



"Just in between the dilemma where we all  
got lost beyond what we thought we  
knew... Arowolo Ayokanmi weave up our  
reading mind dazzlingly in this climaxing  
prose." -Kehinde. O. Akinterinwa

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# THE MURDERER

**A GRIPPING NIGERIAN CRIME  
STORY**

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AROWOLO AYOKANMI

# **THE MURDERER**

**A gripping Nigerian crime story**

***AROWOLO AYOKANMI DANIEL***

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# **DEDICATION**

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO GOD ALMIGHTY AND TO ALL GLORYFIELD  
INT'L COLLEGE TEACHERS- BOTH FORMER AND PRESENT

***This book is written in memory of  
Ijinmakinde Temitayo Nelson.***

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## CHAPTER ONE

Early Monday morning Susan Obi sank into her sofa, her leg stretched forward and her eyes focused on the TV screen. Soon she adjusted her position. Lying on her chest, she rested on the sofa which was slightly smaller than her bed in width, however, the size was just enough to accommodate her lanky structure.

It was 7 a.m. and she was just right in time for the program she anticipated each morning. Susan picked up the remote to increase the volume; listening to the **Morning Show on OBT Channel**, has been her routine. The long ram horn reminded her of the ongoing Muslim festival, thanks to Port Harcourt religious status. Even though the main celebration was last week, the majority of the northern population and some south westerners were still having lots of mutton in their stew pot. The street buzzed with festive greetings. She wished her industrial training calendar had July in it, the freedom of sighting the landscape of almost idle highways would have been fantastic.

The euphoria of becoming a news caster was seated deep within her. It had been her dream since her fourth year in high school. Though she was an average student, she had never let her dream crumble. She had always wanted to sit before the camera in order to broadcast news to the world. She could recall how she had felt whenever she rested her head on her father's chest, as they both listened to the news.

At 7:30a.m., a picture which adorns her hi-fi cabinet below the TV caught her attention. Swaying on her sofa to focus on it, memories of her deceased mother flooded her mind and nostalgia swept through her. Susan remembered how easy she got her industrial training placement at the same TV station her mother had worked. She could remember her affable smile during her troubled times, but now this was gone. She would have to move on, to live her life right, and make her mother proud of her. She had to do it for her pride; for her unborn children.

Susan jerked to the right when she heard her phone ring. She followed the echoing sound, trying to guess the last place she must have dropped the phone.

She walked towards the empty wardrobe, where she had left it.

'Stan,' she said, as saw the envelop display on her phone. She thought that he was trying to plan an excuse, perhaps he was on his way, until the "where the hell are you?" message popped out after she unlocked her phone. She slide her feet into a pair of fancy flip flops and headed toward the door, this visit was a welcome distraction.

'Sorry, I was preoccupied,' she said as soon as she saw Stan Okon. She moved to the side as she left the door ajar for her guest. Stan looked like he was out of the '70's. The cross belt clipped the three quarter trouser firmly leaving the tucked shirt fixed. His humorous appearance was not expressed on his face, his face had lines and he projected an image of seriousness every time.

'Hmm,' he said as his gaze fixed on her. She could see the surprise in his face, maybe confusion too, she wasn't sure.

'Are you missing Kelvin?' He winked, before bursting into laughter.

'If you get lost in thoughts, it must have been a conversation with him,' he said, leaving her speechless, she put her hand into her pocket and absorbed his teasing.

'No, I'm not,' she said softly. Trying to end the discussion, she held his hand to usher him inside before Reb's eyes would catch him entering her apartment. Kelvin Eze was the type of man she wanted since her third year in college, though she didn't allowed him in her heart until her final year. She saw his undying quest to get her. Well, that was after Tade had told Kelvin he wasn't into her.

'I can't believe that,' Stan retorted. 'It has been eight days since he left for Kaduna.'

'I am sure you are right, she is certainly speaking with him,' a tiny voice said behind him. She was sure it was Rebecca Shittu, she must have overheard this conversation. Reb's footsteps were always muffled like that of an assassin. She looked quite well in her Afro hairstyle. Her red ribbon matching with her dress. Kelvin had only spent a week in Kaduna- in the northern part of the country to represent Crossgate University at the annual university competition. And that was enough to bring a tease.

'Come on Sus, what kept you occupied?' Reb asked as she walks up to her, resting her hand on Susan's shoulder.

'Will you come in or should I lock you out forever?' She said to abruptly end any further teasing she wasn't in for.

'Stan, what are you here for?' Reb asked with utter disregard for Susan's request.

'Oh, you mean Stan,' Susan ran her eyes on him then returned her gaze to



Reb. 'I'm sure you noticed his dressing.' She said, trying to change the topic. After all, she wasn't expecting her to be here, not when she is busy with something.

'Susan should be able to give an answer to that,' he said as he tried resting his buttocks on the chair. 'I need to save my energy, kiddo.'

She slowly ran her hand through her hair, then her right hand found it's way into her pocket.

'For a camera installation,' she stopped to study the expression on Reb's face before saying anything further. She had no choice than to say that. 'Should have informed you, but...' She let her voice trail off as Reb laughter filled the room.

'That's crazy Sus, camera for what? This is just an unnecessary expense, you should be working on your project or maybe reading for exams and...'

'This is for a personal reason,' she said slowly, grateful that she hadn't got angry, 'I just...' she stopped, she didn't want to disclose the reason.

'Ok,' Reb said in a nonchalant way suggesting she wasn't concerned but she could see the chagrin on her face. 'At least you should inform me about the renovation we are about to have.'

'I think we need to know why Sus.' Stan said, 'and...'

'Reb, please come, with my phone.' She said putting an end to whatever he might have planned to do with the phone. His eyes caught the phone on the stool, she had left it there when she headed to the kitchen.

Stan sat on the sofa waiting for breakfast, at least she was the one who told him to come early and she promised to cater for his breakfast. Though his mind wasn't off the meal Tade and Mart will also cook at the hostel.

Susan poured the needed volume of water into the tomato sauce she has prepared inside the pot, then closed it with the lid. She perched on the smaller table behind her, waiting for the water to boil before adding the rice. Her apartment was few kilometres to the school, and probably one any student would be keen to have. But she disliked the limited space left for the kitchen, which was the reason she had to stop frying.

'I need to eat before any work.' Stan mumbled. It was a perfect declaration with perfect timing as he saw a plate of jollof rice coming toward him. His stomach grumbled, he was determined to win this battle with the plate.

Her phone rang, she took a swipe at her phone to pick the call.

'I will be there, just give me thirty minutes,' Susan said, the smile on her face was a contrast to the scowl on Reb's face.

'Who was that?' Stan asked.

'Tade,' she replied as she began to pack up. She walked in haste to the kitchen

and returned with a take away food container.

'Is Mart around?' She asked, only to be answered with laughter.

Had she asked something amusing? Mart Davidson was the only Medical student they had as friend, the last to join their group. His studious character has been one of the features Stan liked in him.

'Where do you think he will be?' He replied, setting her free from her lost state. 'The guy will have some crazy test this week, Medicine is killing him.'

'So that's why you are amused. Right?'

'Oh no, maybe Tade is bored, because I trust Mart to be mute, the guy said he want to be the best graduating student in gynecology, that sounds lovely Sus, doesn't it?'

'And that is why you like him,' Reb said.

'Exactly,' he said pointing at her. 'He makes our group complete, that's why Susan trips for Kev,' he teased.

'Not so, Kev and Tade fought to have me, remember?' She paused. 'Mart doesn't have any choice, he has to ask if he wants my jollof rice. Poor Mart, he has to read the whole night.'

'I said so,' Reb looked at Stan 'The only reason she won't be worried about Kev's absence is Tade.' Her words caused the room to fill with laughter.

'Thank God Mart is around to watch you guys,' Stan said turning to Reb. 'Meet you at home, Sus,' he said as she opened the door for her exit.

## CHAPTER TWO

Reb perched on the iron railing. She had decided to stay here; she wanted this to be her last time of checking on her. After the call Susan had received in the morning Reb had not heard from her.

She fixed her gaze on the sky which was gradually turning into a shade of red, one she believed was formed as a result of atmospheric particles. She hopes the fact is true, she hopes it isn't a symbol for blood. She knew that Port Harcourt has experienced a lot of kidnapping in the past few years, and that increased her fear especially when she couldn't reach either Susan or Tade on the phone.

