. If you are surprise about this, what will you do when you see others” Fast spoke.

“I will update you later” Jason said.

“So what’s the distraction?”

“Flight 39” Jason responded bringing out something round from his big bag that was at the back of the van.

“No one will ignore this. It will give you enough time you need to enter the compound” Jason said.

“But what’s the function?”

“Distraction. What will you do if something round, glassy that glows spins into your compound?” Ghost said.

“It’s only Fast that can come up with this childish gadget” He said.

“I wish I can deny it” Fast said.

“It’s childish but works all the time. Foundation, eye pencil, red lipstick, purple lipstick, pink lipstick, mirror....”

“Ghost what are you saying?” he asked.

“There is one Alhaji on my radar. I’m looking through the things in the bag of his mistress, I need to check something on Alhaji using her phone. But this lady’s bag is just like her brain” Ghost answered.

“Ghost did you pickpocket her? That’s illegal” Wild said.

“You could have just hacked her phone to collect the information you need” Jason said.

“Pickpocketing is faster. Everybody has a gift, you use yours and leave me alone to use mine.. bingo...money, phone, more lipstick” Ghost said.

“So you have not changed, you are still the same person” he said.

“I have changed a lot, I have honed my skills. I can even pickpocket a lion’s meal. Major said it’s honing” Ghost answered.

“That was not what I meant. You are not supposed to harm a civilian in anyway, women must be protected” Major Ahmed joined the conversation.

“I was not even planning to take her bag, I was only tailing her, then I wanted to have a friendly chat with her but I changed my mind when she called me Aboki and asked for my wheelbarrow to convey her goods to her car.”

“What are you before, it’s Aboki not my friend anymore?” Doc said laughing.

“You've forgotten the wheelbarrow part?” Ghost answered.

“Your case is hopeless. Just update us on your findings” Wild said.

“Roger that” Ghost answered.

“I’ve activated it” Jason said.

“Okay send it to the compound” he said picking out weapons from his bag.

“I’m at your back” Jason said handing over their mission camera which he pinned on his chest.

“I need to get there same time as Flight 39. Once it gains entrance and a good number of them are distracted, I will enter. We must neutralize all before entering. The hostage is not being held at gun point. I don’t want any obstacle when bringing out the hostage. I will be front and you be my back as you said” he said wearing his bullet proof vest.

Jason did the same. It was a rule. Their number one rule during a rescue mission was to come back alive, they must prepare for any possibility. The first laser bullet found his targets just when he had come out of the van, the second one followed few seconds later. It was 7:37pm and it was already dark. Apart from

the flame from the explosion, the compound was almost submerged in darkness, but he could still see the targets. The birds had night vision camera.

“Let’s move” he said carrying his bag and running towards Chief’s compound but using a bushy path.

He removed the spectacle as he ran, he was not yet used to it.

He got to the back of the compound after eleven minutes nonstop run.

“Jason, are you in position?” he asked.

He did not answer but he got his response when a beam touched his chest.

“Where the heck did you see somewhere high to climb so fast?” he asked.

“There are so many tall trees to choose from” Jason responded.

“Is anyone thinking something is wrong with Jason or I’m I the only one?” Ghost asked.

“Have you not met Cindy?” Doc said.

“But he had known Cindy all his life” Fast said.

“There is a difference from then and now, but you guys won’t understand” Major Ahmed said.

“Seriously? We are on a mission” Jason said.

He understood, he knew that feeling. Abigail did a lot on him.

They had taunted him the way they were taunting Jason. He was nicknamed Beast by Major Ahmed when he newly joined the Special Force, it meant exactly the name, then it was Ghost who changed it to Tamed Beast three months before he married Abigail. Later, Late George had changed it to Tamed. He

touched his heart again but only felt the emptiness left there by Abigail.

“Major apart from Tamed, we were all in the wedding and I think somehow I understand. Cindy was so beautiful in that wedding dress. I was a bit jealous” Doc said.

“And Jason was smiling like a child about to receive his first Christmas gift from...what do you people call him?”

“Santa Claus.....” Mark said.

“That’s American name...it’s Father Christmas. I never knew Jason could smile until that day” Fast said laughing.

“Don’t worry Sabrina, you are going to look hotter on our wedding day” Mark said to Doc.

“Get lost Mark” Doc said.

“I love you too” Mark responded.

“Looks like I’m not the only hopeless one here” Ghost said.

“Mark. What’s the status? Over” he said.

Having those guys around before going out for a life and death situation always made someone feel at ease. It had always felt like he was just going to the supermarket to buy some goods.

Now they were around during an open mission. He was beginning to feel something he could not explain.

“Surprisingly, Fast childish toy just arrived. Tamed you were very fast. I’ve ignited the light and it’s climbing its way into the compound. Over” Mark said.

“Use every means to get your work done. Whether childish or not. Talking of a child. Jason when I’m I going to be a godfather?” Fast asked.

“Jerk” Jason responded.

“Did everyone notice Jason did not deny it. Wow” Ghost said.

The next thing he heard were congratulations from different voices.

“I can’t believe I’m working with unserious soldiers. We are on a fucking mission. Wild please control your soldiers” he said.

“Ouch. Tamed that’s segregation, you know I’m a naval officer” Mark said.

“What of me? I’m from the air. Mark looks like we are not welcomed” Fast said.

“Mark and Fast stop segregating yourselves, everybody here belongs to the three. Congratulations Jason. I will be he or she or their combat trainer” Wild responded.

Even Wild was not helping.

“We are in. Over” Mark said.

Jason did not say any word. He had gone mute. He put on his spectacle and watched how the guards were responding to Flight 39. It really worked as many of the guards moved towards it while pointing their weapons at it. The others pointed their weapons at the gate. From what he was seeing, few were missing and the small gate was partially opened. If he were to interpret it, some went to find out what was happening to the electric pole while the others were by the generator.

“I’m going in. Please how do I change the spectacle to normal? I need to use it for a clear vision” he asked.

“Press the middle button at your left” Mark answered.

“Done” he said already climbing the wall with his climbing tools.

He quickly used his laser knife to cut out some barb wires.

He was in within five seconds and landed noiselessly on the ground same time one of them shot at Flight 39. He had landed

at the end of the car park and stealthily walked towards where the generator was located. He knew he should be expecting some of the guards and he was ready with his suppressor which he had already locked onto the mount of his M1911 handgun.

They were six of them. They had a bright torches and water pipes and they were trying to quench the flame that had already expanded as a result of the diesel in the generator.

“Jason engage those outside the gate. Do you copy?” he asked.

“Roger that” Jason responded.

Mark how many of them? Over” he asked keeping his voice low.

“Four. Over” Mark answered.

“Jason. Take the shot on targets. Do you copy?”

“Roger that” Jason answered.

Before Jason's shot wrecked the almost peaceful night, he had shoot down three of them. He shot the ones farther from him.

The remaining three were too shocked and not ready, one dropped his pipe and fired without cocking his gun. He was closest to him. He shot him on his head and dived left. A bullet missed him by millisecond, he fired back same time his body landed on the ground. The last one had just cocked his gun but he did not give him the chance as he fired at his legs then his chest as he went down.

Gun shots from the other side meant it was not only Jason that was busy. The guards were firing sporadically.

“The four outside are gone, three inside have also been exterminated. That's thirteen down remaining fifteen. Jason is preventing escape of the targets” Mark reported.

“The fire is spreading, you have to move fast. You can take cover using the cars at the car park. Right now two are shooting from there but they are backing the car park focusing on the gate. Thirteen more” Mark continued.

He moved towards the car park and saw the two men shooting towards the gate which was now wide open.

“Come out and face us you coward” one shouted as he shot.

Jason picked out another one firing from the boy’s quarter. And just as he fired at the back of the one shouting, another one shooting from the duplex went down.

“Eleven more. Dodge Tamed” Mark said.

He acted immediately but at the same time, he fired at the second one by the car park who was already pointing his gun at him. But he was not the reason Mark had told him to dodge. The

reason was already on the ground. There was a confidence one had knowing Jason was up.

“Nine more” Mark said same time bullets were released towards the car park.

Somehow they had torches and had seen their colleagues die.

The flame which had already seeped into the duplex was lightening the compound. He hid behind one of the cars. He could hear the sounds of bullets shattering the windscreen of the cars in the car park.

“Six more. Tamed go left, one foot horizontal and half foot vertical. Fire sideways” Mark said.

He quickly shifted by a foot and raised his hand a little high, without showing his face, he fired right then left. Immediately he shifted back to his position.

“Two more. One coming straight at you, he is off Jason’s radar.

Now one more. Tamed he is all yours” Mark said.

“Come out, you fools and cowards. Come out and fight me like a man” the last man shouted as he fired.

He ignored him and waited for him to get within his reached.

The man tried to fire but from the sound he heard there were no bullets. He did not give the man the chance to reload as he

launched himself at him. He landed on top of the man. The man struggled to gain control but he was no match for him. He pulled

out a knife from his shoe and sliced at the man’s throat. As the man struggled to close up the wound he picked up his gun,

reloaded it and shot the man on his head.

“All have been exterminated and completely neutralized” Mark said.

I'm going over to the boys' quarter. Jason back me up. Do you copy?" he asked.

Jason responded by pointing a beam of light on the door of the boys' quarters just for a second then it disappeared. He would be scanning for further enemies.

"Guys, it's a card key and there is no electricity to open it" he said.

"Use your laser knife" Wild said.

"You must hurry up, the fire is spreading fast and it will be bad if it gets to the car park" Mark said.

He opened his bag and brought out his laser knife. It was still fully charged. It took him a minute to slice through the lock. He found himself in what looked like the parlor. There were other doors leading to different room but only one door had same door

as the entrance door. He used his laser knife to open the door lock.

“Hurry up, you have just two minutes left” Mark said as he entered the room.

Before his eyes registered what he saw, his hand had already pulled out the camera on his chest.

“What the heck!” he exclaimed.

“Tamed, why is your camera off?” Mark asked.

“Tamed what is going on?” Jason asked.

“Tamed say something. Do you copy?” Wild asked.

Others were also talking but he was frozen on the spot. He had been trained on how to carry out a rescue mission and things he was expected to see. He had done many himself and he had met

hostages in a lot of dire situations but his fourteen years of training did not prepare him for the situation at hand.

There was definitely someone in the room but the person was not male, he was seeing a female with all kinds of injuries, both old and new, his night vision spectacle had made the image glaring. What was worse was she was naked.

CHAPTER SEVEN

{When the sun comes after the dark; could it be real?}

It was already dark and the food was definitely not coming. She would have to wait for the next marking. Chief might come with the food because he had said he would move her. But what kept disturbing her was what Chief had said. Someone was looking for her and Chief was not happy about it. She tried thinking of something she might have done but could no longer remember anything. She knew she had recently remembered something important but at that moment, her memory was blank. If the wall was not made to prevent someone from hearing her scream, she might have known someone came looking for her. A long time ago, Chief had told her that no matter how she would scream, no one would hear her because the wall was made to prevent her voice from coming

out. A thought came to her mind, it was followed by fear. What if Chief was testing her? What if Chief wanted to send someone who would act like that security guard to find out if she was still faithful to him?

She took a deep breath to calm her fears, there was nothing to be afraid of, she would never disappoint Chief; she would prove to Chief that she would not run away. Chief would be very happy and reward her by sending food twice in just one marking. Her fear vanished immediately she made up her mind on what she would do. She became excited, it had been long since she got food twice in just one marking. She remembered Chief had said he was celebrating his victory in one house she could not understand, but it had been a memory worth remembering, now she would experience it again.

There was noise coming from the door. Although it was dark, she knew it was the door. Chief never came back twice in a marking. It was it, the test. The person had come. She saw sparkles of light at the door and just few seconds later, the door was opened. She could not see the person because it was dark, she just waited. He would ask to help her and she would say no, she would never go with him. Suddenly, the whole room became bright. Her eyes automatically located what was making the room so bright. Chief had called his a rechargeable torch but the one she was seeing was brighter, she saw the person's legs, she raised her head to look at him. She jerked back and pushed her body further inside the bed she was sitting. He was big, she had never seen someone so big. Chief was short and had a big belly. But the man was big, tall and large. She could not see his face clearly because his jacket had a cap covering his head and both sides of his face. He was also wearing a glass on his face. She

just knew it was called eye glass. The man kept coming towards her, she kept shifting until her back hit the wall. Why would Chief send someone this big? How was she going to say no to him? But she must say no even if Chief was not testing her, she must say no. He was too big and he would be worse than the security guard.

“I can hear you” she heard the man’s voice.

His voice was very deep. He had not yet looked at her.

“Because you don’t need to see what I saw. It’s not a boy but a girl. Visual will be back shortly” the man continued talking to himself.

She quickly replayed what he had just said. He must have been talking to Chief and not to himself. But she was confused. He was complaining she was a girl when he had not even looked at her. Did Chief tell him he was going to meet a boy? Chief had

told her to put on her male clothes, but it was not until the next marking. Her thoughts were interrupted by the man's movement. He walked passed her bed to the wardrobe. He brought out one of her gown, the one Chief hated most. He only allowed her to wear it after punishing her for something bad. The gown was the only one that was not handless and was the longest of all her gown, it touched her knees. He threw the gown to her without looking at her. Chief must have told him not to look at her. And then she remembered she was still naked. She had been planning on how to pass Chief's test that she had forgotten to wear her clothes. He would tell Chief that she did not wear her clothes and Chief would punish her. He had always told her to clean up and sleep immediately he was through. She quickly wore her clothes.

"I'm not going" she stammered.

The man turned to look at her. He moved very close to the bed so that his legs could touch it. He bent down making him closer.

“I’m sorry, I took so long to see your message. I’m here because of your message” he said bringing out a wire.

He raised it for her to see.

“You carved this” he said.

She shook her head. It was not possible, that was the memory that had flashed into her mind some moments ago. Chief had discovered her betrayal and he was going to punish her. She would reduce the punishment by not following the man. With that, Chief would know it was a mistake she had made long time ago and she did not tell him because she had forgotten and only remembered this night but still could not tell him because he was angry. Chief might have mercy and reduce the punishment.

“Go away. Go, I don’t want to go. I love Chief, Chief is very good, you want to kill me and eat me. I’m not going” she screamed.

She jumped down from the bed and ran towards the wardrobe.

She opened the wardrobe door and ran inside. She was immediately grateful the wardrobe was big enough to contain her.

“Wild I know you studied psychology but even a dumb person would know she had been brainwashed, the question is what should I do?” she heard the man’s voice again.

He was very close to the wardrobe.

“Doc I don’t think I have time to convince her, did you not just see her eyes, she is in a state of delirium. Mark how long do I have?” he continued.

“Go away. I won’t go with you. You are evil. Go away” she shouted again.

Maybe he would understand she would not go and not waste his time if she screamed more.

“Go, leave, I won’t leave Chief, tell Chief I did not follow you. I must pass the test, go away” she screamed.

“There is no fucking way I can convince her in less than a minute Fast. Wild I’m doing it my way. Mark any new target? Over.”

He was still saying what she could not understand. There was no way she would be convinced by that.

“I said leave, leave” she screamed again.

“Good. Jason move now. Get the van and meet up with me.

Thirty seconds is enough time for me” the man said.

She opened her mouth to scream again but stopped when the wardrobe door was opened with force. Her hands were on the door and the force threw her out. She found herself in the arms of the big man. He was not playing fair. He was going to force her even when she said no, then Chief would never believe she never wanted to go.

“No leave me alone. I’m not going” she shouted and bit his hand.

“Shit” the man said removing his left hand from her body.

It worked. She bent her head to bite the second hand but the man pulled her head up. Before she could find somewhere else to bite, he placed one hand at the back of her neck, the other on her wrist. He was doing something to her and she tried to fight but he was too strong. She felt dizzy and she struggled to stay strong but the feeling to sleep was so overwhelming. She felt herself falling into nothingness.

CHAPTER EIGHT

{You're a loin's cub, home fresh from the kill, my son. Look at him, crouched like a loin, king of the beasts; who dares mess with him?}

“Tamed you have less than thirty seconds to get out of there, the fire has gotten to the car park. You know what that means? Over” Mark said.

“Copied.”

He was already by the door leading to the outside of the boy's quarter. He had placed her on his shoulders after putting her to sleep. He did not care whether what he did was medically proven to work or not. All he knew was that it had worked most times. During their Kung Fu training in which they spent six months in Beijing, the kung Fu master had taught them the trick,

he had called the tiny hole at the center of the wrist and the hole at side of the neck the spirit gate.

There were so many thoughts running through his mind but what he needed to do now was to concentrate on leaving Ologbo, he would try to understand what had just happened in the room. It was risky to go through the gate but more risky to go through where he came from. The fire had already licked its way to the car park and before he would find a way to pass both of them through the fence, the explosion that was certain would catch up with them. With his Rugger pistol in his right hand, he started running. Few seconds after he had come outside, he heard the sound of the explosions in the car park. He kept running. He did not see anyone as he ran but his quick glances at the houses he passed, showed some had pulled down the curtain of their windows. They wouldn't see much even if they looked. He was

even the one seeing them because those who did not pull down their curtains had their lamps and he was also wearing his night vision spectacle.

“Mark you guys changed a rescue mission to a burning mission. That house is gone” Major Ahmed said.

“Major you would have been worried of bigger things if I was on ground. Chief should be grateful his cars and his houses are the only things damaged for now” Wild answered.

“Wild don’t put ideas into Tamed. This is a situation I have to deal with Mr President and I don’t plan on making it worse” Major said.

“Major, were you following at all? Who cares about a dumb protocol? Chief is not human....”

“Doc. I get it. I followed everything, and from what Tamed had earlier reported, the girl had been in captivity for at least fourteen years and I don’t want to imagine what she must have passed through, but rules must be followed. Right now, the mission is to rescue and nothing else. Tamed do you copy?” Major commanded.

“For now” he answered.

If there was anything he liked about the Circle, it was the freedom of expression, they were all equal. Their meeting was done in a circle table and Jason had done a lot of work in eliminating military gibberish, as he had called it. Only few remained.

“Major you know you can’t let the President know the exact rescue mission we did” Fast said.

“I’m not stupid Fast. We will wait and see how Chief will report it. That will determine the next line of action.”

He saw the van coming towards him and stopped running. The door was opened almost immediately the van got to where he was. He placed her in the back seat and also joined her. Jason was on the move.

“Trouble alert. Over” Mark said.

“What is it Mark. Over?”

“A pick-up van is coming towards you. Up to ten targets and they are all with weapons. Over.”

“Jason you drive I will face them. Wind down the back screen”

He said looking at Jason to get his response.

Jason shook his head. He raised his right hand and signaled to him, he was already on the targets. He wanted to ask what he had done but heard an explosion.

“Targeted missile?” he asked.

Jason nodded and increased the speed of the van.

“Tamed, she is going to wake up soon” Doc said.

“And she would be in a state of frenzy. She will be worse than before” Wild added.

“Tamed open the first aid box and prepare just 1mg of Midazolam. We must be careful of the amount to give her. At least that would hold her down till you get to your destination. You know how to give the injection. Just wait till she wakes please” Doc said.

“Okay. Mark any more targets? Over” he asked as he prepared the midazolam injection.

“Absolutely none.”

Just then, he felt her stir. She opened her eyes but inside the van was dark, he could see because he was still putting on his spectacle.

“Where am I?” she asked trying to sit up but he held her back.

“You are safe. You don’t....”

“Tamed no” Wild interrupted him.

Almost immediately, he understood why Wild had stopped him but it was too late.

“You are not Chief, no... get me out of here. Where is Chief...take me back to Chief, I’m not going with you” she screamed struggling to pull herself away from his grasp.

He quickly injected her with the Midazolam.

“You are evil, you are a beast, a....” The midazolam did not permit her to finish her statement as she once again went numbed in his arms.

“At least she got that last part right” Ghost who had been silent spoke.

He heard Mark, Fast, Major and Doc laughing. Somehow Ghost had find a way to ease the anger and tension.

“Ghost seriously?” Wild said.

“Wild calm down. I’m angry too. She even look and sound like someone from my tribe, but I’m also happy. Let’s look at the bright side. Apart from the trauma and the debriefing process, she is now free. And as long as the beast is with her, she is safe.

Let's not cry because it happened, let's be happy because it's over" Ghost said.

"I wish I could see things the way you see it Ghost" Fast said.

Ghost words were somehow calming his raging mind but something clicked.

"Wait. What do you mean by as long as she is with the beast?"

He asked.

Jason stopped the van just when he had asked his question. And he was coming out of the driver's seat. They were at the underground house in Benin.

"Jason what the heck is going on?" he asked but did not get a response.

He opened the back door to ask Jason why he had stopped but Jason was nowhere to be found.

“I hope is not what I’m thinking Wild?” he shouted.

“It’s originally your mission, you are the body guard for now till we can handle Chief.”

“Major? Wild are you crazy? You set me up. How dare you Wild? Do you want to die? I thought we are all equal in the Circle. I said I will come back. In fact I’m back, so why will you abandon her to me? I’m not a psychologist nor a doctor. She needs both profession. This is you and doc’s work” he shouted.

“She needs a bodyguard too. You know the Circle no longer work with the Special Force. And you know we are very few and almost everyone have an assignment. Doc and I will be temporally coming over tomorrow morning. And as the leader I’ve made my decision. You will be standing as a guard, use your house. Toll your pickup with the van. Do you copy?”

“Fuck you Wild?”

“You too. You think what you want to do is the only option. You were not the only one who lost someone. You lost your wife, but we also lost a sister. We all loved Abigail too. You were not the only one mourning, we were mourning too. You only took your feelings into consideration, forgetting Circle is like a family. One person’s loss is everybody's loss. We lost Abigail and we are not going to lose you too, not when we are still mourning George’s death” Wild shouted back.

“And you think placing her in my care is going to keep me in check” he said, same time, he felt the rage he had been longing to feel.

“I did not think, I know it. If you don’t want her to wake up when you are still driving, you better get moving now. Just put her in your master bedroom and lock it until we come. Mark rescue mission is over. Disconnect. Over and out” Wild said.

“No wait...”

Mark had disconnected.

He knew it because there was no sound coming from any side.

If only he had thought about what Wild meant by ‘he had a plan’,

he wouldn’t be in this mess. As Wild said, he had no time to

waste. He held down his boiling rage, connected the chain of the

van to his pickup, then he quickly entered the van driver’s seat.

He ignited the van and started driving. He made it to Asaba in

less than an hour. He carried her to the master bedroom. The

room that had belonged to him and Abigail. He had moved out

to the second room after her death. He placed her on the bed,

then switched on the rechargeable torch in the room. He had

removed his spectacle but he could still clearly see the new

bruises. Ghost might be right, she had some of the features of

the Hausas and she was also very dark in complexion which was

disturbing because her dark skin should have been able to hide some of the marks but some of the scars were too deep, they looked like marks from wires. Looking at those scars brought back some memories he would rather not remember. Although his injuries were long gone, the memories had remained. The great difference between him and the lady on the bed was he had to rescue himself and his mum.

He never had a great memory of his father, all he remembered was a little boy lying down beside a sick man. His mum had told him his dad, a hunter had encountered a wild bull in one of his hunt and after his battle with the bull, the bull had ended up dead and his dad was carried home with a broken and torn back, he never recovered till he died. The few times he had heard his father talk which were no little feat, it was to beg his mum to let him go.

“You are wasting money Obinna would need for his education”
his dad had always pleaded.

But his mum had refused and she was left with so much debt after his father had passed away. He was just seven. His mum had remarried a year later. She had married his father’s friend who had promised to help pay the debt and sponsor him to the university. But that man became a monster few months later. He had hit him with sticks at the slightest provocation, and he had become a drunkard. His mum had started the palm fruit business and the money was mostly devoted to paying their debt. At first, he was the only one to receive his stepfather’s beatings and his mum was only pushed away anytime she tried to intervene. He had always feared his stepfather, especially when he came home drunk but things changed when he started hitting his mum. At

first, he had only watched and cried as slippers, shoes, legs were used on his mum.

He had come back from school one day, to see blood gushing out of his mum's left leg, then he was ten and in elementary four.

Something had begun stirring in him, he could not place it but he just knew he would not watch his mum being beaten anymore.

At first, he had ran into the bush to get the plant which was used to treat cuts. The leaf was usually squeezed and the liquid was

put on injuries, but he had returned to see his stepfather still

hitting his mum. He did not think, he just picked the biggest fire wood he could carry and used it to hit his stepfather on his back.

He had used all his strength and the force had sent his stepfather to the ground. He had almost landed on his mum. He must have

been possessed that day because he did not stop there, he had

ran and picked the axe used to break the firewood. As he ran

back to use it on his stepfather, he had seen it, the fear, even if it did not last long but it was there. His stepfather had wrestled the axe from him and had given him a good beaten after overpowering him. But everything had changed from that day. He had promised his mum he would protect her after his stepfather had gone out for another drink.

“Obinna, you are just like your father. He was very fearless and did you not see where it had landed him. Please don’t ever fight him again, please my Obi. You are just ten, you are the only joy I have, please” his mum had pleaded.

But he had not listened as he had set a trap for his step dad. He had always set trap for rabbits at their hole. He did not have the time to smoke them out, his mum had told him he got the talent from his dad. That night, they had been woken up by his stepfather’s scream. He had removed it after his stepfather had

promised never to touch them again. But two weeks later, his stepfather had broken his promise. He was coming from school that day when he saw people trying to hold a man hitting a woman close to a pickup van by the market. It was his mum. For the second time in two weeks, he was once again possessed. In his school bag was the knife he had used to sharpen the sticks he used for traps. He brought it out and before people could understand what was happening, he had stabbed his stepfather at his back almost at his waist.

“I told you, I will kill you if you touch my mum again” he had shouted as he raised his hand to stab him again but some people had already recovered from the shock and held him back.

Luckily for his stepfather, he had survived the knife wound. He and his mum were taken to the council. They were brought before the Asagba of Asaba, there were also elders and council

members. If so many witnesses were not there, the council wouldn't have believed a ten years old boy had stabbed his stepfather. When he was asked his reason for stabbing his stepfather, he had simply said he did not want to stab him but had wanted to kill him and he would kill him in his sleep if he touched his mum again. Surprisingly, many of them had burst into laughter, saying he was the reincarnation of his great grandfather. They had called him Ogbuenhi, killer of elephants. The Asagba had dismissed the case after confirming from the witnesses that his stepfather had been beating his mum for refusing to give him the money she had sold when he had stabbed him. His stepfather was told to stop beating his mother. The Asagba had reminded him of how hot tempered the great Ogbuenhi was and told them the story of how Ogbuenhi had fought with three herdsmen who had wanted to rape his wife and how he had castrated the both of them and had left them to bleed

to death. They had sent them home believing what he said about killing his stepfather was a joke. But his stepfather had known he was not joking. He did not sleep in the house that night and had packed out the next day. That was the beginning of his journey of becoming the beast the Circle had nicknamed him.

A movement on the bed brought him back to reality. She was awake. He was not ready to deal with her.

“Where am I?” she asked.

He ignored her, he went back to the door but before he could open it she was already on him.

“No, take me back, let me go back to Chief. Let me go” she screamed pulling at his jacket.

He was going to kill Wild tomorrow. He gently pulled her away amidst her futile struggle, then he quickly shot the door. Almost immediately, she started hitting the door.

“Let me out, you are an evil beast. Let me out.”

Like Ghost said, she was right. So many people would soon be hunted by the beast and Wild would be the first to have a taste of his wrath. For now he would make do releasing his wrath on his punching bags.

CHAPTER NINE

{I tell prisoners, ‘come on out. You’re free!’ and those huddled in fear, ‘it’s alright. It’s safe now.’}

She was lying down on the floor when she woke up to sunlight. It was a little too sharp for her eyes that she had to place part of her palm on her forehead to reduce the influx of light. At first, she could not understand what was happening, why the room was too bright, and why it was looking different from the room she knew. She tried standing up but felt weak and there was also the pain from Chief’s whipping. She had forgotten to clean her sore with the liquid Chief had always told her to use. But the room was a bit bigger and the walls were painted blue, the wardrobe was no longer facing the bed. Even the bed was higher than the one she knew, it was covered with a

dark blue bed sheet. The window was very big and even though it was covered with white curtains, the room was still bright. Did Chief move her to the place he had earlier promised when she had slept off? A powerful scent permeated her nostril making her stomach to respond. She turned to find what was scenting. It was by the door, not too far from where she was sitting. She rushed to the door, her weakness and confusion forgotten. It was yam soaked inside a dark liquid with loads of meat. Without figuring what the food was called, she used her hand to force a handful of yam into her mouth, ignoring the spoon. The taste was delicious and unexpected. Chief had rewarded her as she had thought. He had sent her something so delicious. She ate in-between mouth full, not pausing to take a break. She felt pains in her stomach but did not stop eating until she had consumed everything. She had to finish it before trying to understand what was causing her stomach to feel like she had swallowed a stone,

because Chief might change his mind. She picked the water can close to the plate of food and drank to satisfaction, but the pain in her stomach increased, she held her stomach and at the same time, she looked for the drug that was supposed to come with the food. Anytime she was whipped by Chief, he had always sent a drug for her to take. He had said it would prevent her from dying and falling sick. She could not find the drugs and her stomach was beginning to feel like she was carrying a heavy block. She used both hands to hold her stomach and tried breathing fast to try curtail the pain.

“Stop it, you idiots” he heard someone shouting.

The voice was completely new. It was a female’s voice, someone like her. It had been long she heard a female’s voice. But why could she hear her? Was she her new neighbor? Did Chief forget to cover the wall so she wouldn’t hear what was

happening outside? Once again, she was confused; she had no time to stay confused because there was something happening outside. She was hearing sounds she could not explain, it was like somebody was hitting two big woods together. She ran to the window, lifted the curtain but did not see anything but palm trees surrounded by bushes. The noise reduced as she moved to the window. The sight before her was so beautiful that even though the light was too bright, she could not take her eyes away. She never thought she would ever see such a beautiful sight. The only thing she had seen for a long time were walls and little light, everywhere had either been almost dark or very dark, but nothing like the beautiful sight she was seeing. A tiny animal with such a long tail climbed one of the palm trees that had ripe palm fruits inside. She was surprised she knew the name of the tree. She smiled as she watched the tiny animal try to take a bite at the ripe palm kernels. She wished she could go outside and

touch the grasses and even lie down on it. She shook her head almost immediately, she was thinking too far. Chief was just allowing her see the bushes because she did well by refusing to go with that big man.

There was a crash coming from the other side of the wall where there was no window, next was a loud noise. It was a gunshot. She knew because that was how Chief killed that security guard. That was the only memory she had never forgotten. Chief had always made sure she remembered. She quickly ran to the wall same time another one was fired.

“Sabrina, what the fuck” two deep voices said at the same time.

One of them sounded familiar.

“Now I have your attention. If you think the robber bullets I just shot you with is all I’m planning to do, then you have forgotten

what I can do. It hurts like hell I know but you know what I'm pointing at you now?"

"Shit, Doc drop that. Are you crazy?" that familiar voice said.

"Sabrina, drop that, it's a command. You won't dare" the other voice said.

"Try me and see. Wild it's like you've forgotten my other nickname. I have a patient to treat and I don't mind making it three. If you two idiots want to find out if I'm bluffing, continue your beast fight. I will shoot where hurts most and treat you later. You know it has been my childhood dream. I came prepared for both of you. I don't give a damn if you both want to tear each other's skin but do that later. Do you understand?" the lady shouted.

There was no response. There was another gunshot.

“The next will be your shoulders. I asked a fucking question, are you two going to display your testosterone or focus on the mission?”

“Sabrina this is between me and Wild” the familiar voice said.

“No this is between the Circle. I get it Tamed, but Wild is also right, we also lost Abigail and you prevented us from mourning with you, you locked us out and you want to end it like that?

And Wild, how did you end up being our leader? So the best way to greet your best friend is to throw punches and fight like cave men? You guys forgot I’m also a cave crazy woman, you know I’ve done it before and I don’t mind doing it again. How did you think I’m surviving you guys as the only female? Try resume your fight and find out what I will do. Are you guys ready for the mission or not?”

“Only if you drop that gun” the familiar voice spoke.

“Nice try Tamed. With the way you are looking at me like you want to hit me with that wood. Both of you drop your wood and move away. Now. I need to see my patient and you better behave” the girl said.

“Am I clear?” the girl shouted.

“Yes” they both responded.

“Good. Tamed what’s the update?” the girl asked.

The voice that was familiar started talking.

“She banged the door for a long time but later gave in to fatigue, I took food to her as.....” the voice faded away and she could no more hear them neither did she understand what had just transpired.

She went back to the window. The animal was no longer there but the bushes were still beautiful. Maybe those were Chief’s

guard who were fighting over money but she could not place the girl's role. There was a noise at the door, it opened and a lady entered. She was putting on a red gown with a long white jacket. She was fair unlike her dark skin, she had a long hair which she allowed to fall to her back. She did not cover her lips the way Chief always wanted her to, even her eyebrow was not painted but she was so pretty. That was the first time she was seeing someone like her after a long time.

"Hello." The lady smiled at her.

She entered the room and walked towards her still smiling.

"I'm Doctor Sabrina, I was sent to check your wounds."

"Chief sent you?" But she knew that was the answer.

That was why there was no drugs with the food she had earlier eaten. But Chief was really acting different, it was unlike Chief

to allow anybody see her, but he had allowed two people to see her face. Something made her look at the door and she jerked back when she saw two big men entering the room. She knew the first one and even though his face was covered earlier, she still remembered how he looked like. The other one was dark like her and was also big. She stretched her neck expecting to see Chief but became afraid when the second man closed the door.

“What is going on? Where is Chief? Why is he still here? Am I still being tested?” She panicked.

“Don’t mind these men, they are my bodyguard” the lady answered still smiling.

She was carrying a big red and white box.

“Nooo, I want to see Chief....” She was worried Chief was still testing her.

“Do you really want to know where Chief is?” the lady asked.

She nodded. The men have not left the door. They just stood there watching. They both had blood flowing out from their arms.

“Okay, we are going to talk about Chief I promised. But we will only do that if you let me see and treat your wounds.” She was still smiling.

She nodded.

“Guys excuse us” Chief’s doctor said to the huge men.

They left and the lady told her to remove her clothes. She did as she was told, hoping she would finish very fast so she could meet Chief and tell him she obeyed him. The doctor made her to lie face down on the bed, it was then she noticed her stomach pain was gone. She started rubbing something painful on the

places Chief had whipped her. It was not smelling like the liquid she had normally used. It was painful but she had felt worse.

“Why are you not shouting? Is it not painful?”

She knew why Chief’s doctor asked that question. She wanted to find out if she would complain and tell Chief.

“No.” She hoped her answer was enough to please Chief.

“Have Chief ever given you drugs after flogging you?”

She wanted to answer but stopped. It was all a test. She was Chief’s doctor so she would know, she just wanted to find out if she would say something bad about Chief.

“It’s okay if you don’t want to answer, but can I confirm your name?”

Chief wanted to find out if she still remembered her name.

“Halima.”

“I love your name. Do you remember where you came from?”

She did not answer, she was asking questions Chief did not want her to remember. Chief was testing her.

“Halima please sit up, you are safe you know, you can tell me anything, I’m like a friend. I want to be your friend.”

She sat up and Chief’s doctor treated the wounds on her shoulder. She kept quiet, she was happy Chief had prepared her for something like this. She would have listened more if she had known Chief would use it to test her. Chief had said she should never trust anybody except him. And she would never tell her anything. Chief would be very happy with her and he might allow her come outside to touch the grasses and he might allow his doctor to come again and be her friend and he might start sending food twice in a marking. She remembered she had not marked anything yet.

“I’m almost done Halima, do you mind if I check inside your body? I want to see if you are injured there?”

She did not understand her question. She had already treated all the places Chief had whipped her.

“I don’t understand.”

The doctor smiled at her. She brought out some drugs from the box and also a water in a white rubber bottle.

“Take this first. It will help stop the pain and also it will help you heal faster.” Chief’s doctor handed the drugs and water to her.

She took the drugs and swallowed it with the water.

“I also need to give you this injection, it will make sure you don’t die from your untreated injuries. Just say still” Chief’s doctor said.

She pushed a needle into her left arm close to her shoulder. She felt a sharp pain but bit her lips to prevent her from crying out.

“Good, I'm also going to put another injection, I want to test if you are healthy.” Chief's doctor placed a cotton wool on where she had just put the needle.

She did not understand what she meant but did not protest when she tied her left wrist and put another painful needle on the back of her palm, blood flowed into a tiny bottle that was connected to the needle. She placed a cotton wool on where she had put the needle just like the other one.

"You are doing well Halima. Now I want to check under your legs, to find out if you have injuries there.”

It was another test. Chief had said he was the only one to touch her there and nobody must see her.

“No, I don’t want. Remember to tell Chief I said I don’t want.”

She put her gown back on. She went to the wardrobe, opened it but there were no chalk on the ground. There were so many female clothes but no chalk. She had to mark the wall, she must mark it to know when Chief would come so she could be ready.

“What are you searching for Halima?” The doctor’s voice was so close and sudden that she jerked up.

“I’m searching for the chalk. I need to do my marking.”

“What’s that?”

“You are not supposed to know. I can’t tell you.” She turned to continue her search but stopped when she heard a male’s voice.

“Hello Halima.” It was the other man.

The both of them were back in the room.

“How did you know my name? Where is Chief?”

“That’s why I’m here. I came to tell you about Chief” the man answered.

He had his arms folded across his chest. The one who came to the other room had not said anything yet. She abandoned her search for the chalk to listen to what he wanted to say about Chief.

“Where is he, when will he be coming back?”

She needed to know because she wanted to be ready. She could not wait to see how he would smile at her and tell her he was proud of her.

“The thing is that if I tell you, you won’t believe me” the man said.

“Tell me. I will believe you.”

It must be something good, Chief wanted to reward her.

“Chief...” the man said and paused.

She waited for him to continue. He just stared at her as if he was studying her.

“Chief is...” He paused again making her eager to know what he had to say.

“Chief is never coming back. Chief will never see you again, nobody will ever whip you again, you can do whatever you want to do, it’s over Halima. We’ve saved you from Chief.”

It took a while to understand what the man said.

“Noooo” she screamed.

“You are lying, take me to Chief, I love Chief, I’m not staying, I want Chief” she shouted running towards the door.

What did Chief want her to do that she had not done to show her loyalty. Why was Chief still testing her? She was prevented from escaping by the beast man.

“Nooo, bring Chief back, you evil people, stop deceiving me.

Stop lying. I passed the test, you are still trying to make me fail so you can tell Chief. Leave me alone” she screamed and struggled in the arms of the man holding her.

“Let’s go. My work is over for now” the liar said.

“Are you sure you are a psychologist? You met her in a tranquil state but you are leaving her in a frenzy state” the one holding her shouted.

“We have a video conference by 10:30am, two minutes from now. I will explain later. Doc get your things lets go” the liar said.

They were going to leave her again. They were not going to tell Chief she had passed.

“Let me go, let me go back to Chief” she screamed.

She bent her head to bite him but it looked like he already knew she would do that. He held her head up and waited till Chief’s doctor and the liar had left the room. He pushed her away and left the room. She tried to follow him but he had closed the door.

“Fuck you Wild” the man shouted.

She hit the door with all her strength. They were taking too long to tell Chief she had passed and Chief might not believe her if they delayed in telling him she had passed. She needed to find a way to convince them that she would never leave Chief before it was too late for her.

CHAPTER TEN

{I find this outrageous-the worst thing about living on this earth-that everyone's lumped together in one fate. Is it any wonder that so many people are obsessed with evil? Is it any wonder that people go crazy right and left? Life leads to death. That's it.}

He was still very angry and was not satisfied with the fight he had just had with Wild. Sabrina had ended it before it had

started. She had actually shot them with a robber bullet, his back still hurts and he knew it must have drawn blood. There was no guessing if Doc would shoot them with her Desert pistol. She had done it before. He still had the scar where the bullet had grazed his leg tearing his skin. She had made sure it was a clean wound, and had later treated his leg. Even Wild had also been her victim. He also had just a slash on his left arm which was Wild's doing. Wild too was not exempted because he had slashed him too. Halima continued hitting the door as he entered the living room.

Even though he and Wild were outside, Wild had made him stay by the door with him. Wild said he had to listen to their conversation so he could understand how to approach her. But he could not see what good had come out of it.

“Doc what are we going to do about her? It's disturbing.”

“She will soon sleep off” Doc responded.

Wild was not in the living room but as he heard the sound of his generator, he knew where he went to. As the light came on, Doc went to switch on his flat screen TV. He had not switched in on for a long time.

“What are you doing?” he asked Doc.

“The video conference” she answered.

The TV did not work.

“I was right. Good I came with one” he heard Wild’s voice making him to turn.

He was carrying another bigger flat screen TV to where the old one was hanged.

“I don’t remember giving you my permission to invade my house and switch on my gen.”

“I don’t need your fucking permission” Wild responded.

“You know...”

“Wild you know Major had banned that language. We need to learn how to be responsible citizens. Most importantly, a baby is coming and we can’t be saying the F word in front of a baby.

And Tamed this is not personal, we are already late for the conference which is your fucking mission. Don’t forget I’m still with my gun” Doc said interrupting him.

“Doc” the two of them called her name at the same time.

“What?” she shouted.

He looked at Wild and they both shook their head. There was no need telling her she just used the F word. She was still in her crazy state. It was better to avoid Doc during her forty minutes madness.

Doc was right. He had seen the message that there would be a briefing on Chief and the way forward. He was going to focus on that for now, later he would deal with Wild. He sat down on one of his cushion chair made for just one person. He watched as Wild and Doc replaced the old TV with the new one Wild had brought. They connected some wires to it and also connected it to a small system Wild brought out from his back bag.

“I thought you flew a helicopter. But I only saw Jason’s jeep.”

“Landed the helicopter in Benin, we don’t need any unwanted attraction” Wild answered.

“But how come you still remember the jeep?” Doc asked

“I don’t forget cars I see especially good ones. Jason had once driven it to Circle house. I remember it's a birthday gift.”

Although Jason's parents were both doctors, they had shares in different companies which Jason and Cindy had inherited after their death, including a big construction company. He had initially wanted to sell his shares but Wild had advised him not to. Instead, he had transferred everything to Cindy. Jason's mum was much known to all of them because she had frequently visited Jason. She came with food for all the Circle members anytime she visited. She had always come on her own, so they did not know much about Cindy until their death. She was brought up by Jason's parents and not too long ago, she had become his wife.

“You guys are three minutes late” he heard Major's voice. He raised his head to look at the TV, they were already online. The screen was split into six. Five showed Mark, Major, Jason, Fast and Ghost while the last one showed their faces. The

cushions were very close to the TV. One small one with one big one placed in a curved shape.

“Is that blood I’m seeing?” Mark asked.

“Doc please tell me Tamed won” Ghost said.

“Did Wild win?” Fast asked.

“If I had allowed the fight to get to a winner do you think we will be having this conference now?” Doc answered.

“Ghost and Fast please transfer my money as soon as possible” Jason surprisingly said.

“I can’t believe you guys betted against Jason” Major said.

“But Jason your drum is full already, where do you want us to pour the water?” Fast said.

“Remember the money must be in my account before midnight.”

Was Jason’s reply.

Jason had been mute since they taunted him about Cindy but he was suddenly talking again.

“Great work Sabrina, that’s why you are my girl” Mark said.

“In your dreams” Doc said.

Her statement immediately attracted an applause from Fast and Ghost which was somehow confusing. They were really not afraid of Major.

“Mark, you are making progress. She has finally permitted you to have her in your dreams” Ghost said making everybody laugh except him Major and Wild.

“Ghost it’s too early in the morning. Let’s start with your update first before we get to the main issue” Wild said.

Looking at Fast, Ghost and Mark on the screen, they appeared like normal people with Ghost being the comedian. Apart from

him and Wild, the others were not huge. Ghost was the slimmest. He was lanky but a good example of what looks can be deceitful meant. Fighting with Ghost was like fighting a ghost. As for Fast, he was just like his nickname. Fast could drive any locomotive object. All he needed to know was if that object could move. And those with weak heart must not allow Fast drive them. Surprisingly, nobody taught him how to drive a car. When it came to using his legs, Bolt who is supposedly the fastest man on earth have not met Fast. But Mark was entirely a different case. Trying to explain Mark was like trying to describe how to fly a plane to a two year old baby. He came from the riverine area. What was very clear to understand was to never allow Mark take the fight to the water, if that happened, that would be the end. Mark also had a way of interpreting the law to suit his taste, although Wild would beat him to that. The

greatest mistakes the U.S navy made was to agree to Mark's suggestion of taking the physical combat underwater.

“I'm still on the trail of Alhaji Umaru. I'm yet to see anything that could connect him to the continuous death of his political rivals. He seldom use his phone for big task, I guess he is the paranoid type, but I picked something new” Ghost said.

Ghost face was replaced by a picture, it was the screen shot of a text message.

‘I cannot continue with this sir. I guess you should turn yourself in, I have the evidence and I will no longer be part of your crew’

Ghost face appeared back on screen.

“This is a text sent my one Mr O. That is how the name was saved in Umaru's phone. I tracked the number and discovered.

Mr O is actually Barrister Omakor who is surprisingly his lawyer.”

“What about the mistress phone you picked pocketed?” Wild asked.

“Point of correction, it was her bag I took. The phone was in the bag. There was nothing, except for money for all kinds of things, there is nothing on her phone.”

“Then move over to stage two. That text message already proves there is something fishy” Wild said.

“Don’t bug only Umaru, add his lawyer to it” Jason said.

“Let’s move over to the main issue. Jason brief us on Chief and the media” Wild said.

“Jason pick one, blue or black” he heard Cindy’s voice.

“Blue” Jason answered.

“The black then. Come and help me zip up” Cindy said.

“Just some seconds” Jason said leaving the screen.

“Unbelievable. Jason just left us to attend to Cindy. It had gotten to this?” he asked.

“He is getting worse by the day” Fast said.

“Let’s be grateful his miracle is close by, we will be hearing directly from Jason instead of reading texts from him” Major said same time Jason’s face appeared back on the screen.

“Sorry for the interruption. I hope everyone have seen the news.”

“What news?” he asked.

“Except Tamed” Ghost said.

“It’s even in different newspapers and online news site including entertainment bloggers. This is Edo State Broadcasting Service 9:00AM news” Jason said.

His screen changed to the news. There was a reporter by Chief's house. The compound was completely burnt and it was still emitting smoke.

“As you can see, I'm right now at Honorable Esigie's compound where the attack took place. According to Honorable Esigie, the attackers had missed him by few minutes and six of his security guards were killed, then five more were killed on their way to counter the attackers.”

The screen changed, it showed Chief being gathered by journalists. From the different microphones that were being pushed to his face, he could see, Independent Television, Channels TV, Nigerian Television Authority, even Delta Broadcasting Service, there were also different big time newspaper companies.

“I received a call just few minutes after I left my house that there was an ongoing robbery at my compound. I alerted the police and also my personal security personnel, but before they could get there, the robbers had killed six of my security men and were already gone. Five of my men were also killed while chasing the criminals. The house was already aflame when the police got there. The fire service men were contacted and after they had gutted the flame, I entered to see if my wife’s jewelries and my gold and artifacts were still there, but it was empty. Some artifacts were burnt beyond recognition. My most expensive artifacts was not among the burnt properties. I believe I was the main target but the perpetrators had made it look like a robbery. I believe this was politically motivated and I call on....”

Jason stopped the video and his face appeared back on the screen.

“Punch words” Wild said.

“Six dead men instead of twenty eight. Reporting the total number will cause suspicions” Doc said.

“But he was right on that one. Don’t forget the ratio was two men to six men” Ghost said.

“Funny you” Doc replied.

“Robbery and attempted assassination. He believes he was the target” Mark said.

“The police. He must have called the police after doing some clearing” Fast said.

“Politically motivated” Ghost said.

“He did not report about Halima” he said.

“He did” Jason said.

“Explain” he said.

“Is it not obvious? His most expensive artifacts is not among his burnt properties but was stolen” Jason said.

“Never thought it that way” Major said.

“Wild you know what that means?” Jason asked.

“He is never going to let Halima go” Wild said.

“This is worse than an obsession” Doc said.

“Part of it” Jason and Wild said almost at the same time.

“Okay I’m lost” he said.

“He is already on the move to get her back and he is putting his all into it, he is even risking suspicions and rumors. Only obsession cannot make him do that” Wild said.

“What are we missing here?” Major asked.

“Jason” Wild said.

“Remember I’m already on a mission to find out the main people involved in Ojogolo arms deal?”

“Yes, I read your report” he said.

“I had trailed one of the major players and bugged him. Before he could change the trouser I bugged, I sent Flight 11 to track the bug. Flight 11 is a beetle, just for sound. Its eye cameras are just for movement, too tiny to give needed visual. Right now, Flight 11 is permanently attached to their meeting place. Last night immediately after the attack, John had contacted Ojogolo, who is the leader to use his network to find her. He had finally revealed her as a girl and even her picture too. I could not stop anything from being distributed through their phones because they are using the slave method of communication”

“Pause Jason. What does that mean?” Mark asked.

“Meaning they will be communicating using their mouth to transmit from one person to another. When one meets any of their partners in crime, they will use their mouth to send the message. They are very good at it that words will never get to the wrong person” he explained.

“The price to whoever will bring her to Ojogolo is three million naira cash. Chief had made sure only John and Ojogolo are the only people linked to him, and those two will never betray Chief.”

“How vast is their network?” Fast asked.

“Very large Fast. When it comes to slave method of communication, especially if someone is being looked for and there is a monetary award attached to it, every criminal is involved, from arms dealers, to armed robbers, to drug dealers

and even buyers. In most cases, enmity is suspended if the message carries a peace sign” Ghost explained.

“Ghost how far did you go?” Mark asked.

Mark was the latest addition, which was two years ago and it was expected he was still learning about them. Ghost could only be defined by his name. He was exactly a ghost. His crimes were more of pickpocketing and delivery boy to most of these bandits. He had lived most of his life on the streets and survived by playing by the street rule and disappearing when necessary. As sensitive as Jason was to everything, Ghost had still succeeded in pickpocketing his car key from his pocket right under his nose. Ghost and Fast had later taken the Jeep for a ride. Then when it came to combat, he had quickly looked down on Ghost because he was the slimmest although lanky and tall. But after fighting with someone he could not touch for thirty minutes, he knew he

was fighting a formidable opponent. And he had always made sure to use his body structure as an advantage because most targets always saw him as an easy opponent but they always realized when it was already too late that Ghost was not an easy target. George had said targets saw Ghost only once. Some were privileged to see him twice. When they would see him as an easy target and seconds before their death.

“A porridge for your birthright” Ghost said.

“Forget it, my Sabrina, my sweetheart will tell me” Mark said.

“I’m bitter Mark, you can take a bite if you want to die of poison” Doc said.

“Focus guys” Wild said.

“Jason please continue” Major said.

“It’s just as Ghost said. This time I believe it’s a peace message, all kinds of criminals will be involved. There are few pictures and it won’t stay one place. Criminals don’t easily forget a face, once they take a look, they will pass it on to the next person”

Jason said.

“Which brings us to why Jason and I think Chief is not just obsessed with Halima. He won’t go this far. I know he is a psychopath but there must be something else” Wild said.

“And what do you think is it?” he asked.

“He said most expensive artifacts. From my study on criminals like Chief, there is one thing common to them. They always believe their captives will never escape or get away from them and because of that, they normally reveal too much to their captives, they talk about their deepest secret and where evidence

of some criminal activities can be found. They tell their captives everything” Wild explained.