She fumbled her hand into her cross bag because her phone was ringing. Her phone lay at the inner compartment. She took a swipe at her phone to the green icon on the right.

'Is Sus at home?' Mart asked.

'No...' She paused blaming herself for not calling him since. 'Look, Mart,' she said. 'I should have called you, but I don't know why I...' She hesitated. 'Maybe I don't want to bring unnecessary alarm. I haven't seen Susan since she left for your place.'

'Okay,' Mart said. His response sounded shallow, making her unsure if he actually comprehended what she said.

'Mart?'

'Will call you back,' he said before dropping the call.

She checked her wristwatch; it was 8p.m.

'Things are getting weird,' she said to herself.

What was more unsettling was that Susan phone line was unreachable. That feeling increased when she called Tade's phone and he couldn't be reached too and few minutes ago Mart had called and sounded strange. The last time Susan came home late, she called Reb but now...

'One message received.' Her phone alerted.

She cared less for it; she had never really cared for messages and this started two weeks ago. Her phone piled up with unnecessary messages.

*Did they go on a secret date? But can she truly do that after just few days of Kelvin absence? Will she cheat on him just because of a momentary distance?*

At exactly 8:05 p.m, she picked her phone and cursed herself for the second time. She had ignored Mart's message and filled herself with unanswered questions.

'Stan said you are right.' Even though the message looked vague, she understood what he meant.

'No cause for alarm, maybe a secret date.' She replied with a laughing smiley, hoping that would erase the odd thought from her mind. She knows he will laugh it off, Tade won't do such thing. Susan won't stoop so low either.

\* \* \*

Susan felt the intensity of the sun on the iron sheet as heat circulated the whole room, she was certain it was an incomplete building, not in this day and age would a complete one be this hot. Her skin boiled, her skin will suffer for this, since she was allergic to heat. Her light skin had never been friendly to such temperature. But maybe today it will have to. Today? She was not sure of when she will be free from this.

Susan knew being kidnapped made the future uncertain, this was the reality of what she was into. Her article about being kidnapped in this part of the country would have been superb if only this had happened before writing it. The fear of death, the restlessness, the uncertainty of today, and of tomorrow. Everyone would have savoured her write-up, kidnapping had become the norm and even Port Harcourt wasn't exempted.

*This captivity would be an exceptional muse for writing another article on kidnapping after graduation,* she thought as if that would add smile to her face.

That could only happen if she would find a way out of her present situation. Now she could feel what they felt, all the abducted girls, all the innocent civilians, even some of those killed by ISIS and Boko Haram. What they passed through at this stage and how hungry they would be when they escaped or released after paying a huge sum of money.

'Why me?' She asked herself. Susan had never bragged about her family wealth, her rented apartment gave no indication of how well off she was. Perhaps this was not the case. Maybe her father's business partners planned this, maybe it's Tade as he was the last to call her.

She allowed her mind dwell on the latter. She needed answers. Maybe then, the mystery behind her current predicament would be revealed.

'But he never knew about it,' She whispered softly as tears rolled down her cheek. 'Tade didn't know about the money.' She had only confided in Kelvin

who wasn't around when she got the cash in her hands, then why the kidnap? Why the chain cuffing her wrist? Why the blindfold? She kept asking herself, as she couldn't fathom it.

The holiday cost her life, but she didn't want to accept that, if her Dad hadn't declined the cheque or the online payment this wouldn't have happened to her. She wouldn't have the cash, she wouldn't have these people around her neck now. Telling Kelvin was wrong, she could remember her Dad reminding her that, she had made the year biggest mistake by giving out such vital information.

'Could it be Kelvin, my soul mate?' Susan asked herself again, it was just unbelievable.

*Kelvin is in the North and he can't and will never plan such for me here in Port Harcourt.* She had always trusted Kelvin and her friends.

'Where is the girl?' She heard that from maybe the other room or outside, she wasn't sure of that. But she was sure about the fear inside her.

'We need to be at our best, we must get to her house tonight...' the voice continued but she stopped listening. She already knew they wanted the money, but how on earth did they know about that. If it was money they needed then why the kidnap. That thought troubled her mind, maybe they needed something more than money. What could that be? She needed some clarity at this point but no one was going to give her the leisure of finding out.

'How much are we talking about?' Someone asked.

Her heart beat increased like that of a sprinter who had just finished racing.

'Guy, that one na small money,' another one said in pidgin. Her heart skipped a beat, their voices were under the influence of drugs. They might not show her any mercy, her experience from various movies she had watched wasn't telling her any different.

She heard approaching footsteps which unsettled her, even though her eyes were on break, her ears were awake to everything. The footsteps halted, making her shift from her position.

*He should be close now.* She thought as she heard nothing. She knew they would not be friendly, however she hoped they would decide her fate quickly or release her from this.

'Where una dey go?' The voice was a cracked one, 'I go kill you o.' The voice later threatened, she has expected that, pidgin isn't far from kidnappers with cracked voices.

'Killing you doesn't mean anything to us, talk now.' She could noticed the voice was different from the first one, the difference wasn't so much, but it wasn't quite as harsh. She could now understand what the first man was saying, he was definitely asking about her destination. But what did he want her to say,

what has that got to do with her being kidnapped.

She could feel the gun on her bare shoulder as she only had her sleeveless blouse on, her jean jacket had been removed. Susan began to shiver. She had never felt a gun before on her.

'Ta...Tade's house, he called me this morning,' she said, shivering in the hot room, hers was more than one suffering from malaria.

'Do you know him?' She managed to ask, not knowing where the courage came from, but maybe that could relax her puzzled mind.

Maybe what she said was quite pleasing, because they began to untie her and also remove the blindfold.

A dark shade tainted her sight as she scanned the room, all her guesses was right it was surely an incomplete building, and probably three storey. She could sight the tall trees and she tried to gaze on her abductors. The image of the closer one formed on her retina, he looked burly, with a stern and maimed face, his eyes were red.

*Not so hard to know those on drug.*

'That won't help you,' the huge man said from the corner of the room, he was also studying her. 'Trying to memorize my face won't help you,' he continued as he tilted his head for few seconds.

She sat on the floor, stretched her leg for impeccable movement of blood, at least she can now kill the blood sucking insects which had been disturbing her with their buzzing sound.

'Do you know Tade or maybe...' she stopped, wanting him to say something, something useful.

'I think so.' He rasped weakly which contradicted his body language, his Damon-like smile in the vampires diaries series was penetrating, maybe her friends were all against her. What a bad luck that would be, she is going to lose everything, starting with her family when the bullet hits her. She was more optimistic about dying today, unless it wasn't written in her stars.

\* \* \*

At 11 p.m, it was no surprise she found herself at the front of her apartment, what her fate would be from the huge and lanky men with their Stechkin silent revolver seems unsure to her. This will be the perfect time for the cock to crow they ought to deliver a message to Reb. Her leg wobbled as she alighted from an old Peugeot car, things look dimmer than she could ever imagine. Nobody to help, and shouting would be out of it unless she want to cause more trouble. Her eyes gazed on the night sky which was not ready to help, few drops of tears roll on her cheek. Today her father money is gone, and on the bright side she

was still alive.

'Move in.'

*Why can't some of my neighbours be out at this time, maybe Reb. She could help by calling the precinct.*

Reb would have checked on her close to five times before sunset, this would have been the perfect time to do that again, but she needs to play smart so as not to fall victim.

She opened her door reluctantly after fumbling her hand for few seconds in her deep short-width pocket. She was afraid of death, they had not let go and it was obvious they won't go in a hurry. She sighed after a brief scan of the room.

*Thank God Reb didn't play dumb to sleep in my apartment today. That relieved her a bit. How I wish we had installed a camera, it would have alerted someone in the control room. Maybe it would also increase my chance of escape.*

She wished she had confided in Stan and Reb in the morning, maybe that would have given them a clue about her whereabouts.

Thoughts about Tade filled her mind again, mixing up her fear with anger enough to give her something to fight for; she had to report him to the police. She was optimistic about living, it seemed that death had passed now that they have brought her home. She had something to fight for. *If I see Tade moving freely with no stint of fear then I will challenge him and find evidence to use against him. The brain behind this would surely be a familiar person.*

She could still feel the touch of the gun on her shoulder, if only she could turn and take possession of the gun move her hand around his neck and escape. However, she wasn't strong enough to do this.