“And Chief had risked many things by telling John and Ojogolo she is a girl and also he has exposed her face. This can only mean one thing. The risk of not getting Halima back is higher” Jason said.

“So what you are saying is Halima can never be free?” Doc asked.

“Except Chief, John and Ojogolo arms dealers are no more. There would be no need to capture her again” Ghost said.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

{I turn my attention to all the outrageous violence that takes place, the tears of the victims, no one to comfort them; no one to rescue the victims from the oppressors.}

Ghost was right. Halima could only be completely free if Chief and Ojogolo arms dealers were no more. But at the moment, they had not been given the Omega order because they were yet to discover the evidence needed for that. And it was a bit complicated because of Chiefs status and also the fact that the president was not aware of the exact rescue mission they had carried out.

“Wild, Tamed and Doc, please update us on Halima. That’s the name you called her” Major said.

“I’ve been waiting for that one myself. Wild please explain what you did” he said.

“Doc first” Wild said.

“There is nothing to report medically. I took her blood sample which I will examine later. Right now, her new wounds have been treated, I gave her pain relieve drugs and antibiotics. I also gave her a tetanus injection. She must have slept off from the drugs. I could not go any further, she refused any further check-up. So I can’t say much for now” Doc said.

“She was okay when she was with Doc but Wild had made her go gaga” he said.

“Wild” Major said.

“Her case is very complex. You know how I always say I’m starting my debriefing with stage two?” Wild asked.

Everyone nodded.

“She is the first freed captive under us that we must start with stage one. I don’t even see stage one as debriefing. In fact she cannot be debriefed now.”

“Wild you know you are not making sense” he said.

“Tamed Halima cannot be debriefed because she is still a captive and no matter how we are going to tell her she is free from Chief, she will never believe us. Chief has done more than brainwashing. If Chief comes here and we bring her out to go free or go with Chief, she is going to choose Chief without a second thought. Her situation can be likened to a rat inside a drum and then almost immediately the drum is covered. It will jump and fall because the cover of the drum is obstructing his way to freedom, the rat will continue to do that and if someone opens the drum after a long time, the rat will still continue to

jump and fall back. Once it get to that height it has always fallen down, it will fall back. It will never leave that drum because its brain had already been programmed that there is no escape. The only way to get that rat out is to turn the drum upside down.”

“Are you saying Halima is like a rat in a drum?” Doc asked.

“I wish I can say I’m not trying to compare both of them, but her current state is like that but with different solution.”

“Why do I feel I’m not going to like your solution” he said.

“We have two solutions, but I’m sure only the second one would give her a full recovery for debriefing.”

“Let’s hear you out” Major said.

“First is the normal protocol, the white man’s method. It’s a very long method where she will be made to meet a psychologist, including a psychiatrist who will be continuously and gradually

making her know she is free. That can take a year or more for someone like Halima.”

“And your own self Nigerian theory?” he asked.

“I believe Halima can only be set free by her captor” Wild said.

“What!” he exclaimed.

He was not the only one shocked by Wild’s statement, from the reactions in everyone’s face he could tell Wild just blew a bomb.

“Calm down, I’m not saying we need to bring Chief” Wild said.

“Wild you’ve always had one solution to all your puzzles and it was a waste of time studying psychology because nothing had changed. Don’t tell me you are planning on killing Chief in her presence so she will watch and see her tormentor die and with that she would know she is free?” he asked.

“That could be an option you know, in fact that is the fastest way, but no. That is not the second option Tamed.”

“Wild please set us free” Ghost said.

“Like I said, she can only be freed by her captor, right now she believe Chief is both her captor and savior and she fears Chief to the extent she is not afraid of us. She needs a new captor, a fake one.”

“Wild....” he said standing up.

“You choose the one you want, a year being her body guard or few weeks being her new captor and setting her free gradually.”

“I choose none. Let her be taken to our debriefing center at Abuja and join the others. The military have professional psychologist that will help her. There will also be enough medical equipment to examine her” he said.

“Tamed you’ve forgotten she doesn’t exist” Fast said.

“Don’t tell me you psychos are buying Wild’s idea.”

“As much as it sound weird I think it’s the only option now. I was in the room, I saw her eyes. I saw how she reacted when Wild told her she was free. I wanted to know why Wild said those words, now I know. If we follow protocols, that girl is going to still remain a captive for another year even when she is free. But if we follow Wild’s method, she will be easily freed. She also need a proper check-up but we can't expose her now” Doc said.

Jason spoke before he could counter Doc.

“If we follow Wild’s method it won’t take up to three weeks. One, she had looked underfed but she will be getting food thrice daily. Two, she was always whipped but no more. Three, she will no longer be sexually abused. Four, gradually she will

discover those things are no longer happening. Then she will discover she is free to move around, I think with that, Wild can start the debriefing. You know we can't reveal she exist. We are still dealing with traitors from my last mission both military and political traitors. I started understanding Wild's method after Cindy told me her experience with Andrew. She had recovered faster because she had watched Andrew die. And Tamed you were the one who killed Andrew in her presence. We can't use that method because we've not been given the go ahead by the president and also we don't have enough evidence but you need to use Wild's solution because you have bigger issues to deal with" Jason said.

Andrew was a defector during the fight to stop another Civil war. He had tried raping Cindy and he had stopped him by beheading him with the laser knife Andrew had wanted to kill him with.

Cindy had been in shock after that but she had recovered quickly.

Jason had joined them later, if he was not there at that time, it would have been too late for Cindy.

“I know this is a serious case but I must say this. I have never heard Jason talk so long. What is going on?” Ghost asked.

“Jason, I’m ready, I can’t be late, my class starts by 12:00PM” he heard Cindy’s voice.

They could see her. She sat on Jason’s lap.

“Bye bye kiss” she said kissing Jason.

“Wait, Jason is that Ghost, Fast, Mark, Major, Wild, Sabrina and is that Dark Prince? Wow. Is Dark Prince really back? But he is still looking scary and why is it that Wild never smiles? Sabrina is always looking pretty. And you know Jason I might consider Mark's proposal” Cindy said excitedly without pausing.

No one talked, no one interrupted her as she talked. But Jason started laughing.

“What is funny?”

“You know they can see and hear you” Jason said laughing.

“And Cindy do you have to show us what we are missing?” Fast said.

She was immediately out of the screen.

“Oh my God. Wild and Tamed heard me. Jason why did you not tell me you were doing your video meeting” he heard her voice from the background.

“Because you wouldn’t have given me a bye bye kiss” Jason said smiling but not facing the screen.

Next came the sound of someone crying. Jason was immediately off the screen. This was getting interesting.

“Hey Cindy” he heard Jason.

“Leave me alone. I’m off” Cindy said.

Jason came back to the screen few seconds later.

“Doc please why is any little thing making her cry?” Jason asked.

“Mood swing dear, it comes with pregnancy. It may get worse, just be ready” Doc answered all smiles.

“Dark Prince? That’s what she calls Tamed. I like that” Ghost said.

He knew if nobody said anything, Ghost would. She was referring to him. Just when he thought his nicknames names were just beast, Tamed beast and Tamed now Cindy had added Dark Prince.

“Cindy is out everybody, it means we must hurry up with this meeting before Jason’s battery runs down and we will start reading texts” Major said.

Jason had said there were bigger problems.

“Jason what bigger problems?” he asked.

“They are not only looking for Halima, they are also looking for you. Somebody was able to sketch you. Although they think the number of men that attacked the compound were about six, they believe you are the link to the other five. They also believe you and the other five guys are working for one of Chief’s political enemy. That is another reason Chief wants to get her back by all means” Jason explained.

“Since they are using their network to look for you, it won’t take long for their message to get to Asaba and let’s not forget you

are a legend here. I believe that was how Lord Nero was able to get your location” Wild said.

The name Lord Nero made him feel a rage to kill. Somehow he was beginning to feel emotions he has always longed for.

“Tamed calm down. I shouldn’t have mentioned him.”

“They won’t need to find me. I’m going to find them” he said.

“That’s why we need to hurry with our investigation on Ojogolo arms dealers and also Halima, so she can exist. Right now if she is sent to the debriefing center, Chief will know and he may lawfully try to take her back. And she will willingly go back to him. We won’t have a strong back up because the President was not informed Chief was our target. Things will just get messy” Ghost said.

“Talking of the President. Major what’s your plan?” Fast asked.

“It’s high time you guys started addressing me properly” Major said.

He was recently ranked a Lieutenant General after he had led the Special Force to stop an almost civil war.

“That will take time Major” Wild said.

“Well no plan. I’m just going to inform him the rescue mission was successful with thirty eight dead men and none from us.

Chief said eleven died and his most expensive artifacts is missing. They are not connected. For now the President cannot know she exist. He may summon Chief and Ghost’s prediction will happen. And like Wild said, she will choose Chief. So I approve of Wild’s idea and since the mission is for Jason and Tamed, Jason will focus on discovering more evidence to prove that Ojogolo arms dealers are killers while Tamed will remain

her bodyguard and prevent any attempt on her recapture. I have made my decision” Major said.

It was one thing for Major to suggest and another thing for him to command. Once he made a command there was no protest. It was the rule. He did not like the way things were going but he had no choice.

“And I suggest you relocate since there is a possibility they will soon find out your location and Jason cannot keep track of potential attackers since they are using their network” Ghost said.

“No, since you all have decided to make me a monster, I will do it my way” he said

“Case settled. Keep us updated Jason and Tamed. I’m out. I have a meeting with the president” Major said and almost same time, he disconnected himself from the video conference.

“Same here. Jason tell Cindy my offer is still available for grasp”

Ghost said.

One by one they all disconnected.

“And we have to move Doc” Wild said.

“Just like that? You know we have things to settle.”

“Not now Tamed. I have a meeting with different Special Force leaders and Sabrina needs to prepare for her undercover mission.

So let’s do this later. Just keep us updated on Halima.

Remember our chat room is open twenty four seven, so you must be online. Jason will be updating you on his findings” Wild said punching his shoulder.

“You can take the TV. Here is the prescription of drugs you are to give her. The drugs are in that bag” Doc said pointing at a bag on his small round glass table.

“Wild don’t you think I’m a danger to Halima? How do I even do what you suggested?” he shouted at Wild who was already outside.

“Find a way Tamed” Wild answered.

“I almost forgot. Jason’s big bag. I need to take it” Doc said.

He handed over the van key to Doc and after she had taken the bag to Jason’s jeep, they drove out of his compound. They could drive through his bushy path because he had cleared it enough for cars to pass through. Although it would still be difficult for low cars.

Just when the jeep was out of sight, he heard a bang on his master bedroom’s door. She was awake.

“Get me out. I have passed the test, I want to meet Chief. You are liars. Get me out” she shouted.

What had Chief told her? Why was she always talking about the test? What exactly did Chief do to her? A feeling of anger starting boiling inside him as he walked towards the master bedroom door.

CHAPTER TWELVE

{I shake with fear, I shudder from head to foot.}

She must have slept off again because she opened her eyes and saw herself on the floor by the door. There must have been something on that drug Chief's doctor had given to her. She must have joined the beast man to cheat. They were trying to delay telling Chief she had passed the test because they wanted Chief to punish her.

She stood up and started hitting the door, she would not rest until they let her see Chief.

“Get me out. I have passed the test, I want to meet Chief. You are liars. Get me out” she shouted.

No one came but she had to hit the door harder, she must not give up.

“Open the door, get me.....” She was not allowed to finish her statement as the door was suddenly opened, the force sending her to the floor.

It was the beast man that was at the door.

“I thought my friend have told you Chief is not coming back.”

There was something different about his voice, it was deep, angry and scary. He bent down to meet her on the floor so she could see his face. She could tell he was angry and it was making her afraid.

“Look at me” he commanded.

There was such force in his voice that she found her eyes meeting his but almost immediately, she turned her eyes the

other way. His eyes were not looking normal, it was supposed to be white but his white part was looking red. Even Chief's own had been red many times but not as dark as the beast man. She moved backwards but the beast man moved closer.

“I don't give a damn on what Chief told you. Chief and I are enemies and he should pray not to meet me because I will slice his throat and watch him bleed to death. And I will enjoy it” he said in that his scary voice and same time, he brought out a knife and pushed it to her face.

“Halima look at me when I'm talking to you” he roared making her shrink back.

Her body on its own started shaking. He did not give her the opportunity of looking at him by herself, he raised her head and forced her to look at him.

“Watch” he said bringing out what Chief had called an android phone. It was a bit bigger than Chief’s own.

He tapped something on it and Chief’s face appeared on it.

She watched and listened to what Chief was saying. Fear gripped her when Chief mentioned his most expensive artifacts had been stolen. Without thinking, she pushed the phone away and ran towards the wardrobe where she sat down shaking with fear. Chief had always called her his most expensive artifacts anytime he was pleased with her. He always said she was a treasure meant for only him. It was not a test, Chief was not testing her, he was serious when he had said someone was looking for her. Chief had always reminded her of the bodyguard. He had always said there were people worse than the bodyguard. That if they caught her, she would be whipped and eaten. She heard footsteps making her raise her head. He was

coming to meet her. He was the beast Chief always talked about. There was no doubt he was bigger than Chief and he would do worse than Chief, no Chief had been doing her good. He had always told her that he was the kindest amongst all those who had pets.

“Good you now understand your new situation. Chief is no longer your new owner. Forget Chief, you will never see him again” he said raising her head up.

She knew he was big when she had first seen him but the closeness made her realize he was bigger than what she thought. She was so small compared to him. She shook with fear as he made her stand up. Her height ended at the top of his stomach close to his chest. He bent her head so she could see him.

“Here is the new rule. I don’t ever want to hear you mention Chief again.” His voice was becoming scarier.

He turned her in circle.

“You look skinny, I don’t like skinny. I need you fleshy.”

Her fear turned to panic. Chief had said if the bodyguard had not brought her to him, he would have forced himself on her and he wouldn’t have stopped till she died. The bodyguard was very small compared to the beast before her. He would never take him back to Chief, he had stolen her from Chief and he was going to be doing what Chief had done to her, but he was too big, she was going to die.

“Chief doesn’t touch me until after seven markings.” Her fear made her mention Chief before she could remember he had told her not to ever mention Chief again.

She did not see him bring out a gun, he was so fast. She felt something flew past her ear before it hit the wall. The sound of the gunshot made her scream in panic.

“I don’t give a fuck about Chief” he shouted.

He dragged her to the bed and pushed her. She found herself on top of the bed. He was right next to her.

“I do my things my own way. I can touch you now, I can touch you later. But it’s like you are yet to understand I’m a beast.

You call me a beast but you don’t fully know what a beast is.

Next time you mention Chief’s name when I have not given you my permission, you will be more worried about this that you won’t ever remember his name anymore” he said pushing the gun on her forehead. He was going to shot her.

“Do you understand me, Halima?” he shouted.

She nodded almost immediately.

“Good” he said standing up.

“Looks like that damn Chief likes you skinny but you must add some flesh for me. I will be sending your food thrice daily.

Don’t piss me off by not eating it” he said opening the wardrobe.

He started packing the clothes out of the wardrobe. She had thought those clothes were for her but he was removing them.

“These clothes belonged to Abigail. They are not your size but even if they are your size, there is no way I’m going to allow you wear them.”

“Where is Abigail?”

He turned to look at her. She immediately shrunk into the bed.

She was not supposed to talk. She had made a terrible mistake.

He was going to whip her or shoot her.

“She is dead.”

He had been speaking with an angry tone but there was nothing to compare the deep angry voice he used to answer her question.

He had killed her. Chief had said others kill their pets when they got tired of them but he was going to keep her forever. Chief was talking about people like Beast. He had gotten tired of Abigail and he had killed her. Now she was his new pet. Her body continued to vibrate as she wondered how long she had.

“Your second food will be coming soon. Don’t even think of escaping, except you want to see what I do to those who try to escape me” he said walking out of the room.

Was that what happened to Abigail? She had tried to escape and he had killed her. As the door was shot with a loud bang, she leapt up in fear. He was gone but she did not know when he would come back, when he would touch her. Was she being punished because she had recently thought about getting free

from Chief? Now her wish had been granted and she had been thrown into the arms of a beast.

She tried controlling her vibrating body but it wouldn't stop. She knew why her body was not listening to her. Her body could somehow take Chief's whipping but her body had never accepted his invasion, it had always felt repulsive, it had always felt like thousands of earthworm were moving all over her body. She had always emptied the contents of her stomach in the bathroom once Chief left. Now she had a new master and he was two times bigger than Chief and he had killed six and five of Chief's men all by himself, and he had captured her. He was going to do worse than Chief and there was no escape. She heard a long forgotten familiar sound by the window. She quickly left the bed and ran to the window. It was the noise of birds. They were perched on one of the palm trees. Except that

was not a palm tree, it was a coconut tree. They were so beautiful, one had a long yellow tail. She forced her face to touch the window and turned sideways to know how far her eyes could see the grasses and different trees. She could see a small clearing, there were long grasses looking as if they were planted. They were spaced and each had a long stick which it was twined to. The grasses were looking familiar but she could not remember the name. Her left side were just bushes and more trees. No, she could see a mango, pawpaw and orange tree. There were some ripe pawpaw fruits and a bird was picking on it. But how did she know their name? Another bird joined the first bird but a bigger bird made the both to fly away. She smiled as she watched the scene before her. Her smile did not last long as she heard the door being opened. She did not know how long she had been standing by the window, she must have stood there

for a while. She tried running back to the bed but he was already inside.

“Thinking about escaping through the window?” he asked in his deep voice.

She shook her head vigorously in response.

“Good because those iron bars were made with the finest iron, it will take a long time for even a laser knife to cut through it.

Don’t even think about opening the bullet proof louvers” he ordered.

She did not understand most of the things he said but she knew there was no escape for her. He must have come to touch her she thought as her fears returned.

“Your second food is here for the day. Come here Halima” he commanded.

She quickly ran towards him. He placed the plate on the floor and told her to sit down.

“Open it and eat. You have three minutes to finish it” he said bringing out his gun.

She sat down and opened the plate. It was same food she had eaten earlier. Chief had only given her food once in a marking, Beast had said he would give her food thrice because he wanted her to add flesh. As she stretched her hand to pick a yam, he stopped her.

“Did you not see the other bowl of water? Wash your hands.”

She quickly obeyed.

“I don’t have the time to watch you eat, just make sure that food is empty before I come back. Do you understand?”

She nodded.

He left the room and like the last time, he shot the door with force making her jerk.

She had always dreamed of eating thrice in a morning and her dream finally came through. But she did not like the way it came through. He was feeding her because he wanted her to add flesh, so he could force himself on her. She had not cried for a long time except when Chief had whipped her but tears flowed out of her eyes down to her jaw as she took a bite of one of the loads of meat.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

*{But why, why this chronic pain, this ever worsening wound
and no healing in sight?}*

He had wanted to feel again, he had wanted to feel the pains of loss, the pains that would make him keep his memories of Abigail but what he was feeling right now was not what he asked for. It had started all of a sudden. Immediately Wild had mentioned Lord Nero, something had triggered in him, making him boil in rage. His anger had increased when he had opened the door to his master bedroom. The sight of Halima, the fears in her eyes, her reactions to her helpless state were producing the

opposite feelings in him. She was forcing memories he had rather not remember, memories of his mother having to live in fear because one uncle had come from nowhere to claim his late father's properties. According to him, he was abroad when his father had died. But he had come back looking haggard. Her fears were reminding him of how his mother had knelt down to beg, how his mother had felt helpless when the Asagba of Asaba had declared his uncle's points valid. The house and land belonged to him but because he was still a minor, it was right that the Uncle should be in charge till he came of age. His Uncle had sighted his mother's marriage to a stranger who would have taken the house and the land from their family as a good reason to take over his brother's properties.

He had hated seeing his mum beg his uncle not to sell the land to a distant relative. His uncle had said the money would be

saved for his education and the land was not leaving the family. As if that was not enough, his uncle had told them to pack out of the house to a mud house because he wanted to also sell the house to another relative. According to him, it was his duty to help pay back the money his mother had borrowed because of his late father's health. His uncle said he did not want him to grow up to meet debt. They were given a two weeks ultimatum to pack. He had felt anger as his mum was pushed by his uncle when she had tried holding his shirt to beg. He was just twelve but there was no way he was going to allow his uncle to have his way. The first people to feel his wrath were his distant relatives and his people who came to inspect the land. Almost all of them had stepped on his trap. Those who had escaped had run to call for help. The sticks he had used were the sharpest he had ever made. The trap was ignited if someone stepped on it. It would close up and the pointed edge of three sticks would pierce into

the person's feet. Pulling the other side of the trap to free someone would make the pointed edges to dig deeper into the person's skin. They had to use manual saw to separate the two sides of the trap and with the sticks still deep in their flesh. They had carried them to an herbalist who dealt on the treatment of broken bones. About seven of them stepped on his trap, but he had set about twenty and they were all hidden.

His uncle who was unfortunately not with them, had come to their house with three youths and a whip to call him out for his crimes. But there was no way he was ever going to be whipped again. From the window, he had seen there was no way he could fight off the three youths who his uncle must have told to hold him down while he whipped him. His mother had come outside to beg and he had hated seeing that sight. She had pleaded that he was only a boy and his uncle should have mercy, his uncle

had pushed her away and as she fell, her knee scraped the ground. That was the straw that broke the camel's back. He had ran to where his father's hunting equipment were kept. There were few options available, either he carried the rifle or the bow and arrow. He had sometimes practiced with both when his mother was not around. The first time he had pulled the trigger, nothing had happened but with trial and error, he had cocked the riffle and when he had pulled the trigger again, the force had sent him and the riffle to the ground. The bullet had penetrated a mango tree. The arrow had been very easy to use, it was as if he was born to use it. Within few days of practice, he was able to shoot down a squirrel trying to chew some palm fruits, then later, he could release arrows in quick succession.

He had picked the bow and just six arrows. The gun would have to wait for another time. He had climbed out through the

window and had stealthily crawled till he was at his uncle's back, with more than three yards distance. His mum had already been pushed out of the way and they were trying to break the door with an axe.

“Looking for me?” he had shouted.

His uncle and the three boys had turned same time he shot one of the boys on his shoulder. He had immediately replaced the first arrow.

“Ten seconds and it won't be your arm” he said ready to release the second one.

He had seen the fear in the boy's eyes and he had enjoyed the feeling of being powerful and in control.

“Get him” his uncle had shouted.

The boy who was already wailing ran the other way but the others still wanted to find out what he would do. He had shot the second one on his stomach but the arrow had missed and had pierced his side sparing his life. The third arrow was ready but there was no need to shoot because the third youth had ran like he was being chased by a beast. He had abandoned his screaming colleague and his uncle to their fate.

As the second boy screamed in pains, holding the arrow in his skin with the hope of stopping further penetration, he turned his focus to his uncle.

“Obinna are you mad? Do you want to shoot your uncle?” his uncle shouted.

He had tried not to show it but it was there, the fear and panic.

“You touched my mum first. Nobody touches my mum” he had shouted back.

“Obinna don’t, please my heart, my Obi. Please let him go, please” his mum had pleaded almost when he was about to release the arrow.

“In the next five seconds I don’t want to see anybody here or I will shoot you. Get out of our house and never come back again” he had shouted.

The screaming boy had suddenly gotten the strength to run. His uncle in his panicked state had ran into the land he was about to sell and had stepped on one of the traps.

His scream had rent the peaceful morning.

“It’s true oh, Ogbuenhi is back oh, somebody help me.

Ogbuenhi is back oh” his uncle had screamed.

Those memories should remain memories but somehow Halima had been forcing back his childhood memories. It was

making him angry. But Chief's name was making him furious. He knew his anger was not directed at her but he could not help it. He was finding it difficult to control his new emotions. He could not feel anything for some time but suddenly all negative feelings were flooding his emotions at once, it was overwhelming. He had sent a message to Jason to send the video before he had opened the door. Then, he was trying to sort out his sudden emotions but she had pissed him off with her fearful face reminding him of his mother. Then she had mentioned Chief, a name his beast yearned to meet, he had fired without thinking and he would need to repair the wall the bullet had pierced through.

He had just left after dropping her second food for the day but he was still angry. What he could no longer fathom was the reason for his anger, Halima was part of it but he had been angry

since Wild mentioned Lord Nero. There was just one place he could relieve his anger. He walked straight to his boxing room but before he started punching his punching bag, he sent a message to the Circle room.

‘You all abandoned her to me but none of you thought she will need food and clothes. I can’t be feeding her yam porridge every day and she needs some clothes’ he sent the message and dropped the phone on the ground.

The more he punched the bag, the more he saw the fear in her eyes, the more he heard Chief call her his most expensive artifacts. As always, Jason was right, he was always right. He could pick out something none of them saw. Jason had known he was referring to her even when all of them failed to notice.

The way she had ran to the wardrobe after hearing Chief mention his most expensive artifacts had said it all. That had

instantly done the work. She had immediately known she had a new captor and he wished he was acting, he wished everything he did there was fake, but apart from sleeping with her, everything was real. He just had to figure out why seeing her was pissing him off. His phone had been vibrating for a while. He had hoped to calm his raging storm by punching the bag but it was not working. He picked the phone to see their responses.

‘I’m on it Tamed but there is a new development’ Jason had replied.

‘What is it Jason?’ Wild had responded.

‘First Tamed need to learn how to use his gadgets. I cannot be controlling his Flight bird. He has not even bothered to ask where the bird is right now’ Mark wrote.

‘Jason how are you on it? What do you plan on doing, are you going to shop for her clothes?’ Doc asked.

‘What new development Jason?’ Wild asked again.

‘What is the news?’ he asked.

‘Ojogolo arms dealers just sold two AK47 rifles to four robbers.

They had killed three during their last operation. They had revealed they would be testing their new guns this night. There is going to be a robbery at Agbor, in the house of a newly retired teacher who just got his pension. Informant is the man’s brother. He had withdrawn the money for something unknown’ Jason wrote.

‘That is a special omega case. But we can only counter and not prevent the robbery’ Ghost wrote.

Ghost was right, he was their lawyer. He had studied law courtesy of Major Ahmed’s wife. Ghost was like a son to her. Only the president could give an omega command and it was mainly for notorious criminals or those their missions had

revealed as threat to humans. Right now, the only option available was to counter the robbery not kill them before the robbery, as much as he hated it, it was the rule. They were not allowed to kill a potential robber or killer except they encountered them in the act, or except they were clear evidence of their crimes.

‘But this is not for us, it’s a simple case for the Special Force or the police. Jason forward the information to my email, I will send it to one of the Special Force team. I’m about to join the meeting’ Wild wrote.

‘But I think it’s still related to our mission. If the Special Force or the police carry out this operation, they will have to give a report and they may capture one of them and they may get to know about Ojogolo’s arms dealers and other things may start happening’ Mark said.

Special Force were sometimes sent to capture suspects but not the Circle. They were only trained on missions and the best way to kill a target.

‘I don’t think it tallies Mark, they will never speak, even if they confess their sponsor, they won’t be able to point out their location, because buyers are blindfolded at a certain point and when they are through with their deal, they are blindfolded again. The only name Special Force or the police may come out with is Ojogolo and there is a twenty percent chance of them discovering one of the dealers within a month’ Jason countered Mark.

‘So the Special Force will handle them. Everyone is busy right now there is no one to spare’ Wild wrote.

That was their problem, he had a bigger headache at the moment.

‘What are you planning on doing about Halima’s clothes and food?’ he asked.

“Cindy is on it, she has seen her picture and she will get the basics things she needs. We will also buy some foodstuffs and bring it to you this evening’

‘Jason, please tell me you are joking?’ Doc wrote

‘About what?’ Jason replied.

‘You just stated that Cindy is aware of this mission’ Fast wrote.

‘Yes, I tell her everything, it’s our deal.’

‘Jason you know that’s against the rule and also the less she knows, the better’ Wild wrote.

‘I did not break any rule, if they can know we are soldiers why not what we do?’ Jason wrote.

‘Jason, the rule is to protect her, you are risking and putting her in danger by letting her know too much. You are being illogical Jason’ he wrote.

‘Tamed no. You are very wrong. Keeping someone close to you in the dark is what puts them in danger, that was what happened to Abigail’ Jason replied.

‘Jason’ Wild wrote.

‘Let’s face the truth now. Cindy is alive today because she got to know who I was, what I was doing and the situation we had find ourselves in during the civil war mission. I had tried to keep her in the dark but that would have killed her before I could rescue her. She was able to convince Faceless that he was about to murder millions of people because she was aware of what was going on’ Jason wrote.

‘And how had that helped her when she was about to be raped by Andrew, or captured by Nick’ he replied.

His anger was now at its peak.

‘Those were times when she could only pray for a miracle and hope I would save her. But there were times when she could save herself and if I had not told her anything, she wouldn’t have been able to get out of Faceless hands because even after knowing he was her uncle, he had still wanted to keep her. You know she would have been kidnapped earlier but she had delayed them by knowing I was supposed to be at Onitsha with George. She had ran into the bathroom giving me the time I needed to get to her. Tamed, you know I don’t know how to sugarcoat the truth. The reason why Abigail died was because she was not given the necessary details, she did not know the dangerous mission you had involved yourself in’ Jason wrote.

‘Jason stop it. This is not the topic for discussion’ Wild wrote.

‘Jason please let’s stop here’ Doc wrote.

‘No, I’m not through, Tamed and all of you need to know why the closest person around you must know what you are doing.

There is no way Cindy will betray me, she will rather be dead, that was the same for Abigail so why keeping them out. Tamed you need to face the truth that if Abigail had known, she

wouldn’t have opened the door. Your house was secured, there was no break in because it would have taken Nero’s men long

time to get in. She had opened the door for them. If she had

known what you were doing, she would have done what Cindy

had done and it would have given you enough time to get to her.

She was killed seconds before you arrived. George and I had

arrived seconds after you had killed Nero’s men. I’m going to

protect Cindy my way and nobody should tell me I'm putting her in danger, if you don't want me pissed off" Jason wrote.

He had to read Jason's text again. Others had replied Jason but he could not see what they wrote, he could only see Jason's last text. The phone fell from his hands and he found himself punching his punching bag. But it was not working because he was suddenly reliving the last minutes of Abigail, how he had felt when he heard the gunshot just seconds after entering his compound. He did not know how he had done it but the five men in his compound were dead in seconds. Then he had ran to her, he had seen the blood and her last breath.

Suddenly, he could feel the pain again, the helpless pain of holding her dead body. Another punch opened his bunching bag, he did not care as the force sent debris scattering around the room. The pain he had wanted was back, but it was too much.

He let out a groan as he held his heart, as he fell on the ground. Jason was right. Abigail had opened the door, he would never know what they had told her to make her open the door, but she had been the one to open the door, she wouldn't have opened if she had known. The pain increased, there was still the feeling of a hole in his heart but somehow it felt like the hole was being refilled with liquid flame. He had carried out a brutal extinction of Lord Nero's clan but he was also guilty. Abigail had died because of him. If he had not met Abigail at the restaurant that day he had gone to get food, she would have still been alive. This was what he had wanted, this was the feeling he had yearned for, but not anymore, he would take it if he could only remember her dead body, he would take that torture but not the girl smiling at him, not the girl asking him if the food he was ordering was for three. Not the picture of what Abigail could have been. His phone had been vibrating but he was not ready to

go back to the chat room, he was not ready to read any counter opinions. He did not want to read texts trying to tell him he did nothing wrong, because Jason was right. His phone started ringing, he ignored it but had to pick the call after it kept ringing. It was Wild.

“Don’t fucking tell me Jason is wrong.”

“I have something that can calm you” Wild said.

“What?”

“I have changed my mind about the operation. Jason will forward the details and coordinates of the robbery to you. They are all yours. I’ve instructed Mark to position your flight bird at a strategic point in your compound so we can know what’s going on. Jason and Cindy will be bring the things Halima will need including food. They will not see her but will wait till you come back. What do you say Tamed?”

“I’m in.”

“Don’t meet Halima before you go. You are a danger to her now.”

“Get lost Wild” he replied ending the call.

Wild was a friend he could count on in moments like this. He knew exactly what he needed. He needed something or someone to pour his boiling rage on and Wild had given him a gift. At the moment, some robbers were preparing to release terror on innocent citizens, thinking they were the predator, if only they knew they were about to become the prey.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

{I'm at the edge of losing it-the pain in my gut keeps burning}

He had fixed another punching bag after gathering his weapons into his pickup. Time was not cooperating and Jason had not yet sent the details. He knew why. Wild might have instructed him to send it when it was time, because Wild knew he was not going to wait. After hitting the bag for a while, he checked the time using the wrist watch Jason had given him the other night. He had worn it after ending the call with Wild. He had also searched the bag with his gadgets to find out if there were any hardcopy manual on how to operate some of the gadgets. There was none. He just picked out the spectacle and their communication gadgets, at least he knew few things about

them. He was ready, the beast in him could not wait but he needed the details before he could move.

At exactly 7:00PM, the message he had been waiting for came. It was a map with a red dot at the location of the robbery. He knew that area. It was called Owa Nta, there was a filling station before it. As he studied the map, an email came from Jason.

‘The exact place is unknown but the robbers currently have a flight bird on their trail, right now they are getting themselves high on drugs. I will soon connect the bird to your wrist watch.

All you need to do is operate the watch the way you operate a normal android phone. You will soon see a picture of a bird on your watch, tap on it and permit it to connect together. Then scroll through it and you will see your spectacle. I hope you had switched it off, if not, you have to charge it on your way. It charges itself with solar power but the sun has gone down and I

know you placed it where the sun cannot get to it. I have already connected your spectacle to your wrist watch, so once you tap on the spectacle device, they will be connected. Create a triangular link by connecting the three devices together. Just scroll to an app with a triangle shape, click on it and the two devices connected to your wrist watch will appear. Give the permit to connect and that's it. Your wrist watch's battery is very powerful, you don't need to charge it now, make sure you are wearing it all the time because it will automatically charge itself when you come outside under the sun. It has solar panel installed on both sides. You will have to learn how to do the rest yourself. Cindy and I are thirty minutes away, and we would not be waiting for you to come back.'

Agbor was about 50 minutes' drive from Asaba but he was going to beat the time to thirty. Jason was on his way and his

personal Flight bird was already placed to watch the compound. It would be able to pick targets as far as three hundred yards which was enough space to fire a targeted missile without causing any destruction to his compound.

The time was 7:07PM when he drove out of his compound. His eyes caught the mango tree his first bullet had gotten stuck in. He had never removed the bullet.

It was not difficult to plug the spectacle. It had a Nokia torch charging point and his pickup van had up to twelve different charging mouths. His wrist watch vibrated as he drove out of his street. He quickly glanced at it.

‘Connect the transmitter.’

He had no idea who had sent the message, it could be Mark or Jason. He brought out his transmitting tools from the box he had placed on the front seat.

“Show time” he heard Mark’s voice as soon as he switched and connected them to his ears and top of his T-shirt.

“I’m charging my spectacle right now, Jason or Mark what’s the status?”

“Tamed please calm down, your voice is still showing danger signal” he heard Doc’s voice.

“I asked a question.”

“The back of your phone has a magnet, if you paste it to the door of your pickup, you can watch what the bird is sending through the chat room” Mark answered.

“Tamed please don’t. Only Fast can multi task like that. Mark just be his eyes till he switches his spectacle on” Major Ahmed said.

“Welcome back Colonel” Ghost said.

But his voice had sounded like he said kolone.

“Ghost I take back my word, please call me Major.”

“So Mark where are my targets?”

“Thirty minutes away from their destination” Mark answered.

“I read what happened, Tamed are you okay?” Major asked.

There was a fatherly concern in his voice.

“Jason you wrote that there were four but they bought two AK47 rifles, does the other two have weapons?” he asked.

He did not answer Major because there was no answer to give.

“Wild are you sure this is the right thing?” Fast asked.

“This is the only option available” Wild answered.

“Just when I thought Jason was becoming normal” Mark said.

“You mean just when you thought Jason was beginning to learn how to be sociable and how to bend the truth” Jason spoke for the first time.

“Jason we got your point but you need to tell Cindy to teach you what to say and how to say it. It was not the right time” Fast said.

“Leave Cindy out of this. I’m warning you” Jason answered.

“So you can do what exactly. You put Tamed in this situation because you wanted to prove a damn point” Mark responded.

“Maybe I will have to refresh your memory on what I can do. Fast and Mark stay out of my business with Cindy” Jason.

“Jason shut the fuck up” Doc and Ghost said at the same time.

“As long as you are part of the Circle, Cindy is our business” Wild answered.

“Last warning” Jason answered.

He did not say any word, he just drove and listened but Jason's last statement was not something to ignore. He meant it when he said last warning. Although he could not figure out what Jason could do to them as a result of the distance, he knew Jason was not joking.

“Jason, stop it right now. Don't ever threaten your family again. We all know you have autism, we have accepted you the way you are but that does not mean we cannot give our dissatisfaction on what you did” Major said.

“I don't care if you are satisfied or not, just leave Cindy out of....” He did not complete his statement.

“What the heck Cindy” Jason shouted.

“I apologize on behalf of Jason. Ghost, Fast, Sabrina, Mark, Wild, Tamed, Major, I'm sorry. I'm trying my best, one day he will learn how to communicate. Tamed it wasn't your fault. No

matter what Jason said, it wasn't your fault. Some things can be analyzed logically but it can still be wrong. I'm forever grateful for your help that day. Don't mind this idiot. He had trusted on his stupid gadgets which have failed him and if you were not there, Jason would have been late. Please everyone ignore Jason. I'm your business, he can choose for himself but not for me. Take back your transmitter. And don't you dare attack my family because they mentioned me. Idiot" Cindy said.

"Case settled. She has officially declared herself part of the family and who I'm I to refuse" Ghost responded.

"Tamed, I'm sorry about the way I wrote that text, it was the wrong time and wrong way of writing it. Is my apology enough?" Jason asked.

The first sentence was shockingly for him but he knew the last part was for Cindy.

“Wow the power of a woman. I never knew this day will come.

Jason apologizing. Unbelievable” Mark said.

“Tamed say something” Major said.

“Where are my targets?” He asked.

“This is bad, very bad” Fast said.

“You must be flying Tamed. You are fifteen minutes apart”

Mark answered.

“Don’t worry Fast, we are here to help him” Doc panted.

“Doc why are you panting?” Ghost asked.

“I’m practicing, I start work this night.”

“I thought we decided you should use another way, I don’t like the idea of my girl working in a strip club” Mark said.

“Mark stop pissing me off. Today has not been a good day” Doc replied.

It was difficult to understand if Mark was serious or not. He had been like this even before he left the Circle and from what he had observed, Mark had not made any progress even after a year. When it came to physical and facial appearance, George and Ghost had been the ones to analyze the Special Force.

According to their analysis, Nick and Mark were the Face of The Special Force. Nick was extremely handsome but evil beyond redemption. He had been the enemy behind the civil war mission. Jason had killed him after a failed attempt to ignite a bomb that would have killed millions of people in Lagos. Mark was second in George’s rating and he was known as the Pentagon. He had dated five girls differently and none of them knew about the other one until Sabrina told him off. She had

said it was a crime against the female gender. The disappointing part for Sabrina were the girls. They had ended up fighting themselves for Mark's love. His nickname as pentagon had ended and he had diverted his attention to Sabrina knowing fully well she hated flirts. Most of the nicknames were given by George, even Abigail was not exempted. A memory suddenly flashed through his mind. He was transported to that day. It was a week before their wedding. Abigail had visited the Circle house. Although she was aware he was a special Force soldier and his team was called Circle, she did not know details of exactly what they did. She had taken a liking to George because he looked young. He was actually the youngest in age. George had declared her his big sister after she had served him Ogbono soup with pounded yam. George had decided to teach her the old English couple dance.

He sat down and watched the both of them dance and laugh.

Abigail called him to join but he shook his head.

“I don’t dance” he said.

“You need to be a bit loose big man. Look at George, he is a soldier like you but he is fun to be with. Maybe George you should just quit. You and Ghost can start a comedy show”

Abigail said sitting down on the ground, exhausted from the dance.

“I was born to be a soldier big sis” George said joining her on the ground.

“But you look normal and too cute. I will now be worried about my little brother every time Wild sends him out” she said.

“Looks can be deceitful my dear, but don’t worry big sis. There are only two ways I would prefer dying.”

“Which is?” Abigail asked.

“It should be when I’ve retired and as a result of old age, but if I must die young, I don’t want to be killed by accident or a sickness. If I must die young, I will prefer to die in active duty, with that, I will make sure I take enough escorts with me.”

“Okay let’s stop. This is disturbing. I don’t even want to imagine it. You are supposed to calm me down and tell me you will always come back. My kids need an uncle like you” Abigail said hitting George shoulder.

“Okay big sis. So are you ready to learn another dance step?”

George asked raising her up.

“Hey Tamed Beast, are you sure you don’t want to dance this with her, I’m not the groom here or will you permit me to do the favor for you next week?” George had asked as the old school music started playing.

'It must be love, oh it must be love, I fall like a sparrow, fly like a dove. You must be the dream I've dreaming of, oh what a feeling, it must be love...' the singer sang.

George raised Abigail up and started spinning her, her laughter was intoxicating and the sight was disturbing. He did not know when he stood up and pulled Abigail to him.

“Jerk” George said turning off the music with a remote.

“Tamed, Tamed...” he heard Wild’s voice pulling him back from that sweet but painful memory.

The pain was still there but remembering George had worsened it. He brought the pickup to an abrupt stop and held his chest.

He had not felt it when George died, he could not even feel anything during his burial which was a week after Jason had ended the supposed war. He had gone to pay his last respect and he had stood from a distance as he watched George being laid to

rest. George had always said if he was killed in active duty, he must be buried at the exact place he died. His parents and the land owners had obliged. The place was crowded with soldiers. Many people had come out to watch, the whole of Onitsha knew that someone was being buried. He had even seen some of the Biafran soldiers they had combined forces with to fight Nick's men, although none wore their uniform he could still remember their faces. They had come to pay their last respect to George. He had even sighted Nnamdi the current leader. What had actually attracted so much crowd was the presence of the president. Although the real details were not given to the masses, it was on the news that the president was going to honor a soldier who had died trying to prevent a bomb from killing millions of people. The news was deceitful because so many people had believed the bomb was in Onitsha. He was honored and ranked a Major General. But he had not felt any pains of

loss, he had only felt numb as the Special Force said their departing quote to George. Now he was feeling the pain. He could hear their voices as they said the quote in unison, but the difference from then and now was he could now feel the pain of losing George.

“He had answered the call to protect his motherland against those who want to destroy her, against those who do not want peace. But today, his work has ended, today a hero goes home, a hero will rest from his labor, worry no more about your motherland, for we will continue from where you stopped. Rest in peace.”

They had said the final word and the gun salute had started. Each of the Circle member had pasted something on his tomb. When everyone had left the grave, he had gone there hoping he would feel the pains. On his tomb was written.

“MAJOR GENERAL GEORGE IS RESTING HERE, WHERE HE FOUGHT HIS LAST BATTLE”

But why was he feeling it now? Was the pain always with him but just surfacing? The idiot had his wish granted. And he had also taken escorts with him. Jason had also added Tiger, his killer to his escorts. Tiger had been a member of the Circle but had been in hiding after he was declared wanted for war crimes. Tiger had also been the only person Jason dreaded because he had never defeated him in any physical combat. But Jason had killed him. He might ask Jason how he did it. Now that he could mourn George, it occurred to him that he never gave George the chance to mourn Abigail’s death with him. If he had known he was going to lose those two siblings within a year?

“Tamed, you are groaning, what is it? What do you mean by the idiot had his wish granted?” Major asked bringing him back to reality.

He did not know he had spoken out loud. There was no way to explain his feeling. How was he going to tell them that he was just feeling the pains of losing George?

He ignited the pickup and was back on the road. He needed to get there fast, he was losing it.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

{I watched as mad with rage, it charged the ram and hit it so hard that it broke off its two horns. The ram didn't stand a chance against it. The billy goat knocked the ram to the

ground and stomped all over it. Nothing could have saved the ram from the goat.}

“Tamed, you are fifteen minutes away. But the robbers are already at the location about to come out of their vehicle” Mark said.

He could not believe he had been so distracted and had lost time. He was going to find a way to sort out these new emotions after he was through with his current mission.

“We just arrived at your place Tamed. I’m will be dropping the goods at your door step” Jason said.

“Tamed I think you can put on your spectacle now” Wild said.

He quickly put on his spectacle, it was in night vision mode.

“How do I switch over to the bird?”

“Don’t do that yet, but once you get to your stopping point, do a triangle connection” Jason answered.

He increased his speed and it was easier because the night vision was making everything clearer.

“It’s time. I’m off” Doc said.

“What’s the mission?” he asked looking for a way to distract him from going back to the past.

“That’s a good sign” Major said.

“Tamed is partially back” Fast said.

“There are tips that the strip club also sell hard drugs and are involved in human trafficking and some who refuse are murdered. My mission is to discover hard evidence. You know it will be omega if the tips are true” Doc said.

Alpha meant they will not be involved. It meant the criminals would be captured, of course there would be a battle and people must die. That would be the work of the Special Force. The Circle were only sent for Omega. They were not trained on how to use handcuff, they were just sent to exterminate and neutralize.

“Sabrina, I’m serious. Agege as he is popularly called is a dangerous man. I don’t like the idea of you going alone, what if you are discovered?” Mark asked.

"Mark you are not asking the right questions. Agege from what I read sleeps with the ladies in his club. You remember what happened last time Doc had a similar mission three years ago" Ghost said.

Ghost was answered with laughter from Sabrina, Fast, Mark, Major and even Wild. He even smiled.

Sabrina had ended an undercover mission in just three days. She had gone with Stud another female Special Force soldier. She was nicknamed Stud because she normally dressed like a boy. They were to be hostesses in a bar at Port Harcourt. According to Doc, she had gone to deliver the day's record but Mr. Right, the bar owner had made sexual advances which she had politely refused, but the man had shot the door and had tried to rape her. What was worse was the man had two friends with him who wanted to have their turn after Mr Right was through. Sabrina had beaten them to stupor. Then after tying their mouths to prevent people from hearing their screams, she had castrated two of them and treated their wound. She had said death was too simple a punishment. Sabrina had videoed Mr. Right confessing to his crimes and where evidences could be found on the promise that she would not castrate him. Castrating the men could be overlooked but she could not kill someone who had

surrendered except it was Omega. The only way she would be vindicated was if it was self-defense. She had given Mr. Right a lifeline of escaping if he could kill her. Crazy Sabrina had stabbed Right's neck killing him in seconds. To prove it was self-defense, she took the memory card containing the record of the video surveillance in Mr. Right's room. And with enough editing, the case was closed but many in the Special Force saw the real video. Somehow the media were able to pick out something.

'Female soldier kills one, castrate two men who tried to rape her'

The good thing was the absence of name, it was written as an unidentified female soldier.

“I was in the python Special Force team then. Stud had said Sabrina took all the fun. They were out before Mr. Right security knew what happened” Mark said.

“Sabrina please this case is delicate, we could not get all the details we wanted concerning Mr. Right. Please don't go gaga” Wild said.

“You still have to answer Mark's question” Major said.

“Let's hope Agege will keep to the deal. I told him I don't sleep with my boss. But if he tries breaking the deal, and I'm discovered, I won't have to work long. I will just take him to the dance hall” Doc replied.

“Wild why do I feel you are planning something? You could have allowed any team from the Special Force do this” he said.

“It was not my choice, three other females applied alongside Sabrina but Adams chose Sabrina” Wild said.

“My business for the day is ending once Tamed is through with this semi mission. I will be visiting that club tonight.”

“Mark stay out of my business” Doc warned.

“I just want to have fun and also have a talk with those who would look at you wrongly. That’s is my new business. Fast how fast can you fly to Lagos? I will buy you a drink.”

“I’m all in. I will pick you up” Fast answered.

The Circle were not allowed to drink any alcoholic beverage and there was no way Fast would accept Mark's invitation because of a drink. If he were to guess, Mark would be showing Fast tips on underwater combat.

“Make sure you guys do not complicate her mission” Wild said.

“Roger that” Fast and Mark responded.

“Seriously? Wild you are going to allow them torment my life?”

Doc protested.

“I can’t stop them from having fun” Wild said.

“Sabrina please make sure you look very hot” Mark said. He was not afraid of Major.

“Definitely Mark, you can only see but you can't touch” Sabrina replied Mark.

“Another permission granted. Mark you are almost there” Ghost said.

“Keep deceiving Mark” Sabrina said.

“I think I’m here” he said stopping his pickup.

“Yes, they are already in the house. It’s ten yards from you” Mark said

“I got it” he said.

He quickly connected the three devices together. Then he pressed the middle button on the left side of his spectacle. He

could now see what was going on. The bird was showing him images through the window.

“Tamed push the first button on the left of your spectacle. The left eye would show what the bird is seeing and the right eye will show your environment” Jason said.

He did as instructed and it worked.

“Where is the fucking six million naira, bring it out” one of the men shouted.

His gun was pointed at an elderly man. A woman was lying face down on the floor, her hands covering her ears. He got furious when he saw a lady and another smaller boy being kicked by two of the robbers. There was an old woman sitting on an old and torn cushion chair close to the wall but the robbers had ignored her. The last one with a knife was throwing everything he could touch on the ground. There was nothing much to throw.

Apart from an old TV, one white and three blue plastic chairs and a small rectangular wooden table with a hole in the middle, the parlor was just big but empty. He had already pushed down the TV from where it was placed on a shelf. The fall had broken the glass and its debris were scattered on the concrete floor. The four plastic chairs were also broken. The table was pushed towards the wall opposite the old woman. There was no power supply. The robbers had come with bright torches. He moved quietly to the door.

“Please I've told you, there is no money” the man said.

One of the robbers hit his shoulders with his AK47. He cocked the gun and pointed it at the little boy.

“Please no, not my grandson” the man pleaded.

“Then the money you fool. Stop wasting my fucking time” the one with a big cutlass shouted.

He kicked the man and placed the cutlass on top of the woman's back. That would be the man's wife.

Normally, he was supposed to first target the ones with gun, followed by the ones without gun. But they were very unfortunate. There was no way he was going to make their death easy, he would not be satisfied with that. He had one option in his mind.

“Tamed, don't. Just shoot the targets and leave” Wild said.

Of course Wild knew what he wanted to do.

He brought out his customized Ruger pistol and a laser knife. He put both back in his pocket. He brought out another weapon, two of it. The weapon was developed by George and Jason. It was Wild's blueprint they had followed. It was a gun but not for bullets. It was called electroshock weapon or a stun gun. But theirs was a bit different. When fired, it would shoot out a long

electrified tasers of about 25,000 thousand volts. The normal stun gun could release 50,000 volt, immobilizing the target. But what was the fun in targets not knowing how they would be killed. All he needed was 25,000 volts, it was enough to give him the time he needed to disarm them but still keep them very conscious. They would be able to defend themselves. He needed a fight and he was going to get one. And he had two with him.

They had broken the door and that must have delayed them.

They had not bothered to close it. That was the dangers of getting high, it made them fearless but stupid.

“The money is under my bed” the man said.

“Go get it” the one pointing his gun at the man said to the one destroying their properties.

That made him pause. He stood by the side of the door. He wanted the four of them in one place because he was going to

fire in quick succession. The destroyer came back seconds later with a box. He opened it.

“Wow, this is good, see money, see food” he said.

“Shebi you say money nor dey” their leader said in Nigerian pidgin pushing his gun on the man’s head.

“Please take the money and leave” the man pleaded.

“Shut up” one of them said kicking the man’s legs.

“We go leave any time we want, we are the ones in charge here fucker” the second one with gun said lightening a cigarrete.

“We get sweet sissy here” the supposed leader said moving over to the lady on the floor.