'Trusting your friends can also be of help to us as it is of help to you Sus, don't you think so?' One of them asked, probably their leader, he was the only one with burly stature. 'And today it was definitely helpful,' he chuckled.

"Trust" she grasped his word, trying to make something out of it. If he was referring to her friends, then it should be Tade, or Kelvin in whom she always confided in, but wasn't so sure of that.

'Are you trying to fix this on my friends?' She asked, if she is about to die, then it should be for bravery.

'Think of anything sweetheart,' he replied scornfully.

*Dad dropped two hundred fifty million naira with me.* She could recall sending that text to Kelvin on Wednesday evening and that meant nobody could eavesdrop.

She deleted that message immediately after sending it, and if it can't be eavesdropped then who could it be? She made a big sigh not minding those behind, at least they will have the money before they will put a bullet through her.

'The money now,' one of them said, he was partly mangled on both hand.

*That may be as a result of his work.* She thought with a slight smile.

'Maybe that will also happen to them after today,' she mumbled on what gave her some smile, probably her last one.

'Inner,' she said and pointed to the wardrobe. Its polish glowed in the dull light she had in her bedroom.

'Bring him in.'

Another commanding voice found its way into her eardrum, but this wasn't for her, it was him.

*Who could this be? Maybe one of their captive,* she thought.

Expecting him to come inside, nothing makes you happier than conquering what makes you anxious.

'You,' she pointed as he came inside, she was pretty sure of what she saw, the forest coloured shirt and black pants have always been his casual choice. She tried not to gaze on him again, her friend nailing her to the cross.

'Do your job.' The voice said again, making her raising her head.

*Was his job, any other thing than to shoot?*

That was her last thought before the bullet pierced her body.



## CHAPTER THREE

*'I'm sure you are going to be a great journalist Sus, a year, just a year, that's all you need.'* Those were Henry's words few days after he came back into the country. He spent most of his days now in London working for a bank which have some of its branches in his home country.

*'I will surely be.'* She had replied. But now what was left of her was her corpse, her lifeless body- a gift to the termites.

*Her head rested on her right upper limb as red body fluid gushed out of her.*

'This can't be!' Reb screamed as she saw Susan helpless body lying on the floor. Her blood stuck to the cream coloured tiles. Reb leg wobbled as she tried to walk towards her, she stood up with an opened mouth; and pointing her finger at her.

'We discussed yesterday, we cooked and...' she stopped, she couldn't believe her eyes, it was her first time seeing a girl in her youth die. She had only seen this in movies.

'I should have stayed yesterday Sus,' she said as she crawled towards her with a hand shaking. 'I'm sorry Sus.'

She could remember Susan had received a call yesterday, and after that all she could do was anticipate her return. 'I should have followed you Sus...' she said as tears rolled down on her face. 'We planned to graduate together, you can't leave me Sus.' Reb began to hope for reincarnation, even though she didn't want to believe Susan is dead, she still want to believe the Yoruba theory of reincarnation. Maybe if it's true, then she might set her eyes on her, but she hissed concerning that thought, it was stupid. She knew she can't see her again, she knew the same belief was firm on them staying in another city far from their origin- they would have new home, new family and new friends. Her lachrymal gland produced more tears at the thought of that.

'Susan, you can't die, not like this,' she shouted again, with a pitch strong enough to call the neighbours' attention.

She smiled at herself, she should surely be in heaven, God always love his creatures, but... she halted her thought for a second, she could reminisce about yesterday when she received a call, Tade actually called, then what? She looked

at her again, rigor mortis had set in, even though her freshness and beauty still radiated, Reb had lost her friend and she ain't coming back.

Maybe Tade will have something to say concerning this, maybe if he had not called her, this wouldn't had happened, maybe she will still be breathing, unless this is her fate. *Could this be an ill given destiny? God will never do something this bad, He has great thoughts for us.*

Reb was numb. When the police car arrived, she was hopeful that they will certainly have something to offer, even if it will take time. She wanted to know who had done this, wanted to know who brought this Tuesday morning tragedy before her.

'Who are you to her?' The detective asked without introducing himself. She looked at him, he had a square face, and she could noticed the single dimple on his cheek as his eyes showed sympathy.

His hair had some gray colour, but he was absolutely in his late thirties.

'Her friend,' she replied quietly and the flood gates of tears opened once again. The policeman began to look at the room and without walking away from Reb. Soon he squatted beside her.

'Do you have any piece of useful information.'

She knew something like this will come up, but what did he expect her to say when she wasn't an eyewitness. *Maybe starting with Tade will be a good start,* she thought. *That will be gross.*

'She got a camera installed yesterday, though I thought it was insane but...' She stopped, 'but now am sure she did it for a reason, a hidden one.'

'Camera? Huh?'

'Yes.' She replied.

'Some...' her voice trailed off, she was scared of saying any implicative words. Mentioning a name could be precarious to her friends. Stan had helped with the camera installation, and for Tade, he had called, probably a right call at the wrong time. She thought.

'And?' He asked again.

'Nothing' she said firmly, trying to keep away names, she knew that was wrong, but was happy when he didn't ask about her previous unfinished statement.

'Any calls, probably threaten calls or a fight?'

'Not really,' she said calmly, rubbing her hands on her wet face. 'She received a call yesterday.'

She held Susan's cold and limp hand in hers, hoping she hasn't betrayed her friends.

'Good,' he said, noting down her words. 'Who called? Did she managed to tell

you?'

'A friend called her to come and...' she stopped in mid-sentence, knowing the implication of what she said. Reb needed to keep her friends from the police perimeter. But she had to do this, this for Susan, she was also her friend.

'Who?' The detective asked with a stronger intonation, the pitch compelling her. She looked at him, guessing what he would say, maybe say this Reb and make your friend have her last smile.

'Tade Leo, he is...' her voice trailed off again as she continued with her sob. But at least she had given a clue to work on. 'He is a close friend, he won't do such thing, maybe it is just...'

'A coincidence,' he said completing her statement for her. 'At least that would lead us somewhere. Can we take a walk?' He said stretching his hand like a church usher to lift her up. 'Need to take a walk Abigail.' He told the other official he came with before he went out with Reb.

\* \* \*

'I told you that going to the precinct yesterday will certainly be of help, but...' Stan stopped, clenched his fist, trying to control his anger, then he banged it on the table. He was sure Tade won't sleep at Susan's house, but his fear was where he would be.

He sat on his bed, releasing his fist. 'If his phone and that of Susan wasn't reachable yesterday, what do you think might have happened Mart?' He asked.

'I can't say,' Mart reply was sharp. He hated the question and didn't want to answer. 'I know they had history together, but he can't be silly to break a friendship tie.' He sat in front of him, and said nothing until their gaze met. 'I think this is unusual of him, but he will have his reasons.'

'So?'

'So...' He took his gaze off Stan and he began staring at the room. 'I thought he would come home late but I was wrong Stan.'

Stan clenched his jaw, as his body shook like he had spasms. He knew he had to calm down, at least they were in it together.

'I thought he would come late.' He mimicked Mart.

Mart walked towards the door, his hands on the knob. 'Perhaps you know what is going on,' he snapped.

Going on? Stan repeated in his mind, thinking if Mart actually meant that. Hell, he is not telepathic, then knowing what is going on should be out of it for him.

'Stan, I understand where your fear lies,' Mart continued without looking at him. Stan noticed the break in Mart voice, he could sense his fear. 'And that is

where mine lies too,' Mart said.

'Reb called yesterday about not seeing Sus, and till now we can't find Tade, I'm scared of what I think.

'It means they might be facing same predicament,' Stan said.

'I think so.'

He checked his watch, it was 9 a.m. He thought going to the precinct for a complaint will be perfect.

'Hey Stan,' a feminine voice called out, it was enough to stop their conversation. 'Are you guys heading out or...?' She asked with a depressed look, her voice with a tinge of melancholy, though the latter was not obvious to them.

'Heading out,' Stan said. With his back presented to her, pressing his phone with one hand and buttoning up with the other. 'Hey Reb, I can sight him, who is he? the lucky man, huh?' He asked without turning to look at her, he could see the detective from the mirror, he looked lanky just as Susan. His black eyes obsidian from his stern look, making his chin prominent in his squared face. 'Tell him to smile, please.'