“No not my daughter” the man pleaded.

“Snake, make we party na, you dey feel me?” the leader said raising the lady up.

‘What a stupid nickname’ he thought.

He had seen and heard enough.

“Tamed, just shoot and leave” Major said.

He removed the sound transmitter from his ears but left the Mic which also had a camera to it. He won't be able to hear them but they would be able to hear and see what he was doing. Once his stun guns hit his targets, he had twelve seconds. He covered his hood, switched his spectacle to full vision, cocked his Circle stun guns and fired both guns twice simultaneously with both hands as he entered the house. He did not give them any time to understand what was happening to them as he quickly disarmed them. He was just removing the last bullet from the second rifle when the effect of the electric shock subsided. He threw the rifle away. He had left the ones with knife and cutlass to hold their weapons.

“Who are you?” their leader asked, bringing out a knife from his pocket and positioning himself for a fight. The other one followed suit. The fear had not arrived, they were supposed to be scared a bit because someone just froze and disarmed them. Their drug was still working. That was good for him because it was too early for them to fear him.

“Wrong question. You don’t need to know who I am, you only have to know what I came to do” he said.

“And what is that?” the one with the cutlass asked.

They started surrounding him, putting him in their circle. What an irony. He was the Circle. The one with cigarette threw it down and stomped it with his feet. The family started shifting away, saving him the stress of protecting them while fighting.

“I came to kill you” he said.

The four robbers burst into laughter. The drug was still working.

“Who you think you be? We be four. E be like say you nor check well boy. Na six feet you won enter fucker. Consider yourself deleted” the one with the knife said laughing.

They always depended on their numbers. He had never encountered any situation where his targets did not trust in their numbers.

“Who wants to die first?” he asked.

The one with the knife rushed at him, he waited for him to raise his hands up, he sized his hand and bent it with his two hands and before his screams could disturb the peaceful night, he sliced his throat with his laser knife. The force and power of the knife choked his scream midway. It took just few seconds. He pushed him out of his way and as expected the other three came at him at once.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

{I could be resting in peace right now, asleep forever, feeling no pain}

They rushed at him counting on their numbers, if one's weapon didn't touch him, the other would. They were two at his front and one at his back. His first kill was not the fight he was looking for, this was the fight he wanted. His adrenaline and survival instinct came alive. Just one wrong move or the right move but a millisecond late could cause his targets to get him with their weapons. In the seconds they came after him, he had marked out their attack method, the one with a cutlass would hit

his shoulders, the one at his back with pointed dagger which could be mistaken as a knife was going to stab him at the back. Chances of the man stabbing his neck was zero because he was short and he was already hysterical. The third one with knife, their leader was going straight for his stomach. If he turned left and the last second, the one with the dagger would miss but the leader would hit his waist while the one with the cutlass would still not miss. He waited for the few seconds it took them to get very close, he did not allow them to get so close to the point of impact, he fell backward to his right, but the force of their movement did not let them stop on time, he spun right knowing the one at his back would get to him first. He stumbled on him and as he fell towards him with his dagger still raised up, he seized the hand with the dagger with his left hand, he used his right elbow to raise and push him to his right same time his comrades hit him with their weapons but before they could

realize their weapon would touch their partner, it was too late. Everything happened in less than five seconds. The cutlass sliced the waist of the man that it would have separated into two if it was laser. The leader's knife went straight into the man's back very close to his neck. He died unable to utter a single scream. Blood splattered everywhere staining his light blue T-shirt, even his jacket was not spared. The shock of killing their comrade propelled the remaining two backwards. He stood up and immediately knew the drug they had injected or inhaled had cleared off.

“Next” he said remaining in the invincible circle he had created in his mind.

“Who are you?” the leader asked again but this time with his voice shook.

“Hunter” the one with cutlass gasp his eyes balls seeming larger.

“I like that name.”

“We did not come here because of you. Leave us alone” the leader said looking at the door but unfortunately they would have to go through him to get to the door.

He hoped Circle were listening. He now knew the name they had tagged him.

“Next” he repeated.

But from their stance, they were no longer willing to fight him, they were looking for a way to escape. It was one thing to fight an enemy you didn't know but another thing to fight an enemy you believed would defeat you. The leader suddenly pushed the one with cutlass towards him. His comrade's cutlass was down and he was not ready for the betrayal. But from the very time the leader started focusing on the door, he had known that was what he would do. Distract him with his comrade and escape while

his comrade was being killed would be his best option but unfortunately for the leader, he was prepared and his laser knife was already raised when he pushed his comrade towards him.

The push sent the one with cutlass straight at his already raised laser knife which went straight at his chest, he left the laser knife there and caught the leader before he could pass his circle. It took just two seconds. Seizing the hand with the knife, he pushed the leader to the ground and brought out his Ruger pistol. The fight was no longer interesting if they were no longer willing to fight.

“Please, spare my”

He bent down and shot the man’s ears. The close contact opened the man’s skull stopping his plead midway. Blood splattered towards different direction staining his shirt which was already stained from the second kill.

He turned towards the man that had his laser knife in his chest, he had already fallen down and blood was still flowing out of his lifeless body. He pulled his laser knife from the man's chest, brought out his hearing tools and inserted it back in his ear after clicking a tiny button on it.

“Tamed, you are no longer Tamed, you are becoming worse than when you were the beast” Major said.

“I hope the Beast is now satiated?” Wild asked.

“Mission accomplished. Over and out” he said removing all communication gadgets.

The torches on the ground were still bright and one could clearly see the ugly sight of the dead robbers. He turned towards the family who had scurried close to the old lady. The young lady had her hands on the face of the little boy while the elderly man held his wife close to him. He moved towards them and they

cawed in fear pushing themselves to the wall. His leg kicked the bag of money making him bend to pick it.

“Take the money, I beg you please, don’t kill us” the man pleaded.

He picked the bag and moved closer to them.

“Why did you withdraw such large amount of money? Are you stupid?” he asked still feeling angry.

“I did not want to, it’s my pension money. I wanted to use it to complete my house and buy other things but my brother told me my bank will be closing down tomorrow and any one with money will lose it. I quickly rushed and withdrew all my money but before I could take it to another bank, it was too late, they’ve closed” the man answered with his pleading voice.

“Your brother you just mentioned is behind all this. He made a deal with these robbers.”

“That’s not possible, Ike cannot do this to me. I trained him in school, he cannot pay me back like this” the man cried.

Although in his words he had not believed his brother had sent the robbers, it was clear in his mind that his brother had done it.

“The police will soon be here, make sure you tell them....don’t look at me” he said putting enough command in his voice.

The man bent his head down almost immediately.

“I’m sorry, sorry” he pleaded.

“Tell the police that the only one who knew about the money and who told you to withdraw it is your brother. They will know he was behind it because no bank will be closing tomorrow.”

The man nodded. He turned towards the door and started leaving.

“You are a lion’s cub, home fresh from the kill, my son. Look at him, crouched like a lion, king of the beast; who dares mess with him.”

He turned, it was the old lady who spoke. He found himself moving towards her. He had read that in his mother’s diary. He called it a dairy because he could not find what else to name it. His mother had written it on the day he had almost killed his uncle with an arrow.

“What do you mean? What are you quoting?” he asked bending towards the woman.

“Look at you, the cub has become a full grown lion, the beast is full of rage. I can see through you my son. Your raging emotions are bare for everyone to see and I’m afraid it will get worse. You say these are bad times for me, it’s one thing after another. God is piling on the pain. I’m worn out and there is no end in sight,

but that gift was not the gift you think it is. There is another gift, and it is unfortunate the gift is there with you but you don't know. The sadness you have right now is similar to that pain, but the coming joy is also similar, and that raging emotion will be calm when you discover the true gift my son" the old lady continued, her hands on his face.

"I don't get you, please explain."

But the old lady had already rested her head on the cushion, she was already sleeping as if nothing had happened, as if she had not said anything.

"I'm sorry, my mother has amnesia, she hardly talks but when she talks, it is always out of context. She won't remember anything even if I wake her up, please don't mind her sir" the man said.

He stood up staring at the sleeping woman. His smart wrist watch vibrated in his hands, he looked at it

“The police are on their way. Time to leave.”

He had no idea who sent it.

Within a minute, he was back in his pickup and on his way home. After driving for about twenty minutes, he stopped his pickup, picked his android phone, opened the Circle app and typed the first words the woman had said.

‘Jason please can you find out anything about this quote’ he wrote.

He ignited the pickup and was back on the road. There was no way he could overlook what that woman had said as gibberish. She had not only quoted something from his mum’s dairy but had also mentioned that the gift his mum had given him was not

the last gift. There was another gift in the house which she had left before she died. His mum had been told she had cancer at the University of Benin Teaching Hospital but she had never mentioned it. Anytime she had lied down making him worried, she had either said she had a fever or she was tired. She had said she will die a happy mother after he applied to join the army. He had thought she was speaking in general term not knowing she had spoken literally. He increased the speed of his pickup and almost clashed with a corolla vehicle he was trying to overtake. Notwithstanding, he still increased his speed. There must be somewhere he had not searched.

Immediately he stopped the pickup at his compound, he was out and inside his house. He ignored the big bags and plastic rubber that were placed outside his door and went to search his mum's things. He searched her bag of clothes but found nothing. He hit

the wall with his right leg in frustration. This was insane, there was no way what the old woman said was a coincidence, or did she make that quote after seeing what he did? But what about her talk about a gift. Suddenly, he felt a serious headache like a punch on his forehead, then he remembered he had not eaten, but the headache was overpowering his hunger. He needed to sleep. He went out to switch on the generator, there was no light in his compound because he had cut it off himself. He did not want any one visiting him because of some unpaid bills. He needed the light because he was going to rest after finding something to eat, and he would need the fan close to his head. As he walked back inside, he carried the bags, one was a big box while the other was a Ghana-must-go bag. He dragged the bag to the kitchen, then carried the box to his master's bedroom door. He went out again and carried the box-like white plastic rubber. Inside the rubber were one big and a medium size flask. He

opened it after entering inside. The big flask had jollof rice with chicken wings, his favorite part of a chicken, the other still had jollof rice and chicken. Cindy had also sent him food. He knew foodstuffs were in the bag in the kitchen but he was not ready to sort them out. He took a jug of water from the fridge and a small cup from the dining table. He pulled off his spectacle and carried the medium size flask with the jug and the cup to his master bedroom. He opened the door, placed the flask under his armpit and switched on the light. She was sitting close to the wardrobe and jerked up when the light came on. She gave one glance at him and pushed herself to the wardrobe shaking with fear. He stood there confused on what was scaring her like that. He moved inside and dropped her food, then he pushed the box inside.

“This contains your new clothes and all the things you will need, make sure you sort them out and hang them in the wardrobe, take the ones you need for bathing to the bathroom” he said but her head was bent with her hand folded across her chest and her body was seriously shaking.

His anger which seemed to have subsided came back again, he moved close to her and pulled her hand from her body. He held her jaw and raised her head up but her eyes were closed.

“Halima, look at me when I’m talking to you” he commanded.

She immediately opened her closed eyes. The fear he saw in her eyes was pissing him off to a new level. Although his anger was not directed at her, he could not figure out why her fear usually gave him an outburst. She was stammering something but she was not audible.

“What is it?”

“Blood” she stammered pointing at his shirt.

“I just came back from a hunt and it was not fun, I could only fight two, and had to make do with killing two. And they are Chief’s comrades.”

He just knew that was the wrong thing to say. Her fear was turning to dread. He was sure he was not the right person for this job. He left her and walked towards the door.

“Are you going to touch me today?” she stammered.

He had flung her to the bed before he realized what he had done or was doing. His hand was on her neck and her eyes were popping out in fear. He immediately stood up and was out of the room in a jiffy. His headache hit a high scale as he entered his room. He placed his hands on his forehead groaning.

“What the fuck is wrong with me. God why are you doing this to me? Why this uncontrollable emotions? Why this pain?”

He stood up and pulled off his jacket and T-shirt. He located the bathroom outside his room and had a quick shower. He went to the dining table and forced himself to eat half of the jollof rice and chicken wings. He searched for his panadol but only saw his sleeping medicine. He had not used it for a while because for a long time, there was no emotions and no nightmare, he took two tablets not caring if they were expired. It never worked on him anyway, it just made him drowsy, but at that moment it was the best option available. The bird would alert the Circle of impending danger which they could take care of meters away and he would stand up if someone tried to open his door. He went back to his room, switched on the air condition and fan, then he pushed the standing fan close to the head of the bed. He

climbed on the bed and as he waited for the drug to take full effect, he thought of what the old woman had said, he tried to understand her statement but failed. Soon the drug took over, temporally giving him the peace he needed. But as the drug made him drowsy, he had a feeling that he had missed something.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

{I have escaped like a bird from a hunter's trap; the trap is broken, and I am free}

There was blood on his shirt and he said he had killed Chief's men. He was looking for Chief to kill Chief, then Chief would not be able to come for her and he would kill her when he got tired of her. Tears flowed out of her eyes as she moved towards her food. She was not hungry but he would kill her if she did not eat, she tried forcing herself to eat the rice and chicken but she could not, he had almost crushed her when he held her neck. What if he came back to touch her, her body shook at the thought. Earlier, she had heard a motor noise close to the compound, she had thought he had returned but after some time, she heard the noise of the motor again and later it stopped.

Maybe those were Chief's men looking for her. She should have screamed for help. She felt sad she just thought about that now it was too late. She tried to distract herself by looking at what was in the big box. There were a lot of clothes, skirts, dresses, tops and trousers. She saw bathing soap and sponge, toothpaste, toothbrushes, undies, brassieres and also pad. Chief had also brought pad every month and he also used to give her some drugs he had called pills. He had said that would prevent her from getting pregnant. But she was sure that Beast did not know that. He would touch her and make her carry a baby. Fear laced through her at that thought. She stood up and started walking round the room, she went to the door hoping to find a hole at the door handle where she could peep and know when he would come to touch her. There was no hole but something was wrong with the door. It was not fully closed, she held the handle and pulled at it, it opened making her gasp. He had forgotten to lock

the door. A thought immediately came to her mind. What if she ran away, what if Chief was searching for her? If she ran she might meet Chief or Chief's men. But then she remembered Abigail. Abigail had ran away and he had killed her. She went back to where she had been sitting close to the wardrobe before Beast had entered. After few minutes of sitting down, she stood up and went back to the door. Abigail did not have who to run to, that could be the reason Beast had caught and killed her. She had Chief to run to, and there was the part where he was looking for Chief, he had killed Chief's men. It was either she stayed back and wait for Beast to touch her which she knew she would not survive it or run and look for Chief and tell Chief Beast was looking for him. Chief would reward her. She shook her head and walked back to the wardrobe but almost immediately, she went back to the door. This must be a gift, this was the help she would ever get and she must make use of it. She opened the door

squeezing her eyes and face with the hope the sound the door made would not give her away. She quietly moved through what looked like a passage, she saw a door which she tried pulling but nothing happened, she pushed the door and it opened to what reminded her of a parlor, she did not know how she knew but that was a parlor, there were two more doors but she did not think it was the way out, she closed back the door but it made a loud noise. She stood still waiting for him to appear, but after some seconds without seeing him, she continued her movement. That big zoom zoom sound must have helped her. She got to another door and tried pulling it but it did not bulge, she pushed it but nothing. She studied the handle and pressed something round, it make a click sound. She tried pulling the door again and it opened. She smiled at the sight before her. Although outside was a bit dark, she could see a little with the help of the

moon. How did she know it was called the moon? Suddenly a song flashed through her mind.

“I see the moon, the moon sees me. God bless the moon and God bless me” she sang.

But how did she know that song?

She heard a bird’s noise making her turn back. She had almost forgotten she was supposed to be running and not smiling and singing a song. She quickly came outside, she felt elated as her feet touched the ground. She ignored the happiness and started running making sure she passed where there were no grasses. It was not that wide but she knew that must be the way. She ran and ran. She stopped and breathed heavily then continued running. She heard the flapping of wings almost touching her head and stopped to look at the bird, the night was not clear enough but she knew it was a bird.

“A bird” she said as the bird flew towards her face.

Even though she had no memory, she knew birds don't bite. She stretched her hand hoping to touch the bird. The bird dodged her hand but did not fly away, instead it landed on her arm making her laugh. She robbed the bird's head.

“Go, fly away. Don't let him catch you. I'm running away. I want to find Chief. I need to go now” she said gently pushing the bird away from her arm.

The bird flew high and she continued her run. She burst out on a road. She knew she had been running on a road but this one was different. It had black blocks on it. This was where cars pass, she thought. But there were no cars, might be because it was dark. She crossed the road, turned left and continued running. She heard another flapping of wings and saw the bird. It was following her. Maybe it was her guardian. She stopped running.

“Where did that thought come from?” she said aloud.

After taking some deep breaths, she started running again. She saw another road that looked like Beast’s road but looked better because there were no grasses here and there. She entered the road and continued running. Finally, she could see houses. She thought about knocking to ask them if they knew Chief but changed her mind. She should run farther before asking. After running for a long time, she could no longer see houses, except bushes and what looked like an uncompleted house. Tiny smoke was coming out of it. She stopped running and turned to go back. She would knock on the first house on her way back.

“Hey lady, you miss road?” someone asked making her turn.

He had come out of the uncompleted house. There was something in his mouth that brought out smoke. Someone else joined him. She took two steps back, her fear resurrecting.

“No, I’m looking for Chief” she said taking another two steps back.

“Who be Chief?” he asked after removing what was bringing out smoke from his mouth and blowing out large smoke from his mouth.

“Take me to Chief. He will reward you” she said.

“Onos you sure say this girl dey alright so, who go dey look for person by this time” the second man said.

Surprisingly, she could understand what he said.

“She be like person when one Chief don use her kpekus exchange for money. Her head come scatter join” the first man answered but she did not understand him.

“But this na manna from heaven na, nothing stop us to enjoy her kpekus too” the second one said.

He took what was bringing out smoke from the first one and put it in his mouth.

“Abi?” the first one said moving close to her making her take a step back.

“Please take me to Chief” she said.

The first man pressed something in his phone that gave light. He raised it to her face.

“Wait oo, guy come check this face, e dey familiar” he said.

The second man came closer with the smoke thing still in his mouth. He pulled it out after looking at her.

“True, guy na she oh, e be like say we don hammer oh” he said.

Smoke came out of his mouth as he spoke.

“You sure say nor be the drink dey do us so? You sure say we never high? How three million pepper go land for our face like this” the first man said.

“Guy snap am and send am, make we confirm am” the second man said.

“Will you take me to Chief?” she asked moving back.

“Girl, relax, shey na Chief you dey call Ojogolo, relax we will take you to Chief. I know Chief” the second man said hitting his hand on his chest.

The first man pressed something on his phone that blinked light. He continued pressing his phone.

“Guy I don send the picture through Facebook. Make we wait. I put my phone number” he said.

“Girl come sit down. We are contacting Chief, we go take you to Chief” the second one said holding her hands.

It felt bad and she pulled her hands away.

“She nor won touch, okay just follow me come sit down” the second man said.

“Wait, I don get response now now, na true oh” the first man shouted.

His phone started making noise, he pressed something and placed it in his ears.

“Yes I dey hear you loud and clear” he said and paused.

“She dey here life and direct, she say make we take am go meet Chief” he said and paused again.

“Oga we ready to bring am now now, but you need to clear way.”
He paused again.

“Guy he say cash on delivery, how far?” the first man asked.

“You dey even dey ask me, you don forget say na peace message, our life dey secure and on top we don hammer three million” the second man answered.

“Oga we go bring am. I know oga, I know the penalty, we nor go fail to deliver. We nor go touch am, no touching, we don dey enter road self” he said.

He removed the phone from his ears and started touching the top of the phone.

“He say make we dey come Ologbo, he say dem go meet us for the boundary” the first man said.

“But who we go borrow car from na, Aka nor go gree. We never pay am for last time” the second man said.

“Tell am say we don win the peace lottery, if he nor believe make him follow you come see, we go share the money with am” the first man said.

“Na him be say you go wait here make I go carry the car come” the second man said.

“Oya hurry, I go dey watch am” the first man said.

“This one wen ojogolo won pay that big amount for person when him don use her destiny, I just dey feel say something else dey.”

“Guy e nor concern you, abeg waka fast” the first man said.

The second man entered the uncompleted building.

“Girl see block, sit down, he don go bring car when go carry you go meet Chief.”

“Really? You are taking me to Chief?”

“Yes na, you still dey doubt?”

She shook her head and sat down on the block.

“Thank you” she said.

“Thankless, you know say plenty people don dey look for you, we dey even dey think say you run but e be like say you nor run, wetin happen?”

“Beast captured me, he wants to kill me. I just ran away hoping to see someone that will take me back to Chief” she said.

“Who be Beast?”

“He is very large, like two of you, he came and took me away from Chief. He wants to kill Chief, then kill me later.”

“Girl I nor just understand wetin you dey talk, how person go be times two of me? And how person go enter Ojogolo territory,

capture you just like that. Wetin dey even do me self. See as I dey expect craze person to talk normal.”

“Craze?”

“Girl relax eh, just relax, we go take you to Chief, okay?”

She nodded. She heard the flapping sound of a bird and raised her head. She saw the bird again making her smile. Her guardian was around.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

{I have no peace, no rest, and my troubles never end}

His wrist was vibrating but he was too drowsy to open his eyes. It kept vibrating but he still did not feel like waking up. But he hated the sensation and wanted it to stop. He held his wrist but his hand touched something else. Slowly he forced his eyes to open, it was his android watch.

“What the fuck is this disturbance for?” he said pulling the watch from his hand.

He looked at the screen to check the time before he would throw it away to have some peace but saw something that cleared his drowsiness instantly.

‘Halima has escaped’ was written in capital letter.

He ran to his master bedroom and saw it was true. That was what he was missing. He had been so disturbed by his outburst and the headache that he had left the door without locking it. And he had slept like a log of wood. This had never happen with the sleeping pills he took. What was wrong with him? His left hand automatically located his forehead, the headache was now mild. He quickly went back to wear his wrist watch, then went to the dining table where he had left his phone. The time was 3:08AM. There were so many messages. He opened the message box but read only the last message which was about five minutes ago.

‘Tamed what the heck is going on with you? Jason is about to come to Asaba. It’s now almost an hour I’ve been trying to alert you. She is about to be taken to John and Ojogolo’ Mark wrote. He entered the Circle app immediately.

“I don’t think I will make it to Asaba in time’ Jason wrote seconds ago.

“But Tamed is not responding. What the heck is going on with him?” Mark had responded immediately.

‘I’m here, took sleeping pills for headache’ he wrote.

‘But it does not work on you and that is a wrong prescription. Don’t you have Panadol?’ Doc wrote.

‘We will need explanations later but you have to move now before the car arrives’ Wild wrote.

‘Directions’ he wrote.

‘Just switch on your communication gadgets and be on the road immediately. Directions will be given to you as you drive’ Jason wrote.

‘But I will want to know why Tamed did not respond to the alert’
Fast wrote.

He left the app and looked for a T-shirt. He did not bother about jacket, he put on a blue jean trouser and transferred his weapons from the other trouser. He picked his communication gadgets including his spectacle and ran to his pickup.

“Okay I’m leaving my street now” he said after inserting the hearing tools and the mic in their right places.

“Switch on your pickup computer” Mark said.

“How long has it been since she escaped?” he asked as he switched on his pickup computer.

“About an hour and she ran like her life depended on it. She is now in residential areas” Mark said.

“I can’t believe someone escaped Tamed” he heard Fast voice.

The anger was back and almost immediately, it changed to fury.

Halima was testing him.

“I’m going to park my car, I was not yet out” Jason said.

“Tamed what is going on? You don’t forget the details, how did you not close the door? And sleeping pills don’t work on you”

Wild asked.

“Seriously, I don’t have the answer to your questions, I don’t know what is wrong with me. I’m having waves and waves of emotions, then headache.”

“Calm down Tamed, your voice has changed” Doc said.

“Can you see it now, the red dot is her current position. The green is your current position” Mark said.

He knew where she was, he would get there in about twelve minutes with his speed. But how did she run so fast?

“What is the current status?” he asked.

“Halima is right now sitting on a block with a guy named Onos standing in front of her. They are waiting for the second guy to come with a car from Aka which they will use to transport her to Ologbo boundary where they will swap her for three million naira. She had asked for their help and the peace message had gotten to them. There is a possibility of the said Aka joining them” Mark said.

“Jason did you find out what I sent?”

“Yes” all of them chorused.

“What?”

“You just needed to Google it Tamed. It’s a bible verse. Genesis 49:9” Jason answered.

“But what is it for?” Mark asked.

“The old woman from yesterday’s robbery attempt quoted it to me” he answered.

“Tamed is that not one of the quotes from your mum’s dairy, the one Major had seen and named you Beast?” Wild asked

“You still remember the words in that diary?”

“Not all but there are some I can never forget” Wild answered.

“She was definitely referring to you Tamed” Fast said.

“I know that’s why I wanted to find out where the quote came from.”

“That was Jacob’s final blessing to Judah. Jesus is the descendant of Judah. Go read it, you will see the full blessing” Jason said.

“You’re thinking it’s not a coincidence?” Wild asked.

“I don’t know” he answered.

“Jason are you back home?” Doc asked.

“Yes why did you ask?”

“You are talking” Mark answered for her.

He made up his mind to look for his mum’s old bible and search the quote.

“Fast you are going to burn that meat” Doc said.

“You wait till you taste it” Fast answered.

“Where the heck are you guys by this time?” Wild asked.

“And what are all of you doing awake by 3:AM?. There is no night mission I know of” he added.

“And Bilikisu why is your phone off, mum have been trying to contact you” Ghost joined the conversation.

“One, two go” Mark spoke fast.

“Saheed if you are trying to piss me off this early morning it will be better you do it right in front of me. Hausa idiot like you can’t pronounce Balikis.”

“Imagine having an idiot as your brother. Must you make mum worried?” Ghost replied.

“Saheed fuck off, I called her this morning, why is she calling my line to the extent she had to contact you” Doc responded.

“Because I’m her son and please show some respect to your senior” Ghost said.

“I don’t blame you, I can’t believe of all the people my mum could take as a son, it was you” Doc said.

At least she had not attacked Ghost for personalizing her mum. She might have given up during the one year he was absent or something must have happened.

“Ghost and Doc this is not a family meeting, and Sabrina can you just behave the way you do with your dad during business?”

Wild came in.

“Seriously, are you warning just me? What of Ghost who started it? Have I ever acted this way with my dad?” Doc asked.

“But seriously this father daughter relationship was hard for me to accept. In fact I only believed they were father and daughter during her mum’s birthday party, they were completely so close. I had to even ask if that was her twin sister” Mark said.

It was not only Mark, those who saw those two at any barrack, or parade or orientation or missions would never believe they were related and those who saw them at home would never believe if they were told they acted as strangers as soon as they were on duty. He still remembered the first time he had seen Doc. That was four years after he had join the army. She was

sixteen then. She had come to their training ground and they had thought she was a lost girl. A cadet was told to ask her if she had missed her way but they had to rescue the cadet from Doc's grasp. He was already on the ground and Doc was sitting on his back with her hand on his neck. Everyone was shocked and when they had asked what happened, she had said the Cadet had told her to disappear if she did not want to be flogged with a koboko, a kind of whip. Her dad had arrived at that moment and she had ran to him looking all innocent.

“Thank you Mark, I've always kept family business out of our meetings but Ghost always have a way of pissing me off.”

“I just don't like the fact that mum can't reach you” Ghost said.

“I feel like punching you Saheed” Doc said.

“The meat is almost done” Fast said.

“I’ve asked about your whereabouts” Wild said.

“We are at Eleko Beach having a barbecue party” Fast answered.

“After a disappointing show from Sabrina” Mark said.

“Mark disappointing show?” Ghost asked.

“Sabrina tricked us, I thought she was going to be one of the strippers” Mark said and Ghost responded with laughter.

“You think her dad will permit me to send her on an undercover mission were she will strip?” Wild said.

“I know. I was surprised he did not say anything but Sabrina could have given me a head start that she was going to be serving the drinks” Mark said.

“But she was still hot in that mini skirt” Fast said.

“I expected something hotter” Mark answered.

“I’m just going to ignore you two idiots” Doc said.

“I still don’t understand the fact that you guys are at a beach at 3:AM without me” Ghost said.

“I’m at home Ghost, I had to fulfill my promise and give Fast tips”

“You swam?” Wild asked.

“Of course. This is the best time to be at the beach, no disturbance, just us” Fast said.

“And Saheed why are you awake? Your watch did not vibrate” Doc asked.

“I’m working” Ghost answered.

“Ghost where are you?” Wild asked.

“In Barrister Omakor’s office” Ghost answered.

“What are you looking for?” Jason asked.

“Right now, I don’t know” Ghost answered.

“Ghost, even if you must break into an office you should at least have a reason. It’s 3:AM”

“Wild that time advice is for those three idiots cruising at the beach without me, you can’t be telling me it’s 3:AM. I’m ghost, this is my working time please” Ghost said making most of them laugh.

They had come again with their talks that could distract a raging mind. He had not even had any flash memory of the past.

“And they are even having a barbecue party without me” Wild said.

That was Wild favorite kind of party. Sit around wood fire and roast a meat under a clear moonlight. Then discuss about

childhood and battles. He too was not exempted. Even after modern barbecue machine had been introduced, none of them used it, they still used the old method.

“Where did you get the wood and meat?” he asked.

“I’m temporarily in Lagos preparing the city for the president’s visit” Mark said.

“A car just drove into the street I’m about to enter. I saw two people inside” he said.

“Okay. They have arrived with the car” Mark said.

“You have less than two minutes to stop her from entering that car” Wild said.

“Who said I plan on stopping them, that street has a dead end for cars, they will still have to come back to the main road. My

pickup will be waiting for them” he said reversing left and stopping at the middle of the street.

No car would be able to go in or come out except his pickup was out of the way.

“Jason have you scanned the pictures of the smokers?” Wild asked.

“Still scanning, they are already negative for wanted criminals” Jason answered.

“Tamed you know what that implies? You cannot kill them” Wild said.

“Connect me to the bird” he said.

“Seriously, that’s your gadget. Jason had already done that. Just look for it on your wrist watch and connect” Mark said.

He scrolled through the app and saw the triangle shape app. He clicked on it and saw connect which he clicked. He did not see what he was expecting, instead he saw trees and trees.

“Why am I seeing trees?” he asked.

“But that is not what I can see in the app. I can see the men talking to themselves” Fast said.

“Tamed you are still connected to my mission Flight.

Disconnect and connect to your own. It will automatically appear since I permanently linked it to your watch” Jason said.

He did as Jason instructed and he could see and hear them.

“So how we won share am since una nor gree wetin I talk?” one of them asked.

Halima was sitting down staring straight at the bird.

“That should be Aka the new guy” Mark said.

“How come I can hear them when I have the communication tools in my ear?” He asked.

“You are connected to the Circle app. Please just go with the flow, leave technology for Jason and Mark” Ghost said.

“500 dey okay na” one of them answered the man.

“That’s Onos” Mark said.

“No, I nor gree, I still stand with one million or I go carry my car comot” Aka said.

“But na we find am na, he nor tally na” the unknown guy said.

But he knew him. His name was Sunday. He also knew Aka.

Onos was the unfamiliar face.

“Take it or leave it” Aka answered.

“Onos abeg make we dey go, them fit don dey reach there”

Sunday said.

“So una agree for the one million?” Aka asked.

“Wetin man go do na, make we dey go. Babe come enter car”

Onos said.

“Are we going to meet Chief?” she asked taking her attention away from the bird.

He had calmed down as he talked with his comrades but her voice changed everything. The anger came back in full force.

“Yes, wetin you dey expect, come enter make we go meet Chief”

Onos said opening the door of the back seat.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

{But I will deliver you. You won't be handed over to those men whom you have good reason to fear.}

She entered the car. Onos closed the door, then entered the front seat. Sunday entered the back seat from the opposite door. Seconds later, the car was on the move towards him.

“Fast this is so well cooked. Mark I’m opening the wine” Doc said.

“There’s wine?” all of them chorused.

“Ready” Doc said as the wine opened.

He could hear the small explosive sound a good wine made when opened.

“No bring the glass closer, okay let’s toast on behalf of the circle” Fast said.

“Wild is this not a taboo? How can they be partying without us?”

Ghost said.

“And Mark you are supposed to be on duty” he added.

“Nah, this is off duty support. We are just helping you find her.

This is so sweet” Mark replied.

“They are almost here, Jason anything?” he asked.

“The name of the unknown guy is Sunday Abiame, he is thirty, Onos is Onome Tejire, he is twenty nine. I’m still scanning the face of Aka” Jason said.

“But they are not on the wanted list so how did you get their details?” he asked.

“Sim registration. I’ve hacked the phone of Onos and right now it’s frozen, he can’t operate it even if he wants to. I’ve checked the owner of the number Ojogolo called with and it’s registered

to a sixty six years old woman, and he is using a Nokia torchlight so nothing much I can do. Ojogolo hardly uses a line twice and it's always with a stolen line, the Facebook account is also not for him. I've opened it and it looks like it was created for this peace message" Jason said just when the car was getting to his pickup.

"Jason I don't even know what to call you, I'm not that fast" Mark said.

"The third one Aka is thirty two. We were born the same year and went to the same primary school. He is a driver who frequents a palm wine joint close to Sunday's mum's provision store where I often buy my things when needed. They are just petty drug retailers and I believe addicts. There is an uncompleted building at the dead end and at the back of the building is Sunday's family house" he said.

“They know you” Mark said.

There was evidence he was chewing a meat from his voice.

“Tamed I will advise you wear your mask and just take her, we have a bigger issue on ground” Wild said.

The men had stopped their car and two of them, Onos and Sunday were coming to his pickup.

“You believe they are just going to let him take Halima without a fight?” Doc said.

It was clear she too was eating something from the way she spoke.

“I meant he should not prolong the fight, there is a bigger issue Jason has raised and it’s an emergency” Wild answered.

“I don’t think there will be a fight and there is no need for mask Wild, they know me, they know my pickup.”

“That’s is going to worsen your current situation Tamed” Jason said.

He did not have the time to ask about the emergency because Sunday was already poking his face on his windscreen. Maybe to confirm if he was the one driving the pickup. He opened the door hitting him, the force sending him to the ground. He was right, mask would be unnecessary. Sunday knew him. In fact looking at him, he remembered he was one problem son to his widowed mother. He had once helped her years back. He started walking to their car hoping someone would test him.

“Who you be?” Onos asked following him.

Same damn question all the time.

“I dey ask you, if you nor won....”

He did not allow him finish his statement, the mention of ‘if’ was enough threat. He turned at the exact time Onos brought out a knife.

“Onos no” Sunday shouted.

But it was already too late for Onos because the hand with the knife was already broken. He punched him on his head before his scream could wake up residents. He landed on the ground but he wouldn’t die because he did not use his full strength.

“All correct sir” he heard Aka’s voice.

He turned to look at him. He was already out of the driver seat and had placed his fingers on his ears and on attention. He did not have time to have any conversation with them. There was no way to tell them that the girl in the car was a rescued victim when she had asked for their help. He ignored him and opened the back seat. He was already furious as he opened the door but

the sight before him weakened him almost immediately. She looked like she was about to explode from fear.

“You could change that breaking of hand signature Tamed. It was exactly what Tiger did. I knew that was what he was going to do” Jason said as he stared at her thinking of what to say.

So that was what had happened. Tiger must have become more stupid with time.

“But that was not why he died” he said.

Halima responded to his statement by shrinking inside.

“He knew Jason feared him but forgot fear is for the brave.”

Wild said part of his favorite quote.

He hoped that a time would not come when he would have to face Jason in a life and death situation because there was no way he would decide to go face to face with him.”

“So how did you prepare for him? Let me guess, you electrified him when he held your left wrist” he said.

“Bingo” Ghost said.

What a stupid way for a warrior to die, killed while frozen not while fighting. He must have kept Jason alive when he had shot him just to rob it on his face that he was the one who gave George the killing shot. And he had the advantage, he could naturally pick out Jason’s spot from hundreds of yards.

He decided not talk to her, there was nothing to say. He just pulled her out of the vehicle. She did not protest nor fight but the vibes coming from her was touching his bones. He took her to the passenger seat, locked the door, entered his seat, ignited his pickup, tried to reverse left but stopped. The other car was very close, the back of his pickup would hit it. Before he could decide on what to do, Aka had already flown into his car and reversed

giving him the space he wanted. Sunday quickly scurried out of the way as he drove off the street.

“The legend. I guess Onome is new. They should have updated him about you now” Ghost said.

“When will I get this kind of respect from my people” Mark said.

“Mark how you can forget you are the male mermaid of Escravo River” Ghost said.

Again, Ghost has succeeded in distracting him. He smiled as he remembered what Mark had done.

Mark’s first mission was located at Escravos River. Then, there was a rise in pirate activities. When the Omega order had been given, Mark had carried it out himself. Just a week later, stories started spreading about a male mermaid who had been appearing from under the water. And he was known to attack only pirates.

A group of travelers had witnessed a pirate boat separating into two. According to their story that had even appeared on Punch Newspaper, the pirates' screams were cut off one by one and the only thing they saw were lots of blood and their dead bodies. A man's back had surfaced and then disappeared into the water and one of them had said she saw scales. And so the news headline had been.

**'PASSENGERS WITNESS THE DEATHS OF PIRATES
SUPPOSEDELY BY A MALE MERMAID'**

Halima's cackling sound ended his distraction.

"What's the emergency?" he asked trying his best to distract himself from her cackling.

"You have to move out as soon as you get back to your house" Wild said.

“Why?” he asked.

“Not with Halima there please, from what I saw she is very scared.

“That is more of a dread. Tamed why is Halima so afraid of you?” Mark asked.

“Are you trying to find out if am doing the job you guys gave me very well?” he replied

“What job exactly?” Major joined.

They were now complete full time night workers.

“Major what a surprise, welcome to the party” Fast said.

“I wake up to take a glass of water and I’m seeing my phone vibrating, not once but continuously indicating you guys are showing an online life video. I immediately open the app and I first scroll through the messages and I’m shock to read that

Halima escaped and Tamed was not responding to your call.

Can someone explain this carelessness?” Major demanded.

“Major Tamed cannot explain now because he is with Halima on their way back to his compound. All I can say is Tamed forgot to lock the door for reasons he himself cannot explain, he then took sleeping pills for headache.” Wild said.

“But sleeping pills only make him drowsy for hours” Major said.

“Same thing I said” Wild responded.

“Tamed I will need an explanation from you once she is back in her room” Major said.

“Roger that” he said.

“But Major that’s not the important thing now. Tamed cannot stay there, he has to move now” Jason said.

“What is it?” Major asked.

“Not until Tamed gets home” Doc said.

“Sabrina why did you switch off your phone? Your mum tried calling you” Major asked.

“Dad I was on a mission which you know and why will mum be calling me when we spoke last morning” Doc answered.

“I told her about your mission” Major said.

“Seriously? Why. Is it because of Jason?”

“I’ve always told her.”

“But not the details” Doc said.

“Dear is that Balikis?” he heard Mrs. Major voice.

That was the name George gave her and she had liked it.

“And now the family is complete” Mark said.

“Jason just call Cindy to balance the equation” Ghost said.

“Yes” Major Ahmed said.

“Can I speak with her?”

“Come closer.”

A pause.

“Put this on your ear.”

Another pause.

“She can hear you” Major said.

“Balikis where are you? I have been calling your line?”

“Mum I’m fine. I can’t believe dad told you everything” Doc said.

“I had wanted that for a long time, I’m happy I can now follow up on what you are doing.”

“By getting worried. Jason you are a bad influence” Doc said.

Which was true. Jason had a way of making everyone follow his ideas without argument. Even though one did not agree with him, it was difficult to stop him because there was nothing to counter him with. Jason had once said saying 'I repeat' during a mission was because of a walkie talkie but the latest technology was very powerful and one could hear the other without the person repeating for clarification. He was not wrong and it had been scraped within the Circle and gradually many things were removed or died over time. Now they sounded like a group of civilians having their annual meeting.

“No I was not worried, your dad told me Mark and Fast is with you. Where are you now?”

There was no response.

“Mum she is at Elope beach” Ghost answered.

“Saheed” Doc said straining the ‘e.’

“Balikis it will soon be four in the morning. What are you doing at the beach?”

“Don’t worry ma, she is safe with us” Fast said.

He was now in his street.

“You are only three, you know pirates work more at night” She said.

The instant laughter that followed her statement came from everybody. He could not believe he even laughed. He parked his pickup, came out and opened the front seat. He carried her and placed her on the ground. He immediately held her hand and started pulling her back to her room. He ignored her fear that was very visible.

“What is funny?” she asked.

“Ma pirates don’t come to this area. But we’ve been hoping one lost pirate will join us ma. I need to practice the tips Mark gave me” Fast

“I don’t understand” she said.

“Dear, Princess can take care of herself and though I don’t support her being at the beach by this time, I would have a hell of report to give if sea pirates visit that area.”

“Mum, the water is Mark’s territory. Don’t worry your daughter is in safe hands” Ghost said.

“Saheed I can take care of myself, I don’t need Mark’s help”

Doc replied.

He opened the door and pulled her into the room.

“I hope you will not swim, I know you. There are deadly animals please” Major’s wife said.

“Ma right now we have equipment underwater which can detect movement of bodies from up to a thousand yards, then we have another on air and we will know if we are going to have visitors. Don’t worry she is safe with me” Mark said.

“One two...” Ghost said.

“Mark you want to die?” Doc said with an angry voice.

“Balikis, won’t you change? Stay close to them and do leave the beach, it’s getting colder each day. Even though your father trained you like a boy still try act like a lady. A lady should not be out this late.”

“Yes mum. Love you mum.”

He made her seat down on the bed.

“Dear I’m going back to sleep.” Mrs. Major said.

“Dad what was that for?” Doc asked.

“This is not the time for family business” Major Ahmed said.

“You’ve already made it a family business by bringing mum into it” Doc replied.

“Princess let’s talk about this later.”

He wanted to say something to calm her down but he did not know if he would say the right words. He just left her shaking on the bed. He made sure he locked the door this time.

“Shoot. Why do I have to leave my place?” he asked as he walked towards his parlor.

“Because your cover is blown” Jason answered.

CHAPTER TWENTY

{You line up fresh witnesses against me. You compound your anger and pile on the grief and pain.}

“How is my cover blown?” he asked.

“Somebody has identified you to Ojogolo arms dealers. That was about three hours ago” Jason answered.

“But how does that affect my moving out.”

“Because they now know where you live” Jason said.

“Then let them come” he said.

“That’s the problem” Wild said.

“I don’t understand, Tamed can quickly end this if they come after him” Fast said.

“Chief is not planning to use illegal means, he is going to use the law, the police to be exact” Wild said.

“The man who exposed you did not just tell them where you live, he also gave details about you and also, he was able to convince then not to attack your den” Jason said.

“That means the person is from Asaba and he knows your escapade there” Ghost said.

“I still don’t understand how Chief is planning to use the police” he said.

“He is going to report Halima missing and list you as a suspect with some few witnesses who saw you at Ologbo day before yesterday” Jason said.

“Jason please give us the full details” Wild said.

“Chief was there when the man came but I don’t think the man was aware. I did not even hear his voice until the man left.

Based on what the man said about you, he wants to implicate you by stating you are a corrupt army officer working for his political opponent. He is going to report Halima missing by stating that the lady he had employed to be cleaning his place had not returned, he got to know after the land lady raised an alarm and he already has someone as her landlady” Jason explained.

“I’m beginning to think there is something more to Halima” Doc said.

“Ghost’s prediction is happening. We are dealing with a man smart enough to hide himself as a criminal for years and was able to become a House of Assembly member and now a House of Reps member. Chief is smart and if he is ready to bring

Halima to the open, he knows what he is doing. And now the situation has been worsened by Halima's escape attempt. If he had any doubt of his intentions, it has be strengthened by what just happened. First we have to understand the game he is playing, then we have to find a way to counter it" Major sad.

"Legally, I believe he is going to use the fact that Halima would choose him and declare you as her captor if he uses the police to rescue her from you" Ghost said.

"That's exactly why Tamed must leave now" Jason said.

"You can delay them by asking for a search warrant but it's better they don't find you there, then we can plan what to do with the other issue" Wild said.

"So I'm now supposed to move to the underground house?" he let out his frustration.

“No. Come to my place in Benin” Jason said.

“Was that Jason?” Fast asked.

“Unbelievable. Jason you want Tamed to come over?” Mark asked.

“No I don’t think that’s a good idea” he said.

“Tamed we are surprised Jason wants you to come over but the part where it is not a good idea is not true. You were not around for the wedding, so you’ve not been to Jason’s compound. That place is a hotel” Doc said.

“With state of the arts facility. Tamed your place is a den but Jason’s place is a fortress” Fast said.

“You will not be staying with me, there is another house in the compound which you can use for now” Jason said.

“Jason why the sudden offer?” Major asked.

“Cindy wants her to stay where she will not be locked up in a room but where the full house is available for her to explore, just that she will not be able to leave the house. She said our method is barbaric. She wants to help because she believes Halima needs to meet real and normal humans” Jason said.

His last word provoked a laughter. Jason was still Jason, always straightforward, said it exactly the way she said it.

“On behalf of the Circle, tell Cindy that we are sorry and we will try to be real humans” Major said laughing.

“I understand if she sees Tamed, Sabrina maybe Wild as aliens. Imagine what Tamed did to Andrew in her presence, she had seen Doc fighting with heels then Wild, well just seeing him is enough. But how did I fall into her category?” Ghost asked.

“Include me please. I was trying my best to defuse that bomb during the Civil war mission” Mark said.

“We all agreed to her supposed barbaric method and she has heard so much about you” Jason answered.

“I don’t understand this robot Jason has turned to” Fast said.

“Get married Fast and find out” Jason replied.

“Nah, women scare me. I’m happy being me, myself and I” Fast said.

“I believe that’s the best option right now. Halima has to recover fast. There is no way Chief will let it go if the police don’t find her in your house especially now that he is very sure she is with you” Wild said.

“The difficult puzzle here is Chief’s next line of action” Mark said.

“Major is there any way you can intervene?” Fast asked.

“No” Major and Wild chorused.

“This is serious. The evidence you were there the day of the incidence and the fact that someone has described you is a big issue. Halima’s escape attempt has made it worse. Telling the D.P.O or IG to intervene will worsen your situation, we are dealing with a lawmaker here. The only thing we can do is to wait and see what Chief will do next” Major said.

“Jason look for a way to install visual around Ojogolo and John, we need evidence as fast as possible” Wild said.

“But there is sound transmission already, there should be enough evidence by now.” he said.

“Jason just started this mission four days ago that’s if we are to count this morning as another day” Wild said.

“There is the issue of the van” he said.

“Tow the van. I will open your pickup computer and connect it to the van so your towing will go smoothly” Jason said.

“Okay” he said.

“You need to start moving now Tamed. It will take you more than an hour to get to Benin because of the van. The police will be arriving as early as 6:AM” Jason said.

“I can make it in twenty....”

“We know” Ghost, Doc and Mark said interrupting Fast.

He went back to the master bedroom. She was back at the wardrobe door. She jerked up and ran towards the window as he entered the room.

“I’m sorry, please don’t kill me” she stammered.

There must be something in her voice that always resurrected the rage to kill. The generator was still on and she had not

switched off the light in the room. The luggage was opened, she had placed some of the clothes on the floor but had not arranged them in the wardrobe.

“Pack the clothes back into that bag and zip it before I come back” he said.

“Tamed calm down, your voice is too harsh. From the way Jason is talking Cindy is listening” Ghost said.

“No she is resting on her favorite place” Jason said.

“Which is?” Ghost asked.

“Never mind” Jason said.

He left the room and made sure he closed the door. He quickly went to his room and packed some of his clothes into his military bag. He carried all his important weapons and gadgets

and then went back to the master bedroom. He moved closer to her to carry the bag but she was shaking badly.

“Tamed she may go into shock, her body may not be able to handle that dread I’m seeing” Wild said.

“You remember the injection you gave her last time? Inject her with 1mg. It will put her to sleep and also calm her nerve at least till you get to Benin” Doc said.

He carried the bag and left the room. He went straight to the pickup and prepared 1mg of Midazolam injection. He went back to the room. She was still standing where he had left her. He moved very close, their bodies were almost touching.

“Please, please” she stuttered.

He forced himself to ignore her and also ignored the raging emotion he was feeling. He pulled her close and injected the

drug on her left arm. It took just seconds and she went limp. He carried her to the passenger seat of the pickup and belted her. He carried all their luggage to the back seat of the van. He went back and switched off the generator. After carrying it inside, he closed the door and went to the back of his pickup where he brought out a towing chain which he hooked to the front of the van. He had to put fuel in the pickup. He always made sure there was a gallon of fuel with him. They were on their way seconds later. They had been talking but he had tuned them off.

“Jason is it possible to listen to what the man said to Ojogolo and crew?” he asked few seconds after he had driven into the main road. He had connected his hearing tools back.

“Yes, but I don’t think it’s advisable in your state. You may retaliate” Jason said.

“I need to understand what the man must have said to them, enough to convince Chief not to send his men” he said.

“Wild?” Jason said.

“Do it. I want to know too” Wild responded.

“Okay, wait for some seconds please” Jason said.

“Igboh is now...I won’t come.....you..” he heard a man’s voice.

It looked like Jason was trying to forward the recording. As the man voice came and stopped, he felt rage. He knew that voice.

The palm wine joint close to Mama Sunday’s store was owned by his family. It had been there for long. His name was Ibe and he was also popular as a storyteller. He even made money from it. At that moment, he wished he never asked to know.

“Got it” Jason said.

Next came the voice of Ibe.

“I know I’m not supposed to ask why you are looking for him but I will tell you about the man you are looking for if you add to the money.”

“Just drop his location and go, that’s all we need to know” an unknown voice said.

Ibe replied with laughter.

“I’m eighty percent sure that is John” Jason said.

“What is funny?” John according to Jason asked.

“I can assure you that’s not all you need to know. But if you just want the location, take it and give me my money. Let’s hope you don’t become the next Lord Nero” Ibe said.

“Wait. Is he really the one? Hunter?” another voice said.

“That should be Ojogolo” Wild said.

“You can’t face an enemy you don’t know. If you want to know about him, pay.”

“We don’t...”

“John let’s hear him out” Ojogolo said.

“Speak” Ojogolo said after a pause.

“His name is Obinna. He is a descendant of the great Obuenhi and people in Asaba call them hunters.”

“Guys gather at the fire, this is going to be interesting” Fast said.

“Though I did not meet him, my grandfather did. Before he died, he told me stories of Obuenhi, Okemili and Obuefi. I am a witness to Obinna’s exploits.”

“Go straight to the point Mr Ibe” John said.

“Exactly what I’m doing. I can’t see your faces but you seem to be impatient, just wait and listen, your lives depend on it” Ibe said.

“You know what, I don’t want to listen to this. We have his location. We should strike now.”

“John sit down, no knowledge should be overlooked. Continue” Ojogolo said.