She groaned. 'Something bad happened yesterday...' her voice broke as tears rushed to her eyes. Stan turned to face her, now he could see how wrong he was about his question. *Then why is he here?* he asked himself as he gazed at the Detective.

'Is it about...' Stan stopped, not wanting to mention Tade. Apart from the unknown man, her tears insinuated something bad might have happened to him, maybe he had an accident or tried to kill... Stan heartbeat increased.

'We haven't seen Tade since yesterday.' Stan told Reb.

Stan stopped, as the shock on her face was obvious, that meant she was expecting Tade's return.

*So what's there to sob about and what's the stranger here for?*

'Susan is dead, I found her body on the floor,' she said in a very flat voice.

'What!' They both exclaimed. Stan could feel his buttocks resting on the floor, yesterday he was busy installing her camera and now she is gone.

*Could Susan have known she was going to die?* He took another look of the stranger who seemed unmoved by the unfolding scene.

'We were just preparing to visit the station before you came in,' Mart said as he sat on his bed with his hand on his head, a sign for misfortune.

'Then who is he?' Stan asked pointing at the man behind her, not minding how wrong the timing of his question is. He knew Reb didn't have anyone pestering her for a love relationship, if he could remember vividly. This was private moment and it was time to define his presence especially now that Susan is dead.

'Detective,' she replied, without facing them.

Stan retired to his bed, his hands in his pocket. His mind flashed back to yesterday, before and after he had finished with the installation. He had followed her instructions just exactly. He had wondered about the oddness of her request since they would be graduating soon. Reb had talked about the installation being an unnecessary inclusion. She had asked for the reasons, but Susan never gave one.

'So you brought a cop down here, for what?' Stan questioned, keen on knowing the intention of the man in mufti.

'Interrogation, or what...' she let that out before she could control it.

'Oh, wonderful.' He said, giving her his best glare but she hung her head low. He gave Mart a quick look. 'I don't know what to say Mart, am sick of all this.' He clenched his hand again into a fist, walking up to her. 'What are you trying to insinuate by bringing him here? I demand answer.' He shouted at Reb.

'He wanted to be here, Stan, what do you expect me to say or do?'

'Not without telling him anything, what did you tell him Reb?'

'What do you want Stan?' she flared up. 'Susan was my friend, we have same right to say what we know about her. And that is what I did.'

'Hold it there guys,' Mart said. 'Stop being driven by emotions.'

'You were there when he put a call across to her right?' The detective asked with his eyes fixed on Mart. Stan noticed the smile at his lips.

'Yes,' he answered. 'We planned to call her, so... so he put the call across to her and...' he stopped, saving himself from his dopey answer. 'Yes,' he stalled a little trying to say something, something less implicative. 'And after that I couldn't find him,' he concluded.

'Find him? What do you mean?'

'He left to buy drinks.'

'And?'

'And what?' he retorted, his heart beat increased.

'What did you do?' The detective asked.

'I was only waiting,' he said.

'Then... he didn't come back, right?'

Even though the answer was obvious, Stan wondered why he still asked, he checked on Reb as Mart was still busy with the unknown detective. Reb sat on a wooden chair and she was paying rapt attention to the discussion, it was a perfect time for Stan to ask her questions.

'Reb,' he said tapping her hoping she will talk, 'you said Susan is dead, do you know how, and why Tade is involved?' He asked in the lowest pitch he could muster.

'She was shot Stan, right here,' she patted her own chest for description. 'All this happened in her room.'

'But Tade never came back,' he snapped. 'Sorry for snapping.'

'I'm confused,' she said.

He was sure she was.

'If Tade didn't come back yesterday and Susan's body was found in her room this morning on the floor, then... He paused, gazed at the detective who was still busy with Mart.

*Tade might have been kidnapped. They might have kidnapped both of them, then make him the needed distraction, switched off his phone and made him their captive.* Stan thought.

'And where was he?' The Detective asked Mart.

'Off to her house for installation.' Stan replied, even though the question wasn't for him to answer. He looked more composed with anger radiating on his face. 'Your questions are pissing me off, we told you he is missing and...'

'You said he is missing. And I'm not daft to accept that,' his voice was low. Stan didn't expect this from the detective. 'And how would I be sure this wasn't planned out, huh?'

'It's possible Detective, but I'm sure that is not applicable here.' Mart said firmly. 'That is what you think about us but we can't carry out such sinister act.'

"We" that sounded with more confidence, more like the Mikaelson's family motto of "always and forever".

'You can only speak for yourself young man, do you know what happened after the call, when he went out? Do you know if he went out for something different?' He asked.

Stan chuckled, he could understand the detective logic.

*He had entered with Reb practically as a stranger and a sympathizer at first. With those practiced stern look to instill fear before saying anything, now he is using the loophole in our combined words.*

'I'm sure Tade can't do that, it may be a coincidence.' Reb gave her own quota, trying to be behind her friends at least insinuating something.

'You said he was off to somewhere, if I could remember,' he gloated as he walk towards the mirror. 'Then maybe a walk to the place won't be a trouble for you guys.' He said, then wink at Reb.

The grocery shop, just six blocks away from their apartment it looked moderate when compared with its location. The signboard was at the opposite side of the road, with a directional arrow.

'Was Tade here yesterday?' Mart asked the shop owner.

Stan felt cold in his body as he noticed the grocer bug-eyed face, but hoped it was because of the number.

'Call him.' He retorted.

'He lost his phone,' Stan said. 'In the morning.' He quickly added as the grocer eyes rolled skyward.

'He was making call when I saw him yesterday so I don't think he lost his phone.' He paused and gaze at Mart 'I'm sure he was in the hostel, why don't you ask him?'

'Why are you sure of that?' Mart asked.

'Will he tell me before making any trip?' He said jokingly. 'Okay,' he continued, 'he was heading here yesterday but... I don't know, a car parked in front of him and he hopped in.'

*That means he didn't buy the drink, Then where is he?* Stan thought.

'Any description... can you describe what the car looked like?' The detective asked.

'Oh!' he said. 'It was odd... as in, it was an old Peugeot car, nothing fancy, except for the fast speed at which they drove the car. 'I hope am free now Mart?'

Stan fixed the detective with a gimlet eye, one he wished will last long. 'I think we are done,' he said.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Detective Thomas John was trying to fix the files on his table into the cabinet when his hand hit the table edge and all the files landed on the floor. There it was, he could see the case file he had abandoned for the past two weeks, the one he could not find a way to decipher the mystery behind it. He picked the file up and returned it to the black polished mahogany table beside his computer. He then picked the remaining case files and kept them in the cabinet which at the right hand corner of his office table.

Returning to the table, he dropped his keys on the tough case file. This was the fourth time in four years in which the police had been informed about what the settlers at the countryside are facing. He had received this four months ago, not long after the precinct there was informed about another occurrence. The killer had been specific with the days of the attack; 28th of February. Even though the locals believed that the dead body being found annually are used as ritual to appease the gods, their elders had denied that.

*"The elders always declare curfew on this particular day it starts at 8:00 p.m. because they still practised the old belief."* He read out to himself as he open one of his books to study again. This had been the premises on which he based his investigation on. He read the next paragraph in the written statement. *'The next day we found a dead body at the market square.'*

'The elders statement does not correlates with this.' He said aloud before flipping to the other page. *"We acknowledge to be unconventional, but we never kill humans like our forefathers, because it is inhumane."*

These incoherent statements had always made him think of a third party. Someone might hid under the shadow of the curfew, he could imagine someone finding pleasure in that. Someone might have been displeased with the curfew, the probability of the killer being a hunter was also high. He had always thought this way, and this day wasn't an exception.

He jerked his head up as he heard a knock on his door. He did not return to the crime scene, he had left for his office after putting his hook on Tade. He pulled the door knob to open the door, then retired to the table. Seated on his



chair, he placed his hands on his chest, turned in the swivel chair before he crossed his leg.

'Any evidence that can be used against his alibi?' he asked. His voice sounded optimistic about finding him. His intuition was firm on that.

'Few but useful ones, Sir.' Jude who was an intern said. He has been in Thomas team after been allowed to have his field experience here at the headquarters. He was probably in his mid-twenties judging from his dashing look.

'Footage of the complete scene and a handkerchief.'

With a look of grim determination on his face, he heaved a sigh of relief.

*This death is definitely a great loss.*

He knew her death will bring in pressure from all angles...

His attention turned to the door when Abigail entered his office.

'And her body?'

'That has been moved to the morgue in a body bag.' Jude said.

Thomas stood up, picked the pending case file on his table and closed the gap between them.

'I want this to be attached to what you have about the blood thirsty killer. His favourite date - 28th of February makes him predictable.' He paused. 'He will always be prepared. If we can't nail the killer before February, then it must not exceed that fixed date. I need information about Tade. Pertinent info from his school shouldn't be excluded.' He picked his phone from the table and showed them Tade picture which Reb had sent to him. 'Tade Leo, that's his name in full.'

'Are we solving these case simultaneously?' Jude asked.

'That will depend on how we solve this present one.' He retorted. 'Take the handkerchief to the Laboratory after Ken extract the prints. We need both the prints and DNA.' He continued. 'I'm going to visit the suspect friends often. Anytime they come in here, don't deny them entrance. Just keep an eye on them.'

'Coming here won't be necessary.' Jude said.

'You are right, Jude,' Thomas said. 'It not necessary but important.'

'You think so... sir?'

'Anyone of them, maybe two, three or all of them in the so called friends group could have a hand.'

'So?'

'It will be easy to get it out of their mouth in a friendly way than in a fierce interrogation. Ken will get some information on them when we have their names.'

'Okay.' Jude said before he exited to his office with Abigail who said nothing.

Detective Thomas waltzed across the floor in a short and leisure strides before he sank into his chair again. He picked his phone which was at the far end of the table.

'Now, it's time.' He muffled as his eyes sparkled and crinkled around the edges. He needed to confirm who was in the footage.

He waited in his office as it seems waiting for eternity, he had called Reb about an hour ago. The only thing that could delay her is the traffic.

*She should be closer now.*

He tried to enthroned himself behind his desk, buying time as he checked out the footage.

'Oh, I see!' He said as he viewed the last part of the video, Susan last words coupled with the killer ability meant something to him.

'My suspect uses left,' he said as he rewind the video to catch some parts he might have missed. Then a knock on the door took his attention off the video.

Reb managed a deadpan expression, as she stood in front of the door, a face he didn't expect from her. Part of the scarf on her head was wind around her neck.

'Come in,' he said. 'I have been expecting you Reb.' He paused for a while, allowing her to settle down.

'I know it's insane to call you over, but trust me it's for the best.' He said as a slow smile dangled at the corner of his lips.

She said nothing as she her head droops.

'I got the footage of the scene here with me,' he studied her as she squirmed in her seat. 'Don't know if you can help me with what I want. But look Reb,' he said. 'You can get the justice you wanted for Susan, all you need to do is just help me with the details I need.'

She nodded with a slow smile. 'Okay.'

'If both of you lived together, then...'

'We stayed in same compound, not same room,' she corrected him, 'she met me in the compound, I was probably the first person she saw.' She chuckled lightly.

'So?'

'That was almost four years ago, she spent her first year in the school hostel.'

'And how do you come across those guys?'

'Guys?' She asked, her forehead made a slight furrow.

'I mean those people we visited.' He replied.

'We are friends, do things together, irrespective of where we live.' She fixed her gaze on the Detective but his intensified look made her shift her gaze.

'I introduced her to them.'

'Was she the last person to join the group? Besides how many are you guys?'

'Mart joined last,' she replied. 'We are only six.'

He returned his focus to his laptop, pressed the play button and paused almost immediately.

'Any beef between Susan and Tade? And do you know why she wanted the camera installed?'

'No beef, they were close friends.'

'Your meaning for close?'

She chuckled, a smile hovered on her face for a while.

'Best friends maybe, but Kelvin was her soul mate.'

'Are you saying Tade wasn't interested in her?'

'He was.' She said. 'But he stopped showing it, he believed in some principles which I think are strange.'

'And his principle concerning Susan was...' he let his voice trail off as he gave her an affable smile.

'He believed he lusted for her, her beauty was what enticed him at first sight, so he quit.'

He took another look at the laptop, trying to see the connection between what he had watched and what Reb had said. It will be frivolous to say Tade was displeased with Susan relationship with Kelvin, he had quit based on his own principle. Though might have discussed his intentions with Kelvin.

*Kelvin refused, and his refusal to let Susan go might have made Tade do this.*

'I will show you what I have here,' he pointed to the computer in between them, 'who do you think can do this?'

'That's extreme for me to know.' She said before giving a questioning look.

He left his chair to perched on the table, few centimetres was what separated them. 'Tade uses left hand, doesn't he?'

She nodded with her persistent questioning look. 'Any problem with that?'

'No,' he said calmly, before turning the screen toward her. 'Do you recognized this person?' He asked as he clicked on the play button.

He studied her as she keenly fixed her eyes on it. He watched her mouth open as she stared. Though she didn't say a word but he knew this would be the greatest shock of her life.

'No,' she shouted, clenching her jaws as she sighted the gun being pointed at her friend. 'You shouldn't have done this.' She said screwing up her face.

'I guessed you know who that his.'

She nodded firmly as she cleaned her face with her ankle. 'That's...hi...him... that is Tade,' she said. 'He was the one who called Susan yesterday.'

'Do you trust him, I mean do you believe what you saw?'

'I...I...do...' She stammered as tears rolled down her face. 'But the money.' She managed to say that. 'Tade won't know, she always confided in Kelvin in issues like this.'

'Ok,' he said.

*Now that I have what to work on, I need to see Kelvin.*

## CHAPTER FIVE

Detective Thomas focused on the distance in front of him as he alighted from the car. He buttoned up his black suit with his left hand, as the right one rested on the car door. He had expected the media folks to be here, and that was confirmed when his eyes caught a van belonging to a TV station.

The hospital door opened, and he saw a large number of people, though he was not sure if they were all journalists. He tug at his suit. He acknowledged the fact of using the exit door he always made use of in times like this and hoped to find the exact route to the fourth floor. He tried to pictured how her corpse will look like after spending few hours in the morgue. How the dark eyeballs will look like in their sockets after prolong closure of it lids. A stiff body with no irritability.

Reaching the exit door, he turned the handle of the door and was glad as the door responded fast, saving him from what he doesn't want to do for now. They needed information, wanted to know how things are as the news of her death will still on the lips of many.

She wasn't coming back just like the Witches of Eastern End does. Maybe also like the trapped souls of the vampires in the hunter's sword who hoped to reunite with a compatible body whenever the sword is destroyed. He hoped all this fiction could be true just for Susan to live again.

Reaching the third floor, which most of it rooms are used for Laboratory investigation he walked to the left, holding the railings connected with the stairs. Using an elevator would definitely unite him with the pressmen and he was doing his best to avoid them at the moment. He turned right as he left the stairs to explore the fourth floor which looked different from what he had saw on his previous visit. The walls now had on it frames that with pictures and details of people who thrive for Health Science today. He lingered on the Florence Nightingale- the only one he was familiar with.

He strode past the pharmacy- the one he believed was for special drugs as it was a tag with 2 boldly inscribed on the tag. He had a slight smile falls on his face as he reached the chubby doctor's door. 'Doctor Cyril Ufom.' He read the

tag to himself.

He made a fist with his hand and knocked the door thrice in quick successions, then he opened the door. The doctor was seated. Dr. Cyril had his right ankle on his left knee.

'What a good timing.' Doctor Cyril said.

'Good to see you Doc,' he replied. The light illuminated his small eleven o'clock Igbo tribal mark at the side of each face between his ears and eyes.

'Why are you here?' Cyril asked with glee, as he placed his both feet on the ground.

'Why didn't you call before coming? You are lucky am around. I have a presentation at Crossgate.' He added as though to explain Thomas puzzled look.

'Just doing what is necessary, Doc, seems you were expecting me though,'.

Dr. Cyril got busy with the drawer at his desk.

'We need to talk...' Detective Thomas drifted off and then sat in front of the Doctor. 'What is the presentation at Crossgate about?'

He studied the Doc as he packed some books into his bag with a laptop.

'Normal medical presentation, remember they have faculty of health sciences there,' he zipped up the bag. 'You don't need to check on me, trust me to handle everything well.'

Their camaraderie dated back to university life at OAU and now over the years Cyril had progressed from being a doctor to a working partner. Though both maintained their fields. A year ago, he had helped him out with the case of a father who removed his son's kidney. The father had sewed back the site of incision and claimed the boy had an accident.