“The man you are looking for is a legend in Asaba, even now grandparents still tell their grandchildren about him and his forefathers. Many see him as the reincarnation of Ogbuenhi, a man who killed twenty elephants and lots of bulls. He was known for his hot temper. There are so many stories about him but I won’t say more than I’m being paid for. My grandpa had said before Ogbuenhi were also hunters and they always gave birth to males. All hunted animals from what he was told and

they had all died at a ripe age. But his grandfather known as Okemili was known for hunting sea animals. He would travel for a long time and come back with a large fish, or unique sea animal. One time, the fish he brought back had fed the whole village but there was a time he was brought back home in a big caterpillar by strangers. He was badly injured. People did not need to ask what happened because along with him was a giant fish bigger than the fish he had always brought. Later, they were told it was the great white whale whose baby's heart is the size of a caterpillar engine. He had killed the whale after a long battle but he had died later from the injuries he sustained, then Obinna's father Ogbuefi was very young. There was another son though not the same mother. He had brought back a woman and a baby years after he had lost his wife to childbirth. Their grandmother had taken care of Ogbuefi, the second son and his widowed wife but years later, she had left Asaba with her son. I

was young but I witnessed the exploits of Ogbuefi. He killed so many wild bulls that people stopped counting. In one of his hunts, he had gone with some group of hunters and they had gone too far and had encountered a Tiger.”

That got him. His mum had said it was a bull.

“The cat had targeted one of the hunters from the back but Ogbuefi had intervened. While the other three hunters ran with their tails on their head, Ogbuefi had fought the tiger with his arrows. He had killed the tiger after a long battle but his back was torn. I saw a tiger for the first time in my life thanks to Ogbuefi. Obinna was very tender, should be four when the incident happened. His wife had stubbornly refused to let him go in peace. She had borrowed countless amount of money forgetting Ogbuefi was yet to fully pay for the modern house he had built. Ogbuefi died two years later leaving his young

window in debt. The worst part was the people who had hunted with him and even the Asagba had all turned their backs on the poor widow. Later, she had married Ikenna, Ogbuefi's close friend who was even the one he had saved. This man started frequenting our palm wine joint and soon joined the family of drunkards. Obinna was ten when he began his escapade and to my best understanding, Obinna is a different case entirely.

Although some people believe he is the reincarnation of Ogbuenhi, there are few victims like us who believe he has the strong gene of all of them combined together. That man is a beast in all ramification. I am talking to you as one of his victim."

There was a pause. He did not know what had caused the pause but he tried dissecting the history he had just listened to. His mother never said it like this man.

"Jason why the pause?" Mark asked

“No way, you can’t stop here” Doc said.

Somehow he hoped that was the end of the recording.

“Just wait” Jason said.

“Why did you stop?” John asked.

“Aha, now you want to know” Ibe said excitedly.

“Continue” Ojogolo commanded this time.

“I will but just know I can only tell you my money’s worth” Ibe said.

“Obinna’s first victim that I know of was his stepfather and he was just ten” Ibe continued.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

{There is nothing on this earth quite like him, not an ounce of fear in that creature!}

There was something confusing about Ibe's words but what he could not understand was why Ibe had to go this far to tell his family history to his enemies. Was he trying to finally get his revenge? He wished something would make the audio stop.

“It was not a hearsay, I witnessed it with my two eyes. I had gone to the market to sell palm wine to retailers when the incident happened. Ikenna had started beating Obinna's mother after she refused to give him the money she had sold for the day. Some people tried to intervene while others like us watched what was happening. Obinna had come from nowhere and stabbed his stepfather on his back. He was prevented from going for round two by some people. You needed to see his eyes that

day. This ten years old boy swore to kill his stepfather at night on his bed. The man packed his bags and ran for his dear life. Two years later, Obinna's Uncle came back to claim Obinna's land as the next of kin. He sold the land to a supposed distance relative. Obinna set traps all over the sold land, the kind of traps hunters have never made. This trap caught up to seven of the new owners who came to inspect the land. They had to be carried to the native doctor who repaired bones. The new owners asked his uncle to return their money making his uncle furious. His uncle hired me and two others to help hold Obinna while he flogged sense into him. When we got there, his mother pleaded for mercy but his uncle pushed her away and told us to break the door. The next thing we heard was Obinna calling us. We turned and before we could understand what he was holding, an arrow had hit one of the youths that came with us. Obinna told us that his next aim will be to kill. Even though I saw the anger in his

eyes, I needed money. And I thought he would not dare kill us. So we rushed at him and he shot at me. See, look at the scar, the arrow had missed my stomach, my chi had saved me. The remaining youth ran away, leaving us to our fate. As I was wailing, he focused on his uncle and if not for his mother who intervened, he would have really killed that man. He told us to disappear and I ran like I have never run before with an arrow in my waist. As I ran, I heard the loud scream of his uncle, he had ran into the sold land and got caught by one of his traps.

From that very day, Obinna grew more wings. Obinna started bullying children who were almost youths. He would come across some boys bullying a small child and challenge them to a fight. They said no matter how they hit Obinna, he would still fight like a beast until he was the last one standing. Many people praised him for stopping bullies but his mother had

cried to the Anglican priest. She had said, Obinna bullied bullies not because he wanted to help their victims but because he wanted to be on top of the food chain, Obinna felt there was no excitement fighting with weaklings, that only cowards do that. He only liked to fight those who he felt were bigger and those who felt children should fear them because he was the king and he had to keep it that way. After defeating them, Obinna would give them heavy task. They fetched his water, cleaned his shoes and even washed his clothes, soon he became the chairman of bullies. He did not go to the market to sell his little animals caught by his traps, instead he sent his subjects. After some time, he got tired and looked for bigger ones to bully, Obinna would fight those ten years older than him. Once he saw anybody or group of youths bullying a younger one, he fought them and most time, he ended up with a lot of injuries but he had still won.

I can't tell you all his escapades and how he terrorized those old enough to be his father but there was the time his mum finished paying their debt, Obinna was sixteen then, but the money lenders said the time had expired and they would rather collect the collateral which was the house. People tried to advise them to just collect their money and leave but they refused, even the Priest tried to intervene but they still refused, they said they were not acting illegal. Obinna had used them as game for entertainment. One of the days, people had woken up to witness a naked man hanging upside down and tied to a mango tree at the square. He said he did not see who had attacked him from his back and knocked him out. Then Obinna had not introduced himself to them so he had no idea what was happening to him. His car which you know was a big feat to have that time was missing some parts the next morning. It was later found at the market square. The day they had gone to pursue Obinna and his

mother from their house was a day people will never forget.

They had met two wild bulls which chased them and also chased innocent people carrying out their daily business. The market was empty that day and it took three hunters to kill just one.

While people fled for their dear life, Obinna stood close to a tree with a rope in his hands, the bull was about to attack one of the market women when Obinna stoned it and screamed for it to come over, that caught the bulls attention as he changed course and ran towards Obinna. As the bull got close, Obinna pulled on the rope which raised him high, then he jumped on it making the already angry bull furious. The bull tried to throw him out but he stabbed him just few times and screamed rodeo, bull ride. He was wearing a cowboy hat with a booth and a robe was wind around the angry bull's neck, the bull turned and ran fast in anger but could not throw him out, but Obinna who was having fun continued stabbing the bull screaming rodeo, bull ride. His

mother who was also at the market had ran inside the town hall with others and she had cried as Obinna enjoyed himself.

Gradually the bull started losing strength and later went down, then later it died. We later got to know the knife was poisoned.

The mother had ran out crying. She kept asking him where the bulls came from and why he had not listened to her not to hunt bulls but Obinna had just held his crying mother. Obinna had apologized to the money lenders, he said he had tied the bulls but they had gotten loosed the exact time they arrived. Everyone but the money lenders understood what he meant, it was a clear warning to stay away from their properties. But they still came back two days later and as they got close to the house, they had noticed there were sticks blocking a path forcing them to follow a particular path, but they did not see anything wrong with it. As they got to a tall palm tree, they had been caught in a net which shoot them high that they were hanging in the sky. They

screamed and begged for help but Obinna was nowhere to be found. The mother could not even find him when she had come back from the market. Some hunters were called to lose the trap but they discovered the net had turned to the other side which was the bush path and cutting it could injure them because the area they would fall was marked out with sticks and a paper was placed there. Beware of the hunter's poisonous trap was boldly written on the tallest stick. The hunters refused to pull out the traps, they were all afraid because Obinna's traps were well hidden and even the hunters could not make such traps. So the search for Obinna began. If I tell you that those money lenders slept there that night you won't believe me. Obinna had come back the next day dragging a bull in a plank wheel barrow he had constructed himself. Obinna was only sixteen and he already had three bulls to his name. We later got to know that Obinna had made a deal with our village doctor to

give him a sleeping medicine powerful enough to knock out a bull. But how he was able to inject the bulls and drag their limp body into his wheelbarrow is what we will never know. He apologized to the money lenders, he said he went for a hunt and he was not aware they would be visiting. He even pointed at a tiny writing on the palm tree which he had written beware of bull trap. He said the trap was meant to prevent another bull from escaping. He slowly pulled out the traps while he whistled, then told them the rope was too tight to lose because they had tightened it from their struggles. So many people tried to lose the rope but gave up, they had to cut it and they had fallen to the earth from that height. One of them broke his arm and the other two broke their legs. They had taken the case to the Asagba but Obinna had defended himself by saying he had written that people should not go through that path because there was an animal trap, and he had also warned people to beware of the

hunter's trap and they were the ones who did not see it. And it was true, there was another paper but the writings were not bold enough. Obinna presented the bull to the Asagba as a gift from his hunt. The Asagba had closed the case by saying they were supposed to inform the hunter before going to his lair. The money lenders ran back to their home at Ogwashiku and forgot to collect the money they had refused. Obinna did a lot of things oh. But I can only tell you based on how much I was paid.

Apart from those episodes, there are so many others Asaba will never forget. There was one that was bigger than the money lender episode. There was a very big stone at the square which our forefathers had met. Nobody had been able to lift it, even Obuenhi himself could not. It was said to be a gift from the gods and also in it were the spirit of the founding fathers, the stone was said to be a sign that the gods and our ancestors will not

abandon us. There were some missionary who came to share rice and clothes to women in the community, so they had lined up at the square but somehow, they started rushing for the remaining goods. Obinna's mother had fallen on the big stone and had a small cut on her leg. When Obinna heard that his mother was being treated, he ran from wherever he was and came to the market square. People said his mother had told him she was okay but Obinna had been very angry. The next thing people saw was Obinna lifting the stone. Obinna had raised up the gods and our ancestors which we were told could not be raised. He carried the stone and a large crowd followed him. When the news got to us, I ran to see for myself. It was true, Obinna was moving the ancestors, he had carried it all the way to the palace of the Asagba ignoring his mother's plea. He had dropped it there, immediately the stone touched the ground, he fainted. At first we thought he was dead until we saw he was

still breathing. Obinna had slept for a whole day before he had woken up. Where his skills and natural strength came from became the topic of Asaba.

Then there was a bigger one. It was related to Mama Sunday who was Ifeoma, Obinna's mother's very close friend, then Obinna was seventeen and about to finish secondary school. She lost her husband who was owing a lot of money. Sunday the oldest son was only fifteen, she had twin daughters who were just ten. The bad thing about her debt was the man in question was the older brother of a soldier. Few months after the death of Mama Sunday's husband, this man came with his soldier brother and three other soldiers to Mama Sunday's house. They picked the ten year old twins with them. They said their father had used them as collateral. Naturally Obinna was not interested. Anything that did not concern his mother was not interesting.

Many people had gathered to beg this man and the soldiers to give Mama Sunday more time, I was among those begging but Obinna had stood there watching. His mother had joined Mama Sunday to hold the hands of the children as the soldiers pulled their other hands. Then the soldiers had pushed the women with force sending them to the ground. They commanded everybody to disappear or they will start whipping with their koboko. But they had touched Obinna's mother. As people started scurrying away, Obinna blocked their path and suggested a deal. He told them he would like to fight them and they should promise they will released the children if he won, one of the soldiers told him to get out but Obinna called him a coward. Then Obinna's mother was already begging Obinna to run. You know we men and our ego, nobody will want to be called a coward. That word made one of the soldiers to raise his whip to hit Obinna but Obinna pulled him with his whip, raised him very high without

even placing him on his shoulders and slammed the soldier to the ground. Normal people would throw someone's back to the ground but Obinna threw him face down knocking him out instantly. You know what he said? He shouted next person and boom the remaining three soldiers abandoned the twins and rushed at him. While one punched him with his hands, the others used their koboko, but Obinna fought back using his God given brutal strength, there was no indication to show he was feeling their punch and their koboko. Once he held one, he refused to let go and even with the beating from the other two he held on tight to the neck of his next victim. With one hand holding the neck, he used his other hand to pull the koboko of one of them, used his leg to kick him in his manhood, then he tied his victim's neck with the whip, the other one with the koboko was about releasing another stroke when Obinna used his hand to prevent the rope from hitting him. With the other one already weak from

Obinna's grip and a koboko already tied to his neck Obinna pushed him with force and pulled the other one closer. As the other man tried to hold the rope in his neck, Obinna suddenly pulled the two towards him and shifted immediately. The two soldiers collided with each other, by then, the one he had hit on his manhood rushed at him with a knife which was his undoing. The knife had sliced Obinna's arm but Obinna seized his hand at his second attempt and bent it. I heard the sound of the man's hand break. The scream was like that of a wounded animal, Obinna still lifted him and slammed him on the ground, then the other soldier who did not have rope on his neck tried to hit Obinna but Obinna blocked the punch, raised him up and slammed him on the ground. He then dragged the soldiers and used their koboko to tie them together. He was not through with them, he went further to humiliate them by filling their mouths with sand. The spectators started screaming Ogbuenhi and they

carried him high chanting Ogbuenhi but some focused on the soldiers on the ground. While some poured water on them, some packed sand and dirt and threw it on them. Even Oke our fufulele, who could not lift a broomstick joined to pour sand on the soldiers. As they carried him around chanting Ogbuenhi, he collapsed and once again, people thought he was dead. He was rushed immediately to the village hospital where he was revived. If I had not witnessed everything with my eyes I wouldn't have believed if someone else told me what happened. The soldiers were later carried away by unknown men. The next day, which was Sunday, the Anglican Priest explained that people should not be surprised about what happened because people like Obinna had existed and are still existing. That Sunday, he talked about David's mighty men of valor and I could not believe it that one of them had killed a lion with his bare hands. After his preaching, people stopped arguing about where his strength

came from, they all believed the priest's message and concluded that Obinna was among the people God created with natural strength.

Obinna continued his escapade but his mum through the advice of the Priest started pleading with Obinna to join the military and used his strength for good. He refused and also refused to go to the university, the priest tried his best but later gave up. His eyes cleared when one of his delinquents had caused his mum to spend two months in jail after she had confessed she was the one who had set the farm of one of the men asking her hand in marriage on fire. People saw Obinna but the police had seen his mother. After his mother had come out of prison, she had given testimony in church that God had touched Obinna's heart and he would soon become a soldier. The women had joined her to dance and praise God.

This is the man you are looking for, the man who without training of any kind did those things I told you of, the ones I didn't tell you are even more. Now he is much trained and when he combines that with his skills, he is something else. People had been afraid that Obinna would become evil when his mother had died but his military training had helped him to behave. Then he had brought one chubby and beautiful Abigail to show Mama Sunday, later she had become his wife, then Lord Nero we all feared had ended the innocent woman's life thinking that would put fear in Obinna's heart. If only he knew that she was the person keeping the beast at bay. Obinna had returned to his old self and wiped out the whole clan."

Ibe had gone too far, there was no way he would let him get away.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

{Then disturbing reports will come in from the north that will throw him into a panic.}

He was getting agitated as Ibe continued. This was because Ibe was putting Sunday's mum at risk.

"I have heard the rumor that he had killed Lord Nero and his clan but how did you know he had done it himself?" Ojogolo asked.

“Akam had told us before he was killed by him. He was part of Lord Nero’s crew and whenever he came to Asaba, he had always looked for trouble and bullied families boasting he was the right hand man to Lord Nero. Obinna had stopped him one of the days and he had seen it as a way to revenge when they had seen Obinna close to Lord Nero’s territory. Akam had told Lord Nero he was a soldier and Lord Nero became suspicious. You know how Lord Nero treated those he saw as threat, he had made Akam disclose Obinna’s house and Akam said he had thought Lord Nero would only kidnap the lady so he had led them straight to their house but did not join them. One night, Akam had ran to Asaba to beg Mama Sunday to help save his life. He said Lord Nero was missing and all his men were being hunted and he said he had escaped one of his hunt and the man he had seen was looking like a complete beast with no soul. While he was begging that night, Obinna had arrived and even

with Akam's mum's pleading, he had slit Akam's throat and left the wailing woman childless. She was so heartbroken that she had called the police but the police had even carried Akam's body away. They had said he was among the list of wanted criminals and they would not even allow the poor woman bury her son, they said the dead body was now government property. I am risking my life to come here, that's why I'm trying to convince you to find another way. I have to come when I got the message because I need money for my wife's treatment and business have been bad. Drug people recently invaded Abbi community where I get my supply of Igboh and selling palm wine is not enough. After thinking about it, I made up my mind to risk it and hope he won't find out. Even if you want to attack him, can you first confirm the direction I gave was correct so I can run away? He won't come after my family but just me."

‘You can go Ibe’ Ojogolo said.

“Wait, I forgot to tell you one important thing” Ibe said.

“Which is?” John asked.

“He has friends like him. You should also be careful of his soldier friends” Ibe said.

Ibe was really going too far.

“Explain” John said.

“Money” Ibe said.

“I think..”

“Give him” Ojogolo said interrupting John.

“This is money” Ibe said.

“Tell us” John said.

“Even though I’ve not seen them since Abigail was killed, I know they will back him up. I don’t know their names but one had been introduced to Mama Sunday as Abigail’s younger brother. He used to speak fast like white people. You hardly understand what he says. Then there was one who had come too but just once. He wore black clothes and black gloves and dark eyeglasses. Mama Sunday said he did not speak but was always typing on his phone to respond to Abigail’s brother. That one made us at the palm wine joint afraid especially when he looked at us. It was as if he could read your inner thoughts and know what crime you had committed. Then there was one that was like Obinna in statue. He was on military uniform the day he had visited Mama Sunday with the others. Obinna is a hunter but that one had the aura of a warrior. He had a way of making everyone afraid without even uttering a single word. I wonder how Abigail could cope with them, she was the only one not

afraid of them. Apart from Abigail's brother, Mama Sunday was afraid of all of them. That one was very funny and always played with kids whenever he came. He was the only one behaving normal until he threw a knife at a chicken being pursued by one of the children. It was a bit far from where he was seating but the knife had hit the chicken's neck killing it instantly. While the kid panicked from what he had just experienced, he went and picked the chicken, gave some money to the kid and gave it to Mama Sunday who was already shocked from his action. Then he acted as if he had not done anything unusual. Mama Sunday told me that all of them are soldiers and they are very close but I don't think they are the typical Nigerian soldiers."

"Then they might have helped him hunt Lord Nero" Ojogolo said.

“No, Akam said it was just Obinna. No one knows why his friends did not join him but Akam said there was no other one.”

“If you want my advice on what to do I can help if you pay me” Ibe continued.

“Now you are taking this too far” John said.

That was what he was thinking.

“But you cannot kill me, it’s a peace message” Ibe said.

“Give him” Ojogolo said.

“My father once said if you want to eat a toad better eat the whole body so you will not be angry when they call you toad eater. Let me know what killed me” Ibe said.

“Tell us and stop wasting my time” John said.

“I only have one short advice for you. My grandfather once said that it is not the same trap you used to catch a rabbit that you

will use to catch a bull. If you are looking for Obinna, then he must know you are coming. You cannot take him unawares.

Abigail's case was different. Akam had made Lord Nero target his wife even before he had started hunting them. And he was not around unlike now he is around and he has no one. Mama Sunday said even she can't get to him. He hardly goes there and anytime he comes, he looks soulless and emotionless. He looks like someone who wants to kill. Mama Sunday is even afraid of the beast he had completely turned to. I even think that may be the reason his friends had stopped coming. The man you are looking for is different from the man I just told you about, at least that one had a soul and had someone keeping him in check. I have told you my own, I'm leaving."

The audio stopped and immediately, he heard shouts and chants from his idiot comrades.

“The legend” Fast said.

“This is my best bonfire this year” Mark said.

“Even Tamed did not tell it like this. Wow” Doc said.

“I can’t believe I had to listen to this in an office and not around a fire. I’m sad” Ghost said.

“Tamed you never told us you rode a bull” Jason said.

Even Jason had joined them.

“I have never even considered riding one before, but I’m adding it to my do list” Fast said.

“And Tamed how come you were not afraid of your ancestors? How could you move them from their position?” Ghost asked.

“And please I need to know how you injected those bulls” Doc said.

“Tamed I need explanation on the Tiger part please. I thought it was a bull?” Wild said.

“My concern here is that net trap” Mark said.

“How many bulls did you capture in total?” Fast asked.

“If I had known it was going to be this interesting, I would have postponed it for a bonfire night. Jason you could have warned me” Wild said.

“I am still sad but Tamed I can’t believe you never told us about those soldiers” Ghost said.

“Don’t forget Okemili who killed a whale” Mark added

“Ghost you know what? I think we should look for that man and pay him to tell us more” Fast said.

“That’s a good idea” Ghost responded.

“Unbelievable” he shouted hitting his starrng.

“I can’t believe you’ve all deviated from the main focus here.

Do guys realize Mama Sunday is at risk now?” he shouted.

“I strongly believe we have not. You are the main focus” Ghost said.

“Now you know how he was able to make them use a net instead of a trap. That means Ojogolo believed everything the man said” Wild said.

“Yes but Chief believes Tamed is working for his political opponent and also one of the guards must have sold him to you” Jason said.

“I think we need to look into our legendary stories. Tamed had been keeping the important things out. For now only three stories are valid, we should scrap Wild’s story and look for someone who knows him. In fact everybody’s story is invalid.

Imagine the many things Tamed did not tell us. With that we can rearrange the tales” Mark said.

That caught his attention.

“What do you mean by three valid stories?”

“For now the circle legendary book has George, Doc and now you’ve been confirmed making it three. Wild must have skipped important things too” Mark said.

“They are four Mark. How can you scrap sons of thunder?” Doc asked.

“But those stories are not completely real now” Mark asked.

“They were the first set of the Circle. We were five then. Myself, Tiger, Tamed, James and John known as sons of thunder. What made you believe it’s not true?” Wild asked.

“You are trying to tell me just two people ended the first Boko Haram sect which is still currently their worst defeat. Just two” Mark said.

“Mark you are still new. You have not even joined the navy when it happened. That should be eight or nine years ago. Although only one came back alive” Major said.

“I know the full story I just thought it was spiced up to encourage Special Force during initiation night” Mark said.

“Tamed and I had been the backup but we had met no breathing human except James who was also called Wolf. He was completely battered. John was dead. He had thrown himself on James seconds before a bomb exploded and James and gone insane. He never recovered and he had to be taken to the States for debriefing” Wild said.

He had not thought of those two for a long time. He remembered James had come back few months later to beg for another debriefing. He had asked Wild to do it. But even Wild could not help because his mental state had been worsened from his break up with John's sister. He even refused to explain what led to the breakup. Later, he had withdrawn from society and when they had tried visiting, he had pleaded with them to leave him alone. He said he might have a chance of healing if the Special Force never showed up. They had granted him his wish. That was more than seven years ago since they saw him last. There was something he needed to clarify.

“Why is George's story valid?”

“Tamed you did not watch the video? Ask Jason when you meet him” Doc said.

Which he was definitely going to do.

“Tamed I still need answers about the tiger” Wild said.

“Please, let’s focus on the issue on ground” Major came in.

“Thank you Major” he said.

“But you will still explain the tiger story and answer our questions when this is over” Major added.

Even Major had joined them, now he believed what Cindy had said about them. They were all abnormal.

“You guys have not answered me about Mama Sunday” he said.

“I’m working on it Tamed” Major said.”

“How?” he asked.

“The Python Special Force team are at Agbor. They just finished an alpha order. I’m sending a message for them to release three to Mama Sunday’s place. I specifically requested that Stud should be included. Done. I have sent it” Major said.

Although Major was always with the Circle, he was still the commander in charge of the Special Force. He had the power to give an omega or alpha order on robberies and kidnappings that was if they were to be confronted in the act.

“There is also the fact that he exposed you people” he said.

“Tamed you have a complicated case right now, let’s deal with that man later” Major said.

“I guess that man was not around when Major and you guys paid Mama Sunday a visit” Wild said.

“You are now in Benin but twenty one minutes away from my place. I have sent the directions to your computer” Jason said.

He was not even aware he had entered Benin. He was at Ramat Park and the only car on the road.

“After a successful bonfire night, it’s time for me to fly back to Abuja” Fast said.

“And Sabrina you can join me in my...”

“Not gonna happen” Sabrina said.

“I’ve been trying to understand this puzzle I saw in a flash drive in one of Omakor’s safe. I’m sending the file now. Please someone explain these puzzle” Ghost said.

“Ghost is in Omakor’s office?” Major asked.

“Yes” Wild said.

“I came to bug the office after bugging Umaru’s office. Then I was searching for any clue to my mission. I have been trying to understand this puzzle” Ghost said.

He picked his phone and opened the app, he slowed down his speed and glanced at the file. He clicked on it and it opened to

other files. He clicked on the first file and pictures of different people appeared on a small box, like a passport size. Some of the pictures had the bad symbol on them but it was not following any particular pattern. He glanced back on the road to make sure he had not deviated, then he went back to the pictures. Numbers were written in all the pictures.

“The three bad are already dead, and there are two more, it’s not following an odd number neither is it even, the first person that was killed is even at the end. And you know they normally kill the whole family. Omakor has a book on his table which looked like he had been doing some math calculations to figure out the next victim. There is another thing though. I discovered only few files can be opened and some of the files have pictures of the murder suspect but the man with the name Musa, a graduate of Ahmadu Bello University, is the right hand man to Mr Abdu

Salam who is from the opposition party, an enemy of Alhaji Umaru. Looks like Omakor must have sent the message to the wrong person, because this doesn't make sense"

"It's almost looking like a chess game but I'm confused" Mark said.

"Ghost, what did Umaru and Abdu study?" Jason asked.

"Mathematics for Umaru, Agriculture for Abdu" Ghost answered.

"Jason anything?" Wild asked.

"This is a work of a math scholar" Jason answered.

"And Umaru is the mathematician, he had made a name after making first class in mathematics from Ahmadu Bello University, but Musa is Abdu's right hand man and Abdu is Umaru's enemy" Ghost said.

“Jason what have you discovered?” Major asked.

“I’m working on the puzzle in the encrypted file, the one you have is outdated. Every picture there has an equation attached to them. He is playing a game with all of them, the answer to the equation tells him the next enemy to kill. The first victim had one as answer, with another number indicating the date. Second victim had two, same with third. I have to find the number four by solving all the equations on the pictures. I may stumble on number four early. Mark you try open the other encrypted file while I work on this math” Jason said.

“Roger that” Mark said.

“Ghost have you bugged their houses?” Mark asked.

“Later today” Ghost said.

“Then what were you doing with Omakor's wife and kid?” Doc asked.

“Just wanted to make acquaintance” Ghost said.

“From what I’m seeing, I think Musa is working for both parties” Fast said.

“But I can’t see Abdu’s picture here, he is Umaru’s public number one enemy. Umaru had defeated him to become a House of Rep member” Ghost said.

“Ghost you just said public. They could be friends” Doc said.

“Something is wrong. There is no way Abdu can create this puzzles. This is confusing” Mark said.

“Ghost how far are you from the third person’s house, that’s Mallam Farouk?” Jason asked.

“Not too far. Why?” Ghost asked.

“You might get there on time if you move now. He is the next target and it’s today” Jason said.

“Jason it’s almost five in the morning, it’s too late” he said.

“Maybe but he would definitely meet them” Jason said.

“Jason what are you not telling us?” Wild asked what he was about to ask.

“I’m on the move” Ghost said.

“Mark get hold of Ghost’s flight and connect it to the circle, increase the audio” Wild said.

“Roger that.”

Soon he started hearing sounds of someone running and landing on a surface.

“What is going on?” he asked increasing his speed.

“Ghost is using the roofs” Wild answered.

That was Ghost best and quickest way of movement. He needed to get to Jason’s place as fast as possible before Halima woke up and also so he could follow up on Ghost’s movement. Just when he had driven past University of Benin Main gate, he heard voices in Hausa same time Ghost stopped his movement.

“Please someone tell me I’m not late, Farouk’s youngest child is just five” Ghost said.

There was absolute silence from the Circle, only the voices of the men speaking Hausa were heard. He could pick out some few words because the Circle were forced to learn up to three languages but their dialect was deep.

“What are they saying?” he asked but nobody answered.

“Ghost I know how you feel but you can’t kill all of them, someone needs to state who sent them to the police” Major said.

“You don’t know how I feel, these men just raped and murdered women and children and they are so happy about what they did that they can’t wait to know their next victim. They are dead Major. Farouk, his two wives, his five children, his security including two police men. I could not save them” Ghost said.

“Then keep Abdu’s man and make him confess” Wild said.

“He will never confess. I’m reading a file on him right now” Doc said.

“They are radical Muslims who believe they are cleansing Islam by killing those who are friends with the enemy and those who are not true Muslim. Fard kifaya. If you capture them, they will never confess, they will see it as persecution and wait for their death with the hope of escaping the torture of the grave. They

will go straight to Garden of Eden. So it will be an honor for them to die as martyr” Major said.

“But there is nothing religious about these killings” Fast said.

“That is the big issue, politicians like Abdu and Umaru take advantage of them to kill their opponents” Doc said.

“So Musa will just be handed over to the police?” he asked.

“He is definitely going to confess, the part where I’m to leave him alive is what I’m finding difficult to accept” Ghost said

“They are twelve in number Ghost. How do you want to attack and how is the man going to confess?” Mark asked.

There was no answer but what he heard next made him stop his pickup. He quickly opened the app. The bird was giving an aerial view of the killers. They had stopped their movement and they were turning towards different directions all confused. He

quickly counted their numbers and only ended with eleven. One was missing. It must be his scream he had heard. Someone told them to continue and they started walking but became alert. If he had not been watching keenly, he would have missed it. Ghost was very fast. A rope fell on one of their necks and was tightened almost immediately. Before the man could scream, he was lifted up. He landed on the roof and Ghost sliced his throat with a laser knife. The roofs were not that high. He was on black and wore a black mask, his black circle bag was on his back. The men turned round again. Their posture was now different, the fear had started. They quickly hurried their movement, changing direction. Ghost moved swiftly but stealthily on the roofs of buildings. His rope was back again and another was lifted to the roof and his throat was sliced. Three gone, remaining nine.

“Who are you?” someone shouted in Hausa.

He could understand him. He must be Abdu’s man. The others started speaking the same time. The leader told them to run which they did but another was lifted again but instead of the back it was from the front. It was like watching an action scene in a movie. Ghost was just ghost, he could not follow his movement. He would see him one moment then he would disappear another moment. It looked like he was diving and resting on the wall to avoid being seen. He had his climbing tools with him. The runners stopped running and stepped back. They were now completely afraid.

“In the name of Allah show yourself coward” the leader shouted in English with a thick Hausa accent.

“Guys you need to see this. I just opened the file” Mark said.

The screen was split in two and a picture appeared in the second screen.

“What the heck!” he exclaimed.

“Ghost just listen. The picture I just opened has Abdu, Umaru, Chief Esigie standing close to each other. In the next picture, they are sitting down and there is another picture with John” Mark said.

Apart from the men looking everywhere, there was no activity on the first screen. Ghost was listening.

“That is not surprising Mark, Chief is also a House of Rep member. So it should not be surprising that they know each other” he said.

“John being in the second picture could mean Chief is their weapon supplier” Fast said.

“I don’t agree with you Tamed. They knew way back before he became House of Rep member. Check out this photo” Mark said.

Another picture appeared on the second screen.

“Ghost the last picture has Chief and Umaru looking younger and the camera looks outdated. I will try check to find out the period using the camera pixel” Mark said.

“Is everyone thinking what I’m thinking?” Doc asked.

“Ghost mission may be connected to Tamed and Jason’s mission. But most importantly there may be the possibility that Halima might have come from Umaru” Wild said.

“But right now every evidence is pointing at Abdu” Doc said.

“Ghost you can make use of the knowledge” Major said.

He wanted to understand what Major meant but the screen was back in full.

They were still waiting, maybe with the belief the person would show himself but Ghost response was to pick another person from the back making them five. The leader cocked his gun and fired at the direction he must have felt the killer had come from. That was too close to residents. Any stray bullet could kill one of them. As if Ghost knew the danger of getting the man more agitated, he saw him on the roof again but this time, he was with a desert pistol with suppressor which he released on them, four went down with four bullets. They were the ones with guns. The others had long blades and dagger. Musa was now the only one with gun and he could see it was an AK 47 rifle. While the others panicked, Musa raised his gun to fire but Ghost suddenly jumped into their midst same time Musa pulled the trigger. Ghost's hand was already on the gun and he had raised it to the sky making the bullet shoot up. He wrestled the gun from Musa.

The others recovered from their shock and attacked Ghost speaking Hausa.

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

{The worst of my fears has come true, what I've dreaded most has happened.}

Ghost flipped Musa to the left and threw him on the ground making the others miss. Then he was up almost immediately. He dodged their attacks picking at one of them as he dodged.

Anyone he picked was sliced at the throat with a laser knife but it looked longer and more powerful than the one he had. When it was just Musa and another one, Ghost suddenly disappeared. He

was concentrating on Ghost's movement, that was why he was able to see him dive into an alley and camouflaged himself with darkness. Musa switched on his torch and pointed it in different directions but could not see Ghost. He was standing so still, resting his back on the mud wall of a house and covered by another mud wall. They started running but he focused on Ghost. Ghost was on the roof in a jiffy. He moved quickly. When the distance was too long to jump, he threw a rope that landed on the next house, then pinned part of the rope to his position, next he used his climbing tools to hang on the rope and cross over to the other house. He pulled out everything and as they were in his hands, he jumped to the next roof. Everything happened within seconds. Ghost was very fast. He had once said the most important thing a pickpocket must learn was swiftness and being stealth. Soon he was ahead of them. He threw his death rope on the last man and pulled him fast to the roof, then shifted away so

Musa could not see him. There was something about the way the ropes he was using worked that made him believe it was a gadget.

Musa paused, turned around, brought out a dagger from his pocket and positioned himself to counter an attack. He had focused on Musa for few seconds and did not see Ghost had landed on the ground and was at Musa's back. Anytime Musa turned, Ghost turned with him. Ghost was with a black material. "Musa" Ghost called making him jerk.

His hand moved to slash at who called him but Ghost dodged and before Musa could see him, Ghost threw the cloth on his face, then flipped him face down. He used Musa's dagger to scrap Musa's back then he was in another alley and soon on the roof. Musa stood up and struggled to pull off the cloth. Once he succeeded, he put his hand on his pocket, then his shoe. It

looked like he was searching for his weapons but he could not find any. He quickly ran back the way he came from but Ghost suddenly landed in front him, making him to run into Ghost and as he tried to absorb the shock, Ghost flipped him down, lighted the laser knife and showed him to his face then used it to create a hole in his ear, as the man opened his mouth to scream, Ghost put something inside his mouth which the man struggled to pull out but could not because Ghost had his hands behind him and had tied him up with a rope that was glowing light. Ghost was off again. Now he was confused on Ghost's plan. Musa still struggled to stand up and started walking back. Ghost was sitting legs crossed on the ground but Musa did not see him. He jerked back when he finally saw Ghost.

“Who are you?” he asked in Hausa

But Ghost did not answer.

“Who are you?” he asked in English.

Ghost stood up pressed something on a rope he was holding making it glow. He walked towards the Musa. Musa moved back. Suddenly, Ghost sped up and covered the distance. He threw the rope on him and Musa’s body immediately started convulsing. Almost immediately, Ghost pulled out the rope which stopped glowing, then he placed Musa on his shoulders and was off. They were already in the last house and before them was a vast empty space. There was a tree not far and he knew that was where Ghost was running to. He was there in twenty seconds. That meant the rope lasted longer than his stun gun. He tied the man to the tree with another rope from his bag and sat down with his legs crossed. Two seconds later, the man opened his eyes and started struggling with the rope but stopped when he saw Ghost.

“Please tell me who are you?” Musa asked.

“What do you think?” Ghost asked.

His voice was very calm, too calm.

“You are not a Jinn, they don’t exist” Musa said.

“Some people call me that. They call me Ghost. I have been called many names but it doesn’t change what I do”

“You cannot be Azrael, are you a messenger of Azrael?” The man asked.

“What’s Azrael?” Fast asked what he wanted to ask.

“He is known as the Angel of death” Doc answered.

“I have little will left to use before I disobey order and kill you” Ghost said.

“Answer me in the name of Allah” Musa said

Ghost smacked his mouth with a rope.

“You are not qualified to mention that name, you are not a true Muslim. A true Muslim cannot be easily deceived. You don’t need to know my name. I’m just a messenger who is sent to send people to the underworld. What you must know is anybody on my list never makes it to Garden of Eden. Their graves are transformed into oppressive, constricting space, they won’t even face Munkar and Nakir. I’m an executioner sent to send the guilty to the underworld. Your dead ones will not be welcomed as martyrs because they had sinned against Allah. I only know how to kill but you were chosen and it’s with great restriction that I’m still keeping you alive, I’m going against my nature. You killed your Muslim brothers and children, the purist of creatures” Ghost said.

Ghost was good. He was not even a Muslim, neither a Christian but knew so much about both religions. He had once said his parents were Christians and they lived in a Christian community but their village had been invaded by Fulani herdsmen.

“They are impure Muslims working with the infidels” Musa said.

“If they are impure, I won’t be sent to you. My work is not to determine who is pure but I’m only sent to send guilty ones to the underworld and like I said, any one I visit don’t enter paradise. You are trying to fight a holy war but the persons picking out the non-Muslims are the impure ones. They are even friends with those you call infidel. Your weapon is supplied by those you call infidels. They are not Muslims but pretend they are, then they use you to propagate their political agenda by using you to kill their political enemies with the false accusations of their enemies not being true Muslims. Ali, Aisha,

Fa'idah, Danjuma, Balarabe and others were innocent. The innocent blood you have shed is already too much, it has caught our attention, hence I have to come”

“Please Allah have mercy” Musa said.

“Our greatest fear is to die and made to face torture in the grave after failing before Munkar and Nakir” Major said.

So Ghost was using Musa’s belief to get him to confess.

“You have a chance to confess to your crimes and those evil men who made you commit those crimes” Ghost said.

“Yes I will...”

“Sssh, not to me. I know your crimes. Once I leave, some men you call police will be coming to pick you. You are going to give them this, then tell them everything. Remember I’m

watching you and you won't get a second chance" Ghost said putting a flash drive in Musa's trouser pocket.

He brought out another cloth from his bag and covered Musa's face, then he was on the run.

"I need to meet Omakor and talk with him. I want to find out where he got the flash drive" Ghost said running.

He dropped his phone, ignited his pick up and was back on the road.

"Ghost you will never know from Omakor" Jason said.

"What do you mean?" Ghost asked.

"Farouk was the fifth victim, second for today. That was why you met them" Jason said.

The silence he heard told him Ghost had gone still.

"No, no" Ghost said resuming his run.

“Jason what are you doing? Did you not watch the video Ghost sent yesterday afternoon? Stop saying nonsense” Doc said.

“What video?” he asked.

“Tamed please try and be active. Ghost had sent a video of himself playing with Omakor’s son when he had gone to bug their car. He had helped the wife who is with a three months old baby to convey her goods to her car, then he had placed the boy who is three on his shoulder” Mark said.

“I wish I can counter myself but Ghost please don’t go further” Jason said.

“Jason why are you saying this now?” Wild asked.

“Because it was already too late and I knew what Ghost was going to do to Musa, it would have hindered him. Musa would

have never believed Ghost if he had mentioned Omakor.

Omakor was a Christian” Jason said.

From the sound he was hearing, Ghost was still running. He had passed Isihor and was now at Oluku. Jason’s direction was immediately after Oluku.

“Ghost please turn back. The police are on their way to pick up Musa” Wild said.

There was no answer from Ghost.

“Jason please be wrong, for once be wrong” Doc said.

“I’m hundred percent sure Omakor was the first target this night. It was in the encrypted file” Jason said.

That was bad. Jason hardly used hundred percent.

“No” Ghost shouted making him stop the pickup.

“Mark let’s see with Ghost’s camera” Wild said.

“He picked the phone and wished he could unsee what he saw.

He had seen the battered head of a baby.

“No. This is not happening. I’m dreaming. How did this happen?

How could I not save them?” Ghost shouted.

The screen was split into two with one showing outside which must be the bird’s image. Ghost stumbled outside and the screen became one.

“Ghost no, don’t. You cannot. It’s a command” Major said.

“What is the essence of killing if it won’t protect those who needed it? The whole family is dead. Someone has used religion to kill babies and a lady” Ghost said.

“Ghost I know but you cannot go after Abdu or Umaru. You cannot” Major said.

“No I can and I will. There is no way I’m going to allow them breathe freely”

And with that, Ghost started running.

“Ghost I am not asking you. Stop it right now. All of you say something” Major said.

But nobody answered.

“Fast I need you to fly to Ghost now and stop him wherever you can, minimize the damage. Do you copy?” Major commanded.

But Fast did not answer.

“Wild I need you to stop Ghost now” Major commanded.

“Why? Musa’s men can die but people like Chief, Abdu, Umaru can live? People like Lord Nero can be given an omega order but the ones who have more blood on their hands must be given

alpha because they are politicians? Major there is no difference to me” Wild said.

“Yes, there is difference. The president is very interested in this case and I have been giving him update. If any of them dies, I will have a lot to answer. I know what I had put myself in when I created this Circle team. I know it goes against your nature but you need to stop. We must follow protocol. Those evidence are not enough..”

“Even if there is a damn evidence, the omega order will never be given. It is always alpha, then they prolong their case in court while they get bail and live their normal life. What is the use of evidence? Did you just see the battered face of that baby? Five children from Farouk and two from Omakor in one night” he shouted interrupting Major.

That was the big problem they had to deal with. The circle could only carry out omega but the deal was they must be the ones who brought evidence, with that, they would never be sent to kill political enemies. The Special Force were only sent for an alpha mission. Any case they were sent to solve was already placed as alpha. The Circle only came in when The Special Force could not find evidence but still had suspicions. That must be the case of Ghost because any mission involving a big man in government had never been an omega order. Chief was not the focus of Jason's mission but the Ojogolos. Chief had come in because Jason's trail was always leading back to him. It was always frustrating working on an already alpha mission.

“Who said life is fair? If Ghost attacks them, he will have to face police officers unlike Chief's case. If Ghost kills them, the media would celebrate them as heroes, I will have to face the

president to explain what happened. There is no point I will give that will be valid. I saw the baby, I know what Ghost is feeling. I have experienced that many times, it's the nightmare we have to live with. But if Ghost doesn't stop, I will be court-martialed and charged for murder because I will claim responsibility. Go on Ghost, get your revenge. I will pay the price" Major said.

The sudden silence that followed Major's speech meant Ghost had stopped.

"Nooo" Ghost shouted.

"Fast you should move now" Wild said.

"Ghost I'm so sorry" Doc said with a teary voice.

He drove into a street using the map on his computer.

“How do I forget this? I’m going crazy. I’m supposed to protect them. I could not protect Efe. He was laughing on my shoulders few hours ago” Ghost said.

“As much as it goes against my personal belief, Ghost we can’t lose Major. Fast pick up Ghost and fly him back to Abuja. Major we will need your wife’s help” Wild said.

“Fast once you drop Ghost in Abuja, you will return and take over from Ghost. Do you copy?” Wild continued.

“Roger that” Fast said.

“No, I can do this” Ghost said.

“Ghost come back to base first. Your mother will be waiting for you. We will discuss that later” Major said.

“Jason with this new development, we need to quicken this mission. Fast your first assignment is to look into the

relationship between Abdu, Umaru and Chief. Find out if there is any clue about Halima. As for Chief, our next line of action will be determined by him” Wild said.

He was now in front of a gigantic gate. The gate opened for him but he did not drive in immediately. He turned to look at Halima. She was still asleep.

“Doc is Halima supposed to still be sleeping?” he asked.

“The drug should have worn off but due to what she experienced, her body is tired” Doc said.

“Tamed please find a way to get to Halima. She may be the key to these two missions. Over and out” Wild said.

Others followed suit. He pulled off his gadgets and looked at Halima again. Not up to two days ago, he had woken up with the plan to end his life and just within that time, so many activities

had happened. Now he was about to enter Jason's compound and he could not put a name to what he was doing. At least he was grateful he could rescue Halima. He knew what Ghost was feeling, many soldiers have experienced it. It tears through someone's spirit to watch those who needed their protection die. Some people have said killing takes humanity from someone, that the more they killed, the more they got lost. But it was not true for him and he believed the Circle too. He had no single regret for any kill he had done, neither did he feel any remorse. The only thing that killed the humanity in them, that gave them sleepless nights and tore through their souls were those they could not save. Cindy was right that they were not normal, but they were also not monsters. As he watched her sleeping face which showed no fear, he could only wish she would recover fast.

“Who are you? Where do you come from? Do you know Abdu or Umaru? You need to come out of your cage. You are free Halima. I won’t let Chief take you. I won’t let Chief get an alpha order. But you need to help me Halima” he said.

He ignited his pickup and as he drove inside all he could think of was ‘what a night.’

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

{I will start a fire that will rage unchecked; burn everything in sight to cinders.}

As soon as he drove into the compound, he almost forgot he was supposed to be in a sad mood. There was no light when the gate was opened but everywhere lighted up as soon as he entered. Jason was standing at the entrance of a duplex. The

duplex was facing an open home gym and a park. There was the treadmill machine, stationary bike, workout machine, weight lifting gadgets and others. By the side of the house was a swimming pool with silver ladder. Then there was a road and by the side of the road was another smaller duplex. The compound was very big and the ground was brick tiled. There were flowers arranged in rows round the houses and fence. He drove towards the car park. There were was a Mercedes Benz and Jason's jeep. He drove into an empty space and parked his pickup. He came out to unhook the chain connecting the pickup to the rescue van but Jason was already there. He had unhooked the chain and was already in the driver's seat. He drove the van to another space and came out seconds later. He nodded an acknowledgement towards him.

“Where to?” he asked knowing fully well Jason was not in talking mood.

Jason pointed to the pickup and he understood what he meant. He went to carry Halima out.

“The bags are in the van” he said.

Jason opened the back of the van and came out with Halima’s bag and his military bag where he had kept all his things. Jason led the way and he followed. He stopped at the other duplex which was big just that it was smaller than the one Jason was standing close to. Jason placed his thumb at the place that was supposed to be the door handle and the glass door opened. He was expecting to see something exquisite but the first thing he saw was more than his expectation. The parlor was flashy and glassy. It was very spacious and black cushion chairs were arranged sparsely with a translucent rectangular table at the

center. The TV should be the biggest he had ever seen. Jason went right which had the stairs. He flowed Jason up. By his right was a door, then his left had a corridor that contained four doors. Jason opened the door at his right. He followed him inside the room and he almost exclaimed but held himself. The room was rectangular in shape but very big. It was like a self-contained. It had a gigantic bed that someone like Halima would have to climb to enter it. It could contain six Halimas. There was a big black loveseat facing a huge mirror close to the big wardrobe. Just after the wardrobe was a door which would lead to the bathroom. Then at the center of the opposite side of the bathroom door, were black cushion chairs. Breadths of the room had glass windows from beginning to the end. Not the dark glass windows found in most houses, but clear white. The curtains were long enough to cover them. He placed Halima on the bed.

Jason dropped the bags by the wardrobe then started typing something on his phone. His phone vibrated in his pocket.

‘The house was built for Cindy and me but we decided to stay in the main house. The fridge has been stacked up and the cupboard. Any other thing should be later in the day. You still need rest’ Jason wrote.

“Why is the house looking so clean?” he asked.

‘Robot cleaner’ Jason wrote.

“Where is the kitchen?” he asked.

“Downstairs has the parlor, kitchen, store room, visitor’s rest room while up has this room and four other rooms. Three are master bedroom while the fourth is a library. This room is the biggest. Follow me to get your finger print permit’ Jason wrote.

He followed Jason downstairs, down to the entrance door. Jason typed something like a tab on the wall close to the door.

He signaled for him to put his thumb on a space blinking light at the side of the door because there was no handle.

“Finger print accepted” a female voice said as soon as his thumb touched the light.

Jason signaled he should follow him which he did. The dining room was demarcated with a step and a big curve, from there was the door to the kitchen. The kitchen was also big, with long rows of cupboards filling up a long line. There was a door which he guessed must lead to the store room. There was the electric gas cooker, the type used to at the circle house. It had many burners. The up was also filled with cupboards but with a transparent glass as their doors. He could see which had the pots, plates, spoons beverages and others. By his right was a gigantic

fridge, half of its body was transparent. Adjacent to the store room door, was another door. Jason pressed another tab on the wall and signaled for him to put his thumb which he did. Then he signaled for him to press the place with his thumb which he also did. The door opened and he was awed by the sight before him. It was a garden just few steps away from the door of the kitchen. He could see tomatoes and pepper plants, he could see all kinds of vegetable plants he knew of, and then there were those he did not know. Further away was a small poultry and he could see it was active. Then after the garden was an orchard, although the mango, peer, pawpaw, cashew, native apple trees could prevent it from being called an orchard. By the side, that's the left of the garden and the Orchard was a field. Then the tall walls of the compound with barb wires.

“Wow” he said but Jason was already walking away.

He ignored Jason and studied his environment for a while then entered back into the kitchen. He went to check the main entrance door and it was closed. Jason had left. Somehow he preferred the new Jason not the old one he just met. He went back to Halima's room to pick his bag but saw Halima had already woken up and was sitting on the bed looking scared. She jerked the moment he entered the room. He walked past her to the windows at the left. From there, he could see the garden and orchard and the grass field. He pulled down all the curtains, then moved over to the window at the right. From there he could see Jason's house, the home gym and the car park then the swimming pool which was sealed but whatever was used to seal it was very transparent. The light went off in Jason's house, same with the compound but there was still light in the room he was standing. He also pulled down all the curtains. He carried his bag and without saying a single word to Halima, he left the

room. There was key by the door but he did not bother. He opened the second room by his right. That was the only thing normal he had seen. It had its bed, wardrobe and rest room but it was average. He opened the wardrobe and threw his bag inside. He entered the bed and as soon as his back touched the bed, he felt exhausted. The time was almost six in the morning. He had no idea what the day held for him but he needed his full strength to face it. He closed his eyes and surprisingly he felt himself drifting off to sleep.

A vibration on his wrist woke him up.

‘Briefing by 10:AM’ was written in capital letter.

He was going to ask who usually sent him those messages. He checked his time and it was already 8:43AM. He quickly left the bed and went straight to the kitchen. He opened the fridge and saw bread and lots of peak liquid milk, then drinks. There were

eggs and some tomatoes too. He turned round and looked for the oil. He sighted it up. He brought it down and quickly prepared fried egg. He opened the door as the egg swelled up in the nonstick pan. Jason was doing some clearing and filling up of the soil around some nursery tomato plants. There were eggs in a basket close to him. He started picking the ripe tomatoes and pepper as he walked towards him.

“Nice garden Jason” he said bending down to pluck out a ripe tomatoes close to him.

“My mum orchestrated it. The land was a present to her from her dad” Jason surprisingly said.

“Where is Cindy?” He asked.

“Should be running on the treadmill machine. I can smell something burning” Jason said.

He quickly rushed into the kitchen. The eggs were all black. He switched off the gas, poured the burnt food into the waste bin he had seen close to the outside wall of the kitchen. He took out six sliced bread, then made a cold tea. He carried it to Halima's room. She was sitting close to the wardrobe. There must be something about the wardrobe. Again, she jerked as entered. He placed the food close to her and left the room without saying a single word. He came outside to explore the mini gym. Cindy was running on the treadmill with earpiece on her ear. She did not notice him until he was very close.