'Getting the DNA result won't be fast,' he relaxed himself on his chair. 'You should understand what am talking about. For the fingerprints Ken has to contact his school.'

'His school?'

'Yeah,' he replied. 'The school tech man will have to check what we have with the student fingerprints database.' He said. 'The pressmen must have choked you on your way here,' he added with a chuckle.

'I used the other door at the base.' Thomas smiled. Cyril didn't blink an eyelid. They had always used the exit door in cases like this. 'You haven't told me something.' Thomas gave him an unrelenting stare.

'What?' The doctor asked.

'Apart of being anxious to leave, you looked worried. Anything troubling you?' He knew he would give a tentative answer, that he had known about him.

He fixed his look on Cyril then shrugged.

'Nothing much,' Cyril said firmly, brushing his hand through the documents

on his table. 'The poor girl died from prolonged bleeding,' he stopped, closed the files and put it in a drawer before locking it up. 'I'm not sure she would survive it, even if she was brought in here earlier.' He said the sadness seeping into his voice.

'Are you some kind of pessimistic doctor?' Thomas voice was low coupled with obvious hunger for answer.

'It's not about being pessimistic Tom, it just a matter of being realistic. It is about where the bullet hit; about stopping the bleed. All we could have done was to staunch it and request for a quick transplant. Unfortunately she was alone and all that wouldn't be necessary. She bled out quickly and that is expected.'

'Where the bullet hit, huh?' his gaze was well fixed on him, a topsy turvy look. He knew the bullet hit her chest and that means any vital organ in there can be hit. Leaning forward with elbows on the table he made a go ahead signal to Cyril.

'It was precisely her liver.'

'So?'

'So, her liver was damaged, releasing blood to the outside and ...'

'Ok,' he said, cutting him off, 'the dead should be left dead, nothing can be done.'

He knew he wasn't supposed to say that, but this had nothing to add or remove from her. What she needs now is justice.

'What of Tade?' Thomas asked.

'I'm sure we have talked about that before.' Cyril retorted.

'Yeah,' Thomas said. 'Based on what I said earlier...'

'What was that?' Cyril asked cutting him off. 'The dead should be left dead,' he made a joke out of him. 'Based on this I know you are bothered about the living.'

Cyril walked towards the refrigerator which was at the far end behind the Detective. The refrigerator had three layers. He brought out a cold tea he had carefully placed in the fridge a few hours ago. Coffee wasn't his thing.

'About Tade, I need to tell you this,' he said. 'On one of my visit to Crossgate precisely when I was off duty last month, a friend invited me to come and that was when I first met him.' He took a sip, grinning after each one. 'When you made mention of that name on phone and...'

'You knew Tade?'

'I linked it to him, but I was not sure about that, until you send his picture. I was drawn to him by his brilliance and what I would say I admired is statesmanship if it was in a political setting.'

Thomas only nodded as he dropped his two hands on his lap.

'He was competing with a friend named Kelvin, 'Thomas exploded out of the chair, ready to listen to whatever he want to say. 'It was a departmental stuff,' he gulped the remaining tea. 'I mean they were having an academic battle for annual University game in Kaduna.'

'So what are you driving at?'

'So I spoke with him after he narrowly lost to Kelvin, and I was amazed by what he said. His words were...'

'And your conclusion is?' He cuts him off.

'I don't think he will do that.' Cyril voice was strong, more like a colossus, though he his one in his own field.

'What makes you so sure of that, huh?' Thomas relaxed his back in his chair, 'you don't have to believe or trust everybody.' He said. 'You seem to be interested in this 'Tade,' he gave him a scrutinizing look. 'What will you say about what was found at the crime scene? Words, principle, or personality can't save 'Tade from the law. A highly convincing alibi would do, but that won't happen in this case.'

'What you don't understand is...'

'Better. I don't understand and it should be like that.' Thomas cuts him off again as his eyes narrowed to a crinkled slit. 'You are a doctor and emotion is taking you up,' he smiled at himself. 'You save emotions for patients not criminals or murderers. Detectives don't allow this, we follow what we see and takes out nepotism and emotions.'

He giggled. 'Favouritism isn't my thing. Look,' Cyril said 'I'm a doctor, I don't think favouritism has anything to do with my profession. But remember a good doctor has to relate well with others, I'm not a telepathic but I'm sure your prime suspect...'

'You don't think 'Tade killed Susan, right?' Thomas asked cutting him off, 'You know what,' he stood and shoved his hand in his pocket, trying to choose his words carefully. He still needed the doctor's cooperation on this case. 'We work on evidences not words and emotion. You can't expect me to believe 'Tade is not guilty unless you have an evidence that could contradict what I have.'

'Why don't you think otherwise,' Cyril said. 'Yes, the killer murdered her because he knew it will be dangerous not to do so, but that may just be a distraction.'

Thomas tried to follow him as the word "distraction" struck his mind. The killer should have used a mask if he want to be on the safe side. But he didn't, neither did rest of his group. He bent his head as a movie scene replayed in his mind.



*Esther sister wouldn't have killed Aiden if she did not want a distraction. She killed Aiden just as a Wolf would, knowing full well that Klaus ego won't let him speak the truth. He had always taken glory in things like this. She had planned that to make Marcel and Elijah angry at Klaus then to increase Davina hatred for him. Distracting all of them that cared about him was the only way to make him vulnerable to her attack.*

*But how can that be applied here?* He thought to himself.

'Would a killer drop any implicating material at the crime scene? Why would a killer disappear if he had planned it well? Do you think if Tade killed her, he would leave Port Harcourt, eh?' Cyril dropped his cup on the refrigerator. 'Did you even think about that?'

'His disappearance would increase his percentage of being the suspect. Your analysis seems right.' Thomas acknowledged.

*It could be otherwise though, Tade might want an approach in the bad boys way, then be the bad boy himself. And if that is exactly what he did, then why would killing her and disappearing to another state or country not be a good plan?* Thomas thought.

'I think you are also wrong if you think the case is settled based on the autopsy which you haven't done.' He chuckled slightly. 'When she was about to die, she was shocked. How do you think someone kidnapped will be shocked at the point of death?'

'Probably the killer instilled the shock,' the doctor answered.

'Killers instill fear not shock Doc, but a known killer instill shock.'

'So?'

'So what I'm insinuating is that I have a potential suspect.'

'I'll take that as a tentative statement.'

'Not tentative, because the court will confirm the certainty but...' Thomas trailed off, not interesting in continuing the conversation.

'But what?' Cyril asked, pulling him back to his statement.

'The tape has him.' He focused his gaze on the doctor and seeing him propped his elbow on his knee said it all. He guessed the doctor's speech was based on Tade being Susan last caller and that was mere coincidence. But the centre of this case for him has been the video tape. 'I need those results to strengthen our evidences against him,' he said.

'Time to go Detective, I got only thirty more minutes.' Cyril said as he checked his wrist. 'We need to check the autopsy room.'

The autopsy room was not far from Dr. Cyril's office, this was because most of the medical examiners occupied the fourth floor. He opened the door gently.

'We are going to spend a little time here,' he reminded Thomas.

'Apart from what I said in my office,' Cyril moved closer to the corpse and unzipped the body bag. 'Because of my almost free schedule today, I attended to

the corpse few minute after your team brought it. Since it's a gunshot,' he said while looking at the corpse 'there is slight chance of knowing who the killer is especially when there is no contact and eye witness.

'Two bullets pierced Susan liver exactly at the centre, which is in between the right hypochondriac and epigastric region. This increased her bleeding and also hints at something,' he paused and looked at Thomas. 'The killer is an expert, I don't believe he got a lucky shot, rather I believed it was an incredible one. The two bullets aligned perfectly well, with precise gap in between. If she was shot between 12 a.m. and 2 a.m. then the killer don't want her to survive. And that made me to believe this isn't his first time.

'You are indirectly saying Tade can't be our killer, unless his accuracy with a gun is perfect.'

'Exactly.' He nodded firmly.

'This is our first case on someone been shot in the liver with such accuracy, we won't be wrong to believe it was a lucky shot. We can only know that if this killer is a serial killer.'

'Tom, he might be discreet about it.' Cyril sighed. 'I mean the killer previous kills might have been done secretly. And remember the killer might be from another location.'

Tom? Cyril always address him with that name when bothered, and that tells him how frustrated the doctor had been concerning his judgment. All that still baseless to him if compared to the evidence he had.