“Hi” she said shyly.

He nodded and went straight to the weight lifting area. The mass of stones connected by an iron rod were two hundred and fifty kilogram. He had counted up to twenty lifts when Jason came with two baskets. He dropped them close to the treadmill

and joined Cindy on the run holding her on her waste and pulling her very close to him. Cindy spared a glance his way and quickly looked away but said something to Jason. Whatever she had said did not work because she started pushing Jason away but Jason pulled her away from the machine and spun her to face him. Cindy tried to push him away but Jason covered her lips with his. She gave in immediately. At least Cindy had some decency but Jason had none at all. He was like the complete opposite of who he knew. He dropped the mass and walked towards the car park, then moved further to the end of Jason's duplex. Just between the end of the house and the fence was the best sight he had seen since he woke up. There was a mini boxing ring but was roofed and had punching bags hanging down from the roof. There were gloves lying close the edge of the ring. He climbed inside and immediately engaged a punching bag.

His wrist watch vibrated making him pause. His body was already sweaty from the exercise. He looked at the watch.

‘Ten minutes to briefing’ was written on it.

He needed a quick shower before he joined the meeting. That made him realize he had no idea how he would join the online briefing. The couple and the baskets were no longer outside. He brought out his android phone as soon as he entered his room.

‘Jason where I’m I doing the conference?’ he sent a personal message to Jason.

He got a reply almost immediately.

‘My house’ Jason wrote.

He was at Jason’s door within seven minutes after feeling refreshed. The glass but opaque door opened as he got to it. Now this was a grand parlor.

“Meeting about to start” he heard Jason making him turn.

There was a TV like the one in the smaller duplex but it was on and split into six. He ignored the beautiful sight before him and sat down on one of the navy blue cushion chairs facing the TV.

Just as he sat down, the screens began to fill up. Mark, Doc, Fast, Major, Wild then his face and Jason’s face were on the last screen. Ghost was not there.

“Major where is Ghost?” he asked.

“He has been put to sleep by my wife. She had to inject him” Major said.

Major’s wife was a medical doctor, the reason Doc became a doctor.

“But how was he?” Doc asked.

“Terrible Doc” Fast said.

“You think he may need to be debriefed?” Mark asked.

“Too early to say Mark but this incident will sure trigger memories” Wild answered.

It was going to be tough for Ghost because he had been in that situation. When he was little he had been the only one to escape. Ghost was somehow mysterious. Even though he was the funny one among them, he had the darkest past which he seldom shared.

“Fast anything?” Wild asked.

“Yes. Not too long I came back. I’m at Ghost room now. The police had arrested Musa but residence are scared because of bodies lying on some of their roofs. There were massive crowd in Farouk’s house, also Omakor’s house. Umaru is already receiving condolences on both deaths. I read about Farouk and he is a member of Umaru’s party and as you know, Omakor is

his lawyer. I just got back from his house. I've bugged part of it and it was easy because I was on military uniform. That's all for now. I will soon find out Musa's confession. Right now my eyes are damn heavy and I need a nap" Fast said.

"Jason any news?" Wild ask.

"The police were in the house but left after they found Tamed was not around. I will be going to put visuals for Chief and Ojogolo today. For now nothing" Jason said.

"The president is right now outside the country and would need report once he comes back, that will be before he visits Lagos. Let's try to wrap up these two missions before then" Major said.

"Tamed how is Halima doing?" Wild asked.

"Still afraid. Don't worry I will find a way to lesson her fears so Cindy can join her" he said.

“Doc have you conducted the test from the blood sample?”

Wild asked.

“Yes, gave it to the lab. Will check my email later in the day to find out the results. But I hope you’ve been giving her the prescription?” Doc asked.

“I forgot” he answered.

“I will send Jason the prescription to get another one. Please it’s important you don’t forget” Doc said.

“Any other thing?” Major asked.

“No. Doc will give us a report of her mission later. I got a message from Stud. She said no attack on Mama Sunday yet” Wild said.

“I’m off to take a nap” Major said.

Jason switched off the TV.

“So right now all I have to do is wait” he said.

Jason nodded.

“Dark Prince..sorry Tamed. Would you like to take some cooked food?” Cindy asked.

She was not around until now. He nodded. That would save him a lot of stress.

“Okay. Let me pack them up” she said leaving the parlor.

“Jason I need to read everything about Ojogolo and Chief again. Can you forward everything to Circle app? If possible the files on Ghost mission” he said.

Jason nodded. Cindy came back few seconds later with a bag and gave it to him.

“Thanks” he said.

As he got to the door, it opened for him. Before he came outside, he saw Cindy sitting on Jason's lap, her head on his shoulders and her hands on his waist while Jason operated a small system. He shook his head.

Immediately he entered his parlor, he opened the app. The file was already there but he ignored it and scrolled up. He found the video Doc talked about. It must have been the flight bird. Ghost had little Omakor on his shoulders and there were two bags in his hand. The boy held Ghost's neck to steady himself as he laughed. A woman who must be Omakor's wife followed along with a baby in her back. Ghost dropped the bag by the booth while the woman entered the front seat to open the booth. He saw Ghost quickly insert something under the booth. He placed the bags in the booth and carried the boy to the passenger's seat. The woman shouted a thank you as she drove off. Ghost looked

at the flight and winked. The video stopped. Ghost had a way of making people like him. It was so sad that the people in the video were no more. That made him remember he was supposed to ask Jason for George's video but that would have to wait. As he was about to open the files Jason had sent, his watch vibrated. He checked it and saw a padlock with receive on the right and reject on the left. He pressed receive and he saw activated. His phone vibrated.

'Now you can open the gate. I'm off for my mission. Cindy is around. She has no lectures today, you can ask her anything' Jason wrote.

'Okay' he replied.

He spent the whole of the remaining morning reading the files, starting from Ojogolo then Ghost's mission. When he was

halfway through with Ghost's mission, he checked the time. It was 1:54PM. He brought out the food Cindy had given him.

“Wow” he said.

It was eguisi soup and eba. He brought out a plates from one of the cupboards and cut out some for Halima.

She was still by the wardrobe, her knees raised up and her head on her knees. She had emptied the breakfast. She started shaking as he went close.

“Halima. I don't want to see this gown on you when I come back this night. Take a bath and change to any of your new clothes. Do you understand?” he asked trying his best to sound friendly.

She nodded immediately. He took the breakfast plates and cup and left the room. He thought of switching on the TV but shook

his head. TV was not his thing. He went back to the files he was reading after eating the remaining eba and eguisi soup. The files on Ghost's mission were many. This was because the special force had been the first to go for the mission but they could not discover a single evidence. They only had suspicions. The president had requested the Circle to take over. The big issue right now was how Omakor got the flash drive and if that was the evidence he meant. Because even with the flash drive, Abdu would be the only person that would be in trouble because of Musa, but even that was not enough to prove him guilty. One thing they were sure of was Chief was friends with both of them especially Umaru, and Halima could be the first link between them. His phone vibrated making him to open the Circle app. There was a picture with a name Osama written on it.

‘This is Ojologo’s son. A student of Uniben. It's not too long he left his father’s territory after getting a desert pistol. He is twenty two and about to carry out his third killings as a black axe member. His target is not a rival cult member but someone who Osama wants to punish for dating a girl he wants. Venue is Ekosodin, Newton Street, the road close to Fatima hostel, Winners Street.’ Jason wrote.

‘Where are you?’ Wild asked.

‘On my way to Benin. Visual is now in their meeting place.

Flight 19 now activated’ Jason answered.

‘What is Flight 19?’ he asked.

‘A baby wall gecko’ Mark answered.

‘Wild is it going to be alpha or omega?’ he asked.

‘Major’s call’ Wild wrote.

‘Omega with target in the act. Let’s shake Ojogolo’s table’

Major answered.

‘Okay. I got it’ he wrote.

‘Tamed I will send you a direction to the Street. Get there before 8:00PM. You have the picture and your spec is powerful enough to see him. He will be waiting for Prosper close to Fatima hostel’ Jason wrote.

‘Okay’ he wrote and dropped his phone.

Major hardly gave an omega order in cases like this but it looked like he was in a bad mood like all of them and it was Ojogolo’s son.

He checked the time. It was almost 5:58PM. He had been so engrossed with the files that he had not noticed time had gone far. He got his weapons ready and as he searched through his bag, he

discovered he had dropped the pack that had his wrist watch in the bag. He brought it out to throw it away but saw a black-hand band inside. He pulled out the band and studied it. It was larger than the normal circle own and where there was supposed to be a watch, was just round and flat. It must be a camouflage he thought as he pressed it. He was right, the circle path shifted inside and a tiny watch appeared. His wrist watch started vibrating making him look at it. The picture of the band appeared and immediately two dots. He wore the band on his wrist and checked the watch. He pressed the side of the tiny watch and it closed up. Without pulling it out, he picked the weapons he needed. He would ask Jason what it was meant for. He was out of the compound ten minutes later.

He did not drive fast. He had all the time he needed. He even got to boundary road too early. He switched on his pickup computer

and saw the map to the place. The street he had to enter was before the back gate. There was a hostel with Newton written in capital letter. He continued straight and was soon at Winner's street. The hostel was the first hostel by his left. There was a small kiosk opposite it. He drove past the hostel and further down to study his environment. After driving through streets that allowed cars to pass through, he drove back to the hostel but stopped his pickup close to the tiny street by the hostel. It was already 7:45PM. He came out of his pickup and put on his spectacle. He entered the tiny street which was very bushy and almost impossible for cars to drive through. Just as he passed the hostel down into the street, he saw him. He was wearing a red cap with red T-shirt and walking very confident towards the side of the hostel. The street was very dark and it was a good place to commit crime. Osama had been so excited that he did not notice him. Osama stood waiting for his prey without noticing a

predator close by. He moved further inside the bush as he saw two girls going towards Osama. Osama ignored them as they fearfully walked past him. Another boy was coming. He was holding the hand of a girl. They got close to Osama and he blocked their path. That would be Prosper.

“Shey you nor dey fear me abi?” Osama said bringing out his pistol and pointing it at Prosper.

“Please... please....” Prosper begged already on his knees.

The girl joined him but did not utter a word.

“Shebi I warn you make you leave this babe for me, but you nor dey fear face oh. My papa men dey even fear me but you this idiot won use me play” Osama said.

He was putting a lot of energy in his voice to make it sound deep and scary.

“Lie down flat. Your father left yansh” Osama said kicking Prosper.

“Please...please. I swear I will leave her.” The boy pleaded.

He hoped the girl was listening to the boy she was following.

“Too late” Osama said.

“I don’t think so” he said coming out.

Osama was already pointing his gun at the boy’s head but not yet cocked. Osama pointed the gun at him.

“Who are you?” Osama asked.

“Why do I always get same damned question” he said.

“Answer me before I blow your heard” Osama shouted.

“I’m giving you a lifeline Osama. You have a chance to live if you can shoot me” he said.

Osama cocked the gun and fired but he had moved out and almost immediately he had the hand with the gun.

“No second chance” He said as he broke his hand.

He pushed the pistol into Osama’s mouth to muffle his scream. Then he brought out his laser knife.

“Your father will understand when he sees my signature. But you should know you are not paying for your father’s sin but yours” he said as he opened Osama’s throat.

He pushed Osama to the ground and walked quickly back to his pickup and was driving out of Ekosodin.

Something made him stop his pickup as he got closer to the end of boundary road. There was a fight going on by his left. It was not the fight that made him stop but who was fighting. They were two men and a girl who would not be more than eight.

“Pay your money.” The girl shouted as she used a block to propel her high enough to do a summersault kick.

Her legs hit one of the men on his forehead, knocking him to the ground. He pulled off his spectacle and wiped his eyes. He put back the spectacle but he still saw the girl, he was not hallucinating. She had bent down to search the fallen man’s pockets forgetting there was another man. He quickly came out of his pickup and was there in time to prevent the man from hitting the little girl with a stick. He stopped the stick midway and punched the man on his forehead knocking him out. The girl turned to look at what happened. He expected her to jerk or at least show signs of fear but she did not, instead she was trying to figure him out.

“Who are you?” she asked.

He was tired of hearing that question.

He bent down towards the girl but she stood up and positioned herself for a fight with one hand folded forward and the hand behind her right hand. Her legs were positioned correctly.

Where on earth did she learn that?

“I can see you are not afraid of me” he said.

“Are you owing my mother too?” she asked getting ready to strike.

She had dropped a wallet on the ground which must belong to the man who was already standing up. He pushed the girl to the left and pulled the man down as he was about to run.

“What did he do that a little girl like you have to fight him?” he asked.

“They did not pay my mum and she is sick. She needs money” she said.

“Your Ashawo mama when...”

He punched the man’s mouth. The man held his mouth trying to absolve the pain.

“How old are you?” he asked.

“Seven” she answered.

Unbelievable! He was not even like that when he was nine.

“Where is your mum? Are you not afraid? What seven year old fight men in the night?” he asked

“I said she is sick. There is no money and she said she might die. I need to collect money from those who bought drink from her but did not pay”

And she was speaking in English and not pidgin.

“And your mum allowed you to move in the night?”

“She does not know” she answered bending down to pick the wallet.

She brought out all the money inside.

“Get out of here” he said to the man.

The man immediately fled towards Ekosodin.

“Who thought you how to fight?” he asked.

“Nobody, I watch films and practice by myself” she answered putting the money in her pocket.

“I have never seen your kind in all my life. It’s good you can fight but you must not do that. If I did not come over you would have been badly injured. Do you understand?” he asked putting enough force in his voice but the girl was not shaken instead he was the one shaken.

“No, I know all those that used to visit her, my mum said they did not pay her everything. I am going to collect it” she answered.

He brought out his wallet and packed all the money inside and gave it to her.

“Take. Don’t come out in the night again to fight anybody. It’s dangerous” he said.

“I am not afraid” she answered taking the money.

“I know that already, but fear is for the brave, you need to have fear to survive. What is your name?” he asked.

“Pearl”

She started walking away without thanking him.

“Hey” he called.

She turned back. He pulled off the band in his hand.

“Bring your hand” he said.

He had to triple it before it could be firm in her hand. He turned the round part to the front.

“If you ever find yourself in trouble and you need help. Press this round place very tight and I will come for you” He said.

“Thanks” she said running away.

He did not even ask about her dad. He walked back to his pickup and was on his way back to Jason’s house. Just when he had entered Oluku, he reversed and drove back to boundary road. He came down and looked around for the girl but did not see her.

Close to the road were fruit and bread sellers. He walked up to them and inquired about the little girl but none saw her or knew her. He went back to his pickup feeling a pang in his chest. He should have followed her home. He should have done more.

He drove back feeling sad. As he came out from his pickup after parking it, Cindy came out from the house with two flasks.

“Welcome. I have food for two” she said giving him the flasks.

Jason was standing by the door hands in his pocket. He nodded towards Jason.

“Thanks Cindy” he said taking the flasks.

“And this is her drugs” she said handing over a small white nylon.

He took it and nodded in appreciation. He went straight to his duplex and without opening it to see what was inside, he took a spoon from the kitchen. Then brought out the drugs she needed for the night. He placed everything in a tray with a plastic bottled water. He carried them to her room.

She was still by the wardrobe. He ignored her fear and placed the food before her. She had changed to another gown.

“Take these drugs after eating” he said.

She nodded. He left the room and opened his flask. It was beans and fried plantain. He finished everything and went straight to his room. He took a shower and continued studying Ghost’s mission. By 11: PM, he went to check on Halima. She had eaten her food and taken the drugs but she was not sleeping. She was still in her position. It was as if she was expecting him. She jerked up immediately. This had to stop. If she continued like that she would not recover on time. He had to stop her from fearing him. He moved very close to her and held her hand. He took her to the bed, raised her and placed her on top of the bed, then he joined her.

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

{Even prisoners enjoy peace, free from shouts and harsh commands.}

He was going to kill her but she did not know when. She had seen what he did to those people that were about taking her

to Chief. They were all afraid of him. He had killed one of them. She thought he was going to kill her immediately but he had not. He had taken her inside and made her pack her clothes, then he had put something painful on her arm. She had slept off and woken up in a strange room. She had been so afraid waiting for when he would kill her that she did not bother looking at the room. He had told her to change her clothes and she had somehow found the bathroom. She just used the shower without knowing what she was doing. She had been waiting to see when he would come to kill her. He had come back with food and drugs making her afraid. He was not going to just kill her, he would touch her first. That was why he had brought the drugs. She had forced herself to eat the beans and fried plantain and taken the drugs. She had been sitting by the wardrobe waiting for when he would come and touch her. She thought of the repulsion she normally felt and wondered if it would be worst

with the beast. She heard the door being opened and knew it was time. She would not survive it. Her body shook as he came closer. He picked her up and pulled her towards the bed. The bed was very high and she had almost fallen when she had tried to come down. He placed her on the bed and joined her. Her teeth started jamming together producing a sound. He pulled her to him making her back to rest on his chest and stomach. He pulled her closer and used one hand to hold her from her waist to her stomach, the other hand was across her head holding her hands. Chief normally told her to pull off her clothes but he did not. She shook with fear waiting for what he would do next.

“Halima” he whispered in her ears making her shiver.

“Listen to me very carefully because I won’t repeat myself. I am going to give you a chance to survive this night. If you can pull

off the hand holding your stomach, I promise not to touch you. I always keep to my words Halima. Now do it” he said.

She did not know if he would keep to his promise but she had a chance to escape his touch and she was going to give it a try.

Immediately he released the hand holding her hands, she used all her strength to pull it away but it was as if she was not evening pulling anything. She tried and tried but he held her tighter. She started crying. Suddenly, he flipped her to another side and her back was now touching the bed. He pulled her hands up above her head. He was almost on top of her, he was so big that she could not see anything apart from him.

“It’s like you want me to touch you” he said, his voice so deep.

She shook her head and increased her cry.

“Then why did you not pull my hand out?” he asked.

“You are too strong. I tried but you are too strong” she stammered.

“Exactly my point. I can do anything to you and you won’t be able to fight me” he said moving one hand to her stomach.

He spun her again and she found herself back in the same position he had earlier placed her but he pulled her closer that she was almost covered by him. Her body shook with dread.

“If I want to touch you I should have done it by now. I have no plan of touching you Halima. Do you know why” he asked.

She shook her head.

“Think. You should know” he said.

“Because I’m still skinny” she stuttered.

“You are very intelligent Halima. I like chubby and you are not even close to being chubby. So you can sleep this night because today is not the day I will touch you” he said.

She heard him but she was still afraid. What if he changed his mind?

“Halima you are still afraid. I’m still holding you because you are not yet asleep. I promise to leave once you fall asleep but you can stay awake if you want me to hold and touch you” he said.

She shook her head and closed her eyes. She waited for that annoying feeling that made her skin feel like it was going to peel off from her body but it did not come. Beast was not lying, he was not going to touch her. She tried to relax her body.

“Exactly Halima, you are relaxing. You can sleep now. I will keep to my promise. Just sleep” he said.

He was right. He was very strong and could do anything to her but she was safe this night. He might touch her the next day and she needed her strength to survive. Her body suddenly relaxed and it felt like a weight was lifted off her. Soon her eyes felt heavy. She did not fight the sleep that overwhelmed her.

Everywhere was so bright even when her eyes were still closed. She forced her eyes to open, to see what was causing the brightness.

It was morning and there were large windows in the room with their curtains pulled out. It made the room bright. The room was beautiful, it was very large and the floor was different from the floors she knew. She had really slept off. She remembered Beast and turned but did not see him. He had kept to his promise. The plates were not even by the wardrobe. She climbed down from the big bed and tried to explore the room. She stood by the

mirror to look at herself. She was really skinny. Her hair was looking rough and it would be very difficult to comb because she had not combed it since Beast captured her. She moved to the window close to the mirror. It was very long, large and very clear. She was immediately awed by what she first saw. There were so many fruit trees. She brought her eyes closer and gasped. It was Beast with another man. Beast was packing sand into a small black bag that had a plant inside. The other man was picking ripe tomatoes from some plants. She smiled as she remembered the name of the plant. She sighted some chickens in a small cage. She looked back at the man and Beast. There were two baskets in his hand. One had eggs and the other tomatoes and pepper. She wished she could be allowed to pick eggs and touch the tomatoes and pepper. The man started leaving. It was now just Beast. Beast stood up and turned towards the window, he raised his head and their eyes met sending dread to her body.

She quickly moved inside. He had seen her. She ran towards the other window and saw flowers, water and some things she could not understand. She could also see a big house. She saw a girl riding something that looked a bicycle. She kept ridding but the bicycle did not leave its position. She was very fair and had packed her hair. The other man came towards her. She saw the man and came down, then threw herself on him. The man spun her round making her laugh. She looked so happy. She gasped when the girl put her mouth on the man's mouth. What were they doing? She saw Beast coming towards them. He had a small basket full of tomatoes. He was talking to them but they were not answering. He picked a large tomato and threw it towards the man. The man caught it with his hand, then dropped it on the floor but still held the girl with his other hand. Beast put his hands on his waist, he was looking frustrated. The girl pulled herself down and smiled at Beast making her gasped.

She was not afraid of Beast. What was going on? The man said something to Beast, the girl punched him in his chest and started walking towards the big house but the man pulled her back, raised her up and placed her on his shoulder. She started struggling to get free but the man raced towards a blue water, then he jumped inside with the girl. Beast shook his head as he watched them. He could not save the girl from the man.

Suddenly, Beast turned and looked straight at her. She was frozen on the spot. She could only move when she saw he was coming towards her. She ran inside and sat close to the wardrobe waiting for her punishment for looking at him. Not too long, she heard the door being opened.

“Halima do you know how to make egg sandwich?” she heard Beast voice and raised her head.

She looked at him confused.

“Can you make egg sandwich?” he asked again.

She shook her head.

“Okay, follow me. You need to learn how to make your food, I’m too busy to cook” he said.

She still looked at him confused.

“Stand up and follow me” he said.

She stood up and he started moving. She followed him but stopped when she saw steps.

“Afraid of the stairs?” he asked.

She nodded.

“Just hold the rails” he said pointing at a silver iron by the steps.

“Or you want me to carry you down?” he asked.

She shook her head and immediately held the rails. She slowly took one step at a time. She was afraid he would shout at her to be fast but he did not. He just waited. As soon as her leg touched the last step, he continued walking. She raised her head and got lost by what she saw.

“Hurry up Halima, I have a meeting to attend” he said preventing her from looking at the beautiful parlor.

She followed him up to the dining table. She knew it was called a dining table. She entered the kitchen and became lost. It was different from the one in her memory. It must be the kitchen because she could see plates.

“Okay, pick the number of eggs, tomatoes and pepper you need. The onions, the onions. Okay got it” he said opening a glass hanging up.

He brought a flat basket that had onions inside. He brought out two small trays and picked so many eggs, tomatoes, onions but few peppers inside one of the trays.

“I don’t like pepper” he said placing his tray on milk color shining surface that was covering lots of cupboards.

“Halima, hurry up, pick what you can eat” he said.

She bent down and picked two eggs, two big tomatoes, one big onions and three fresh peppers, then placed hers on the milk color surface like him.

“Good. Do you know how to slice them?” he asked.

She did not know what to answer.

“Okay, follow my lead” he said.

He brought out two knives and two bowls. He poured his stuffs on the bowl and went to the tap.

“What are you waiting for? Do as I do” he said.

She quickly did the same thing but he was too big and was covering where she would get the water. She waited until he left. He waited for her to join him.

“Okay, you cut the pepper first so it will reduce the peppering sensation” he said slicing the pepper on his tray. She did the same.

“Good. You know how to do it then. When you are through, cut the tomatoes and onions” he said.

As she sliced the pepper, she felt she had done it many times. She finished slicing the pepper and placed it at one side of the tray. She did same for the tomatoes and onions but after peeling the back of the onions.

“Wow. You are through before me. And you even separated them. How did you know?” he asked.

She did not have an answer so she shook her head.

“Do you know what to do with the egg?” he asked.

She nodded.

“Good go on” he said bringing out a small bowl from the cupboard, he also brought out a fork.

She broke the eggs inside and whisked it. As she whisked, he brought out a frying pan, oil and salt. She did not know how but she just knew what to do. She took the frying pan and looked for the fire.

“Here Halima” he said making her turn.

“These are called burners. Number one, two, three, four, five, six. If you press this place and turn it left according to the

number I pointed out, it will light up. Try it” he said giving her space.

She pressed number one and turned it. Fire came out on the number one burner making her gasp.

“If you know what to do, you can fry your egg. I’m still cutting mine” he said.

Something triggered in her memory, she had done this before.

The oil first, then the onions, then the pepper and tomatoes then the egg and the salt. As she followed the order in her head, Beast joined her. He had a big pan and switched on the third burner.

Then started frying his own. But he poured everything at once after pouring the oil. She gasped.

“What? This is my own recipe. Fry yours your way” he said.

She stirred hers with her fork and later removed the frying pan.

“Okay, press and turn the button right and it will go off” he said pouring his many egg into his big frying pan without allowing the tomatoes to get done.

And he said he wanted to teach her. She did as he said and the flame went off. There were plates on the surface and she picked one and poured hers inside.

He left his food on the fire without stirring it and brought out Bonvita and Peak milk. She gasped. She could read what was written on it.

“Anything?” he asked dropping them on the surface.

She shook her head.

“Do you know how to make tea?” he asked walking towards a big fridge, half of it was glass.

She nodded.

He opened the fridge and brought out a gigantic bread.

“Okay take cup and make your tea. If you want it hot, you can take water from that kettle” he said going back to his food which was already burning.

He poured his food into a big bowl. It was too much and there was no way he would finish it. He brought out a big cup and poured a lot of milk and bonvita inside, then he went to the fridge and brought out a cold water then poured it in his cup. He brought out another bread, kept it under his armpit, then he carried the big bread and his bowl of food.

“Halima, I don’t have time. Hurry up and join me at the dining. You know what that is?” he asked.

She nodded.

He left the kitchen. She opened the bread and took four slices then placed it on a tray. She also placed her plate of eggs on the tray. She quickly made a small tea with the hot water. She carried her tray to the dining table but jerked and gasped at the same time when she saw Beast. His food was halfway gone, so also the bread.

“What?” he asked putting a large slice of bread with too many egg in his mouth.

She shook her head and placed her food on the table. She could not eat even after sitting down. She watched Beast consume his food with her mouth open. He was going to kill himself with food.

“Halima if you don’t want me to add yours to mine better start eating” he said.

She forced her eyes away from him and started eating. It tasted so good.

“You really like it. Can I take a bite?” he said making her look at him.

Again she gasped with her mouth wide open. He had finished the whole food. He stood up and came over to her seat. He picked a slice of bread, poured some of her eggs inside and forced half of it into his mouth.

“Who taught you how to cook Halima?” he asked after eating the slice of bread.

She shook her head because she could not remember.

“I have a meeting right now. Do you know where to wash your plates?” he asked.

She shook her head.

“Follow me” he said going back to the kitchen.

She followed him. He stopped at where the tap was.

“This is the kitchen sink. The soap and sponge. Watch me wash my plates” he said.

She knew that already but was afraid to tell him.

“So when you are done eating, take the drugs I will give you, then wash your plates. Don’t worry about sweeping. Jason’s machine will do that. Just take a shower and try comb your hair. Okay?” he said.

She nodded. He left the kitchen and she went back to the dining table to finish her food. He came back with her drugs and placed it on a plate. Without saying another word to her, he left.

She slowly climbed back after she was done with everything. She entered her room and quickly went to the mirror. She smiled when she saw she was still skinny.

“I don’t ever want to be fat. I want to be very skinny and skinnier” she said to herself.

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

{So why should I fear in bad times, hemmed in by enemy malice.}

Jason had said there was fire on the mountain when they were clearing the garden but he had refused to say what was going on. The others were already online when he entered Jason's parlor. It looked like they were waiting for him. Jason had changed to another black T-Shirt and black jeans. He turned around to look for Cindy but she was nowhere to be found. He turned back to stare daggers at Jason who seemed unperturbed. "Trouble in paradise" Jason said as he sat down for the briefing. "Tamed why are you staring at Jason like you want to break his head?" Wild asked.

“Why don’t you ask this insane love stricken idiot” he said still looking at Jason.

“Jason what did you do?” Fast asked.

“I was having a fun time with my wife in my compound” Jason said.

He was even smiling.

“You know Halima was watching what you guys were doing. I wonder the kind of confusion you’ve placed on her mind” he said.

“Please can you explain exactly what they were doing? If possible send me visuals. I need to confirm something” Mark said.

“Seriously!” he and Jason said at the same time.

“Please we have a bigger fire to quench” Major said.

He turned towards the TV. Ghost was not around.

“What of Ghost?” he asked.

“He is fine but my wife refused to allow him attend this briefing.

Tamed you were two minutes late” Major said.

Major was all about timing.

“I’m sorry, I had to teach Halima how to make egg sandwich”

he said.

“How? So fast” Wild said.

“Did she not go hysterical?” Doc asked.

“Surprisingly no. She knew exactly what to do and it looked like she enjoys cooking” he said.

“You’ve not answered how?” Wild said.

“Does it matter? As long as she is coming out of her shell” he answered.

“Tamed please tell me you did not eat in front of her” Fast said.

“Why not.”

His answer was followed by different exclamations from all of them including Jason.

“I thought she was brought to Jason’s place so she could live and experience normal. She had seen Jason make out with Cindy, then Tamed had eaten a gigantic bread and sandwich in her presence. Wild is her mind not too tender to experience all these?” Mark asked.

“I don’t know what to say Mark. But if Tamed says she is okay then let’s believe him. Let’s focus on the bigger issues” Wild answered.

“You keep saying that” he said.

“There are so many. Where should we start from?” Jason asked.

“Let’s start from Fast” Major said.

“Okay, I hit a jackpot yesterday evening. Halima is a gift from Umaru to Chief” Fast said.

“Explain” he said.

“I went on a field work and I intentionally put on my Air force uniform to ask about Halima. I followed an old cleaner of Umaru. All I had to do was speak Hausa and I became her friend. Those people don’t play with uniform men and foreigners that can speak their language. I was even invited to eat towu shinkafa. So I asked about what she felt about the killings and she said Umaru is a lucky man because it has been long opponents have been trying to kill him. According to her, Umaru has lost close

friends and family members ever since he joined politics. She remembered one event where his Muslim secretary converted to Christianity. People were calling for his head but Umaru refused to sack him. She said that was one big reason people hated Umaru because he had relationships with infidels. She said Adamu was attacked and killed alongside his wife and two children. She said Adamu's last child had a beautiful name and acted like her name. She called her Halima" Fast said.

"So Halima is supposed to be dead" Wild said.

"Did you inquire about her age at the time this incident happened?" Major asked.

"Yes. She said Halima should be eight or ten when the incident happened but she could not remember the exact year but would be between fifteen to sixteen years ago. So Halima has no family" Fast answered.

“Halima should be within twenty two to twenty five” Jason said.

“I don’t think she will still remember, except she gets a full recovery” Wild said.

“The picture of Umaru and Chief looking young is not from a phone camera but outdated digital camera which was used about fifteen to sixteen years ago” Mark said.

“So Umaru must have given her to Chief as an exchange for weapons” Major said.

“There is something you guys are missing” Jason said.

“Which is?” Wild asked.

“Umaru is very smart. Too smart. The average Muslim in the north do not support violence and killings of non-Muslims. Only few are radicals and Democracy is all about the highest vote.

Umaru surrounds himself with Christians intentionally” Jason said.

“Because he can easily get rid of them and blame radical Muslims or political opponents for their deaths. Then he gets a sympathy vote from the peaceful masses” Wild said.

“I never saw it that way” Fast said.

“And he has made sure it will only be suspicions without evidence to link him to any crime” Doc said.

“That’s why Abdu is now under police custody. Musa had mentioned Abdu as his sponsor. The file is a bit of evidence.

Although the police will not be able to open the encrypted file, they would be able to question him on the ones they can see.

Farouk and family have been buried according to Islamic rites.

Omakor’s mother and daughter came yesterday afternoon and

Umaru welcomed them. He gave them a check of two million naira gaining more praises from the masses” Fast continued.

“Pause. Did you just say daughter?” he asked.

It looked like all of them were just hearing it for the first time.

“Yes, he had a daughter out of wedlock and she has been with her grandmother. She should be within eighteen years and above.

They will be carrying their corpses back to Ozoro, Delta state tomorrow for burial and Umaru has promised to be there” Fast said.

“Hope you put something on Umaru” Wild asked.

“Yes. His cars. I can track his movement. But I don’t think he would contact Chief because he is smart enough to know that someone on air force uniform have been asking after Halima and he must have known Chief has lost Halima” Fast said.

He did not know how to react to what he had just heard.

“Fast please find a way to find any evidence against Umaru”

Major said.

“Roger that”

“And Tamed Ojogolo got your message loud and clear and has responded” Wild said.

“How?” He asked.

“Stud sent a message. She said about seven men came to assassinate Mama Sunday and family. They killed six of them and handed the seventh to the police” Wild said.

“Then where is the fire on the mountain?” he asked.

“Chief has gone to the media” Jason said.

“What now!” he exclaimed.

“I received a call from the Chief of Defense Staff yesterday afternoon. The IG had called him to release you for questioning on the attempted assassination of Chief. Then also to answer question as a suspect for kidnapping one Halima, Chief’s cleaner. I told him to give me five days to sort things out” Major said.

“But Chief had gone to the media after the police failed to make any arrest and after they refused to give him any answer. All the major newspapers have it as headline. Check out what Wild snapped and sent” Jason said.

A picture appeared on the screen.

‘ARMY REFUSES TO RELEASE THE SUSPECT OF CHIEF
ESIGIE’S ATTEMPTED MURDER FOR QUESTIONING’

Another read.

‘HONOURABLE ESIGIE CALLS ON THE CHIEF OF
DEFENSE STAFF TO RELEASE OBINNA, A SOLDIER TO
THE POLICE FOR QUESTIONING’

‘DRAMA AS ARMY REFUSES TO RELEASE THEIR OWN
TO BE QUESTIONED BY THE POLICE’

‘ARMY REFUSES TO RELEASE A KIDNAP SUSPECT TO
THE POLICE’

“He did not stop there but also went to different TV stations. He has called on the president to intervene. According to him, there are so many witnesses who saw you within his house and also saw you with the girl. He even released Halima’s picture. She is wearing the gown she wore the day we rescued her. Right now social media is on fire and programs on radio and TV stations are making it their point of discussion. NGO’s and Human Right

activists have joined Chief to call the army to release you for questioning” Jason said.

Chief had really used a net instead of a trap.

“So what is going to happen now?” he asked feeling angry.

“Right now the only success we have is that we have cut off Umaru from Chief. But Chief is winning at the moment” Major said.

“Jason, anything from the visuals?” Wild asked.

“No news that can implicate Chief. Ojogolo is very furious right now and he has sworn to end Tamed. Apart from some sold weapons, nothing”

“I told Stud to prevent the news from going public because Chief will try to disassociate himself from Ojogolo and I don’t

think it will help our cause if that happens, because we need good evidence that Chief is involved with them” Wild said.

“The president will be back in four days. There is House of Reps meeting tomorrow and I’m very sure Chief will raise the issue.

He knows he is running out of time. The President will

definitely need an explanation immediately he comes back and

Chief will definitely be there to appeal directly to him. And

worst case scenario, the president will demand to see Halima

and you all know how it will turn out as Ghost said. Chief has

three days same as us. But Halima is our only hope if it comes to

no evidence” Major said.

“So you want Halima to be okay in just three days? You know

that is not possible” he said.

“Even if she stops fearing Tamed, there is the part where she

would still choose Chief when she comes in contact with him.

This will be out of fear of Chief. Major it's not possible in three days" Wild said.

"And the fact that the president was not even aware Chief was our target from start is another big issue" Mark said.

"Then the evidence is our only hope, because I won't allow her face Chief, not when she is still not stable" he said.

"Jason anyway to get visuals on Chief?" Wild asked.

"I will use Flight 49" Jason said.

"What's that?" he asked.

"A bird" Mark answered.

"So what now?" he asked.

"Just try to get Halima to be in the state for debriefing" Wild said.

“How will I know she is ready?” he asked.

“You will know” Wild answered.

“I think Cindy can visit her now Jason” he said.

“Then we will have the upper hand soon” Jason said.

“You really think Cindy can help?” Doc asked.

“I don’t think, I know” Jason said.

“Wild is there anything Cindy should know before seeing her?”
he asked.

“Yes” Wild said.

“No” Jason said same time.

“You will ruin everything if you prepare her. Just let her be
normal with her. She will be ready for debriefing in two days”
Jason said smiling.

“Even as much I want to know how, I’m more happy that Jason said it himself, that means we have hope. Tamed we have your back” Major said.

“Doc what about the blood sample?” Wild asked.

“Oh about that. She tested negative for HIV. There were traces of contraceptive pills and anti-bacterial drugs in her blood.

There is no malaria, no typhoid. In fact her blood is clear, even her blood count is normal” Doc said.

“Good to know we won’t worry about her health. Fast make sure you keep tabs on Umaru and Abdu. Jason let Fight 49 get to Chief as soon as possible. We need to get enough evidence that could back us up when I meet the president. At least enough to make the president give us time. The media and others can rant but our focus is getting evidence” Major said.

“I’m off” Wild said disconnecting.

Jason also disconnected.

“I don’t need anyone to tell me you are furious” Jason said.

“I feel like visiting Chief and the whole clan of Ojogolo and end everything immediately. I can’t let her meet Chief” he said.

“Just calm down. If you take this anger to her, she is going to misinterpret it. Cindy has classes this morning but she will visit her before going for her class” Jason said.

“You really think Cindy can help?”

Jason nodded.

“I need to punch something” he said standing up.

He went straight to the mini ring and immediately vented his anger on the punching bags.

CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

{What is love?}

After taking her bath, she selected a black long-sleeved top and a blue flare skirt. It was very difficult but after a long struggle, she was able to comb her hair. She stood by the window to watch the garden and trees but soon got bored. She decided to climb down to the parlor with the hope she would not be caught by Beast. Slowly, she climbed down the steps and looked round the parlor in awe. She was more attracted to the writings on some thick papers which were pasted on the wall. That was because she was excited she could read them.

“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 your path” she read out loud.

Something clicked as she mentioned Lord.

“The Lord’s prayer” she heard a man’s voice.

The memory disappeared almost immediately but she tried to hold on to it. She felt a sudden pang on her head, her hand immediately rubbed her forehead. She heard the voices of people talking, followed by the door being opened.

Beast was back and he was going to catch her and he would think she was trying to escape and he would whip her. There was no time to run back, the closest place she could hide was the kitchen. She quickly ran to the kitchen and squatted by the giant fridge.

“Jason this is not necessary” she heard a female’s voice.

“I will leave after I confirm you are all safe” a male voice said.

The female started laughing. She crawled to the door and pushed her face out. She could see them. They were standing no too far from the dinning. It was the man and the girl she had seen earlier. The man did not drown her because she was still looking okay. The man's head was by the girl's stomach and he was touching it with his mouth while the girl laughed.

“Don't be ridiculous. Why will she attack me? Don't worry Ifeanyi is safe. Just go, this is girls' time out.” The girl said pushing the man away but she was still laughing.

“Cindy let's not discuss that here please. You keep saying Ifeanyi. My baby's name is George and if it's a girl then I will decide when I see her” the man said.

He had stood up and was holding the girl in her cheek. She stopped smiling and she looked like she was about to cry.

“Cindy don’t. Hey. Not again” the man said pulling her to him and wrapping her with his hands.

“I’m sorry. George was your friend too” the man said rubbing her back.

She just could not understand what they were doing.

“I am going to have three boys, Ifeanyi, George and Ebuka” she said sobbing.

“Okay let’s not run faster than our shoulder. Don’t scare me” the man said.

The girl pulled herself away and burst out into laughter after looking at the man’s face which was looking like he was really scared.

“This face is priceless. I am taking a picture for posterity” the girl said bringing out what Chief called a phone.

She pointed it at the man and dropped it back in her gown pocket.

“Let’s go see her so you can join Dark Prince” the girl said pulling his hand.

She saw something in both their left fingers, the finger close to the smallest finger. It was gold and beautiful. What was it for and who were they trying to see? The man pulled the girl back.

“Wrong direction Cindy, she is here” the man said turning towards her.

She quickly shifted inside. He had seen her but how?

“Really?” the girl asked but the man did not answer.

She heard footsteps coming towards the kitchen and shifted farther inside. It did not help because they entered the kitchen few seconds later. She became afraid as they saw her.

“Oh my gosh. I knew it was your size, the clothes look so good on you and the colors complement each other” the girl said excitedly moving close to her but the man pulled her back.

“Jason” the girl shouted at the man but the man ignored her and just looked at her making her shake.

He was not big like Beast but he was tall and light skin like Beast but the girl was very fair. He was not fleshy like Chief but looked strong and handsome. She gasped. Where did that word come from?

“Okay, I can go now, remember you have to be on your way in less than ten minutes. I will take...” the man said.

“No way Jason. So that those girls at my faculty can keep drooling about you. I will drive myself” the girl said stopping the man’s talk.

“Really? I’ve never noticed any” the man said.

“You are serious. I thought you are very aware of your environment” the girl said.

“I’m aware of you and any threat to you” the man said.

“Don’t worry. I will drive myself. I have my watch. Go stay with Dark Prince” the girl said.

“I love you more than anything in this world” the man said putting his mouth on the girl’s mouth.

She gasped. The girl was in danger and she did not know. If only she knew what love meant and what the man meant, she would run before it was too late but she did not, instead she pushed her body to the man and the man held her tight. He pulled away after some seconds.

“I love you Jason” the girl said to the man as he left the kitchen.

What was wrong with the girl? She even told the man willingly. Chief had always told her to tell him she loved him but this girl said it without the man telling her to say it. And she looked so happy as she said it. The man had not started showing her love. When that happened, it would be too late for her. She wanted to tell the girl to run as she turned towards her but her mouth refused to open.

“So did you like the clothes I bought?” the girl asked sitting down close to her.

“The clothes?” she stammered.

“Oh, Dark Prince did not tell you? I bought all the clothes, in fact everything in that bag I bought them with my husband” the girl said.

“Husband?” she stammered.

“Yes. Dark Prince said you made egg sandwich. Do you like cooking?”

Who was Dark Prince? But she had said something about cooking so she nodded.

“Great. I hardly cook except Jason is not around. He said I get everywhere dirty. Jason said Dark Prince is also a terrible cook except for porridge and pepper soup. Did you cook for both of you or for just you?”

She must be calling Beast Dark Prince. That was his real name. But it was not different from Beast because he was not dark in completion, the dark meant he was a bad prince. And she was right, he was a terrible cook. But how come she was not afraid of him?

“For myself” she answered.

“Great, so what’s plan for lunch?”

“Lunch?” she asked.

“I mean what food are you going to eat next?”

She shook her head.

“Are you still afraid of Dark Prince?”

She nodded but remembered Beast must have sent her and shook her head, then nodded again because she did not know which would be the right answer.

“Why?”

She opened her mouth to answer but paused. She tried to think of a reason but could not find any. He had not yet touched nor whipped her but he would do that later. She shook her head.

“Stop thinking too much Halima. You will get headache. Can you read?”

She nodded, at least she had an answer to that.

“That’s great. Follow me let me show you where to get books. I have lectures and I can’t stay” She said holding her hands and standing up with her.

“If I’m to advice you, I will prefer you read Judy Blume’s books. They are hilarious” the girl said pulling her towards the steps.

She sounded so excited and happy that she did not know the danger ahead of her, she pitied her as she allowed her to pull her up. She did not fear the steps this time because the girl was holding her hands. She took her to the first door by the left of a corridor opposite her big room. Her mouth opened when she saw the books in the room.

“Same thing I did when Jason took me up here after we got married. He stocked the library with novels and Christian literatures from my favorite authors. I like action and romance

novels but I fell in love with Judy Blume after reading one of her books. See it here” the girl said pulling a book from the shelf.

“Take it” the girl said giving the book to her.

“Tales of a fourth grade nothing” she read the book title.

“Wow! You can really read. That’s cool. You can sit in any of these chairs but you will enjoy this one” the girl said pulling her to a red chair that looked round. She sat down on it and she spun it round.

“You see, you can rotate the chair as you read. Do you like it?”

She nodded looking at her. It was not just the chair she liked.

She liked the girl. She was so friendly and happy, she felt different from that doctor who she thought was Chief’s doctor.

“I’m Cindy and you are Halima right?”

She nodded.

“I really don’t have friends but since we are neighbors, I will like to be your friend. Can I come back?” Cindy asked.

She smiled and nodded immediately but stopped. She had forgotten Beast.

“What? Are you afraid Dark Prince will be mad?” Cindy asked as if reading her mind.

She nodded.

“Then you have nothing to worry. He told me to come see you” Cindy said making her gasp.

“You seem surprise but’s it’s true. He is a friend of my husband” Cindy said.

Now she understood everything. That man was like Beast, the difference was he had not started loving the girl, the way Chief loved her.

“I have to go Halima, I will come back if you want” Cindy said.

She quickly nodded. Her nod made the girl to smile making her smile too. She liked her.

“Great. Can I turn on the AC?” Cindy asked.

“AC?”

“Okay, you see this switch, press here if you feel the room is hot and you want it to be cold, then press it like this if it’s too cold” Cindy said showing her something on the wall.

“See you again Halima” Cindy said waving at her and leaving the room.

She waved after the girl had left. She felt bad. She was bad, she was very bad. She should have told the girl what would happen to her but she did not. She made up her mind to tell her when she came back. With that settled, she opened the book and

started reading. Soon she was smiling, then later, she started laughing.

“Fudge is so stupid and funny” she said after three years Fudge decided to fly like a bird and fell breaking some teeth, then started telling everyone he met that his teeth were all gone.

“Here you are. I’ve been looking for you” she heard Beast’s deep voice making her jerk up from her seat.

He was carrying a bag. He placed the bag on the table close to the chairs, then brought out two flasks, two spoons and two bottled water. He was not looking angry. She stood waiting for him to get mad at her for leaving her room.

“Time for lunch. Thanks to Jason, I won’t be preparing lunch.” he said pointing at a seat opposite where he was sitting down.

“Halima let’s eat unless you want me to eat yours too. Come. I’m waiting”

She dropped the book on the round chair and sat down where Beast was pointing at. He opened the smaller flask and pushed it towards her, then opened the bigger flask. Immediately, he started eating.

“Eat Halima.”

He was not saying anything about what she did. She looked at the flask and saw it was jollof rice and a big meat. She took her spoon and started eating.

“Good. As for your drugs, Doc thinks you are okay. So no more drugs.”

As she ate, she took a peek at him.

“Halima eat” he said making her look at her food.

Soon Beast had finished his food in the flask. He opened one of the bottles of water and finished it in one gulp making her gasp. He stood up, carried his things and left the room but came back few minutes later with a bottle of Fanta. He placed it close to her.

“You can drink it while you read. If you don’t like it, then go take your choice from the fridge. I have so many newspapers to read” he said leaving the room.

He did not come back. The Fanta she knew was in a glass bottle but the one Beast brought was in a rubber bottle. She opened it and took a sip. It was so delicious. She could not remember the last time she had a drink. She went back to her chair and continued her book. She read for long and was almost through when Beast came back again.

“Halima is time for dinner” he said.

She rushed to her food but she was too late, Beast had seen she had not finished it. He went to the wall and pressed something and the room became dark.

“I don’t think you know it’s dark already. Is the book you are reading that interesting?”

The room became bright again. She nodded in response to his question.

“I can see you did not finish your food” he said taking a spoonful of rice.

“It’s still tasting fine. So just have it as dinner and go to your room” he said leaving the room.

Something was wrong. Beast was acting weird. He was not acting like the other man in the other house.

She was back in her room after taking her flask downstairs and washing everything. She went to the window for the garden. Outside was still bright even though it was night. The light suddenly went off and it became dark, even the other side became dark too but there was still light in her room. She entered the bathroom to take another shower and discovered for the first time that there were two taps with hot and cold written on them. Under the taps was a big strong bowl. She turned on the hot tap and put a finger but quickly removed it. It was too hot. She quickly turned on the cold one and placed her burnt finger under it to reduce the burning sensation. She left the bowl and the taps and used the shower.

She tried to sleep but could not. She kept thinking about the girl. What if the man was loving her at that moment? It was her fault she did not tell her the truth. She climbed down from the bed

and sat by the wardrobe. She felt sad for the girl but also felt sad for herself. She still had Beast to deal with. She was still skinny but what if Beast changed his mind and decided to touch her? As if Beast knew what she was thinking, the door opened and Beast came in. She was right. He had changed his mind. Fear laced through her as he came closer. He bent down close to her, covering the whole space.

“Halima, what’s with the wardrobe? Why are you still awake?”

She had nothing to answer, his deep voice was making her shake with fear. He raised her up and took her to the bed. He joined her after placing her on the bed. He held her like the other night but there was a little difference. Her head was under his jaw and he was closer than the other night.

“Halima this is the last time I’m coming to make you sleep. So listen to what I’m going to say. I’m not going to touch you as

you call it. I will never touch you Halima. I hope you know why?”

She nodded.

“Tell me”

“I’m skinny. You won’t touch me until I’m chubby”

“Let’s change that now. I will never touch you because you will never be chubby enough, even if you become chubby, you are still very short and you will never grow taller than you are right now. I like chubby, fair and tall girls. And you are not any of the three. So I will never touch you. You did not meet my standards. So you can stop worrying about that. Okay?”

She nodded. He still held her. It was too good to be true. He would never touch her, she felt elated but her fears came back immediately.

“Are you going to whip me if I disobey you?” she asked before she could stop herself.

He held her tighter and she could feel his breathing had become very fast. She wished she had not asked. He was angry. She waited for him to strike her but he did not, slowly he released his tight hold on her.

“Halima that is never going to happen. Only a coward and a weak person whip people like you. There will be no touching and whipping”

She must be dreaming. There was no way it was real.

“Now that I will not touch you because you are not my type and I cannot whip you because you are too small, what do you think I should do with you?” he asked.

It was true, he would not whip or touch her.

“I I I” she stammered thinking of what to say before he changed his mind.

“It’s okay Halima. Don’t rush, settle down and think. You can tell me tomorrow. Now is time to sleep. I will leave once you are asleep”

She felt instant relieve. She would come out with something tomorrow. Her eyes felt tired and heavy and immediately she closed her eyes, she slept off.

She opened her eyes and discovered Beast was gone. There was light coming from the window. It was another morning. She quickly ran to the window. She saw Beast at the man. They were pouring water on the plants using a pipe. He turned and looked at her almost as if he knew she was there. She immediately left the window and went to the other window. The girl was not riding the bicycle but was running on a surface. She kept

running but did not leave her position. She could not understand how that was possible. She looked her way and waved at her smiling. She was looking okay. It meant the man had not started loving her. She still had time to tell her to run. She waved back at her and smiled back. But she stopped immediately. Beast had told her to think of what he would do with her. She quickly left the room and slowly climbed down, then ran to the kitchen. She opened the fridge and saw some eggs and some tomatoes. She tried to pick the salt and onions but it was too high. She went to the dining and carried one of the chairs.

Within twenty minutes, she had prepared egg sandwich as Beast called it. She carried everything to the dinning and something flashed in her memory. She had done something like that before. She set Beast's food and her food, then prepared a cold tea for Beast then a hot tea for herself. As she was placing

the bread on the table, she heard Beast's voice but he had entered from the kitchen.

"Halima what are you doing?" he asked from her back making her jerk.

She turned to talk to him but her mouth did not move.

"Wow, you made breakfast?" he asked walking towards the place he had sat the other day and where she had placed his food.