'I'm afraid your findings can't help our suspect for now.' He said.

'Are you scared he might not know about guns?' the doctor snapped. 'When you find him, take him to the field, let him take a round of shots.'

Thomas opened his mouth to laugh but he closed it almost immediately. 'That's the least you should expect. Suspects will always try to know what your plan is, so they won't agree with what you want from them,' Thomas replied him.

Thomas studied him as he zipped up the cover bag, standing akimbo with a tight face muscle.

'About the shock,' Cyril said slowly with no enthusiasm. 'Detecting some stress hormone may help with that, because they are capable of increasing heart rate, blood pressure and damaging arteries.'

'I will wait for the results.' Thomas said as they walk towards the door.

Cyril picked up his brief case and stared at him. 'I believe you know sometimes crime like this bring little or no contact between the killer and victim. Moreover, I only dwell on the bullet, so I'm not through with her.' He replied.

Thomas took few steps forward, stopped, then turned and jumped in front of

him. He caught the surprise on the doctor face.

'I know that,' Thomas said. 'You only have to do your quota and I will do mine. I'm sure you have medical histories of all the students in the hospital database.'

Cyril lips froze. He picked up his phone, swiped it to the right before a name popped out, and he showed it to Thomas.

'I think I'm familiar with that name.' Thomas said.

'Excuse me for a while.' Dr. Cyril dialled the line as Thomas stood giving his friend a piercing stare, trying to figure out what he was up to.

'It might take me additional thirty minutes to be there, I need to attend to something.' Cyril was now on phone Thomas knew Cyril was up to something.

'Confidentiality is needed in medicine, so be plain about what you want,' Dr. Cyril said.

'I need Susan's health profile, then I will diligently wait for the autopsy report.'

Dr. Cyril gasped and waved his right hand. He laughed, then shoved his hand into his pocket and drew out his key. 'A brief talk will be needed.' Dr. Cyril said as he pointed to his office.

'I don't have to tell you...' he paused after he had opened his door then walked toward the table. He opened the green folder which was on his table, his hand flipping through. 'During her six month industrial training period she was involved in the car with her Mum when she was killed.'

'I knew about that.' Thomas tried to rush him.

'This incidence affected Susan. She started having psychological trauma which she later overcame, but she could suffer a relapse if faced with such situation again.'

'She was only shocked when the killer came inside.' Thomas said.

'That is a sign that she had contained it well. If Susan was truly kidnapped, in which I believed she was, then the whole scenario could assist her in replaying the incident. I need to see the video too.' Dr. Cyril said with tinge of melancholy, his eyes off from the detective.

'If the killer can bring that out of her, then she must have felt betrayed by the friend who knew her Mum was shot and would also want same for her.' Thomas looked down.

It would have been easy if the dead are allowed to say a word about their killer.

'I think...' He cleared his throat. 'An autopsy should help to concrete that because I think the killer...' Thomas stopped. 'If her Mum was shot in her presence, then Tade pointing a gun at her would bring a strong flashback.'

'That isn't a proof that Susan told Tade about the money.' Cyril said.

'I think it is. Susan was shocked because someone she confided in betrayed her.' Thomas said.

Walking back through the stairs was quite relieving until a journalist caught up with him. He tugged at his suit and return one of his hand into his pocket as the front door had been blocked by the press. He had expected this, but not today. Susan background was enough to alert him, he should have been aware that he would be the orbit for the revolving journalists at least for the mean time. The trouble of answering their questions overshadowed him, if it were to be an average citizen murder case he may not experience this much hounding.

'Any information about the deceased?' One of the journalist asked, she was short and chubby.

'Yes,' he said. 'But we still need to work...'

'Then who is the actual killer?' Another question popped in, stopping him from his first reply. People were really anxious to know who did this but this wasn't a discussion for today. He tried to turn back but was amazed that he was already in the centre.

'Do you think a cult group or probably an assassinator did it?' Another journalist fired at him.

'All assassins are killers but all killers aren't assassin. But on a real note they are all murderers. Telling you who the killer is will be unfair to his image, we have to be certain before saying a word about that. The killer could probably be a student, the closest one to her or someone she confided in.' He said as his forehead puckered.

'Her father said she was killed due to the money in her possession, do you think so?' Another journalist asked.

Thomas smiled, the question sounded silly to him but they asked for clarification.

*How did these people even reach Susan's Dad. Apart from not being in the country, the time interval between when her corpse was found and now shouldn't be enough to get that information from a bereaved father.*

'That is what we are working on, if her death was because of the money then someone within her fold should be responsible.'

'Are you saying her friends? Because she will always confided in her friends.'

He felt like having a bodyguard to save him from these, he had expected them to be satisfied with what he has said, but their voracity was an evidence they weren't.

'We believe so and... I think she confided in the wrong person and she pay for it,' he said. 'I have to go now,' he added.

'Any prime suspect now?' The chubby journalist asked again, bursting into the discussion. 'Anyone the investigation team are keeping tabs on.'

He gazed at the doctor who had found his way out. He was definitely in haste.

He placed his right hand on her shoulder. 'Yes we are keeping tab on someone, but this is not for the press now,' he throw her an affable smile. 'That's why there is a place for detectives.'

\* \* \*

At 7:30 p.m., Detective Thomas parked in front of Susan's house, he had to study of her environment. It had struck his mind after leaving the hospital in the afternoon.

With his car off-road, he alighted and faced Susan's apartment, giving himself a side view of it. The building was about two kilometres away from the school. Its proximity is good, but apart from the serenity he disliked the location. He always preferred staying in school hostels because of the access to school facilities at any time including more friends to chat with. Maybe this won't have happened if Susan still lived in the hostel.

He could hear the squeak of the small animals from the bushes around. Even though a few people passed by, he wasn't satisfy. Tranquility will soon be here in the next few hours.

He scrutinised the compound, a duplex was at the left and a block of six flats at the right with Susan apartment being the first. It would have been of great help if the building was fenced, and a security guard assigned to it.

The proximity of her apartment to the road was to her disadvantage unlike Reb who rented the sixth apartment. She might have been a victim if she stayed with Susan.

He ambled towards her apartment in the lonely street, he halted after taking few steps.

'If she was killed between 12 a.m. and 2 a.m., then the gang should be here around...' he paused as his mind drifted to the camera, he had been engrossed with the quest of identifying and finding the killer and left necessary details. 'The time would definitely be there.' He spoke quietly to himself. *They would probably be here around eleven, when the whole environment was silent. Tade would have told them all needed information including the time when no one would be outside.* He thought as he walked closer.

Entering Susan's apartment with Reb, he fumbled his hand around the wall for the switch and when the light came on, he could still see the dark blood on the floor. According to the camera, the gang had done well. They did not touch

her neither were they careless in leaving one of their belongings and they did not touched anything outside nor inside.

The living room was the exact picture of how a student apartment should be. Her reading table was at the left corner of the door with piles of books on it. It was arranged in such a way that the space in between the piles was enough for her to read. A flat-screen TV faced the door while a coffee table occupied a space in the middle – were four legs on a rug. A three-seater settee and an armchair was what she settled for.

Thomas noticed the laptop on one of the piles.

*In a normal circumstances, they would have stolen the laptop. It won't be here, not after what had happened.* He thought. *This shows what their priority was.*

They both entered Susan bedroom to find any other helpful material apart from the laptop. Her bedroom was more spacious. She had only a bed, bedside lamp and wardrobe. The wardrobe faced the door. On the floor, to the left side of the wardrobe was a filing cabinet of about 40 centimetres long. Reb squatted in front of the cabinet after putting on a pair of glove Thomas gave her. She then put in the right key into the lock.

The cabinet looked more like an archive, as books and other materials were well packed inside. It has only three layers. Thomas took out all the files and books. The first file he returned contained all her school documents from her first year. He checked the third layer and could see diaries with different year inscribed on it. He browsed through the latest one and heaved a long sigh after he read a little.

*4th July: Kelvin traveled to Kaduna- the northern part of the country for annual University games.*

*6th July: Dad dropped the total sum of 250million Naira with me due to some reasons.*

*Told a special individual about this, someone who believes in my abilities.*

*8th July: Dad called to asked if I have installed the camera and my negative reply annoyed him. I was forced to call Stan for help.*

*9th July: I bought the camera with Stan help, and we both agreed to get it installed on Monday.*

*11th July:*

'Now I know why her Dad trusted her. She was so good with records.' Thomas said as he turned to face Reb. 'Who is she referring to as special? Kelvin or Tade?'