"But why?" he asked.

"You said I should think of what you can do with me. I want to be cooking for you" she stuttered.

"Hell no. Think of something else. You have today and tomorrow. I don't want a cook. I can cook for myself" he said.

She wanted to tell him he was a bad cook but she kept her mouth shut, instead she nodded.

“But you’ve already made breakfast. I won’t to reject it. Sit let’s eat” he said already filling his bread with the sandwich.

She watched and waited for his reaction. He closed his eyes as he took a bite. He picked his cup with tea and drank from it.

“Wow, you even knew I like cold tea. This is delicious. Halima why aren’t you eating?”

She quickly picked her cup of tea and sipped from it.

As she ate, she risked a glance at Beast. He was really a big eater. She had a lot she would want to find out but was afraid to ask.

“Halima, you keep opening your mouth like you want to say something. What is it? Tell me. I’m all ears. Remember I don’t whip girls.” he said taking another sip of his cold tea.

“What is love?” she asked the first thing that entered her mouth, although that was not how she wanted to put it.

He dropped the cup on the table and started coughing. She knew it. She shouldn’t have ask. He would get angry.

“Halima where did that come from? That was out of the blue” he said after he stopped coughing.

She kept quiet not knowing what to answer.

“Did you hear that from Cindy and Jason?”

Cindy was that girl, which meant Jason was the man with her. She nodded.

“See what they have caused, now I’m made to face the consequence” he said looking at her.

“Love, what is love? The love you are asking about is not the general term, it’s because of those insane lovers. Okay. What

really is love? Hmm I think love is the emotional feeling you have for someone. Like you love that person. What am I even saying? I'm using love to define love. But I should know what love is. Okay, love is when you have a feeling towards someone. You want to always be with that person, you feel happy around that person and you don't want to ever lose that person. Yeah. I think that's love" he said filling another slice of bread with sandwich.

But that was wrong. That was not what Chief said. And Chief was always right. Was he trying to deceive her?

"Do you love me?" she asked.

He was already putting the sandwich in his mouth when she asked. He dropped it immediately and started coughing. Why did he cough whenever she asked her questions? He was the one who said she could ask.

“Hell no Halima. I don’t hate you but I don’t love you. Based on the love you are asking about. No I don’t love you and I will never love you. Abigail was the only woman I’ve ever loved and it will remain like that” he said.

She gasped as he mentioned Abigail. That meant Chief was right. She was instantly happy he did not love her. Immediately, she believed he would never touch her because he did not love her. But she was sad for Abigail. She must have been tall and chubby that was why he loved her and had killed her when she tried running away. She gasped again when she remembered Cindy. Cindy was in danger.

“The way you are reacting shows that you have another meaning about love. What is it? What do you think love is?”

She shook her head. He must not know she knew the real meaning of love.

“Halima, you can tell me. I promise I won’t be mad. You know I keep to my promise”

He was right, he had kept to his promises.

“Love is when a man sees a girl and take her and lock her up.

Then he shows her love by whipping her back and buttocks and touching her after the whipping, then he whips her again, then after that, he tells her he loves her, then she must tell him back”

Just when she stopped talking, a plate flew past her head making her scream from fear. He was not just angry, he was very mad.

She shouldn’t have told him. He was angry she knew the truth.

‘I’m going to kill him slowly” he shouted.

She came down from her chair and shook from fear waiting for him to strike her. She heard an unfamiliar noise and turned but screamed. She felt someone pull her up and pull her close. It was

Beast that held her. She did not know when she pushed herself closer. She preferred Beast to what she was seeing. It was moving around the splattered food on the ground and swallowing it into its big mouth.

“Halima, I can feel your fear. Breathe. It’s nothing to fear. This is a machine that sweeps and cleans the house. It must have come from the store or kitchen, I don’t know. But that man you saw with that girl can make a lot of things. That’s why I told you not to sweep. You are safe Halima. Just breathe okay” he said.

She studied the machine. It was true. It had cleaned everything, even the broken pieces of the plates had disappeared. The machine started going towards the kitchen after moving round the parlor and dinning.

“You see. It’s just a machine” Beast said gently pulling away from her.

“I am late for a meeting. Finish your meal and clean up the plates” he said leaving the dinning.

He walked towards a glass door and pressed something, it opened and he left.

She slowly went back to her seat. Was Beast still angry with her?

She did not even ask about the gold thing she saw in their hands.

She made up her mind to never ask him again but she would find a way to tell the girl.

As she entered the kitchen with her empty plates, she looked around for the machine. It was there by the fridge. How come she never noticed it? It was not moving at there was no light coming out of it.

She placed her plate on the sink and as she went to pick Beast’s plate and cup, she felt somehow happy for herself. She was safe.

Beast did not love her.

CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

{I have no peace, no rest, and my troubles never end.}

What had just happened? Did he gain her trust only to shatter it because of his uncontrollable emotions? But thinking of what she had said about love made his rage boil.

“Jason where the heck did that unique vacuum cleaner come from?” He asked as soon as he entered Jason’s parlor.

“I was too busy, I forgot to activate earlier” Jason answered.

“Well you just had to activate it at the wrong time because it scared the shit out of her.”

“Why do I feel like it was not only the cleaner that scared the shit out of her?” he heard Wild’s voice making him turn.

They were all online including Ghost.

“Ghost welcome back” he said sitting down.

“You should have called like others if you really missed me”

Ghost said.

But from his expression, it was clear he was not trying to accuse him.

“Got a lot on my mind” he said.

“Tamed?” Wild said.

“Got pissed off from what she said Chief told her. I guess I reacted wrongly” he said.

“That is not good at all” Major said.

“But Jason seriously? Do you guys have to mention love in front of her?” he asked facing Jason.

“I don’t get what you mean by that but you have to calm down because we have a serious situation at hand, let’s talk about that later” Jason answered.

“What could be worse than the current situation? I read all the newspapers, I even listened to the records of different radio stations and I’m now the bad one. So what could be worse?”

“Where should I start?” Jason asked.

“The issues are so many. Okay I think we should go chronologically” Wild said.

“Okay, first event is something you need to watch” Jason said.

He pressed something on his legendary tool box and the split screens became one. Next was a news broadcast from African Independent Television.

‘The member representing Oshimili South in House of Representative Honourable Jude Obi has reacted to his colleague, Honourable Esigie’s call for the arrest of a soldier by name Obinna. In a news briefing with journalist, he stated that Honourable Esigie has no right to demand for the arrest of Obinna. Osamudiname Paschal, our reporter has the full details’

The screen changed to Chief Obi sitting down in a conference room with different newspapers, radio and TV microphones. But why Chief Obi? He was the one man in Asaba who was supposed go against him.

‘I am saying Chief Esegie does not have the right to call the army to release Obinna. It is the work of the police to carry out their investigations and if the army have refused to release Obinna to the police, it means they are also doing their investigation. Aside from that, I believe Chief Esigie is not straightforward. At first he said only his properties were burnt and an artifact was missing, now a picture of a girl has resurfaced and Obinna is being accused of kidnapping the girl. I got news that police were at Obinna’s place because they suspect him to have a girl he had kidnapped. Ordinarily, I don’t involve myself in issues like this and there is also the fact that I never had a good relationship with Obinna but I am making this conference because of the way media and news broadcast stations were so quick to take sides. I am from Asaba and I know the said Obinna very well. Before those that call themselves Human rights activist carry themselves to barracks to

demonstrate their foolishness based on the person crying more than the bereaved, have they sat down to answer these questions I'm about to raise. One, according to the police, witnesses stated that Obinna was seen around the premises few hours before the attack but none said they saw Obinna kill the security men in Chief Esigie's house and none had said they knew about the girl. Only the landlady knows but there was no statement to prove Obinna took her, yet social media is calling for his head. Two, why all of a sudden, there is a girl involved, how come Chief later became aware his cleaner was missing and not immediately? Three, what would Chief be doing with eleven security men? And what will six men be doing in a compound not inhabited but only visited once? Four Obinna is not from Edo state, is a proud son of Asaba soil and Delta state. Then how will Obinna be working for his political enemy? I am not saying Chief Esigie is wrong, I am just saying he needs to answer these questions.

Except it is not the same Obinna from Asaba, but if the person being accused is the son we know, then I strongly and copiously believe there is something wrong, because Obinna never starts trouble, he only finishes it. Obinna can never become a boy boy to any politician, go and ask the Asagba how many times he tried to recruit him as a bodyguard. Only his mother could control that boy, and after her death, the military had done a lot but Obinna is not money driven. He has been using the old pickup his mother used for business and had never changed it. Obinna did a lot of things but one thing he was not known for was carrying girls. Go there, go to where the police have placed someone to watch his house and see vast amount of land. He was his mother's beacon and fought off those who wanted to take over that land. Obinna does not involve himself with anything that does not concern him. The soldier all of you are crying for his head, lost his wife protecting the masses who

wants his head. The innocent woman was killed by a drug lord. These are the things they face while you sleep comfortably in your homes. He is being accused of kidnapping and possibly raping a girl named Halima. It sounded strange in my ears because this same Obinna almost died protecting two girls from being kidnapped, this Obinna fought for windows who were being oppressed by their families. Of all his escapades here, there was no record of him hurting any girl. I refused to believe and accept that a soldier like Obinna who makes people sleep outside anytime he is around because criminals disappear will go so low as to attempt the murder of Chief Esigie and kidnap a girl for no reason. Let the police tell the media the last time they heard there was robbery in Asaba, in the last four months. An incident happened late in the night yesterday. The closest person to Obinna, Mama Sunday who was the best friend of Obinna's mother was suddenly attacked and the police had called it armed

robbery attempt. It does not tally that of all the rich people around, it is a poor window who has a small kiosk that will be robbed. That was exactly what happened to Obinna's wife Abigail. She was so generous that all the women at Anglican church loved her. The same incident almost repeated itself and if not for a good Intel according to the police, that woman and her family would have been dead. I believe there is something more to this that meets the eyes. If the army is silent, then they have a reason and the masses should not be too emotionally driven to act before thinking. I was so appalled by how social and news media were so quick to join Chief Esigie to ask for the immediate prosecution of Obinna, a soldier who have lost all to protect the same people. Nigerians don't deserve people like Obinna'

The video stopped and the screen split back to seven.

“But this is good news na” Fast said.

“Not at all, I know he is sincerely in support of Tamed but it has rather worsened the situation” Wild said.

“Tamed, do you know him?” Mark asked.

“Yes, the guy I burnt his farm. I’m surprised he is doing this”
He said.

“It is common Tamed, it is mostly the people you did wrong that can defend you because they are the ones who know what you cannot do, and it’s also a form of campaign” Wild said.

“Makes sense now, but how has that worsened my situation?”
He asked.

“The masses and media outlets were divided on opinions but like I said before, we do not need the masses’ support” Major said.

“Esigie has stuck back at Honorable Obi. And this time with evidence that even those who had changed sides are now backing Esigie. Right now, there are paid protesters at army barrack at Abuja” Major said.

“What proof?” Doc asked before he could ask.

“Onos is receiving treatment at UBTH and he was interrogated by the police. He is the evidence. According to him, a girl ran to him at around 7:PM and had begged him to take her to Chief. He was able to call Chief with the phone number she gave. Chief had asked him to help convey her. She had said a giant kidnapped her and wants to kill Chief. But you had trailed her and when he had tried to prevent you from taking her, you broke his hand and knocked him unconscious. Right now, he has granted interviews to so many newspapers and TV stations” Wild said.

“And to worsen the situation, the IG saw Chief Obi’s comment as an insult to the intelligence of the Nigerian police and has personally declared you the suspect of murder, Chief’s murder attempt and Halima’s kidnap and has declared you wanted, just that they cannot get any image of you. Now the international community is interested in this case. BBC Africa read it as their headline” Jason added.

“This is bad” he said placing his hands on his head.

“So the president will definitely ask to meet with Chief, Halima and Tamed and the only evidence we have now is our story.

Aside from the marks on her body, we don’t even have proof she was sexually molested” Ghost said.

“And we cannot prove that, even if Halima says so, her words won’t count” Jason said.

“What do you mean Jason?” Major asked before he could ask.

“I looked into Chief and dug deeper into his life, his assets, his family and his health. Chief is impotent. That is he cannot sleep with a woman, he suffered from stroke and it affected him”

Jason said.

“Are you saying she...”

“No, I’m not saying she was not raped” Jason interrupted Mark.

“Then is the report fake?” Fast asked.

“No, it’s not” Jason said.

“Then how?” he asked.

“Now I understand why Chief is so obsessed with Halima” Doc said.

“Someone say something” Major said.

“It’s a psychology thing major. The medical report might be true but somehow Chief finds a way to get excited with Halima, there must be something but...”

“I know” he said interrupting Wild.

“Her fear gets him excited, then he also inflicts injury on her for the same purpose” he continued.

And he had made Halima believe that was what love meant. He felt like punching something.

“No wonder he is so bold. He can even accuse you of inflicting the mark” Mark said.

“This is frustrating. Chief is really prepared and legally, we are losing this case” Ghost said.

“The only hope we have now is to stall or get Halima to tell us where we can get the evidence we need which is impossible

because we just have exactly today and tomorrow to wrap this off” Wild said.

“I will never allow her see Chief, never” he said.

“We may have no choice Tamed. The only evidence we have is not enough to hold water but it could be used to stall and make the president give us some time to come out with concrete evidence” Major said.

“What’s that?” he asked.

“A video of Chief Esigie at Ojogolo’s place. That was yesterday night. He wants to disassociate himself from them because of the issues raised by Chief Obi. Even John will no longer be following him. He also told Ojogolo not to be hasty with his decisions because his son who is also Chief’s nephew was killed by Tamed. Ojogolo is related to Chief from his mother. Chief

told him to carry on with his activities and watch as he destroys Tamed bit by bit” Jason said.

“So if we can play this video to the president he might give us time to get evidence because there is another video of John killing a defaulter in his meeting place. Even if Chief denies being aware of what John does? It will still raise suspicions” Major said.

“Although the president will now be placed between the choices of choosing a road full of lions or a sea full of crocodiles because the nation is now involved” Wild said.

“Don’t forget Chief will raise it at House of Reps meeting. Legally Chief believes he can get back Halima but he is not aware of the video. The video will not prove him guilty but like Major said, we can use it to stall but if this becomes an open meeting, both Chief and the Circle will lose Halima, she will be

given to a neutral party but this can destabilize her and even worsen our case because she was made to believe we are holding her hostage” Ghost said.

“So what you are saying is that we need a miracle” Jason surprisingly said.

“Since when did you start believing in miracle?” Ghost asked.

“Since my last mission. The time is too short, if a miracle doesn’t happen, we will be in big trouble” Jason said.

“If Jason says we need a miracle, then there is trouble” Fast said.

“I have directions to twelve of Chief’s different estate scattered across Nigeria. We could at least do something by searching them for any clue” Jason said.

“Okay. Distribute the locations based on our closeness to them lets’ get working. Doc's work is at night so include her. Then try

search for old murder cases that has a link to Ojogolo and find out if it would lead to Chief” Major said.

“Roger that” Jason said.

“Tamed, you try more on Halima” Major said.

“I think Cindy did a good job but I’ve messed it up already” he said.

“How much of a mess up?” Jason asked.

“I can’t tell. I need to punch something” he said standing up and leaving the parlor.

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

{Shake yourself free. Rise from the dust, undo the chains that bind you.}

She had washed the plates and taken her bath but could not settle down because of Beast. He had been so mad that he might have forgotten he wanted to hit her because of that machine. He might come any moment and whip her for telling the truth about love. She went to the library and tried reading the last two pages of the novel but could not. She went back to the

room and sat by the wardrobe waiting for Beast. She did not know how long she had been sitting down but she heard Cindy's voice.

"Halima where are you? Cindy asked.

Her voice was coming from the library side. No, she was not supposed to come, she did not know Beast was very angry. The door to her room opened and Cindy came in.

"There you are, I've been searching for you" Cindy said.

She came and sat down with her at the wardrobe.

"No, Cindy go, you can't be here. Beast is mad" she said pushing her away.

"Beast?" she asked and burst into laughter.

She looked at her confused. She did not understand what was funny. Her life was in danger but she was laughing.

“Wait until everyone hears you call him Beast. But come to think of it, Beast was his original name sha” she said clapping and laughing.

“I am serious, he is mad, I don’t want him to find you here” she said pushing her away but she shifted back to her position.

“Why is he mad? What happened?”

She might listen if she was told what happened.

“I told him the real meaning of love and he got mad.”

“Wait, what is the real meaning of love and what on earth brought that discussion?”

“I can’t tell you now but you have to leave here and run away from this place, from that man, he is going to make you feel bad and he is..” she stammered.

“Halima, you are really serious! Calm down, you are already confusing me, tell me everything that happened Halima.”

“No, there is no time. You have to leave now” she said pushing her again.

“You are acting hysterical. Okay, let’s reach a compromise, you tell me everything that happened that led to Dark Prince’s outrage and I will know the kind of danger I’m in. At least let me know how I will run okay?”

She nodded. At least she was making progress.

“Tell me Halima, tell me everything and how I’m in danger”

She told her everything from when Beast had joined her in the dinning. But she did not mention Abigail. As soon as she stopped talking, Cindy started crying making her more confused.

“Why are you crying?” she asked worried.

“Chief is an animal, in fact the worst animal is too pure to be compared with him. He is a waste that can never be recycled, a sorry excuse for a human” Cindy said wiping her tears.

“I don’t understand, you are in danger.”

“Halima whatever Chief told you about love is not true, what you just explained is known as rape and sexual abuse which is a serious crime. Chief can spend more than twenty years in jail for that. Halima that is the opposite of love. No wonder Dark Prince was mad” Cindy said holding her hands.

She shook her head, Chief was right.

“Look at me Halima, love between a man and a woman is a strong emotional feeling of attachment. You never want to be without that person. You feel complete and sex is different from rape and it’s supposed to be from love. I lost my foster parents, that is they were not my real parents, they were Jason’s parents

but they raised me. I've always been angry with my mum, sometimes, it was my dad. They died the same day and left us just like that. I thought at least one should have remained but after I got married to Jason, my perspective changed. Now I'm happy for both of them, I am not angry anymore, because I cannot imagine how life will be without Jason, only the thought of it makes me feel empty and scared. There is no safer place than being around Jason my husband. He is incapable of harming me. I grew up with him, I knew his name before I could pronounce my name. We grew up and fell in love. He will never harm me Halima because he loves me" she ended her long speech.

But Chief was still right.

"You don't seem convinced Halima. Look at me, do I look unhappy, do I look sad?"

She shook her head.

“Because he has not started showing you love” she answered her.

Cindy stood up and starting pulling off her top, she watched in confusion as she held her top in her hand.

“Halima, look at my body” she said turning round.

“Do you see any whip mark?”

She shook her head.

“Jason has been loving me like a brother, then as a husband and he has never hit me once, not even when I was the annoying sister. He gets mad when I’m hurt. You are not wearing long-sleeved today so I can see your whip mark Halima.”

She tried to digest what Cindy had said. She was really happy and there was no mark on her body and she was not afraid of the

man but the man had not yet showed her love, Beast had killed Abigail.

“But he said he loved Abigail”

Cindy had put back her clothes.

“Yes Halima, he loved Abigail”

“Then you must believe Chief was right. You are not safe, he killed Abigail”

Cindy gasped and placed her palm on her mouth.

“Halima, where did that come from? Please tell me you did not mention that to Dark Prince” she said holding her hands.

She shook her head and Cindy immediately breathed a sigh of relief.

“Where did you hear that? Abigail was his wife”

“He said it, he took her clothes from the wardrobe. I asked him where Abigail is and he said she is dead. He must have killed her after she tried to run away.”

“Halima will you wake up” Cindy shouted making her shock.

“You need to stop this, I don’t understand all this psychology stuff but you need to stop thinking that way, why will you think Dark Prince will kill his wife, she was killed by people like Chief. Halima people like Chief killed her” Cindy said crying.

She was too confused to say anything.

“Halima please wake up. Dark Prince is in trouble because of you, although you are still the reason he is alive, you may also be his end”

“I don’t understand.”

“Halima I’m getting frustrated, what is it that you don’t understand? Where you not the one who called him?”

She shook her head, something was wrong with Cindy, how did she call Beast?

“Then who created that word with a steel wire? Who fudged the word help and put it in a clay pot?”

She gasped and covered her mouth with her palms.

“How did you know about that?” She asked.

“So it was you. Why did you do something like that if you believed no one will ever see it?”

Cindy was angry with her, like she was accusing her.

“Why do you think Dark Prince came? How do you think he knew your existence and knew where to find you? I thought he had made it clear he is Chief’s enemy. Why do you think so? It

was because of what he saw. Halima although I'm grateful he broke that pot and saw your message because he would have committed suicide by now...."

"Suicide?" she asked interrupting her.

She wanted to follow everything she was saying.

"That's is, he wanted to kill himself because, he was in pains because Abigail was no more, because he loved Abigail so much, he could not take the pain anymore. Jason said something he was listening to made him angry and he had broken his clay pot in anger, then he had seen your message. Jason had followed him to rescue you Halima. He said you refused to go with him even when he showed you what you fudged. You refused to believe you are free that's why they had to lock you up, they said it's normal, that you have been there for long and it will take time for you to accept that you are free. That's why I'm

asking why you put that message there? At least you should have believed someone will come. Jason said it takes very high heat and pain to fudge what you did. So why will you go through so much pains and burns to fudge that word if you thought no one will come. Why Halima?" Cindy asked crying.

"The word, my message" she stammered.

She immediately remembered the day Beast had come, he had shown her the message and had said he was sorry for coming late but she had thought Chief knew her secret and had sent him to test her but he was Chief's enemy. If Chief had not sent him, then how did he know she was there? She gasped. Could it be true?

"Now you are getting me. Good. You better think about my question because you must answer me. The novels I've read, freed captives don't act the way you are acting. They are always

happy and grateful to those who rescued them, they even give hugs and kisses but in your own case you've made him the bad person, in fact the world is accusing him of kidnapping you and you are not helping matters Halima."

"Is it true? Are you sure? He really saw my message? Please tell me" she pleaded holding her top.

"Jeez, Halima you are going hysterical again. Calm down."

"Please tell me?" she asked holding her skirt.

"Yes Halima, how else will I know? And has he touched or whipped you the way you call it?" Cindy asked.

But it was not real, it was just a dream, it was not possible, she had given up hope a long time ago. But she said he had broken the pot after listening to something. That was the same way he

got angry earlier and broke his plate. She needed to see her message again, she needed to touch it.

“Where is it?”

“Where is what?”

“My message, please I need to see it. Let me see it” she begged holding on to her clothes.

“I don’t know. It should be with Dark Prince. You can ask...”

“Where is he? Please I need to see my message” she pleaded, tears already coming from her eyes.

It was too good to be true. She stood up and ran downstairs, she did not even remember she was afraid of the steps. She was hoping to see him in the parlor but he was not there.

“Where is he? Please I need to see my message.”

“Calm down Halima. Let me go call him for you. Just sit down”

Cindy said taking her to sit on one of the chairs.

“I will go call him.”

As soon as Cindy left the parlor, she started crying, what if it was not true? What if Cindy was wrong?

“Please let it be true” she said.

CHAPTER THIRTY

{She is beyond compare, pure and innocent as the day she was born.}

Cindy had rushed to the mini ring crying. Jason had followed her, he must have been at the gym. She had told him to go to Halima because she was acting hysterical. Jason's reaction had been ridiculous, he had spun her around to find out if she was hurt. He had left them but she was not in the parlor as Cindy said.

What was wrong? Did Cindy add more damage to what he had already done? He went to the library but she was not there. Then

she must be at her favorite place. He opened the door to her room and saw her sitting face down by the wardrobe. She was crying. He went close and bent down.

“Halima are you okay?” He asked trying his best to keep his voice moderate.

She raised her head like she was just aware of his presence, there was something different, the fear was not there.

“My message, is it true, did you break the pot and found it?” she asked holding his T-shirt, she was in a state of panic.

He had so many things in mind that he was expecting to see but not this.

“Please tell me.” She tightened her hold on his shirt.

“Yes” was all he could say.

He wanted to see her reaction.

“Give it to me, please I want to see it, please.”

“I showed it to you the day I rescued you but you went gaga.”

“Please, I need to see it.” She was now pulling his shirt.

He was not sure he had kept it in his military bag.

“Stay here let me check” he said pulling her away from him.

He went to his room and searched the bag, he sighed when he found it. He went back to her room.

“Here” he said giving it to her.

She rushed at him and almost stumbled but he stabled her. She grabbed the message from his hand.

“It’s real, it’s my message. Did you come because of it? I’m I really free? No whipping and touching?” she said grapping his T-shirt with the other hand.

He gently pulled her hand away.

“If you made this and put this in the native pot my mum gave me? Then you are free, I found it and got you out because I saw this” he said slowly.

She was on the ground almost immediately, she held the fudged word to her chest and started crying, that even her body shook from it. He could handle ten men pointing gun at him but not this, he was not trained for this and he did not even understand what was really going on? How on earth did Cindy make her realize she was free? She had believed Cindy but not him.

He brought out his phone and opened the circle app. He studied it for the first time, there was a symbol of Camera by the right.

He clicked on it and there was an option to go live or select video from file. He clicked go live and focused the camera on crying Halima. Soon messages started popping up from under.

‘Tamed what did you do to her?’ Wild asked.

‘Why is she crying like that and what is she holding so tight?’

Doc asked.

‘She just realized she is free’ he replied.

‘How is that possible?’ Wild wrote.

‘Cindy was able to convince her using the fudged message.

That’s what she is holding’ he replied.

‘That is good news, I guess a miracle just happened’ Fast wrote.

‘What should I do?’

‘Leave her to express herself. I will tell Cindy she has nothing to worry about’ Jason wrote.

‘Don’t you think she is ready for debriefing Wild?’ he asked.

‘Not yet Tamed, I need her fully ready, she just passed stage one, keep updating me, I will tell you when it’s time’ Wild answered.

‘You know there is no time’ he replied Wild.

‘I cannot destroy everything cause there is no time. You are now out of danger zone at least she will not name you her kidnaper if we lose custody. Right now the person you need help from is from Doc, the realization is too sudden. It can cause a fever’ Wild wrote.

‘Try to calm her down, if possible make her sleep, watch her temperature, call me if it’s very high. I’m off’ Doc wrote.

‘I almost forgot about how all this started, I don’t think Chief is aware of this. There is no way she would have realized she is free this fast. This is good news. I’m off’ Ghost wrote.

He left the app and watched her cry for some time still confused on how to calm her.

“Halima I know you are crying because you are happy but you need to stop because it might affect your health” he said bending close.

But it was as if his voice increased the volume of her cry. He thought about calling for Cindy but changed his mind. Jason would not allow her. He raised her up and gently pulled her to her bed. He placed her on the bed and held her hands. He did not have a single experience on this, his mum’s tears had always made him angry and his reactions had always been to punish who or whatever made her cry. Abigail had never cried like this. He just held her hands and let her cry, soon her crying changed to sobbing, he placed his palm on her forehead and it was warm. It was still safe. She still held her message to her chest.

“Ssh, it’s okay Halima, it’s okay. Just sleep, please don’t fall sick, okay” he said robbing her hand.

Soon she fell asleep, he checked her forehead again but it was still warm. There was no cause for alarm. She started muttering something inaudible, he bent his ears closer.

“Does my strength come from mountains? No, my strength comes from God, who made heaven, and earth, and mountains. He won’t let you stumble, your Guardian God won’t fall.....”

He had heard it every day till he left to join the military. Every morning and evening his mum had said it. He had always said it until he turned twelve. She had given up after trying to make him say it along with her. She quoted the whole words holding tight to her message. Then slept off after.

He left the room to take his bath and check online to find out what the media were saying about him. The more he read, the

more he got angry and frustrated. He went to switch on the TV but discovered the decoder was not recharged. He went to Jason's house but met only Cindy. Jason had left the house. Cindy asked if she could see Halima but he told her Halima was sleeping. She had given him yam porridge for lunch. He took the lunch to Halima but she did not respond when he called her. He touched her forehead and it was hot. He immediately sent Doc a private message which she responded immediately. He had to go to the rescue van to take the drugs she prescribed. It took time, but she finally woke up, and it also took time to make her eat and take the drugs. She held on tight to her message with one hand. He went to her bathroom and wet her towel, then placed it on her forehead. She slept off almost immediately. He left her to take his food. He got a message from Jason that the decoder had been recharged but he was no longer interested to watch anything. He later went back to check on her in the evening and

felt relieved, her temperature was down. He warmed the remaining porridge she did not finish and gave her for dinner, and with much pressure, she was able to finish the food and take her drugs.

By 11:11PM, he went to check on her. Her temperature was very normal, he sat close to her and watched her for some time before finally going to sleep. A vibration on his wrist woke him up.

‘Pick your call’ was written in capital letter.

He turned to his phone he had placed at the head of his bed.

Wild was calling his line.

“I don’t understand this your deep sleep Tamed” Wild said.

“My phone was in silent”

“Let Halima come outside, put on your transmitting tools, Jason will go live, I want to see her reaction”

Before he could ask for further explanation, Wild cut the call.

He checked the time and it was 7:19AM. He really slept deep again. He stood up and connected his tools then went to

Halima’s room. She was sleeping by her side and the message was still held close to her chest.

“Halima” he called.

Slowly, she opened her eyes. She looked confused at first but quickly checked to confirm the message was with her. Then she looked at him and smiled.

“Will you like to come outside with me?”

She sat up immediately.

“Really, I can go outside? For real?”

He nodded. She jumped down from the bed forgetting it was too high, he held her from falling and balanced her. Just as he removed his hands from her arms, she was on the run. He followed immediately and was worried she was going to fall because she ran down the stairs without holding on to the rails. She ran to the parlor door and waited excitedly for him to get to her. He had wanted to use the kitchen door to show her the garden but changed his mind. She had chosen the door she wanted. He opened the door and came out but she stood by the door.

“You can come out Halima.”

She stepped one foot outside and paused, he waited for her to take her time. She took the second step and opened her mouth. She looked round the compound laughing. He did not know what to say to her.

“Oh my gosh, Halima, you are outside” he heard Cindy’s voice saving him the stress of thinking of what to do.

She ran towards Cindy as Jason walked towards him. He had two baskets with him. He saw a bird flying close to Halima.

“We are now online” Jason said.

He nodded to Jason’s words and watched Halima. Cindy gave her a hug.

“Thank you, thank you. Look at it, the message” she said showing the message to Cindy.

“I’m so happy for you” Cindy said giving her another hug.

“Where is it? I want to see it” Halima said.

“See what?” Cindy asked.

“The tomatoes and the vegetables and the chickens” she said.

“Oh that! This way, come let me show you” Cindy said puling her left hand.

They both followed the ladies' movement. No one had said anything. As soon as she got to the garden, she started plucking the tomatoes. Cindy came to collect the baskets Jason was holding but Jason pulled it back.

“What are you doing lady?” Jason asked Cindy.

“I’m fishing from the stream” Cindy said.

“What?” Jason asked.

Jason did not get the sarcasm.

“You see her plucking tomatoes and you are asking what I’m doing with a basket” Cindy said pulling one basket from Jason.

“Since when did you become interested in farming?” Jason asked.

“Since this morning, it’s looking interesting as she is doing it”

Cindy said taking the second basket and moving over to Halima.

Halima already had her hands full of tomatoes. She poured it in the basket and continued plucking the ripe tomatoes, Cindy joined her and soon they entered the peppers. Halima bent down and filled sand to the nursery tomatoes, Cindy joined her and laughed with her. No one had said anything yet.

Soon they were off to the chickens, they picked the eggs, but Halima did hers differently, she picked and patted the scared chickens on their heads while speaking to them. Once they were through with the eggs, they were off to the orchard, laughing as they ran towards it.

“Hmm, this has trampled everything I was taught, it’s like she is not even aware she was recently rescued” Wild spoke.

Finally, someone was talking.

“None of your trainings talked about a victim fudging a word and inserting it in a native clay pot” Doc said.

“All she needed was a trigger which we all could not fathom but Cindy did it” Major joined.

“Cindy is not even aware of what she did” Jason said.

There was a stick resting on an orange tree, Halima was trying to pluck an orange, Cindy took over and they had a success.

Halima picked it up and studied it like a mystery. He could hear her laughter from the sound transmitter, it sounded nice and intoxicating.

“How did you mean Jason?” Mark asked.

“She did not talk to Halima as a psychologist, she was just being herself” Jason answered.

“There is a ripe pawpaw” Halima said running to a pawpaw tree.

Cindy followed suit carrying the stick.

“You try it. Let me hold it, I will give you back” Cindy said giving the stick to her and taking the message.

Her expression changed for some seconds but she was back to smiling as she tried plucking the pawpaw. The pawpaw fell making her laugh.

“I think there is another reason behind Chief’s obsession” Ghost said.

“I just noticed that. Ghost you are talking about what Kung Fu master said” Fast said.

“Yea. I never believed him but she looks like the kind of people he described. They are very few but their spirit is pure and strong and unbreakable, very innocent to the core and tender” Ghost said.

“People have a pull towards them and they bring a sense of peace to troubled minds” Doc said.

“Chief might have been obsessed with that attraction but just did not know how to handle her. Someone with a twisted mind like Chief can see her as a drug, a sense of peace from his troubled mind, and I’m pretty sure he must have told her a lot of evil he had done hoping to find redemption. He kept breaking her to break that purity he can never have” Wild said.

“She will not need much work because the message have done eighty percent of the work” Major said.

“So what is the current status?” He asked.

“Nothing Tamed. We’ve combed all the estates but nothing” Wild said.

“The only addition is just suspicions. Few months before the election, the wife of his party member who was vying for the same position was kidnapped with two of his children, even after paying ten million naira ransom, they were still killed. No arrest is yet to be made by the police. Chief was his biggest supporter” Jason said.

“We might need Halima to help us with that” Mark said.

They had moved over to more orange trees.

“But today is our deadline, can’t she be debriefed now?” e asked.

“No, I’m still searching for something, even as we are out of time, I still need something from her. Tamed try get her to see a picture of Chief if possible add Umaru and tell me her reaction”

Wild said.

“Right now the president is on a flight back to Nigeria. He will arrive by 6:PM today. And things have worsened because the Senate and House of Reps have ordered the Chief of Defense Staff to appear before them. Chief is in Abuja right now and will be among the people to welcome the president” Major said.

“But right now, we have a case, even if there is no concrete evidence, Cindy has wiped out fifty percent of our worries. As it is now, we may lose Halima but Tamed will be vindicated by Halima and Chief may be implicated. Just that she will be in danger if she leaves our care” Ghost said.

“Fast how about Umaru?” he asked.

“Nothing to report, he is carrying out his life like he never knew Chief, even during yesterday’s meeting, he never made any speech” Fast said.

“We are going to need another miracle then. Because Chief’s medical report can work against us and Halima. He can even accuse Tamed of doing the brainwashing” Jason said.

“So all I need to do is tell you her reaction to Chief’s picture?” he asked.

“Yes” Wild answered.

“I have a crucial meeting now. Jason please thank Cindy for me. I’m out” Major said.

“I will keep monitoring Umaru” Fast said.

“I will do more research on Chief. As for Ojogolo, there have been two more killings, all connected to rivals. Then there is going to be a delivery of weapons. A big boat will be delivering it at Escravos River. Number of people Ojogolo is expecting to

come with the boat is ten, so he is sending fifteen to do the exchange” Jason said.

“We will keep that in mind” Wild said.

The transmission stopped. Jason had disconnected. Cindy and Halima were coming towards them. Cindy had a pawpaw fruit in her hand while Halima had two oranges with her. They were talking and laughing but he could no more hear what they were saying.

“Halima, I’m placing the pawpaw in the tomatoes basket. You take the oranges too. We have enough” Cindy said as they got close.

“Okay” she answered looking at the vegetables.

“I never knew this is fun Jason” Cindy said throwing herself on Jason who raised her up.

“Your hands are dirty. Need I to help wash it?” Jason asked.

He was happy Halima was not watching, she was by the scent leave tree, her nose on the leaves.

“Please take your love affair away from here, I don’t want to be answering another question” he said.

Jason dropped Cindy, bent down and Cindy climbed on his back. They started leaving and he shook his head. No wonder Jason now believed in miracles. Halima was by the small poultry. She carried the small basket of eggs and walked towards him. She dropped the basket close to the basket with the tomatoes, then ran towards him. Before he could ask her where she was running to, she suddenly threw herself on him. Her hands were in his shoulders making her hang up. The zap of electricity was unexpected, he felt it all over his body. His groins came alive

and he felt shock at his dead heart, almost like it was beating again.

That was not possible, something was wrong, there was no way his body was supposed to react to the contact. People like Halima were those he saw just once, he never looked twice, he was never attracted to them, even at the moment, his mind was totally against what his body was feeling. He pulled her away.

“What the heck are you doing!” he exclaimed.

“You look shocked. Was I bad, did I not do it well?” she asked smiling.

He was even feeling her smile and his heart was beating fast against his will.

“Do what well?”

“Hug. That’s how to hug right? I’m supposed to give you hugs, I’ve given you one”

“And who told you that?”

“Cindy, she said I’m supposed to give you hugs” she answered running back to her basket.

“I’m damned” he said holding his heart.

Cindy had to say that.

“Let’s go. I have to cook” she said carrying the baskets and walking back the way they came.

He pulled her back.

“I thought I said I don’t need a cook” he said but her response was laughter making his heart beat faster.

“This is bad”

“Yes it’s bad, you are a bad cook. Who pours everything into the oil that is not yet hot? Let’s go” she said.

There was no atom of fear left in her eyes. He pulled her back.

“This way Halima” he said pulling her towards the kitchen door.

“Wow, short cut” she said entering the kitchen.

“Halima, I don’t think I will eat egg sandwich, I’m tired of it, you cook for yourself I will find something else to eat” he said hurrying over to the parlor.

He was feeling hot even when the weather was not hot. He pulled off his T-shirt and turned on the AC. He was still hot. He went to switch on the TV and waited for the decoder to boot.

African Magic was the station on screen, he started changing channels till a news headline made him stop. It was ITV. They were reporting on what happened in House of Assembly

meetings, they were showing the House of Representative and Chief was speaking. The volume was low but as he tried increasing it, Halima screamed from his side. He turned towards her and saw raw fear written all over her face. At first, he thought she was back to fearing him but her eyes were focused on something else. He followed the direction of her eyes and quickly switched off the TV. She ran to him but held him from behind. She was shaking from fear and it was bringing out a sudden rage in him, the rage to kill, like the feeling he always had when his mum was hurt.

“Please don’t take me back to him, I don’t want him to take me again” she said trembling and increasing his rage.

He picked his T-shirt which was close to him and quickly put it on, then pulled her front and allowed her grab his waist, her head resting almost at his chest.

“Sssh. Halima, calm down, your fear is pricking me, please”

“Don’t let Chief get me, please, I don’t want to go back” she pleaded almost at the brink of tears.

That was what Wild wanted to know. He wanted to find out if she would be afraid of Chief, the kind of fear of being captured again. The table was turning and Chief had no idea.

“You are safe here Halima. Chief cannot and will never touch you again, I won’t let that happen, I promise. Okay?” he said robbing her back.

“Okay.”

Her vibration stopped instantly calming his rage a bit. He allowed her to hold him because the attraction had stopped which was a welcome development.

“How do I do the second one?” she asked raising her face to look at him.

The feeling was back as soon as their eyes met. He was noticing things he never saw before, her big eyes, her pointed nose and her inviting lips. Gosh he was going crazy, something was really wrong with his brain setting, he would need a brain format.

“How?” she asked.

“What second one?”

“Cindy...”

“Oh no not Cindy again.”

But she laughed and his heartbeat doubled.

“Cindy said I’m supposed to give hugs...”

“You’ve said that. Okay let’s count this as a second hug, it’s now hugs.”

“Not that, another one.”

“What other one?”

“I’m supposed to give you hugs and kisses but I only know how to give hugs”

He quickly pulled her away before he did something stupid.

“Halima, let’s say I’m okay with just the hugs, you can skip the kisses. I really need to talk with Cindy.”

“No, it’s not you, it’s not for you to feel okay. It’s something I must do to feel okay. So will you show me how?”

“Okay, Halima I’m really hungry, please make a lot of egg sandwich for two. I can join you if you want” he said walking towards the kitchen but she held his hand sending another shock to his veins.

“No way. You are a bad cook. Go do something else. I will do everything myself” she said running to the kitchen.

“Good” he said bringing his phone from his pocket and climbing the stairs to his room.

As soon as he entered his room, he dialed Wild’s line.

“What is it?” Wild asked.

“Fear of being captured by Chief, that is what you were looking for. Right?”

“Exactly, we are advancing fast” Wild answered.

“Great, then you should be on your way for the debriefing”

“Not yet.”

“What do you mean by not yet? What else do you want?” he shouted.

“I will know tomorrow morning.”

“Tomorrow when the president will summon us?”

“Major has promised to delay the summoning.”

“I don’t care about that, she is ready, come pick her up.”

“Obinna, I’ve been your friend for about fourteen years now and I should know you enough. What is it?”

Of course Wild would know something was off.

“Ola, just come and take her, I’ve done my best”

“Talk to me as a friend” Wild said.

“It looks like she has transferred from believing Chief to believing Cindy, now she wants to do everything Cindy says.”

“It’s normal, although you physically liberated her, Cindy liberated her mentally.”

“This is bullshit.”

“Obinna I’m still waiting to hear what is getting you agitated.”

“Cindy told her to give me hugs and kisses, she gave me a hug and she is no longer afraid of me.”

“And?”

“She wants to find out how she can give me kisses.”

But the idiot burst into laughter, so much for having a friend.

“Ola, this is not funny.”

“What is wrong with her giving you hugs and kisses, it’s with a clean mind and a show of appreciation and it’s not that it will affect you in anyway, her type don’t move you now” Wild said still laughing.

“I have self-respect.”

“Okay if you say so, except there is something you are not telling me” Wild spoke in Yoruba.

“Ola what should I do?”

“Kiloshele? Ogbeni show her how to give kisses” Wild said cutting the call.

Even Wild was making fun out his predicament. He threw the phone to the bed.

“Think, if this is a combat situation, how do I handle this, first keep my emotions in check and..”

“Where are you, I can’t open the door, I need to get pumpkin leaf” he heard Halima’s voice interrupting him.

His heart leapt as he heard her voice.

“I’m damned” he said.

CHAPTER THIRTY ONE

{The thing I was are searching for was closer than I thought.}

It looked like a dream, it felt like it was not real. After a long time, she was free from Chief. The reality was her fudged message, it was with her, the exact one she had made. Beast had thrown the native pot same way he had angrily broken his plate and he had found her message. How come she never realized it until Cindy explained it to her? She remembered the other man who was big like Beast, who had told her she was free and she would never meet Chief again. How come she never believed? As she washed the tomatoes, she ran through her life with Beast, he had never whipped her nor touched her, she should have known he had set her free, she would be grateful to him all her life. Hugs and kisses were things Cindy said she had to do but

she would try find a way to do things for Beast. She turned to make sure her message was still where she had placed it. After slicing everything and whisking the egg, a memory flashed through her mind, she remembered slicing pumpkin leaves too. She tried opening the door to cut pumpkin but there was no way to open it. She decided to look for Beast. There were so many questions in her mind. Who was she? How long was she in the dark room? What of her family? How old was she? She just could not remember. He was not in the parlor nor in her room. She did not know his room so she called out for him. Few seconds later, he came out of the second room by the right of the corridor. He was really very big, and his hair was cut low, he did not have beards like Chief, his face was smooth but not fleshly, it was looking strong making him handsome. She gasped, how did she know that?

“I will want to know why you always gasp” he said.

His voice was deep, it had always made her afraid but she loved it now, it made her feel safe.

“I want pumpkin leaf.”

She loved that he was big, he could protect her because he was big. He looked at her like he was studying her, it made her feel something she could not explain. He moved towards her and walked passed her, she followed him downstairs.

“I will have to tell Jason to give you finger print permit” he said putting his thumb on a part of the door.

She really liked his deep voice.

“When you are through just close the door” he said going back.

“Wait, when will you show me how to give kisses?”

He stopped his movement and became stiff, she just knew he was stiff. He started going back without turning or answering her. She turned to the door after picking a knife. She would ask him later.

She had set the table and was about looking for him when he came down.

“So quick?” he asked.

He must have taken his bath because he had changed to a dark jean trouser and a brown T-shirt. He went to his seat and started eating. She sat down to eat hers but heard a man’s voice.

“Pray before you eat.”

She held her head as if to hold on to the memory.

“What is it?” Beast asked.

“I keep hearing a man’s voice, then it will disappear.”

“Don’t force it Halima, it will all come naturally. Okay?”

She nodded and continued her food.

Just when she had finished, that was after Beast had left, the parlor door opened and Jason came in, she was still afraid of him. He looked at her once and did something on his wrist watch. Beast came down later.

“Halima come and get your finger print permit” Beast said.

She did not understand what he said but she went to him. After Jason did something on a big phone by the wall close to the door, he took her right hand and used her thumb to touch something small on the door.

‘Finger print accepted’ a female voice said making her jerk and making her move closer to Beast.

Jason looked at her then started going towards the kitchen. Beast took her along with him. Same thing happened at the kitchen door. Jason left without saying a word. Beast released his hold on her.

“You can now open the door, just put your thumb there, okay?”

She nodded.

“Follow me let me show you how to operate the TV” he said moving to the parlor.

The big thing that Chief had appeared in was the TV. That was completely different from the TV she knew. She listened and did as she was told. He left the station at Nickelodeon.

“Is that cartoon?”

“How did you know?”

“I remember Tom and Jerry.”

He nodded and started leaving.

She left the TV and went to clean the kitchen. Then she took her bath and ran back downstairs. They were showing Penguins from Madagascar. Later, they started showing white people, they were too fast, she could hardly understand what they were saying, she decided to go to the library but as she tried switching off the TV, someone put her mouth on a boy's cheek. The boy said he wanted a kiss not a peck, then the girl put his mouth on the boy's mouth. She gasped. That was what a kiss meant. That was what Cindy and Jason always did. They kissed, that was what she was supposed to give Beast but it looked disgusting and gross. She could not place where that word came from but that was how it looked like.

As she climbed the stairs to the library, she decided even though it would feel bad, it was something she must do to show

her appreciation. First, she went to her room, to her box to confirm her message. She had kept it there because she did not want it to get lost. She went to the library and finished the last pages of ‘Tales of A Fourth Grade Nothing’ then discovered it had part two, she searched the books and found it. As she read, she hoped Cindy would come, but she did not come.

“Halima it’s time for lunch.” She heard Beast voice by the door.

“What am I cooking?” she asked dropping the novel.

“Do you know how to cook anything else apart from egg sandwich?”

She tried to remember something, but everything was blank.

“Cindy is not around, she said she will teach you later. Come let’s eat” he said placing a bag on the table.

It was jollof rice. As he ate, she stole some glances at him. She wanted to know when she could give him kisses, she wanted to know how long she had been in the dark room, what year it was, what day it was, what time it was.

“Halima, quit staring at me and eat.”

He carried his food and left. She did not know where he went to because he was not in the parlor, maybe he was in his room.

Cindy did not come even when it was night, she had even forgotten she could go outside but it was already too late. They had eaten rice again, but Beast did not eat with her, it looked like he was avoiding her. She took her second bath and slept off as soon as her head touched the bed.

“The Lords’s prayer.” Her dad said.

They all knelt down including Christian, her brother. It was part of the prayers they said before sleeping. They had not even started when the door burst open and guns were fired at them, it happened so fast. Her dad, her mum and Christian were all lying on the ground, blood pumping out of their body, there was blood everywhere. A man picked her up as she screamed, she tried fighting him but he was too strong. Another man tied her eyes and mouth. She tried to scream but could not.

She opened her eyes and quickly tried removing the clothes on her mouth but touched only her mouth. She jerked up from the bed and looked around expecting to see the men. But there was no one around, she tried to assimilate her environment and remembered she was in Beast house. Almost immediately, a memory flashed through her mind, it was a man and Chief, she knew that man, he was supposed to be a friend. She ran to the

man as soon as her she could see. She also knew Chief, he had always bought something for her anytime he came.

“She is all yours, just fulfill your own side of the deal.” The man said pushing her to Chief who grabbed her on her buttocks.

“My daddy, my mummy, she cried resting her head on Chief’s bod.

The memory disappeared and she started crying. Her parents were dead, she had no one waiting for her, she had no one looking for her, that man had given her to Chief and she had not been afraid of Chief. She had thought Chief and the man saved her from being killed. Chief had said she would never escape from him. What if he was around? What if he was in the room? She quickly climbed down the bed and turned round but Chief was not there. What if he was in the compound? She was afraid to go look from the windows. Cindy had told her when they had

plucked the fruits that she would always be safe with Beast. She wiped her tears and picked her message, then came out of her room. She knew the room he had come out from when she had looked for him. She turned the door handle and it opened. The room was dark, she slowly moved into the room, stretching her hand to prevent her from falling. Her leg kicked a wood and she was falling. Suddenly, someone grabbed her and threw her on the bed. His hands were on her neck and he was choking her, a hand left her neck and the room lighted up.

“Halima. What the heck are you doing here?” Beast asked removing his other hand from her neck.

She coughed and inhaled enough air. The room was very cold. He was above her, almost covering her like that other time but she wasn't afraid this time.

“Were you crying?” he asked sitting her up.

She threw herself on him and started crying.

“Hey I thought I told you your tears disturbs me a lot” he said holding her close.

He lied down on the bed and pulled her to his chest, then started rubbing her back.

“My parents, my brother, they are all dead. I dreamt about it. I remember” she sobbed.

He did not say anything but held her tighter, he started wiping her tears with one of his hands.

“My dad’s friend gave me to Chief, Chief was a friend. I thought they saved me” she said crying more.

The hand rubbing her back stopped. He raised her up and sat up.

“Is he the one?” he asked showing her a picture from his phone, Chief was in the picture.

She nodded but became more afraid. He removed the phone and pulled her close again.

“Please don’t let Chief get me, I can’t go back there please” she pleaded.

“Sssh Halima, you are shaking. I’ve told you I will never allow Chief take you again. I’m sorry about your parents, I’m going to make Chief pay. You are safe with me.” He said after some minutes.

She felt safe in his arms.

“Promise” she said.

“I promise” he said in his deep voice.

She felt relaxed.

“Please can I stay here? I’m afraid of being alone” she pleaded.

“No Halima, I will leave the room once you sleep.”

“But I’m afraid Chief will get me.”

“He won’t, he can’t come here, he does not know this place. He is far away right now and my friend is monitoring him, so just sleep.”

“Then can I give you kisses before I sleep?” she asked hoping to be quickly done with what she must do.

He did not say anything but touched her cheek with his mouth. She felt something all over her body and it was not a bad feeling.

“That’s a kiss. You can sleep now.”

“No that’s not a kiss, it’s a peck.”

“I thought you don’t know what kisses means” he said releasing his hold on her and looking at her. There was something about his eyes.

“I do now. I saw it on TV, the girl gave a peck then later a kiss”
she answered.

He was looking at her somehow.

“We can’t do that kind of kiss Halima.”

“But I have to do it.”

“I don’t want it.”

“I have to do, I must do it.”

“Halima, for someone like you, it’s gonna be repulsive because
of what you’ve been through.”

“What’s that?”

“I mean you won’t like it.”

“But I still want to give you.”

“It’s also not a good idea for me Halima.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Right now staying close to you is difficult for me, I am a man Halima, it could lead to other things. I may hurt you.”

“But Cindy said you will never hurt me.”

“Sleep” he said pulling her to him and making her back rest on his stomach.

She held her message to her stomach and tried to sleep but she could not, his hold was not tight. After some time, she pulled herself from him. She turned to face him, his eyes were closed and she could see the fall and rise of his chest. She moved her face closer. She placed lips on his closed lips expecting to feel gross and bad but felt the opposite. Before she could understand what she was feeling, he suddenly pulled her close and opened his eyes making her gasp.

“I warned you Halima, I told you, you won’t like it. I think I really need to show you so you will stop disturbing me” he said placing his palms on both her cheeks and pulling her face close.

He first touched her lips with his, then covered her mouth with his. There was nothing gross about it. He was very powerful but he was so gently, the only thing that was slightly rough was his strong lips. He was touching her with his mouth but she felt it all over her body down to her stomach. She wanted to feel more, it was not enough. She pushed herself closer and opened her mouth more for him. He made a deep sound that she felt like a shock on her skin. He pulled her closer and pushed his mouth further inside, one of his hand was rubbing her back, then her shoulder, her neck, her ear, her hair. She felt hot at any place his hand touched. She pushed herself closer, her message dropped from her hand and she held his shoulder, she wanted to touch

him, to know if it would feel better but he suddenly stopped. He gently withdrew from her and sat up.

“No, why did you stop? I don’t want you to stop” she said standing up to meet him.

“Halima you surprise me for someone who had been sexually abused for more than fourteen years. This is totally different from what I’ve read” he said facing her.

“Fourteen years?” she asked.

“You don’t know? That clay pot have been with me for fourteen years” he answered.

She shook her head in disbelief, it was not possible, that was too long.

“You look shocked. I thought you knew.”

She could not hold back her tears, how was it possible she had been in the dark room for fourteen years.

“No, Halima don’t. I can’t stand your tears” he said pulling her close.

“Fourteen years. I have been there for three years before he locked me in that room, that is seventeen years” she sobbed.

He became stiff again, and he was breathing fast like he was angry but she was not afraid, he was not angry at her.

“How old were you when Chief took you?” he asked after some time.

“I don’t really remember maybe nine.”

He did not say anything, he just held her.

“What is sexually abused?” She asked raising her head to look at him.

“That’s what you’ve been calling touching.”

Cindy had said the same thing.

“It was not fourteen years, he did it before I was locked up, it was so painful.”

Her body shook from the memory. He did not say anything but she knew he was very angry.

“I am going to kill him” he said after some time.

For the first time she was not bothered if Chief was killed.

“Halima, you can sleep here, I need to leave” he said but she held his shirt.

“No I want to sleep with you.”

“Do you know what that means?” he asked looking at her.

“I just want to sleep in your arms.”

“No that will no longer be possible Halima” he said trying to pull her hands away but she hugged his back.

His breathing changed, it was fast.

“Halima you are resurrecting things that are better left dead and I am not capable of holding it in.”

There was something different in his voice, it sounded deeper.

“I don’t understand what you are saying, but can I get another kiss?”

He turned and pulled her to face him, his lips were close and she felt hot again.

“Halima if I kiss you again, I won’t stop there, I will sleep with you.”

She looked at him. He was serious. Was that what Cindy was talking about?

“I don’t care. As long as you won’t hurt me.”

“I care Halima. It will have a lot of meaning to you but not to me. It’s just my body that wants you but I don’t love you. And it’s wrong, I will be taking advantage of your ignorance which can be seen as abuse.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I am saying I don’t love you Halima, it’s just my body that wants you. You will feel hurt later.”

Cindy had said something like that.

“If you love me, will you....”

“That’s not gonna happen Halima, Abigail will remain the woman I will forever love, so let’s stop here, no more kisses or hugs” he said.

Why did she feel a slight pain on her chest at his words?

He tried standing up but she threw herself on him, she did not want him to leave her, she liked being with him. He pulled her closer, then started putting pressure at the hole in her neck and her wrist.

“What are you doing?” she asked feeling dizzy.

“Making you sleep.”

She tried to fight the sleep that was overwhelming her but failed.

She opened her eyes to sunlight, she was back in her room and on her bed. Beast had done that thing he did to her when he had rescued her and she had slept off. She went to the mirror to check herself. She was not happy with what she was seeing. She was too dark, too short and too skinny. She went to both windows but did not see anybody. Beast was not in his room. She climbed down and saw him sitting on one of the chairs in the parlor. He had what Chief had called a laptop on his lap.

Something flashed through her mind. She moved gently and cautiously towards Beast. She covered his eyes with her palms as soon as she got close.

“Seriously? This is a child’s play” Beast said.

He was not even shocked, it was as if he already knew she was around.

“Guess who it is?”

“Halima I’m seriously busy. Can you free my eyes?”

“No you have not guessed.”

He sighed making her laugh.

“You are Halima.”

She rested her head on his shoulder without removing her hands from his eyes.

“I don’t feel like removing my hand.”

He placed the laptop far from him and suddenly flipped her over, he was very fast and took the breath from her. She was on his lap.

“I guess you want to sleep again” he said placing his hands on her shoulder.

“No not that, don’t do that again, I don’t like it” she said jumping down.

He did not say anything but carried his laptop, her eyes sighted an artifact by the side of the laptop.

“Why do you have that?”

“It’s a laptop, I’m looking at files.”

“I know that is a laptop, I’m asking about that artifact” she said pointing at it.

“This is not an artifact, it’s called a flash drive.”

“But Chief had many of it and called his special artifacts.”

He dropped the laptop and held her hands.

“Do you know where they are?”

“Yes, he used to put them in my gown, he said nobody will ever find it.”

“Shit.”

He looked frustrated.

“What is wrong?”

“I would have loved to get them but the whole damn house was burnt to the ground, no wonder he said only his most expensive artifact was missing.”

“No it’s not, you are not getting me” she said.

“Halima they are all burnt.”

“See listen to me. After Chief is done touching me, I’m supposed to wear my clothes but I must not wear the gown he hates to see me wear, he only make me wear it if he is not happy with me and he wants all his special artifacts in one place. I have never disobeyed but I had not worn my clothes when you came. You made me wear the gown, I thought that was what Chief wanted to make me wear. The gown has a pocket inside where he puts it” she said feeling bad in her body. She hated talking or remembering Chief’s touch.

“Where is the gown?” he asked holding her hands.

“In my room” she answered.

He did not let her finish before running upstairs, she followed him and by the time she got to her room, he had scattered her clothes including those she had hanged.

“What are you doing?”

“Where is the gown?”

“I thought you said you don’t ever want to see it?”

“Halima I’m serious.”

“I kept it here” she said opening the small bag inside the box.

He took it from her and started ripping it off.

“Not like that, give me” she said taking the gown from him.

She turned to the back of the gown and opened the zip, then brought out three flash drives as Beast called it. She gave it to him. He started leaving the room.

“Wait, there is another one” she said bringing out the last one.

He took it and ran downstairs. He was just acting like a beast.

She started rearranging her clothes. She went downstairs when she was through.

“Jason come here immediately, a miracle just happened.” Beast was talking on the phone.

As she got close to him, she gasped.

There was a woman and two kids sitting on the floor in Beast’s laptop. The woman was bleeding from her head. Chief was pointing a gun at her. He was going to kill her. Chief pushed the gun closer to her head. She screamed making Beast turn. He dropped the laptop on the chair and rushed to her. The door opened and Jason and Cindy came inside. He pulled her close. Jason walked straight to the laptop while Cindy moved towards them.

“Cindy please take Halima with you” Beast said leaving her to join Jason.

Cindy looked at Jason same time he looked at her. Jason nodded at Cindy and she pulled her towards the door. As the door opened, Cindy looked at Jason again, he was also looking at her. No words were said but there was something in their look that was special, like they were holding each other even when they were not close. Beast was looking at the laptop but Jason was still looking at Cindy as she pulled her outside.

“He is going to kill her” she said.

“Who?” Cindy asked.

“I gave Beast Chief’s flash drives and he put it in his laptop, the woman was there, Chief is going to shoot her” she cried.

Cindy pulled her to her.

“I’m so sorry you have to see that Halima, but I’m happy, Thank you Jesus. Halima you just saved everybody. You are safe now.

Chief is going to be punished. It's okay Halima. Thank you"

Cindy said.

She was crying too.

"Come let's do some exercises" Cindy said pulling her towards the stuffs she used every morning.

As she followed Cindy, she thought about love, she thought about how Jason loved Cindy. That was why Cindy was always happy. She was sad because Beast did not love her.

CHAPTER THIRTY TWO

{Man as such is smoke, woman as such, mirage. Put them together, they're nothing; two times nothing is nothing.}

That must be one of his longest nights. Even when he had carried her to her room, he still could not sleep and he had to leave the house to the boxing ring. But something good had just happened. Halima had given him the evidence to take down Chief, yet he could not concentrate. He had forgotten about her when he inserted the flash drive to the laptop, and he did not know she would react that way, but he was relieved she did not watch when Chief shot the woman and the kids.

“This is the woman I talked about, the unsolved kidnapping and murder case” Jason said after Chief had shot the woman.

Before shooting her, he had made the woman know how things would change, how he would console her husband. Her two kids

were shot after her. It was a terrible thing to watch but they had to watch everything. Jason removed the flash drive and inserted another one from the table. He could not watch it after few seconds. It was Halima tied to a nail by the wall, her back was facing the camera and she was being whipped as she screamed and begged.

“Take that thing off” he shouted at Jason and same time, he stood up.

“Tamed calm down, we have to check the contents of the remaining two” Jason said putting the third flash drive.

It was still Halima, she was half naked and lying on the bed. Jason pulled it out before he could fling the system away.

“Don’t” he said as Jason tried putting the fourth file.

His fury was already at its peak. Jason looked at him for some seconds and listened to him.

“Your reaction is eighty percent personal” Jason said.

It made him pause. Was Jason right?

Jason brought out a cord that had the phone mouth and inserted it to the flash drive, then his phone. He did that to all the flash drives.

“I’m sending them to the app” Jason said.

He was too angry to talk, he just moved round the parlor, he needed to punch something. His phone vibrated in his pocket, they had started responding.

‘What the heck is this and how did it come?’ Wild asked.

‘It had been with us all this while. Halima gave it to me from the pocket of the gown I had made her wear the day of the rescue.

She had called it Chief's special artifacts. She said Chief never allowed her to wear it except occasionally. So Chief right now has no idea they were not destroyed by the fire because he is very sure Halima had obeyed him' he wrote.

'This is a miracle Tamed, there is no logical explanation to it. You had to choose that gown of all her gowns and that was because you had met her naked' Jason wrote.

'I'm still stunned, but this is too much to watch' Mark wrote.

'Suddenly the table has turned' Ghost wrote.

'Unbelievable, Chief is really not normal' Major wrote.

'We can get the IG and make an arrest, with that, we can stop Chief from his plans' Fast wrote.

'What plans?' He asked.

‘Chief plans on destroying us live. With the aid of his comrades he wants me to brief the whole world on why I’m keeping a criminal and the president has made it an open meeting with the press. I was thinking of how to announce this to you’ Major wrote.

‘But why would the president do that?’ Doc asked.

‘He was cornered and he was also shocked that I had not reported about Chief becoming one of our mission’s target. He said even UK, US and others are interested in the case and he trusts us to come with a good evidence otherwise we are on our own. The meeting is scheduled for tomorrow at the villa. It will be broadcasted live because Chief wants transparency. My plans had been for me to truthfully give chronological details of everything that have transpired and the little video evidences we have, including Halima’s reactions when she was rescued and

her reactions yesterday morning then let the president decide whether to hand Halima over to a neutral party while suspending us until further investigations, but this has changed everything. I will meet with the president immediately with these evidences' Major wrote.

'No Major, let things unfold as it is supposed to, do everything you planned to do, just let these evidence be the last. You are the one to speak first before Chief brings his evidence of Onos, then his impotence, that would cancel your speech and put you in the spotlight, then you can project the videos after that. Jason will help us blur Halima's face. Ghost I need you to visit the family of that woman, get the permission to display the video' Wild wrote.

'Roger that' Ghost responded.

'Don't you think that is not relevant' Major wrote.

‘Does anyone go with Major?’ Wild wrote.

‘No’ Mark wrote.

‘No’ Ghost wrote.

‘No’ Fast wrote.

‘No’ Even Doc wrote.

‘No’ Jason wrote.

‘No’ he wrote

‘Major you lost’ Wild wrote.

‘I don’t still agree with you Wild. I want Chief dead, he is going to be arrested and tried’ he wrote.

‘Tamed, for some people, there are things worse than death.

Trust me, Chief will prefer to be killed to what I have in mind.

I’m not through Tamed’ Wild wrote.

‘What again?’ Major asked.

‘I had a chat with Jason on the delivery of the weapons. Now that we are having the king let’s give Chief a checkmate’ Wild wrote.

‘How?’ he asked.

‘Major will be okay on his own, he will go with a tinted van with the false impression Halima is with him. I will contact Stud and few others to stand guard round it. Major will inform the president personally on the new development, we need his help for the final game. That will enable Mark set up the projector and our other tools which will be connected to Major’s phone. I will assign everyone for their missions. Let me put down my plans first’ Wild wrote.

He knew Wild enough to know what he was planning to do and thinking about it pacified him. He was right, there were things worse than death and Chief was about to receive doses of them.

‘When are you coming for debriefing?’ he asked.

“Any news?” Wild asked.

At first he thought he was asking about the kiss but on a second thought, he remembered what Wild had earlier said.

“Nightmares?” he asked.

‘Okay. I will take over from you tomorrow morning, because you won’t be around. I will be coming with Doc. Just prepare her, she has seen us before’ Wild wrote.

‘I don’t even know what to feel about this. This is really a miracle’ Mark wrote.

‘At the dying minute’ Doc wrote.

‘You will get your orders later. I have some preparations to make’ Wild wrote.

He left the app but his phone kept vibrating. He was still standing. Jason stood up.

“Please take those flash drives with you. I don’t want to see them” he said.

“You will need to upgrade your weapons” Jason said packing the flash drives.

“Why”

“I thought you must have gotten a hint of what Wild wants to do.”

It was now very clear and he was becoming excited. He nodded at Jason.

“Have any for me?”

“You bet” Jason answered walking to the door.

He followed him outside. Halima was running and screaming on the treadmill while Cindy cheered. He had some solemn for some time but seeing her resurrected the feelings he did not want to have. How come she was so easily pleased? She was even handling everything better than him, and that kiss.

He shook his head.

“Beast I’m running” Halima shouted just when he had passed them.

“Beast?” he asked.

“Oops” she said.

Cindy was laughing, even Jason which was rare. He walked towards her.

“I did not know what to call you then. You were acting like a beast” she said coming down from the treadmill as soon as he got closer.

“You’ve ever seen a beast before?” he asked with a stern voice but she laughed.

She was really no longer afraid of him.

“I like it” Jason said pulling Cindy to him and kissing her forehead.

“Jason you are not helping. I think I prefer you not talking” he said.

“Are you not tired?” Jason asked Cindy ignoring him.

“I’m fine Jason” Cindy said.

“Halima, from now on, call me Obinna. Jason I thought you have something to show me?”

“Do fast and come” Jason said to Cindy giving her a kiss.

Jason started walking towards his house and he followed.

“Obinna, I don’t like it, it does not fit you. I prefer Beast.

Obinna cannot protect me from Chief but Beast will” she shouted behind them.

Jason and Cindy started laughing. He turned to give her a warning stare but she was not even looking at them, she was already trying to climb the bike. He felt like going to shake her a little. She needed to start fearing him again, even if it was a little fear.

“Beast, the weapons” Jason said.

He responded instantly by throwing a punch at Jason but he dodged and continued walking.

Jason did not enter through the door he knew, there was another door behind the house which led to a room full of weapons.

“Time for shopping” he said picking a desert eagle pistol close to him.

They boycotted his pickup and the rescue van and chose Jason’s jeep. They were not supposed to be spotted. Just after putting all the weapons they needed in the jeep, his phone vibrated. It was exactly as he thought, Wild had distributed their task, and it was game on.

He stayed back for some boxing with the punching bags before going inside. Their laughter was what he first heard as soon as he entered the house. He went to the kitchen to see what they were doing. It looked like they were going to prepare fried rice.

“So you will come to church with me next tomorrow” Cindy said.

“That will be Sunday right?” Halima asked.

“Very correct”

“I get to see Pastor Sam?” She asked.

“Yes, he will be happy to meet you”

Did Jason not tell Cindy she will not be around on Sunday?

“I feel like I have done this before” Halima said as he walked to his room.

Her voice was disturbing him on a high level, he could not even understand why she had such effect on him. There was pretty nothing much to do after taking his bath. His phone started ringing as soon as he sat down on his bed. It was Wild.

“What happened?” Wild asked in Yoruba.

“If you want to hear that I kissed her, then yes and that’s all.

Don’t you dare ask another question” he said cutting the call but he received a message from Wild.

‘But how was it?’ Wild wrote.

He deleted the message and threw the phone farther down the bed. He was even feeling sleepy as a result of his all night boxing because of Halima.

“Hey Beast, wake up, food is ready”

He had felt her presence even before she spoke. He stood up and left the room to the dinning without looking at her. There was no need correcting her, she wouldn't listen. He needed help very fast before he did something stupid.

She had left with Cindy and he had gone to sleep, but this time, he locked his door. He spent the remaining time studying

Ojogolo clan and their building structure. Jason had done a good work. Lunch and dinner came and he was happy Halima only appeared those two times. She was with Cindy throughout. But there was something he noticed about her, she was no longer disturbing him for a kiss or even finding every opportunity to touch him which was a welcome development.

He had locked the door to prevent Halima from invading his room and had ignored the many knocks at midnight, but she was damned persistent. He stood up and opened the door after concluding she would not stop knocking. He stood by the door, preventing her from entering the room.

“Please can I sleep here?”

He wanted to say no but paused. She was shaking all over making him angry. He must find a way to understand why Halima’s fear made him angry. He shifted to let her in. She had

her fudged message with her. He expected her to jump on the bed but she just stood close to it.

“What is it Halima?”

“I can’t sleep. If I close my eyes I feel Chief’s whip on my body” she stammered.

She was really ready for debriefing and he was not good with things like that.

“You are having a trauma Halima, it will pass.”

“But can I sleep here? I will sleep on the ground, I won’t kiss or hug you.”

Why the sudden change? He went to her room and carried her blanket, then placed it on the tiles, then laid down on it.

“You can sleep on the bed” he said.

She entered the bed and slept off without saying anything. He studied her for some time. What happened within the past hours? She was suddenly acting matured and different. Soon he too slept.

A scream woke him up. It was Halima. He was on the bed immediately.

“Please, I’m sorry, please” she screamed.

He tried to raise her up but she screamed more.

“No it hurts, everywhere hurts, please don’t touch me this time, please, I will die” she cried.

He was going mad, this was too much. He could not even stand watching the video, now he was being forced to watch a reenacting of some of her worst experience. Wild had explained a little of it to him. He had said trauma was different from a

nightmare, because the person relieved everything and it was as painful as the actual event. That was why even his touch was painful to her. But he had no idea on what to do. She was not only screaming and pleading but also moving her body in response to the whip. His rage was on a high level and if Halima did not stop, he would be going out to find a criminal. He thought about calling Wild but changed his mind. She needed to wake up to reality. He raised her up and closed his eyes and ears to her reaction. He pulled her to him and wrapped her in his arms.

“No” she screamed.

“I look up to the mountains: does my strength come from the mountains? No, my strength comes from God, who made heaven, and earth, and mountain” he whispered to her ears.

“He won’t let you stumble, your Guardian God won’t fall asleep.”

She stopped screaming as soon as he mentioned guardian. She took over from him and continued to the end.

“Good Halima, wake up, you are not with Chief. You are safe. Okay?”

Gradually, she opened her eyes.

“Beast” she said pushing herself closer.

Suddenly the feelings he had completely forgotten came back in full force.

“Halima stop” he groaned.

She became still, then slowly pulled away. She left the bed and went to the blanket. He did not stop her, he wanted the heat in his body to cool down first. She did not sleep but sat down on it.

“I don’t think I can sleep again. I am going to stay awake” she said.

“Why are you doing that?” he asked.

“Doing what?”

“Suddenly you are not pressing me to kiss you.”

“Because it’s wrong” she answered like he was asking her where she kept her shoe.

“Says who?”

“Cindy and the bible.”

“Seriously? What else did you guys talk about?” he asked sitting up.

“A lot, even things you must not know about.”

“Now I’m interested, what else did she say it’s wrong?”

“What is wrong is not for everybody, it’s only for Christians. I am a Christian, I remembered our prayers” she answered.

“What else?”

“Love.”

“What about love?”

“I now know the real meaning and the different types. We can only do all those stuffs if you love me and if we get married, that is what the gold thing she is wearing is meant for.”

“Why must I be the only one to love you?”

“Because I already love you” she said it again like he was asking her where she kept her shoes.

“I’m not sure Cindy told you what love really means, you don’t love me Halima, it’s a kind of syndrome, you want to stick to the person who saved you.”

“Cindy explained that, but that is why I know that I love you, it’s not because you saved me. You did not really save me, God used you to save me.”

That was it.

“Now I think of it, you should have met my mum Halima, she should have given birth to you because that is the only thing she had done that usually put me on the edge.”

His mum had always thanked God every time he had saved them and the land. She would beg him to stop his actions but must times, he had refused and he had ended up saving them but after that, she would say it was God that used him. The same God that let his dad die, the same God that did not heal her cancer. She had refused to disclose it because she knew he would have found a way to get money to treat her, she had suffered in pains and died yet God had not saved her. Now it was Halima.

“How come this same God allowed you to suffer for more than fourteen years, Halima why are you so easily brainwashed, it’s too early.”

“Don’t say that. I know what brainwash means and I’m not brainwashed. Before I forgot everything, I always said psalm 121 before I sleep, God used you to save me” she adamantly stood her ground making him angry.

“Then how come your parents had to die because they converted to Christianity? How come God allowed them die?”

He had said it before he knew what he said. She started crying.

“Shit” he said moving over to the blanket.

He pulled her close.

“I’m sorry Halima.”

She did not say anything for a long time.

“Are you not a Christian?” she suddenly asked.

“My mum was, I had to go to church till she died.”

“So you don’t follow the rules?”

“What rules?”

“No sex till marriage.”

That was so out of the blues.

“That is my private life Halima.”

But she started laughing and it was having the wrong effect on him. He gave himself sense and went back to the bed.

“Halima what is funny?”

“There is nothing personal and private about you. I listened to everything that man said you did. You are really a beast.”

“I think you guys had too much time together and why would Jason do that?”

“It’s not Jason, its Cindy that played it for me.”

She would not understand even if he explained.

“So tell me” she said.

He was beginning to understand Halima, she would never stop except he answered.

“Not anymore, stopped long before I met Abigail.”

“Why”

“Cause I always felt my mum’s disapproving look each time I slept with any girl. And it stayed like that for days. Some days, I could almost hear her screaming at me that I will go to hell if I don’t repent.”

Halima responded with laughter but it was not funny.

His mum had three places, the market, the house but the Church took more of her time. She had never mentioned hell to him until she had caught him kissing one of the girls in line to have a taste of him. The one hour hell fire lecture was the worst lecture of his life. Instead of a sex education, his mum had spent time reading the bible passages about fornication and hell fire. She had even started crying when she felt he was not listening to her and she had only stopped crying after he had promised to stop. His mum knew how to play the emotional game with him, she did not need cane, she only needed to cry and the only times he ignored her tears were times she was trying to prevent him from saving her.

“Halima, you are going to be having visitors tomorrow. You’ve seen them before.”

‘Don’t worry, Cindy told me.’

He gave a sigh of relief. Finally, something good came out of Cindy.

“Can I ask something?”

“No let’s sleep.”

“Just one.”

He had almost forgotten her personality.

“What?”

“Your Uncle. Did he not come back again after he got caught by your trap?”

She always asked what he would never fathom.

“No, he took me to the Asagba. I defended myself by asking the Asagba to choose from two options.”

“What options?”

“Either he accepted me as the reincarnation of my great grandfather, which would make me more than hundred years old meaning I don’t need anyone to manage my land or he would have to accept me as a minor. Minors don’t get jailed for a crime, and as a minor I would continue to do my best to protect my mother and somebody might die by accident.”

Her laughter was very intoxicating. It was doing something to the empty hole in his chest. He had only had that feeling once. It was for Abigail and it had died with her death but why was that feeling happening again?

“Let’s swap places, so you can sleep. No more questions please” he said moving over to her side.

But she did not stand up even when he was already lying down, she was just staring at him and it was disturbing.

“My heart beats fast when you are close, I want to touch you, I want to be closer, I want you to kiss me but I’m not supposed to do that until we are married.”

“And that’s not gonna happen.”

“I feel like it will happen because I’m praying about it.”

“Oh not again, Halima goodnight” he said closing his eyes but she was still there.

“Halima you can stay if you want me to kiss you.”

“What?” she asked.

He sat up and immediately pulled her closer, then moved his lips closer to hers. Her breathing changed.

“Now that I know you are matured, I can guiltlessly kiss you and have sex with you to quench my desire” he said touching his lips to hers.

It worked because she pulled away and ran to the bed.

“Goodnight Halima.”

CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

{I tried to relieve your fears: Don't be terrified of them.}

He was really a beast without feelings. He had just slept off after telling her goodnight, leaving her to face her fears and her feelings for him. He had even made fun of her feelings and if it was a joke. Even Cindy had agreed that there was something unexplainable about her feelings because she was not supposed to love kissing him, or love him holding her close because from books she had read and law cases she had followed concerning victims like her, they normally could not stand the touch of men without feeling repulsive or having a memory trigger and it was true. She had felt bad any time Chief had raped her and when the man that would have taken her back to Chief held her hands, she had felt bad. But Beast had been different from the beginning.

She had not even noticed it until Cindy talked about it. She looked at the beast lying down on her blanket and wished his heart would change and he would love her and not just want to sleep with her. Afraid to have another trauma as Beast called it, she just laid on the bed but did not close her eyes. She was also not comfortable being close to Beast, her body kept pulling her to him. She started saying Psalm 121 and other bible verses she could remember. But the pull was still there. Beast suddenly stood up and left the room. She wondered where he must have gone to.

The sun rays that permeated her room made her to open her eyes, she must have slept off. But she was happy there was no trauma. She really needed the sleep because she and Cindy had done a lot of cooking last evening. She had taught her how to

cook eguisi soup. Cindy said they should prepare food for those coming.

“Those coming” she said jumping down from the bed.

She needed to be prepared for them. Cindy said that Sabrina, the doctor will check if she was healthy and Wild which was a fearful name would help her with her nightmares. She said if she was no longer afraid of Beast, then there was no reason to fear them because they were helping Beast to protect her. She quickly took her bath and as she put on her clothes, she thought about the questions she could not ask Beast. She had wanted to ask him about his suicide attempt, about Abigail, if he was okay, if he still wanted to kill himself. But she just could not. What was more disturbing was she could feel his rage whenever he pulled her close. Beast had two emotions, rage and nothing.

When he had mentioned Abigail, it was as if he had transferred

his pain to her, she felt it but she could not ask because she too could not understand why she felt it. She went to the garden window but there was no one. She moved to the other window and saw them.

They were three not two. Wild and Sabrina and one other tall man.

“Soldier” she slowly said.

That was who he was but not just the tall man, Beast and Jason were also on soldier uniform but with a black T-shirt. Wild and Sabrina were not putting on their uniform. He was wearing a dark blue jean trousers with a black top, Sabrina was wearing a long but free gown and she was covering her head and both sides of her cheeks with a wrapper, she knew what that was. She tried remembering what it was called and how she knew but could not. The tall slim guy was talking to Cindy who was

laughing at something he was saying. Jason was pressing his wrist watch close to her. Sabrina was running on the treadmill with her long gown. The crazy thing she was seeing that made her mouth to open was Wild and Beast throws. She had tried lifting that weight and had fallen down without moving it an inch but those two were throwing it at each other like it was a rubber plate. She wanted to tell them that what they were doing was dangerous but something was wrong. They were easily catching it. The tall man suddenly knelt down before Cindy but only one knee was on the floor, he brought out a flower from a bag on his back, then gave it to Cindy. Cindy gasped and opened her mouth in excitement. She tried to collect it but Jason snatched it from the tall man. As if the tall man knew what Jason was going to do, he brought out another flower but Jason pulled Cindy back, the man stood up to meet up with them but Jason blocked him. The man brought out a phone from his pocket and

waved it at Jason who looked surprised, even Beast and Wild and Sabrina had stopped what they were doing and were looking at them. They were even laughing but she could not understand what was funny. He used Jason's distraction to give Cindy the flower, then he bent his body like he was bowing to Cindy, his hand on his chest. Beast looked at her. How did he always know she was at the window? Wild looked at her too. She quickly left the window. Then she remembered she had not warmed the soup and made eba. She quickly ran downstairs and started warming the soup. Then she put water on fire.

“Ghost you are supposed to be my mentor but you keep using blackmail on me” she heard Cindy's voice.

She sounded excited. They were already inside.

“What blackmail? We agreed my online teaching makes me a godfather. My flowers was the seal.” The man she called Ghost said.

“Stop dreaming Ghost. You will never get Jason’s approval.” She heard a deep voice.

“All I need is Cindy’s approval since Jason is now a robot” Ghost said.

But what type of name was that? Cindy had told her not to fear but she was suddenly afraid.

“Jason how long before we make contact?” Beast asked.

His voice gave her a little relieve.

“In less than three minutes” Jason answered.

“Tamed you see what I told you, Jason is enjoying life.” That must be Sabrina.

“Jason should be investigated, this was not part of our trainings, soldiers are not supposed to be living in luxury. Jason bribe me” Ghost said.

“First transfer to the police force, then come for your bribe” Jason answered.

“Or I could pickpocket your watch for ransom” Ghost said.

What was the meaning of pickpocket? Because he made everybody laugh.

“Jason now you know what I had passed through” Sabrina said.

“That really took me by surprise” Jason said.

“Is that food? Like eguisi soup? Tamed can you smell that?”

The deep voice said.

The voice was close to the kitchen and it was not long before she saw him. It was Wild. She stood by the gas lost on what to do. But Cindy came inside making her comfortable.

“Wow you are already turning the eba” Cindy said.

“Halima, you made this?” he asked opening the pot of soup.

She nodded looking down.

“Thanks. I am hungry” he said carrying the big bowl with the spatula inside.

“I’m not through” she called to him.

“This is smooth enough” he answered leaving the kitchen.

“Like I told you, birds of the same feather flock together” Cindy said checking the soup.

It was frozen making it take long to boil.

“Food is ready” Wild said.

“Oh mine. Where is the soup?” Ghost asked.

“And get water for washing on your way back” Sabrina said.

Ghost entered the kitchen and went straight to the pot before looking at her.

“You cooked this?” he asked but he did not speak English.

She gasped.

“Wow you understand Hausa. Bilikisu you have a sister” he still did not speak English nor the other one but she still understood him, making her gasps again.

“Unbelievable, you understand Fulani too. You know what that means?”

She shook her head.

“Are you mad, you want me to soak your face on that soup?”

Sabrina shouted at Ghost as she came inside the kitchen.

“Doc you are making Halima afraid” Wild said.

He had entered the kitchen too, even Beast.

“Tamed I just got a sister from my father and mother’s side. She can hear both Fulani and Hausa” Ghost said pulling her to his side.

She waited to feel bad but did not. Beast and Wild looked at her like they were waiting for her to do something.

“Hi Halima, pleased to meet you again, my sister” Sabrina said in Hausa pulling her away from Ghost and embracing her.

She had a nice scent.

“Halima that’s my kid sister I adopted. I now have two sisters but you are now my favorite” Ghost said smiling at her.

She smiled back immediately. She liked him.

“Idiot” Sabrina said.

“Show off” Wild said switching off the gas and carrying the pot of soup just like that.

She and Cindy were the only ones shocked, the others were not.

Ghost took a bowl and poured water inside. Then followed Wild to the parlor.

“I will get the water” Cindy said excitedly, opening the fridge.

She packed a handful of bottled water and left. Sabrina left but also packed a handful of bottled water from the fridge before leaving. It was now just she and Beast.

“Let’s go” he said leaving the kitchen.

She did not follow immediately, she waited for some time and walked slowly to the parlor. They were all eating and the food

was already half gone, even Cindy joined them. Only Jason did not. He was setting up something by the TV.

“We are now online” Jason said same time someone appeared on the TV.

Gosh he was so handsome, very handsome, fair and tall and looked smart and was on a uniform but did not look like soldier uniform. He was standing close to a large river. The TV divided and another one appeared. He was standing close to a helicopter. It looked like only Wild and Tamed were the very big ones. He was tall too but not slim nor huge, but he was looking okay. He was dark like Wild and was on another uniform too. They both put on a dark eyeglasses and did something on their phone.

“Helicopter” she said.

Everyone looked at her. It felt like the two men on TV were also looking at her.

“Hi Halima, you are looking pretty today. I never knew you were this pretty. Let’s go on a date,” The handsome man said.

She gasped. How? He could see her and he knew her name.

“Mark seriously?” Beast said.

Mark? Oh Cindy had mentioned him, then the other must be Fast. How come they could see them?

Everybody looked at Beast.

“Guys please I’m I missing something?” Fast asked.

“What?” Beast shouted at them.

They stopped looking at him and continued their food. Even Jason joined them and all of them stopped eating. He was standing very close to Cindy, their bodies were touching.

“What?” Jason asked.

“Oh, Fast we are really missing something” Mark said.

“You are missing this delicious meal prepared by Halima my new sister” Ghost said.

“Mark this is what we call cheating and it’s unacceptable” Fast said.

“Let’s deal with that later. Halima please I’m waiting, don’t keep a guy waiting. I will take you on a boat ride” Mark said.

“Halima please ignore this idiot, he is not serious, he does that to every girl” Sabrina said.

She nodded.

“Wild shebi you see how Sabrina dey pour sand sand for my garri” Mark said.

“That’s because she don dey fall small small...”

Sabrina stoned Ghost eba which he dodged.

“You guys are confusing Halima. Can’t you act normal for once?” Wild said.

He had a big lump of eba which he swallowed making her gasped.

“Wild a leader must lead by example, how can we be normal when our leader is not normal. Halima my precious sister ignore us, just stick to Cindy if you want to be normal” Ghost said smiling at her.

“What of Beast?” she asked.

The laughter that followed her question lasted for a long time. Beast stood up and carried the pot of soup and the bowl of eba away.

“Time for briefing and dispatching” he said after coming back from the kitchen.

“Halima I think I really like you. You just became my sister”

Fast said.

“Halima so you agree with me that he acts like a beast?” Wild asked her.

“Halima” Beast stressed her name as she was about to nod to Wild.

She still nodded.

“Somehow, I even prefer it to Tamed, after all my mum called me king of the beast” Beast said looking at her.

“Okay Beast, Jason said you’ve stacked up weapons” Ghost said.

Beast became stiff, but loosened after some seconds.

“Thanks Halima” Beast said.

But she knew he meant the opposite.

Cindy came over to her carrying the bowl of water.

“Let’s go” she said to her.

She followed her to the kitchen. She was supposed to be happy she was leaving them but she was not.

“What will you eat?” Cindy asked her.

“Don’t worry, I will make sandwich” she answered.

“Good, let’s go to the garden” Cindy said opening the door.

She felt elated as she entered the garden, there were so many ripe tomatoes to pick from.

They picked all the ripe tomatoes, then went for the eggs. They talked as they worked. Cindy answered all of her questions and she got to know that was how they behaved in the Circle house which was the name of their team. They did the work of police

and military and navy and air force. Mark was a naval officer while Fast was an air force officer.

“Halima” she heard Beast’s voice.

She did not even see him coming. Jason was standing by the door of the kitchen. Cindy went to meet him. Beast came closer to her. He was so big, she felt too small close to him but it made her feel safe.

“I’m off for a mission, I’m going to go with Jason and Ghost but Wild and Doc will be around”

“I know.”

“You are safe with Wild and Doc.”

“Please come back” she said throwing herself on him.

He did not push her away, he even pulled her closer.

“You don’t need to worry about that, just promise you will talk with Wild, he can help with your trauma.”

She nodded.

“But must Ghost go too? I don’t want him to get hurt.”

But Beast smiled, he was more handsome when he smiled.

“I see he had enchanted you already.”

“What’s that?”

“You like him.”

She nodded.

“Not as I like you.”

“Okay, let’s stop here. And don’t worry about Ghost” he said walking away.

She stood there for a long time.

“Halima” Cindy shouted her name from the kitchen door.

She picked the basket with eggs and went to meet Cindy. She stopped to carry the basket of tomatoes.

“We will take these to Church tomorrow” Cindy said carrying the tomatoes basket from her as she entered inside.

“Are you not afraid?” She asked Cindy.

“Other times but not today. He will not be on the ground.”

“What does that mean?” She asked.

“Don’t worry Halima, they will be okay. Wild is waiting for you” Cindy said going to the parlor.

“Hey Halima, come join me” Wild called to her pointing at a space on his seat. Sabrina was looking at the TV.

She went and sat down close to him and instead of feeling dread she felt safe.

“What’s that on your head and face?” she asked Sabrina.

“Oh it’s called hijab, I wear it when I’m off duty” Sabrina answered.

“I remember now. I used to wear it when I was little” she said.

“It’s part of our costume” Sabrina said.

“It’s not, it’s just that Hausa and Fulani have confused their costume with Islamic costumes” Wild said.

“I’m not even going to argue with you” Sabrina said.

“I heard you are now having traumas of your experience with Chief. Do you want me to help you stop having them?” Wild asked.

She nodded. Cindy sat down at a chair opposite Sabrina’s chair. Their chair was directly opposite the TV.

“Okay, I’m going to do that but I want you to choose from two options. If you want me go gradually, I will ask you questions, you will answer me and I will help you separate a trauma from reality, that could take weeks or months or I can make it stop as from today, but you may feel very scared and bad at first. But after few hours it will be over” Wild said.

“I can be free today?” she asked raising her head to look at him.

“But it will be hard for you” Wild answered.

“I don’t care. I want it today.”

“Okay. Look at the TV” Wild said.

She raised her head and gasped. It was a beautiful big room with many people. The chairs were arranged in a rectangular shape, there was just one person on one side of the smaller length.

Someone on military uniform was standing at his back. The

other sides were filled up. Even their backs had chairs and chairs with people with camera. There were microphones all over the table. Chief was sitting at the center of one of the length of the rectangle by the right which was opposite two men on military uniform and cap. One of the men on black uniform was making a speech. She saw another person, the one who gave her to Chief. She became afraid.

“Your fear is normal Halima. Yes that is Chief. Everything you are seeing is happening life. It is happening as you are watching it. Chief is trying to get you back. He wants us to release you so he can take you back and lock you up again, then he wants Beast to go to jail” Wild said.

She shook her head as her body vibrated from fear.

“Please don’t let him do that” she pleaded.

“I promise he will never get his hands on you, that is why you must take courage and watch what will happen to Chief and all his men. Watch how he will become afraid and shake from fear. Watch us destroy his empire and clan. Watch how he will be arrested. You need to watch everything so you will know he is just a weak man, he is just powerless and a nobody. But you can stop....”

“No, I will watch. You promise he will never get me?”

“Yes, and you will see it with your eyes.”

“I will watch.”

“Okay. Let’s go. Doc” Wild said.

The volume of the TV increased and she could hear the man.

“That’s is Major, he is Sabrina’s daddy and he is there to fight for you with his words and the flash drive you gave us.”

She nodded.

“So we had to keep it away from the public because of our suspicions and investigations which had not been completed” Major said.

The way he spoke was sounding familiar, there was something about his English pronunciations.

“I can boldly say, that is all lies. A propaganda by the military to protect a criminal and support my political enemy” Chief said.

His voice made her feel bad.

“I will want you to watch your words I’m the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces.” The man sitting alone said.

“That’s the president” Wild said.

“I’m sorry Mr. President. I will retrace my words and be specific. General Ahmed is not saying the truth” Chief said.

“The IG?” The president said.

“We have evidence to show that General Ahmed is protecting a criminal. Selected men of the police force carried out their investigations and we have proofs that Obinna, a military officer carried out a murder of Chief’s security men, we suspect he must have had an accomplice. Then he is a suspect of an attempted murder of Honorable Chief Esegie, arson and the kidnapping of one Miss Halima” the IG as the president called him said.

She gasped as she heard her name.

“But that is not true” she shouted.

“I know” Wild said.

“What of General Ahmed’s claims? Did you look into Halima?”

The president asked.

“Yes. She is an orphan who migrated from the North. Chief had rescued her from the street as a prostitute and gave her a good source of livelihood. Her landlady made the statement. She sometimes stayed in the boy’s quarters of Chief’s burnt building but the landlady had raised an alarm that she had not come back home hence leading to our investigation. One Mr. Onome, a witness had stated in a viral video which we also investigated that Miss Halima had ran to him for help and the said Obinna had prevented him from rescuing her. He is right now at University of Benin Teaching Hospital receiving treatment from a broken arm. I wrote a petition to the Chief of Defense Staff for the immediate release of Obinna which was rejected. The statement of General Ahmed is invalid because there is no proof and it does not tally” the IG said.

There was noise from the others which later stopped.

“But our tip was true and she showed signs of abuse, both sexually and physically and she had mentioned Chief Esegie as the man who had locked her up for fourteen years and raped her consecutively” Major said.

“It’s only Major that is saying the truth” she said.

“I know” Wild said.

Chief started laughing as people started whispering amongst themselves.

“I can’t believe how people can go so far to bring down a good man. Even though it had been a secret I have kept from the public, I’m being forced to say it out. I had a stroke fifteen years ago which rendered me incapable of sleeping with a woman” Chief shouted standing up.

The whole crowd started talking loud all pointing fingers at Major. But Chief was lying. She started crying.

CHAPTER THIRTY FOUR

{Do you suppose they are embarrassed over this outrage? No, they have no shame. There's no hope for them. They've hit bottom and there's no getting up. As far as I'm concerned, they're finished.}

Cindy tried coming over to her but Wild stopped her. He did not console her but allowed her to cry. The noise and shouts stopped after the other soldier shouted.

“Unfortunately, we are aware of your impotence Chief Esegie. But that does not change the investigation we carried out” Major said.

“This is arrant nonsense” the man that gave her to Chief shouted.

“That is Umaru” Wild said.

She nodded.

“Mr. President Sir, we need the immediate release of Obinna for interrogation. The Police Force should be allowed to carry out their duties” the IG said.

“I called General Ahmed after he and his team successfully stopped a bomb that could have killed millions from exploding, not to forget we lost General George, a gallant soldier during the battle. I called him and his team to look into a recent increase of robberies, kidnappings and assassinations all over the country, especially in the South South region. This was supposed to be the work of the police but after the IG reported that they could not trace the source of the high increase in weapons and crimes, tips came in that there may be a national threat because there were suspicions that the weapons were supplied by external illegal arms dealers from foreign countries, so I called General Ahmed to pick a team from the special force soldiers who are

trained on land, sea and air to look into it as it constitutes a national threat. General Ahmed is one of my must trusted commander. I was surprised to watch what was trending on social media and the news and I was more surprised that the accused is one of the best Nigerian soldier and one of the best of the Special Force. But because of how the IG and Honorable Esegie and the House of Assembly have handled the issue, I was forced to carry out an open briefing which have never happened in Nigeria. This is because the public have demanded transparency. Different embassies have stated their interest in the news that the Nigeria government is hiding a soldier from facing the law. The whole country is watching, the world is watching and I've listened to both reports.”

The president paused for some time.

“The accusations from General Ahmed are too heavy to overlook, and the evidence presented by the IG must also not be overlooked, I also watched Honorable Obi’s press briefing and read a lot from newspapers and listened to different analysis.

But numbers of men killed do not tally. According to the police, Obinna and an accomplice murdered eleven personal security guards of Honorable Esegie but according to General Ahmed, they had encountered at first, twenty eight heavily armed men and later, ten. So whose report should I belief? General, you need to address the issue of the witness” the President said.

“I’m not denying it” Major said.

They started making noise again.

“So you accept that she had escaped and asked for help?” IG asked.

“I won’t call it escape, she was still in a state of denial and could not even be debriefed because of her state of mind” Major said.

“So you agree that Honorable Esegie is impotent and you don’t deny Onome’s report. But you’ve refused to release Obinna and his accomplice” someone said.

“Yes but I can’t release Obinna because he and his team mate carried out the rescue under my command and I know she was an abused victim because the best team of the special force have a doctor and a psychologist. They crosschecked her and they are certain she was sexually abused and based on my conclusion, we are indicting Chief Esegie of being the man behind Ojogolo’s arm dealers, and also for kidnapping, physically and sexually abusing Miss Halima for more than fourteen years and.....”

The noise started again.

“And what is your proof?” IG asked.

“We had an hundred percent correct Intel” Major said.

“And you cannot reveal who gave you that information?” IG asked.

“Yes I can. Miss Halima was our Intel” Major said.

The noise increased this time.

“General Ahmed, is this a joke to you? You said I kidnapped and raped her and she was still the one to inform you she was kidnapped?” Chief shouted standing up.

“General please answer the question” the president said.

“Halima is one of the strongest lady I’ve experienced. She has been surprising us in many ways and her recovery has been tremendous and have beaten all debriefing protocols. This is how we came about Halima, although Chief was already in our

radar, we had no idea about the existence of Halima until this was found” Major said.

Her fudged message suddenly appeared on a big screen that was up and opposite the president. The TV became two, one showing the people and the other showing the big screen. She gasped. Those sitting behind it turned.

“This was discovered inside a broken clay pot and Obinna from enquiries, discovered Halima. I sent him and one of my men to get her out but they met heavily armed men who later bowed to their superior power. She was rescued but found it difficult to accept she was free from Chief” Major said.

Chief’s face was changing. Was that fear?

“That is a.....”

“I’m not through” Major said interrupting Chief.

“She could not be taken to Abuja for debriefing because of the seriousness of her situation and the fact that we needed to trace her origin. At first, it was difficult because the criminals we were looking for were very good in hiding their crimes, but my team was able to trace her state and in the process we were able to unravel three murder cases. First, Halima is supposed to be dead because her parents who were workers of Honorable Umaru were murdered and it had been circulated that she died alongside her brother. On further investigations, we discovered that she was actually a present from Umaru to Chief Esegie and we now have crucial evidence to back up our claim” Major said. Umaru and Chief stood up but there were soldiers at their back who made them to sit down. They were really afraid.

“Surprisingly this crucial evidence came from the same Halima. This is Halima with Chief and Umaru” Major said.

She was very small on the screen, it was the day her parents died and the day she was given to Chief but how did they get a picture?

“Then on further investigation, we discovered there was a link between Ojogolo arms dealers and the recent killings in the north which the victims have always been those close to Umaru, the most recent being the gruesome murder of Farouk and Umaru’s lawyer. Their whole family were not left out. But now we have evidence to prove that Umaru has been the perpetrator of all the murders” Major.

“Unbelievable, you lie” Umaru shouted but was pushed back to his seat.

Major pressed his phone and Umaru appeared on the screen. He was speaking with another man in a room and he told the man he was going to take a break because a soldier have messed up

his plan. He said the police will never be able to trace the killings to him. People started shouting. Umaru's eyes were wide, he was shaking.

“I'm not through. This is Mrs Osagie and her two children who were murdered even after the kidnappers were paid a ransom. With permission from her husband who is Chief's party member, I am going to play a video, some part have been blurred because of the violent contents.

“No, how? How?” Chief shouted trying to stand up but was pushed back.

The woman she had seen earlier was really dead. Chief had killed her and her kids. But only Chief's face showed on the video. She could not watch, she could not listen to what Chief was saying to the woman, she closed her ears with her palms and bent her head down.

“Look Halima” Wild commanded making her raise her head same time three gunshots were fired.

Tears started falling from her eyes but it looked like she was not the only one crying, Cindy was crying too. The people on the TV had burst out shouting. Some were already standing to attack Chief but some soldiers blocked them, but why? They should allow them beat him. But there was something about Chief. He was shaking and shouting no. She could not believe it was the same man she was afraid of.

“I have so many things to play but they are too terrible and unfortunately I had to go through them. But I have one more. Like I said my team are the best. The psychologist and doctor said it was possible that Chief even though impotent, had raped Halima for more than fourteen years. He could still function as

long as he physically abused her and also kept her afraid” Major said pressing something on his phone.

Thank God no one could see her. It was just Chief they could see. He was flogging her back, she wanted to run away, she did not want to watch it but she forced herself to look at the TV, to look at Chief and look at how he was shaking. Another one showed Chief pulling off his clothes, she was lying on the bed waiting for Chief to rape her but the video stopped and she was grateful.

“I don’t think we all want to continue this video. Sir this is John and Ojogolo, John is the man always found with Chief which raised our suspicions, we have videos proving they are also kidnappers and murderers. Mr. President, some of the best of my team are on ground. One is by Escravos River, another on air not far from where Ojogolo arms dealers are waiting to receive

weapons from their foreign supplier. Others are around Ojogolo's territory, we are all waiting for your command.

"I'm short for words. I will deal with the incompetence on the police force later. As of this time, Ojogolo's arms dealers and their suppliers are wanted dead or alive" the president said.

Chief was still shaking.

"Roger that. You heard him, return fire for fire" Major said pressing something on his phone.

She saw a boat, then Mark. He was by the edge of the boat, no one would know him because he wore something on his face. He was holding something big, but she was now seeing his head as if she was looking from the sky. There was a bigger boat close to his boat.

“This is the Nigerian Armed Forces. You are not permitted to go further, surrender your weapons” Mark spoke into the stuff he was holding.

Suddenly he was shot at, she gasped same time Mark dived into the water, there was a bag on his back. They had killed Mark, even the people on TV were also worried. The screen changed and showed a Helicopter, it was Fast. He covered his face and head too. The door was too open, but he was not afraid. There were many men on the ground, he threw something down from the helicopter and flew close to the men. They picked the stuff and looked at it. One of them lifted his gun and fired at Fast but the bullet did not even hit the helicopter, Fast flew it too fast. They all started firing at him and the helicopter but he was spinning it and the bullets were just hitting the body of the helicopter, he was the only one and he was going to be killed

like Mark. She did not see him bring out a gun, she could hardly see him with the way he was spinning the helicopter. She just knew that he was firing back because the men on the ground were falling one by one. In just few seconds, they were all dead and Fast flew high and was leaving the place. The whole crowd in the TV, apart from Chief and Umaru who were being held by soldiers, stood up and started shouting and clapping.

“Show off” Wild said.

“Big show off” Sabrina said.

Cindy held her chest smiling, she too was happy. Fast was safe but what of Mark?

The screen changed to the river. Mark was nowhere to be found but suddenly, the big boat was separating. She could hear some people screaming and some firing at the water. What was going on? Maybe a shark was attacking them. But it was not a shark

because the boat separated and one part was tumbled making those inside to fall inside the water, the other side was also tumbled and she was just seeing blood, it's like they stopped the voice because she could not hear anything. Like a minute later, nobody was moving, it was just blood. But suddenly Mark was back on his boat. He saluted.

“Mark” She shouted excitedly standing up.

Even those on the TV stood up clapping. Mark was alive.

“Another show off” Sabrina said.

She sounded jealous. The screen changed again but fear gripped her. There were gunshots everywhere. Someone was holding a long gun, he was about to shoot somebody but got shot from nowhere. She gasped standing up. It was Beast and Ghost the man was about to shoot. They were not even looking at him. They were backing each other and shooting as they turned, it

was as if they were glued together, people with gun were falling anyhow, either from Ghost or Beast or from the sky. Beast and Ghost were too fast in their spinning and they were shooting as they turned. People were running out with guns but they were not even allowed to shoot it. Ghost stopped shooting for some seconds and they stopped spinning. He was replacing something in his gun but Beast was still shooting, people about to fire at Ghost fell on the ground. Something was hitting them from the sky. It was just few seconds like she was blinking her eyes and they were spinning and shooting and moving forward. They stopped again and it was Beast that changed something in his gun but he was faster than Ghost. They were now very close to the house they were moving to. Everywhere was silent, no one came out.

“Halima don’t forget to breathe” Wild said.

She inhaled in some air.

“That’s is my Obinna” a man in the TV shouted standing up.

But their faces were covered, how did the man know it was
Beast?

“Politics” Wild said.

Someone came out of the house, his hands were raised up but he
was laughing.

“Hunter, Obgbuenhi, the beast, I finally get to meet you. I see
you came with your friend” he said laughing.

“I can see that is Ojogolo but why is he laughing?” the president
asked standing up.

“Because there is a bomb that will detonate in a minute and
there is no escape by land” Major said.

She did not know what he meant but people's reaction said it all.

They were going to die. She started crying.

“I am not Lord Nero, I know when I've lost. I've always known I will die one day but I know I will take down my killer. You killed my son, my men, you destroy my empire and you think I will let you go. Go on shoot me. Whether you shoot me or not we are all going to die.”

“Forty seconds more” Major said.

But then she heard the sound of the helicopter before she saw it. It was Fast. Beast and Ghost ran towards the center of the compound same time a rope was dropped. They were always too fast with everything. They were already on the rope and Fast started flying the helicopter away even as they were pulling themselves to the helicopter. Fast flew high and was out of the compound exact time there was a large noise and fire and the

whole building was exploding. She could not even see the person they had called Ojogolo. The smoke was even preventing her from seeing them.

“Situation report, over” Major said.

“Mission accomplished, replied fire for fire” Beast answered after some seconds.

“I hate smoke” Ghost said coughing and making everyone laugh same time clapping their hands and screaming and shouting Nigeria.

“Copied. Over and out” Major said pressing his phone.

The screen turned white, but people were still clapping. She ran to Cindy and hugged her. She had even forgotten about Chief.

“We need a doctor” somebody shouted from the TV making her turn. It was Chief, he was vibrating seriously.

“Get doctors from the clinic” the president told someone.

Nobody moved towards Chief, they just watched him shake. A doctor ran over to him same time Chief stopped shaking.

He checked him with something he pulled out from his neck and shook his head.

“He is gone” the doctor said.

People started talking and shouting.

“Did you hear that Halima. Doc what does the doctor mean by that?” Wild asked.

“It means Chief is dead” Sabrina said.

Was she supposed to be sad? Why was she happy, why was she shedding tears of joy. Was she that bad?

“Halima there is nothing wrong with what you are feeling now” Wild said.

“I’m free, I’m free” She cried falling on the ground.

Cindy started robbing her back.

“Congratulations Halima, you can’t see him again, he can’t flog you again. You know why?” Wild asked raising her up.

She nodded.

“Tell me” Wild said.

“Chief is dead”

“Very good”

“Wild, the president” Sabrina said.

She looked at the TV same time Sabrina increased the volume.

Chief was being carried away on a flat stuff and Umaru was being chained. His hand was pulled back and something was used to chain it by a female soldier, she looked manly.

“This is a clear warning to corrupt politicians that are giving Nigeria, a great country with gallant soldiers a bad name on international front. We will no longer tolerate it and Nigeria is no longer a safe ground for criminals whether internally or externally. Especially foreign dealers who see Nigeria as a country for their business. Nigeria army has improved greatly and we have the Special Force and their best team with first class graduates, scoring more than ninety percent in every training and the army as a whole will continue to defend our motherland from those who would threaten her citizens and security. We appreciate the naval officer, the air force officer and the soldiers...”

His voice was swallowed by round of applause with people screaming Nigeria. Sabrina went to switch off the TV.

“What’s now your problem?” Wild asked.

“The president is overrating those idiots” Sabrina said.

She liked saying that.

“When will they come back?” She asked Wild.

“They are on their way but do you want to wait or you want us to go now?” Wild asked.

“I don’t understand” she said.

He made her sit down and squatted in front of her.

“Halima listen to me very well. Beast’s work is over. He is supposed to keep you until Chief is arrested. It’s now over and you need to come with me to the Circle house for rehab. That’s were Doc can do a proper checkup” Wild said.

“No” She and Cindy said at the same time.

“I am not going. I want to stay with Beast” she said.

“You can’t Halima. Beast has to return to his house and his life, you need to get rehabilitated into the society” Wild said.

“No” she said shaking her head.

She ran to her room and closed the door. She started crying.

Beast could not do that to her. She was not ready to face the world, in fact, she did not want to. She did not know how long she sat by the wardrobe but she heard a knock on the door after the person could not open it.

“Halima is me Obinna” Beast said.

She rushed to the door and threw herself on him crying. He took her inside the room and made her sit down on one of the chairs.

He sat opposite her. He was still in his uniform but had removed the thing on his head and face.

“Halima...”

“Don’t tell me to go. Don’t push me away. My heart wants to stay with you forever. I am following you to wherever you are going to” she said.

“But that is not possible Halima. We have to go our separate way.”

“But I love you” she cried.

“And my heart still belong to Abigail even though she is dead, she still holds my heart Halima. Don’t worry, I promise you one thing, this your feelings will soon fade, just give it sometime.

You are the first victim they want to keep at the circle house, you have Sabrina and others.”

“What of you?”

He did not answer for some time. Somehow she knew what he was thinking. Fear gripped her.

“Beast please don’t, please. Okay let’s make a deal.”

“What deal?”

“I promise to leave with Wild and listen and do everything they tell me to, only if you promise not to kill yourself.”

“Who told you that?” He looked surprised.

“Cindy. If you don’t take it no deal and don’t think about forcing me because I will hold on to you and even after you’ve left I will never eat again, I will starve to death.”

He looked at her for a long time.

“You are serious!” he exclaimed.

“You promise to get rehabilitated into society, learn a work and make friends and to never have nightmares or traumas again?”

“Only if you will stay alive.” she answered.

He did not say anything for long. It looked like he was thinking hard.

“It’s gonna be hard but I will try keep myself busy and stay alive.”

She hugged him and cried herself out.

As she entered what Cindy called a jeep after she had given Cindy a tearful goodbye hug and after Beast had helped put her bag inside the booth, she saw Beast standing by the door of their house. Cindy was being held close by Jason, she waved at her as she cried. She waved back at Cindy and allowed the tears to fall from her eyes. As the jeep left the compound, she felt a hole in her heart, she held her heart. It hurt so much to leave Beast but she knew she had made the right choice. It did not matter how much her heart hurt, she could bear it as long as Beast stayed alive.

CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE

{God might get their attention through pain, by throwing them on a bed of suffering.}

It had been three months since Halima was driven out of the compound while he stood close to the house they had shared. His heart had felt like it was tearing as she disappeared from sight. Every day had felt empty more than it was when he had lost Abigail, every day had felt like he was missing something. His house felt emptier and life was boring and looked like a bottomless dark pit. At a time, he regretted the promise he had made to Halima because he felt worse each passing day. There were few missions where they had intercepted cocaine dealers on their way to Nigeria. He did not contact her even when he was told she now had a phone but followed up on her

development. She had chosen to learn fashion and designing. But he had dreamt about her many times, he had felt like seeing her again, holding her in his hands and kissing her again. He had hoped it would stop but even after three months, it was still there. He had remembered the little girl he didn't help. He had also watched the video of George and it had explained everything. There was no way those anybody could have gotten close to their camp without George being aware. The first people were from the Special Force, about ten of them. George had thought they were backup but they had given him the wrong code because they were not aware the code had been changed. George had killed ten of them even before the company men arrived. Nick had been in the scene after George was killed by Tiger who actually was a coward. All the special Force defectors were carried away before Jason arrived because Nick knew the implication. The file was extracted from George's flight bird.

The intriguing thing was George had died smiling like he was about to sleep. That video had calmed him down and healed his pain of losing George.

He was back from doing some clearing at the back of his house and went to his mum's room. He did not even know why he was there. Her bible which had a case with zip was on her bed. It had been there all the time. Even after cleaning the room, he always left it there because that was exactly where she had left it. He remembered what Jason had told him about his mother's quote and picked the bible to check it out. He unzipped the case and discovered there was something inside the bible, the place the quote came from had a folded paper. He brought out the paper and opened it.

'Dear Obinna, King of the Beast,' was the first thing he saw.

It was written two weeks before she died. He sat down on the bed and started reading.

‘If you are reading this, it means I’ve translated to heaven. Don’t cry too much, be happy because I have gone to rest. My only worry is you. I keep worrying about how you will live, will you be good or become bad? What does the future hold for you?

Every day, I go to church and pray for God to direct your path.

Then I had a dream, but I don’t know whether to call it a nightmare or a vision. I was in a dark room but it was somehow blue and there was a very big native pot, and a dark little girl was sitting inside and she was crying. I tried to move towards her but I was frozen. Then I saw you by the door, you were just the way you are now. Anytime you took a step towards her, you became bigger and matured, so was she, but you looked like someone out of control. I was counting your steps. You seemed

very happy when you took your twelfth step, but the girl in the native pot was still crying. As you took your thirteenth step, you fell on your knees, you were in so much pain and tears flowed freely from my eyes because I could not console you. I did not even know why you were in so much pain. You had to struggle to take the fourteenth step which led you to her outstretched hand which you held. You carried her out of the big pot but you were still in pains. Gradually, you became better and as you took her out of the room, I knew your pain was over, you were happy. When I woke up, I became confused. It was so real, I dream sometimes but there was something about this dream. I went to Rev Oke and told him my dream. He said that could never be just a dream but he had no interpretation but he will pray to find interpretation. He told me you need to come see him. Just few days after my dream, I saw them selling the last native pot from one Chief Esegie, I had a pull to get some. Even when I knew

our old ones were still okay, I could not resist buying some.

When I got home, I felt like giving you one of the pots before you travel. Maybe that pot will make you meet that girl. I could not tell you my dream because you will make fun of it and ignore it. But I had to write it down. I know you will listen to me because I'm dead. Although I don't understand my dream, I know there might be a link to that pot and the girl in the dark room and inside a big pot. I don't know what brought joy to you and why you felt that pain but I was relieved because there was light at end of the tunnel. You found happiness again. Go and see Rev after reading this. He might have gotten an answer for you. I've tried to interpret my dream my own way and I have left this ring for her. It has been in my family and passed on to our first daughters but I don't have a daughter. Give it to her when you find her. My final prayer for you is that you find God on a personal level. And your father killed a Tiger not a bull, I

had hoped it will prevent you from hunting bulls. I love you so much.

Your Mum.

He read it over and over again. The ring was there in the bible. His mum silver ring.

He ran all the way to his pick up and sped over to the Anglican Church. The last time he was there was for his mum's funeral before she was taken to her hometown, Iseluku for burial. His wedding had taken place in Ogwashiku Abigail's hometown and he never followed her to church when she had moved in. It had been renovated and was bigger. But he did not meet Rev Oke, he was told he passed on five years ago. As he left the vicarage the current priest called him.

“Are you Obinna?” he asked.

He turned and nodded.

“I have something for you. Just wait” he said going back inside.

He came out later with an envelope.

“Rev Oke left this for you. He said you will come looking for him one day and I should give you this” the Priest said giving him the envelope.

He quickly opened it. There was a short note inside.

“FOURTEEN STEPS, FOURTEEN YEARS, TWELVTH
YEAR ABIGAIL, PAIN, HALIMA’

He had written it down thirteen years ago.

Without looking at the Priest, he ran to his pickup. He touched his cheek, those were definitely tears. How? Why? That damn letter had been with him for fourteen years. He could have saved

her earlier. Abigail would have still been alive. Suddenly, he remembered the old woman who had talked about the real gift.

“It was definitely not the pot, the gift was the girl in the pot” he said wiping the tears from his eyes.

So it was definitely not a coincidence but that left him more confused. He had so many questions but no answer. He had not doubted the existence of God, but he had also not believed. If only George was alive, he would have been in the best position to answer his questions. George was a Christian to the core and always prayed about everything. But then he remembered Jason. Jason had started believing in miracles. He was someone he could have vouched for with his life that he would never believe in miracles or anything supernatural. Not just because he had doubts, but because his brain and way of thinking was all logical,

everything must give him one plus one two. But he had changed, Jason might help.

He arrived at Benin around 11:03AM. He had informed Jason that he was coming. Cindy was very happy to see him and her pregnancy was beginning to show. Jason had instantly noticed something was wrong.

“Can we talk?” he asked.

Jason nodded. He walked towards the ring and sat down on it, Jason joined him few seconds later. He gave Jason his mum’s letter and after he was through reading it, he gave him Rev Oke’s words.

“That thing has been with me for fourteen years, Halima could have been freed earlier and I wouldn’t have met Abigail” he said rubbing his forehead.

“You saw it exact time you were supposed to see it Tamed.”

“What do you mean?”

“Some dreams which are visions are already stamped and nothing can change it. There are instances like that from the bible, Isaiah’s vision of the messiah is one. Nothing could have changed it. From what I read, yours could not have been changed even if you had seen it. To find Halima, that pot needed to be broken and you wouldn’t have known to break the pot. It was like God showed your mother fourteen years of your life, a projection into the future and it was confirmed by a second witness who gave an accurate interpretation without even meeting Halima. It was already decided and I think you saw this at the right time, because you can’t doubt it. Now you seek answers which you wouldn’t have done if you had seen it before

meeting Halima. I know this is not the reason you came. You came because you need answers.”

“Then tell me if you know. Why? Why did God allow my mum to die? Why Abigail? Why did I have to meet her? Why did she have to die because of me? Why Halima’s parents? Why did Halima suffer for more than fourteen years even after praying everyday till she lost her memory? Why?”

Jason did not answer, instead he controlled his flight bird to the ring and caught it with his hands. He patted it and let it fly back.

“It’s not just you Tamed. I had same questions. Why did my parents who loved God so much die by accident? Then the common ones people ask are why are there so much evil? Why so much death, disasters, sickness? What kind of God ignores the pains of his people? And so many others. I even had the question on why God created people like me. I did not even

believe in the existence of God then. My mum told me I will find Him one day, just like you are about to.”

He flew the bird to him again.

“I’m also a creator you know. Right now the Special Force employs first class graduates from different sciences to help with the production of some of this gadgets but I always do the software programming and the best robots are known as AI intelligence, we are trying to create something with freewill, something that can work on its own but even at that, they still need to be programmed making them dependent. But God who is the greatest creator gave us complete freewill, we are not programmed, we are allowed to behave the way we want, whether to serve him or hate him it’s by choice, our freewill only ends with death. Then why are people not asking God to take away our freewill and remote us like robots? My mum and

dad died because a drunken man decided to drive a trailer, freewill. Abigail died because Lord Nero's men shot her, freewill. Your mum died because of an incurable disease which our freewill brain have not gotten a solution to. If it was my bird, I must look into what is causing the malfunctioning because I created it and it is programmed and not completely free. I tell it what to do. But it's not so with humans. Our actions and inactions have consequences that affect others and it's not God who programmed those actions." Jason said.

"Then why do people pray if God won't help? What's the use?"

"Who told you He does not answer?" Jason asked.

"Seriously? My mum died of cancer, Halima was abused for more than fourteen years and Abigail and George have always asked God to keep them safe."

“That is a wrong answer. I asked who told you God did not answer those who prayed to Him?”

“I just did. They died?”

“We want freewill and still want to control God’s way to answer. His ways are not our ways Tamed. And his thoughts for us are always good to give us an expected end. Our own is to pray but God answers are based on what is best because we believe he knows ahead.”

“I don’t understand?”

“It is appointed unto man once to die and after that Judgment. Death is an appointment and if you look into it, it’s more of how they died, and what age they died that hurts us but that is their appointment Tamed. Cindy was right. Even though Abigail could have been saved, it does not mean you were wrong. It was an appointment. Although we have freewill, there are those who

he has chosen. Some call it fate. You were supposed to meet Abigail, she was supposed to die that day because that was her appointment. Meeting you and stabilizing you at a time you were going AWOL was her purpose and she went back to her creator when it was time. God did not sent Lord Nero, he only permitted it. We care too much about someone's age forgetting everybody must die. Some it was not how they would die that was appointed but that they will die and it's not about age. My parents' works were over, that was why God allowed it. No matter how you live your life, whether you abuse the freewill or not, you will still die and God only intervenes when it's not time. It was not time for Cindy and I that was why we scaled through that civil war mission but it was time for George. I came to the realization that it has nothing to do with age because I had a sister."

That was new. He had never heard about it.

“She died the day she was born. But that was her appointment because she had fulfilled her purpose. If she was not conceived, my mum would never have met Cindy’s mum. My mum said the only reason she had listened to Cindy’s mum was because she saw Cindy as a consolation. There was no way she would have taken Cindy in if my sister had survived. She would have sent her to the orphanage. Without Cindy, I would never be close to normal, I will not be talking to you now. Stop making your mum and Abigail so special and forcing God to take responsibility for their deaths. If you believe they were very close to God and God should have given them preferential treatment then you should have studied how those very close to Him died. From historical records none of the disciples died old or peaceful apart from John. All the others died painful deaths. Peter was crucified

upside down, one was dragged towards different directions by horses and was torn to pieces and some were beheaded and they actually died because of Jesus Christ not because of sickness, or accident or criminals, yet none of them questioned God or blamed him. They happily died and even Stephen prayed to God to forgive his killers. But it was the same God that saved Daniel from the lion's den. Was Daniel too special? It was because it was not his appointment. He had not written the visions that are even yet to be fulfilled. I had studied so many earthquakes, explosions, collapse of buildings and many other mass disasters and most of them had an unexplainable events or stories of a survivor or survivors which everybody called a miracle. God said He will show mercy or compassion to who he chooses and that can explain such situations. Some people have actually hastened their appointments or other people's appointment, like bombers, killers and drunks. But if God chose to permit it, if

God decided to allow them die, it's to His gain Tamed. You can never love Abigail or your mum more than God. You wanted them to stay with you, God wanted them to come home. We are the ones losing not God, he has simply taken his own home and there is nothing you can do about it. He knows it will cause us pain, it will make us hurt that is why we are told that it's okay to feel pain but not like those who God had no hand in their doom because they've gone to be with God and it's not that we will never see them again. Even Muslims understand this. You never see them question God for the death of their relatives, they always called it the will of Allah, but some Christians get angry at God for any little thing. God did not kidnap Halima Tamed, Chief did. God answered her prayer long time ago Tamed, it's just that the instrument was not ready. As long as we are in this world, evil men will remain and that is why people like us do our best to stop them. Even when bible said God answered

Isaac's prayer for a child, the next verse said he was sixty when Jacob and Esau were born, a big twenty year gap from when he prayed. Stop trying to understand God with your human knowledge because to God one plus one can be three. God is not a math problem you solve and have a corresponding answer. My gadgets can't malfunction and force me to fix it the way it wants. It just shows that something it's wrong with it and I decide if I want to fix it or let it rest. My decisions have always been what it's best for me, for my operation not what is best for my gadget. George had always said he always pray to God to protect him but he knows that one day God is gonna say no George, this time come home son. And who is he to say no when his father calls? I understand him now" Jason said standing up.

"I'm still not there yet you know. I need Cindy" he said leaving the ring.

He did not cry when his mum died, he only felt heavy pain. He did not cry when Abigail died, he shouted and screamed and felt rage but he was crying now. Men must not cry, it was a sign of weakness but he was crying.

“Mum finally your prayers have been answered. I’ve found God. I’ve found Halima, they are the true gift right?” he said crying.

For the first time in fourteen years, he prayed. For the first time in more than a year he felt peace, he felt life in his dead heart.

The time was past twelve when he left the ring but he had time, he was going to drive like he had never driven before straight to the Circle house.

CHAPTER THIRTY SIX

{Restless in bed and sleepless through the night, I longed for my lover. I wanted him desperately. His absence was painful but then....}

The circle house had turned out to be more than she expected. They had occupied her and helped a little with her boredom, her emptiness and loneliness. She would never allow Fast to drive her again. The helicopter scare was enough. He was crazy. What people called over speeding was Fast slowest. Mark had taken her on a boat ride across the river and she had felt free. He was always immersed in computers and their big and deep swimming pool. She rarely saw Sabrina because Wild said she was on an undercover mission in Lagos which Mark always visited to taunt her. She had been put inside a machine that rolled her inside something. Sabrina had said she was checking

her vitals, later she was told she was very healthy. Major Ahmed and Wild had helped establish her and she was able to choose fashion and designing. Major Ahmed's wife was very welcoming and she sometimes paid Major and wife a visit.

Ghost was a different case entirely. There was hardly a time she did not laugh when Ghost was around. He had given up on her after several failed attempts to teach her on how to open a door with a hairpin. She loved to cook for them and loved the way they consumed everything, and above all, she felt safe. She had so many brothers and two sisters. A mother and a father. Wild was always odd, she could not figure him out. She told him so many things but he hardly talked about himself. One day, she had asked him about his family.

"I just have a wife" he had responded.

That had shocked her.

“But how come I have never seen her, where is she?”

“That’s the problem Halima, I don’t know where she is. I’m still looking for her” Wild had answered confusing her.

“But where is your ring?”

“Could only afford one then, I gave it to her but it was too big so I had to make it a necklace, it should fit her now” he had answered.

That was when she gave up. Wild was too complicated for her understanding.

The media had carried on the story of her and Chief but only the one picture Chief had posted that was circulated but most times, she was forced to wear hijab to prevent being noticed.

The IG was replaced. The fake landlady was convicted. The trial of Umaru and Abdul had been so swift. Umaru’s house was

even attacked but the police were able to prevent the murder of his family. Umaru and Musa were sentenced to death while Abdul was sentenced to life imprisonment. She had learnt a lot. She had learnt how to operate an android phone. Mark had patiently taught her the basic things to know about a laptop and so many others. She even had her android wrist watch and most times, one of her free brothers escorted her to where she was going. She started going to a large Pentecostal church not too far from the Circle house but did not make herself known to the pastors, she was just a regular member. She was no longer afraid of the elevator that pulled her down or up the underground and four storey building. Her training was for six months, she was through with tailoring and was now learning how to make bags, hats and shoes. Everything had been okay except her heart. No matter how busy and happy they made her feel, she still felt empty especially at night. Most times, she could not sleep, some

days, she had to imagine Beast wrapping her in him before she could sleep, some days she just cried and prayed. Beast had said she would soon forget him but he was wrong, everyday became worse. The nightmare and traumas were no longer there, except on few occasions but it had been Chief who was shaking with fear. Even Jason had been to the house a few times, one of the days, Cindy had come with him, she was so happy to see her second sister. Her stomach was getting big. But Beast never showed up, he never called even after Wild had sent her number to him. She talked to Cindy almost every day and always missed her.

She could scale through the day but always feared the night and night was coming. It was already past seven. Wild, Ghost, Mark and Fast were currently around and she had prepared ewedu soup for them. She had no idea where they were, she

could guess for others but not Ghost. It did not take long for her to understand the meaning of his name. She needed some fresh air. She used the elevator to go up. Mark and Fast were playing shooting game in the big parlor. Her puppy which was a gift from Ghost to cement their brother sister relationship was resting in-between them like it was enjoying their shouts and the noise from the game.

“Puppy come over” she said whistling to the dog.

Fast had said puppy was a funny name but it was her choice.

“Where to?” Mark asked as she moved close to the door.

He was still focused on the game.

“The garden and the field, I need some fresh air.”

“Stay safe” Fast said but was very focused on his game.

There was money on the table. She shook her head, they always bet before any game. She carried puppy and went outside. She dropped him as soon as they came outside. The night was a bit chilly and she rubbed her arms with her palms. There was an alley which they said led to their farm where they produced so many gadgets. Workers could only get there through the other side. She walked by it but after some seconds, she turned and saw puppy running inside.

“Hey puppy come here” she said but the puppy did not listen.

It was like it was chasing something. She followed puppy down the alley and discovered it was a bird. Anytime puppy got close, the bird flew few distance and stopped. She pursued after puppy and when she got to what they called T-junction which had three alleys, one at her front, the other two by her sides, she heard a

voice she knew so well. The alley the voice came from, was dark and she had forgotten to carry her phone to light her path.

“Halima” the voice said.

She could not see anybody because it was too dark. He was not there, she was just imagining his voice and if she continued like that, Wild would soon take her to a psychiatrist hospital. She carried puppy and turned to go back.

“Halima” the voice called again.

“This is not real, I’m imagining it. Halima stopped thinking too much” she said dropping puppy and slapping her two ears.

“Stop hurting your ears. You know you just gave me a scare, please don’t do this in another place. Apart from the circle house don’t ever go wondering on your own” he said.

He was at her back, she could feel the heat radiating from him but it still felt like it was not real. She tried turning to confirm her sanity but was held back by strong hands.

“My name is Obinna, I have done so many things that are even hard for me to believe. I came from a family of hunters. My dad died as a result of injuries he sustained from killing a tiger. My mum told me it was a bull to prevent me from hunting bulls but it did the opposite in me. I hunted bulls because of same reason, I wanted revenge and I had hoped to wipe out bulls from existence. When I got a little hint that my grandfather was a fisherman, I went fishing and did a lot of dangerous things that gave my mum a scare. But I became bored because I could not run or climb inside water. I could not descend on animals the way I landed on bulls from the tree with my injections ready. I fought both humans and animals and most times, it was for fun.

It was to test my capabilities. The woman I brought a lot of joy to was the same woman I brought a lot of tears to. She always woke up each day with the thought of the trouble I would bring next. I have killed a lot of people and I have no remorse killing them, sometimes it made me excited. I met a girl called Abigail at a time I was totally out of control. I would provoke criminals I was not supposed to kill, just to make them take the first shot, then I would go on rampage and showed no mercy. Some call me Ogbuenhi, a reincarnation of my great grandfather, some call me Tamed because of what Abigail did on me. She was killed and I lost it, I lost my heart to her death, but I met a girl. She called me Beast and refused to change it. At first, I thought my feelings were due to the closeness, but now I know it's real, now I know she is a precious and priceless gift. I have a new heart now and the only one I want to hold it is the girl I met. But I'm sacred to ask her, I'm worried she would not accept this Beast

that I have become. I will try and change but I need her to keep my heart and make it Tamed again” Beast said.

He opened her left palm and placed something cold. She looked at it and gasped. It was a silver ring.

“Halima please marry me.”

“Are you for real?”

She could not think of anything else to ask. He pulled her closer as a response. The connection was instant.

“Can I turn now?”

He chuckled and it made her body tingle.

“Only if you say yes I will marry you” he answered.

“But that is not how they do it. You are doing it the wrong way.”

“Please correct me.”

“The man stands in front of the woman, then goes on one knee and he gives the woman flowers and a ring and ask will you marry me? That is it. You keep doing things like a beast” she complained.

He chuckled again. It was like he was not aware of the effect it had on her. He slowly turned her to face him. Thank God they were not in the dark alley. She could see him, he was looking so handsome and so big but she liked him big.

“Then we will need to look for flowers outside, we cave men are still learning. I’ve never proposed before you know. Abigail had asked me to choose our wedding day between two dates. That saved me from proposing. Hmm, flowers, kneeling down, oh the ring” he said opening the palm with the ring.

“What are you doing?” she protested folding her palm more tightly.

“You just lectured me on how to propose” he answered.

She held on to the ring, he might change his mind and disappear with the ring if she gave it to him.

“Don’t worry, I’m okay with the proposal. Leave the flowers. You know you did not actually meet me, you saved me.”

“Halima?”

“Yes?”

“I’m waiting.”

“Oh when is the wedding?” she asked.

His face lighted up and he pulled her for a breath choking embrace.

The first person to know was Cindy, she had told him she would talk to Pastor Sam to join them together in their compound. They had planned everything that evening and Beast

seemed surprise she wanted them to stay in Cindy's compound. She could not believe he even thought she would follow him to his cave. Jason had sent him a message on the rent he would be paying. All her brothers apart from Wild had been so shocked that they had launched a search for Tamed. Later they accepted Tamed was gone, it was her beast that was now around. Beast told her everything that led him to God and her. It made her cry, it made her believe she was not an accident, her guardian was always with her. She was so happy for him but she tried to console him when he told her about the little girl he had left to wonder in the night.

A week later, they held their small wedding at the compound. Mark had said it was not going to rain. Mama Sunday had been invited and she had shouted very loud when she heard George was dead, they had to start consoling her. But Jason had

wondered why she never saw it on the news. As Mama Sunday represented Beast's mother, Ghost had acted as her father because Major and wife would only come for reception because of their religion which they respected. Pastor Sam was so easy to be with and he was funny and love radiated from him. The reception was held in the evening.

The reception had a full house, it was bliss and it made tears of joy fall from her eyes. Mark and Cindy sang together then, differently. Mark just had to be good in everything. She had danced with all her brothers, including her daddy except Jason. But she understood.

"Take my hands, take all I have, cause I can't stop, falling in love with you" Mark started singing as Beast finally took her back.

The song was so cool and sweet, and Beast spun her slowly to the rhythm of the song. Fast was playing the keyboard. Nature even came for her reception, because there were so many stars and the moon was full. The music changed to something fast and she and Beast excused them to their house, to her new home. She was going to get sick from being too happy.

“Hey lady, did you just know what you got yourself involved in, you are bound to a beast for life” Beast said pulling her to him as soon as they got to their room.

He covered her mouth with his before she could respond. All thoughts disappeared from her brain as the sensation rushed through her, she gave as much as she took. Beast temporarily pulled away and looked at her.

“I promised to get better and....”

“No no don’t say it, I don’t ever want you tamed, I love you like this. Please remain the king of the beast, the beast that gives evil men like Chief sleepless nights, don’t ever be tamed” she said cutting him off.

He stared at her as if he was going to cry.

“I love you Halima.”

He had said so many things but she was sure this was the first time he said he loved her. He said it but her body felt it, her heart was painful, it would break because the feelings were too much for her small heart.

“I love you my beast” she said pulling him for another kiss, he left her mouth and kissed her ear, her nose, her neck.

“Tell me what you want from me” he said lifting her to him and placing her on the bed.

“I want everything, I want you to touch me, I want every part of me to be replaced by your touch, I want you to remove Chief completely from my skin, show me something different from what I’ve known for more than fourteen years” she said unbuttoning his shirt.

“Your wish is my command” Beast said.

CHAPTER THIRTY SEVEN

{Distress that drives us to God does that. It turns us around. It gets us back in the way of salvation. We never regret that kind of pain. But those who let distress drive them away from God are full of regrets, end up on a deathbed of regrets.}

His wrist watch vibrated waking him up. Halima was sleeping on top of him. He stared at her sleeping face for some time ignoring his wrist watch. He could never have envisaged the peace and joy he was having. He could never have predicted his heart could heal again and his pains would be forgotten. She thought he saved her, but she had saved him. They had both been saved. If he had not broken the native pot, by now he would have been dead. He would have been among the people who God had no hand in their doom. Not many people got

healed like him. Now he understood that in all his pains and agonies, he was special because God had planned ahead for him. He had finally let Abigail go because she was through with her mission and he would go through everything again as long as it would lead him to Halima. That was because he now understood better. From the little he now knew about heaven, Abigail wouldn't even want to come back. As for his house and land, he would think of what to do with them. Halima's happiness came first.

They should be in a hotel but it was so difficult to explain it to Halima. She could not understand why she had to leave her house to a room and bed many people have used before and when she had been told it was called honeymoon and it was mostly a two weeks lone time to be together before starting their normal life, she had said she wanted to start normal life

immediately and she had also said an hotel would be more populated than their house. He just had to give up. His wrist watch vibrated again making him raise his hand to look at what was wrong. He jerked up immediately, raising Halima with him. He gently shifted her inside the bed and started putting on his clothes. He picked his phone and called Jason, texting might delay.

“What is the function of that black band when activated? Apart from tracking, what else can it do?” he asked as soon as Jason picked the call.

Thank God he had picked.

“Beast it’s past twelve, I thought it was an emergency” Jason responded.

He sounded very sleepy.

“It is, the person I gave it to just activated it” he said checking the weapons in his bag and transferring some to his shoes and pocket.

“Put on your tools, you will soon know, just get moving, I will connect it to your pickup” Jason responded.

He had finally woken up.

“Okay” he said cutting the call.

“Hey Beast where are you going?” Halima shouted as soon as he got to the door.

“Halima, the girl I told you about just activated a band I told her to use when she needs help.”

‘Go, hurry, please hurry’ she said.

There was panic in her eyes. He wanted to go back and tell her to be calm but there was no time. He dialed Doc’s line as soon

as he came outside. He had almost crushed puppy, Halima's dog. Doc might handle her more than him. Luckily for him, she picked.

"Hey what newly wedded man calls another..."

"Doc join me at my pickup immediately, it's an emergency."

Doc cut the call even before he could do it and just seconds later, she was running towards the gate to meet up. Her circle bag was with her.

"Situation report" Doc said.

He connected his tools and switched on his pickup computer.

Jason had connected it and it was almost same place he had saved her. The gate opened and he drove with full speed.

"I saved a seven years old girl from two men. You won't believe she was fighting them. Her wildness took me aback and I could

only give her some money and my hand band to call for help because she refused to listen to me when I told her to never fight again. I should have found out more but it had escaped me then.”

“I guess she had activated the band, but you can handle the situation why calling me?”

“Wait till you meet her, she scares me, someone like you can help”

Doc started laughing.

“I can see she really scares you” Doc said.

“You can now hear what is going on” Jason said.

“We go share the money equal, this kind chance nor dey come easy. Police nor go ever look for am, her ashawo mama dey sick” a man said.

He was past Oluku, already at Isihor.

“How much Agege won pay? This one healthy and get energy, and she even fine pass her Mama” another one said.

“Jason connect to the app immediately and Doc put on your tools, you need to hear this.” he said.

“Na two hundred thousand na. She still small she never ripe na” a third person said.

“Who tell you, I hear say some of them like the girls small” a fourth person said.

“So how we won do the waka now, how we go take transfer am to Lagos, I don call Agege already” the first man said.

“Shit” Doc said.

“What the heck is going on?” Wild asked.

“Can’t explain now” he said.

He was now very close to Boundary Road.

“Cowards, fight me one on one and I will win all of you, all of you had to fight me same time. Cowards” Pearl shouted.

The girl was unbelievable.

“I must be dreaming or something is wrong with my ears. You guys just heard a child’s voice right?” Ghost asked.

“I thought I was the only one” Mark said.

“Even me” Fast said.

“Who was that?” Major asked.

They were now all awake. Soldiers didn’t ever sleep deep.

“This pikin nor dey fear oh!” the third man exclaimed.

“You nor see my face? Who teach am how to fight?” the fourth man asked.

“And she nor dey fear at all” the second man said.

“Guy we go need put am to sleep” the first man said.

“Fight me one on one you cowards. Give me my mother’s money or I will kill you” she shouted.

He heard a smack that made him wince, Doc had the same reaction. But Pearl started laughing.

“He is coming, I know he will come and you all are like chicken in front of a lion, run away before he comes. Cowards” she screamed this time.

“I’m dreaming” Ghost said.

“Now I am also scared” Doc said.

He stopped the pickup. They were at one uncompleted building.

“This girl dey normal so? She nor dey cry” the first man said.

Someone was about to smack her face but Doc fired at his hand.

He was even shocked at Doc’s action. Others would be able to

see through their camera. He quickly shifted away same with Doc. It was necessary to found out if they had guns. He and Wild were terrible teachers. Doc wanted to provoke them enough to kill. But they did not fire back, they were not with gun. Maybe knives and daggers. The man Doc fired at was screaming so loud.

“He is here” Pearl shouted same time the both of them entered inside.

Pearl was tied with a rope which prevented her from moving. A black school bag was close to her. There was no way she could have activated the band in that position except she had done it before they had overpowered her. He was a bit calm before but seeing her bruised cheek and arm brought rage.

He looked at the four idiots already resting their backs on a wall all looking for a way to escape. Pearl was right, they were

cowards, they were not even thinking of fighting considering their numbers.

“Unbelievable” Fast exclaimed.

“I am not going to beat the four of you cause I will definitely punch to kill. I will let Doc deal with you” he said as they cawed in fear from his voice.

He mentioned Doc for a reason, she was known as Sabrina in her undercover mission. He bent down to cut the rope.

“And you think I will spare them? I just need one.”

Good thing Doc had covered her face, it could blow her cover.

He ignored Doc and loosened the rope.

“What did I tell you about wondering alone in the night?” He used a stern voice as he helped her to stand up.

She did not answer but smiled.

“You are really slow. You came late” she answered.

And before he could respond to her ungratefulness, she sprang on the men using the blocks close to them as a lift. She hit the injured one right in his neck, exact place needed to knock one out and she was on the second person almost immediately leaving him with an open mouth.

“What the heck?” Wild said.

“Let me wipe my eyes and look again” Ghost said.

The third and fourth men must have forgotten they were there as they tried to fight back making Doc to join the fight. There was nothing to do. He just folded his hands and watched. The four men were knocked out cold in a jiffy. Pearl started searching their pockets to collect their wallets.

“How will now you talk to one?” he asked.

“I am going to wake this one up” Doc answered moving over to the first man.

“Pearl let’s go” he said but she did not respond, instead, she moved over to the third man.

He really did not have the time. He picked the school bag and picked her up.

“Let me go, I must collect my mum’s money” She shouted trying to kick him.

She was really lucky she was a girl and a little girl. He forced her inside the pickup and closed it as soon as he entered. She tried opening the door.

“Doc get the wallets she did not take” he shouted for Pearl to hear then pulled off his hearing tool.

“Done, she will bring your wallet. Now show me the way to your house, we will pick her up on our way back” he said igniting the pickup.

“I told you my mum is sick, she is in the hospital. Don’t ask me about my dad, I don’t have one” she said.

It was too late to go to the hospital.

“Then show me your house, let me take you home” he said.

“I don’t have a house. Landlord threw our properties outside yesterday morning. Someone has already packed inside.”

He stopped the pickup. What kind of landlord does that to a little girl? He was supposed to even help in her welfare but he just had to send a little girl outside with no thought of how she would survive. He would have a meeting with that landlord but that would be later.

“Where do you sleep? How do you survive? How come you can speak English so well?” he asked.

“Which one will I answer?”

She was too sharp. Doc joined them before he could answer her. She sat with Pearl giving her two wallets.

“So quick?” he asked igniting the pickup and reversing.

“You removed your tools? I have all the answers I need. Agege will never suspect me because we spoke few hours ago and he must have tracked my location the way he does to all his employees.”

“And it must have shown?”

“Abuja. I did not even have to lie, because he did not ask. I don’t work on weekends” Doc said.

“Where are you taking me to?” Pearl asked interrupting them.

“My house” he said.

She looked at both of them. Doc had already removed her mask which was even a silicone mask. The circle were really terrible. Even though Pearl did not get scared by her transformation, she was surprised, at least that was something.

“So cool, how did you do that?” she asked.

Doc looked at him, now she too was scared.

“How old are you?” Doc asked.

“Seven” she answered giving Doc a bigger scare.

“How? I wasn’t that bad at your age. Who taught you how to fight?” Doc asked.

“Same question every time” Pearl said bringing out the money in the wallets and arranging them.

No one spoke until they entered the compound. He was not surprised everyone was outside, including Halima, Cindy and Major's wife. The only exception was Mama Sunday. She would be travelling back the next day. Pearl was out of the pickup as soon as Doc came down.

“Wow, this is so cool, wow” Pearl said looking round the compound.

Either she did not see the others, or she just ignored the fact that they were staring at her. He looked at Halima, she was smiling at him making his heart pound. The powerful solar lights made the whole compound very bright.

“Oh my gosh, a gym bike” Pearl shouted running to the bike. She was wearing her school bag on her back.

The others started moving towards her. He had no idea what to do, he just focused on Halima and pulled her close as soon as she got to him.

“Your clothes are light, are you not cold?” he asked trying to kiss her forehead but she surprisingly pulled away and ran to the girl.

“I like the bike too, but this other one is more exciting, you want to try it?” Halima asked with that her voice that was difficult to resist.

He was already close in case Pearl attacked her, there was no way he would allow it even though she was little. But she did not, she nodded and smiled back at Halima. She came down and followed Halima to the treadmill.

“Are we watching a movie here or I’m I still dreaming?” Ghost asked.

“Halima always have that pull, I’m jealous” Doc said.

“Halima has put us through about her. But I still don’t understand” Major said.

“And she is seven. How?” Mark said.

Pearl was already running on the treadmill shouting so cool while Halima cheered, even Cindy had joined them.

“I wouldn’t have believed if I did not see what she did. But her English is different from someone raised on the streets” Fast said.

“I think we need to ask some questions, I need to go back to sleep” Wild said moving over to the treadmill.

He grabbed her on her waist and carried her towards one of the tables they had used for reception. She did not protest. All of them followed Wild.

“Pearl I need to ask questions and you need to answer that is if you want to continue your run.”

Wild had placed her on the table. She looked at Wild for some seconds and nodded.

“Where is your mother?” Wild asked.

“At the hospital, she is sick and I need to take care of her.”

“So you had to leave your house and go fight with addicts and robbers by twelve in the night?” Wild asked.

“I don’t have a house, landlord has thrown our things outside, I have no choice, they used my mum and took her drinks without paying their full money.”

“Used your mum?” Wild asked.

She paused.

“Pearl” Wild said.

“I don’t know what they do but they always pay her visit and my mum said they did not pay everything.”

“How come you speak good English and not pidgin?” Wild asked.

“I go to school. Although I’ve stopped but I am the best in my class, I’m in class three about to enter four.”

“I can see that” Wild said.

“Can I go now?” Pearl asked.

“No. Who taught you how to fight?”

“Oh not again. Nobody, I watch TV and I practice all the time” she said stretching her hands.

“I don’t believe you. I saw what you did, there was a camera.”

“Okay, my dad” she said but she sounded very angry.

“I thought you said you don’t have a dad?” he asked.

“I don’t but my mum said I take after my dad in everything. She always shouted that there is no connection to her apart from the resemblance, everything else is my dad” she said.

“Where is your dad?” Wild asked.

“I don’t know, he doesn’t even know I exist and I hate him so much. I hate him more than he hates my mum. He threatened to kill her and accused her of ruining his life, my mum had to run away from a mad man. But he was the one who ruined my mum’s friendship, my mum said she lost her fiancée and because of my dad, she lost her friend but my dad said she ruined him. I hate him.”

“Okay I can see the hatred. So right now you are a fearless, homeless seven year old intelligent girl, who is now taking care

of her sick mum by fighting and collecting money from those owing her” Wild said.

“Wow, you are very correct.” She looked amazed.

“I’m so sorry” Halima said pulling away from him again and holding Pearl’s hand.

“Your landlord is very wicked. You don’t have to worry again okay? You will stay with us till your mum gets better. Don’t worry about money, Jason will help with your mum’s health” Halima said.

“What!” he and Jason exclaimed at the same time.

“What do you mean by what? Jason you have money and hospital, we have three extra rooms. I can take her to school before going to work” Halima really had everything solved and she was saying it with a convicted face.

She was not suggesting and there was no way he could change her. He was damned even Jason because Cindy was excited and okay with Halima's suggestions. The others were smiling. How did his life get to this point? As a wedding gift, Jason and Cindy had bought a two bedroom flat and had converted it to a fashion company, with basic equipment for Halima. It was supposed to be their wedding gift but it looked like Cindy did not understand Halima was the only beneficiary.

“Really?” Pearl asked looking at him and Jason.

He did not even know Jason was standing close to him and how did she know they were the ones she had to look for? Halima and Cindy were actually looking at them.

Jason started rubbing his cheek while he thought of how to cope with living with Pearl because he was already trapped.

“Only if you try to control her” he said.

Jason nodded in agreement with his condition.

“What is there to control? She is okay the way she is. I like her like this. Extra protection.”

“Seriously? Halima” he said.

“Pearl, you promise you won’t go fighting around? That scares the big guys” Halima said.

“My mum will be taken care of and I will stay here and start school again?” she asked.

At that moment he saw the child in her. He understood her. She had been forced to become an adult at an early age but she was still a child.

“Yes” Cindy and Halima said at the same time.

“And you get to learn how to pick from people’s pocket without fighting them” Ghost said.

“Ghost” everyone shouted.

But he also understood Ghost. Ghost had to survive on his own at an early age.

“It’s the basic, she needs to learn so she won’t get herself in trouble because she is already trouble” Ghost said.

“Don’t mind him, we will rather teach you how to really fight on water, air and land. You know why?” Wild asked.

She shook her head. Even Wild was not helping.

“Because we are soldiers and the best of the best. And if you want to stay with one of us, there are rules. Until you pass your training you must not fight the kind of people you fought today. Do you understand?” Wild put command in his voice.

“Yes” she said.

“Yes what?” Wild asked.

“Yes I understand. Thank you, thank you” she said crying.

So she could cry. Halima pulled her close.

“It’s okay. You are safe now” Halima said.

“Is this not child abuse?” Major Ahmed’s wife finally spoke.

“What is there to abuse? If she doesn’t learn, she will get herself killed” Wild said.

“I somehow agree, we would have lost Princess by now if I did not train her. But this girl I’m seeing is worse than Princess, it’s either we teach her or she teaches herself” Major defended Wild.

“I guess our work is done here. Doc will have to treat her bruises” Wild said standing up to leave.

“Wait. Soldiers! Soldiers!” she shouted excitedly making them confused.

“You can find my dad. He was a soldier too” she said jumping down from the table and holding Wild’s hand.

“We don’t find people Pearl, and why will you look for someone you hate?” Wild asked.

“Because I want to punish him for what he did to my mum” she said bringing out a picture from a note in her back bag.

It was almost looking rumpled. She gave it to Wild.

“My dad is the man at your left” she said.

“Holy shit! Beast come and see” Wild exclaimed making him move over to see the picture.

“Damn. Make sense now. Looking at her, she has his eyes” he said.

“How on earth did this happen?” Major asked.

“Now I understand the reason for the breakup” Wild said.

“Guys we are lost here” Ghost said.

They were gathered round the picture.

“What a small world. Who could have thought the girl you saved is the daughter of someone we know” Major’s wife said.

“You should say something” Fast said.

“Major but Doc was not this bad” he said.

“That was because I was not as bad as the wolf himself. You are right Beast. Everything make sense now. The wolf wouldn’t have given birth to anything else. She really has his eyes” Major said.

“Major you are scaring Beast, imagine how Beast’s daughter will behave” Wild said.

“Seriously? But the men look familiar” Doc said.

“Why are you people ignoring us?” Mark asked.

“I am not scared Wild, Ibe said we don’t give birth to females. I can manage my son acting like her. Jason should rather be worried” he answered.

“Seriously?” Jason surprisingly joined them.

“The man by the left is James followed by James’ ex finance. I think her name is Mena and this is late John. This was his fiancée, her name is, I think”

“Pearl” Wild answered for Major.

“Wow, how did you know?” Pearl asked shocked.

“Wait Pearl is your mother?” Wild asked.

“Yes I’m Pearl junior, her fiancée is dead” she answered.

The shock on the faces of others were really noticeable.

“I will have a boy and if it’s a girl she will take after Cindy” Jason said.

His facial expression made them laugh.

“But how are you sure she is James’. It doesn’t make sense that John’s fiancée gave birth to James’ child. Pearl and James wouldn’t betray Mena and John like that” Major’s wife said.

“She is seven, John died nine years ago. James had broken up with Mena but he never told me the reason when he asked me for another debriefing” Wild said.

“Wow, so we already had a circle baby” Ghost said.

“It was called special Force Team A then” he said.

“So James is real? But why was there no picture?” Mark asked.

“Because it was his wish” Wild answered.

“The stories I heard about him not fearing anything and he and his friend nicknamed sons of thunder are enough to conclude that Pearl is very normal. She is just a wolf pup” Ghost said.

“Can you find him?” she asked.

Wild carried her and placed her back on the table.

“Pearl we are going to look for James only if you promise us something” Wild said.

He just knew where Wild was going.

“Wild no” Major said.

“What should I promise?” Pearl asked.

“We are going to train you starting from tomorrow. Every weekend you will come to our training house at Abuja and you will learn how to defend yourself. Then we will send you on a temporal visit to your dad. You can punish him all you want but you must make sure you give him hell of trouble” Wild said.

“That’s it?” Pearl asked.

“Yes, you must show him all the stuff you are made of” Wild said.

Wild was very evil.

“Yes I will” Pearl said.

“No you say roger that”

“Roger that” Pearl said.

“Now if you take my hand, our deal is sealed” Wild said.

She grabbed Wild’s hands even before Wild could finish his statement.

“Wild unbelievable” Major said.

“The wolf needs to wake up and face his nightmare” Wild said.

Jason left. Fast moved close to Pearl.

“So you really don’t fear?” Fast asked.

She nodded.

“Oh no. Fast no, she can’t ride with you” Halima protested.

“Will you like to fly on a helicopter?” Fast asked.

“Like real helicopter?” Pearl asked.

Fast nodded.

“Pearl say no, he drives like a crazy man” Cindy said.

“Yes I want to fly” Pearl said excitedly.

“Deal” Fast said giving her a high five.

“And lady you need to know the secret of a lady’s fight. You don’t have to dress like a boy. I will take you shopping and I will teach you stuffs you need to learn, ladies secrets” Doc said.

“And I will sure love teaching you water combat” Mark added.

Pearl was squealing with joy at their patronage.

“You will learn how to hide and come out only when you have to” Ghost said patting her hair.

“Ahmed, how do you manage all of them?” Major’s wife asked.

“I try my best knowing I will come home to you” Major answered.

“I guess you guys won’t sleep again” Jason said coming out with an American football and ballot papers.

“Oh yeah game time” Wild said picking a paper.

All the others picked a paper except him. They all looked at him.

“Seriously? I just got married” he said pulling Halima to him.

“Wow your wife is the opposite of you” Pearl said and they all had to laugh at her comment.

“Go play. Don’t use me as an excuse” Halima said pulling away for the third time.

“Can I join?” Pearl asked picking the last paper.

“No” he said taking the paper from her.

“Puppy, its so cute” Pearl shouted running to pick puppy who was running towards them.

He wondered if its name would change when it was no longer a puppy. Pearl carried the dog and puppy seemed to like her.

“It’s going to be a long journey Beast and you must know her background made her tougher” Major said.

It sounded more like an advice.

“Who will referee?” Cindy asked.

“We don’t need a referee, we know the rules” Wild said.

If George was around, Major would have refereed.

“Old man, you think you are up for the game?” Doc said to Major taking the ball from Jason.

“I guess we should find out little princess” Major said.

He played alongside Ghost, Sabrina and Fast. Wild led Major, Mark and Jason. While Cindy, Halima, Pearl and Major’s wife cheered. Pearl still had puppy in her arms. He had no idea who she was supporting. They were the offense team and Major who was among the defense team had accurately stopped Sabrina from hitting a touchdown. Now they were automatically the defense team, and whoever was going for the last run would have to pass through him. He glanced at Halima same time she looked at him. For a millisecond, he thought he was dreaming. Life had not always favored him, he had lost his dad at an early age and from then, he had faced both the tough and easy sides of life, but looking at Halima, he knew all his

pains were worth it. He had wanted to be tamed again but instead, he had found someone who needed to be untamed and who wanted him to remain Untamed.

[THE END]

[THE CRICLE series just began. Buckle your seatbelts because we are going to be taking a ride to Warri, a Wolf's territory.

James is about to receive a surprise package but not what he would have ever imagined. Inside the package is Nightmares of Pearl. Also known as Another Chance. COMING SOON.....}