He could see the bewilderment in her face as she struggled to answer the question.

'I need an answer Reb.'

'I don't think I can answer that, all of us are special to her just as she is special to us.'

He took a snapshot of the writing before returning everything to its place. 'I understand your fear Reb, but...' he walked towards the wardrobe and stand before her, he throw her a cordial smile. 'I have been fed with lectures on this case today, and most of it convinces me about my suspect.'

She walked swiftly towards the bed. 'Then is your suspect still him?'

'I'm still working on my suspect, so your reply will go a long way in helping me with that.'

She nodded, as her cheeks flushed. She shifted forward, then sit on the bed and rested her hands on her laps. 'Kelvin and Tade, she likes Tade for his words and...' She halted. 'I think same goes for Kelvin, they are good with words.'

'Then who do you think she was referring to?'

'Since Kelvin is not around I think the special one will be Tade. But she can also call Kelvin and leave Tade behind.'

'That means they are both special, right?'

'Yes.' She replied and left for the living room keeping her eyes away from the dried blood.

Thomas gazed on the picture adorned on the hi-fi cabinet, he studied it. The face was that of Susan, same oval face with a flat nose. He could also see the birth mark beside her lips, but something look different, the person in the picture looked older than Susan. He tried to scan the room for the last time before finding his way out of the room.

Closing the entrance door behind, he saw Reb resting her hands on the railings, her head drooped.

'The picture on the hi-fi cabinet... that was her mother, right?' He asked.

'Yes.' Replied Reb as she went back to lock the door.

## CHAPTER SIX

*Tade's cheek looked puffy as the meat still lingered in his mouth. He was clad in white gown which made him look more like an Arabian, the scarf not failing to make it look convincing. He lowered his gaze, then stopped as the filled plate invited him once again, making his stomach rumbled for more food.*

*'Tade,' Mart called out, as Susan's death case find it way into his memory, 'Tade...' He called out again before Stan woke him up.*

'What?' He asked with clenched jaws as his gaze met that of Stan who was now laughing.

'You sound lost.' Stan said. 'You perspiring because you had a nightmare.' He picked up a towel and tossed it to him. He then retired to his bed, his eyes gleamed with amusement.

'Reb didn't...'

'I dre.... dreamt of Tade,' he managed to say, cutting off Stan. 'He dressed like an Arab man.'

Stan gave him a piercing look with his now widened eyes. 'Do you believe that yourself?' He asked.

'No.' He retorted. 'I'm just telling you what I dreamt about.'

'We need to save ourselves from this Mart, and we must start with Tade.'

'Then you need Reb.' Mart said.

Stan halted. Mart was right, Reb will always be the Detective's informant. But what worries him was were her stand is. He had visited her twice yesterday and even called her but all was futile.

'Remember all my efforts to reach her yesterday?'

'She lost a close friend Stan, and to made it worst another friend was responsible for it according to the detective. What do you expect from her after that, huh?'

Stan flung himself onto the bed without a reply, he inhaled a sharp breath owing to the fact of seeing Reb today. The thought of that made his lip set in a grim line.

'Kelvin, yes, Kelvin, what do you think...?' Mart let his voice trail off, trying



to find the right word to impede him from sleep after about five minutes of silence. 'Now the police will declared him wanted if the camera you installed showed him.' He rested his back on the wall and fixed his gaze on Stan back view hoping for a reply.

'And Tade's mother, huh?' He said again after silence followed his initial question.

'What is wrong with his mother?'

'Tade will be declared wanted, what do you think she will do?' He edged closer to him. 'We eat together, we do everything together. What do you think she will say or do?' He said even as Stan never turned to look at him.

'She will roast our head before noon of any day that happened,' Stan replied blithely with his back still facing him. 'Sorry,' he said after changing his posture. 'I don't know what to say or think, Mart, I don't know if I will be able to stand what people will think about us.'

Stan let his mind ran many thoughts before Mart words stopped him.

'That's why we need to be patient,' Mart gestured. 'We only need God factor, and hope he is...'

'Let hope he riot in jail.' Reb said cutting him off, she picked a paper, crushed it in her fist and throw it at them.

Stan could see her narrowed eyes as her chin jutted out, making her message glaring before she let tears rolled down her chin. He watched her stifled it. Her cracked voice was obvious. All he could think of was an uncontrolled sob before heading here.

'Stop!' Stan shouted, his pitch enough to cease a beat. She despised them, he could understand that but coming up with such word seems gratuitous. 'What is it Reb, what happen to your courtesy?' He questioned.

'Ta...Tade happened,' she said with the highest pitch she could think of. 'You guys are bunch of killers, ungrateful fools.' She added, her voice quite affected by the tears.

Stan could only found himself looking at her, speechless.

'He killed her, wasted her life because of money..., Stan.' She sobbed. Now he understood why Susan wants a camera being installed. But his confusion was basically on how Tade got to know about the money. If Tade had threatened her, then Susan would definitely talk about it. He thought. On the other hand she won't have allowed him to help with the installation.

'What made you sure about this?' He asked.

'The detective invited me to his office yesterday if I can recognized the killer,' she said with a low voice, as she sat on Stan bed. Her head closer to her laps. 'The killer happened to be...' She sobbed without saying a word again, she

then cleaned part of her tears with the back of her hand. 'If only I knew who you guys are,' she stopped and stood, 'why did he do that, Mart?' She pointed at him then turned to Stan 'because of money, huh?'

Stan tried to move closer to her but stopped following an unwelcoming expression from her.

'I understand why you are acting like this Reb,' he said with a lowered voice. 'Remember Susan is also our friend and I'm sure you remember that I helped with the installation.'

'And so?'

'Then you should understand what I said earlier.' Stan said.

'I watched the tape with the detective, Stan and...' She stopped, letting her hand sway in the air. 'Don't know why I'm here.'

'I installed the camera, Reb, you have to know that I informed my roommates about it. This means that Tade knows about the camera,' he paused and searched for her gaze, 'put yourself in that scenario, will you be too daft to kill without covering up your face?'

His question must have made an impact as she was speechless for about forty seconds.

'I'm not bird-brained, Stan. I know what I saw, you can't talk me out of this.' She stood up, 'I'm going to show you.' She said as she rolled up her sleeves.

Stan tried to keep eye contact with her, hoping she had secretly transferred the video to her phone.

'One,' she said. 'He put on his favourite casual cloth and...'

'What is his favourite casual cloth?' Mart asked.

She searched for Mart gaze, and when it met with hers she said 'Thank goodness, you are a witness. Black trousers and a forest green colour shirt. Am I right?'

'And,' she gave a slight smile. 'I could recognize his face. He shot with his left, and the last time I checked he still use his left for most things.' She returned her gaze to Stan. 'I'm sorry you guys can't convince me because you...' She stopped, realizing how big her word would be.

Stan dipped his two hands into his pocket. If it was Tade he won't have attacked carelessly unless he chose to. And based on Reb's words she won't have expressed her anger if she wasn't sure of what she had seen. And that might actually be in line with Mart dream. Stan thought as he kept lulling.

She had spent months together with Tade, Stan thought, then why won't she recognize him if she sees him. He scanned the room even though his mind wasn't there, conceding easily to what Reb had said would only make him just

like her. He needed to say something, at least fill her with words.

'Calm down Reb,' Mart said. 'We need to discuss on what our next step should be not accusing one another.'

'Discussion under my...' She paused and stood up so as to perched on the table.

Stan perch beside her, his hand on his chest. 'We didn't see or find him yesterday,' he placed his hand on her shoulder before returning it to his chest. 'and that is really unusual of him.'

'What are you trying to say?' She asked.

'Tade might have been kidnapped, and then compelled to take the shot.' Mart said jumping into the conversation.

'Why not decline.' She said allowing tears to flow on her cheek again. 'He can refuse to shoot Mart, is that not so?' She turned to look at Stan and Mart again.

'Things doesn't go that way in cases like this,' he led her to a sit and sat beside her. Containing Reb was some progress. 'He might be killed if he refused and...'

'And they will still go ahead...' She stopped and looked at both of them. 'I understand, I'm sorry for my behaviour.' She said.

'But how will this convince the judge, I don't want him in prison,' She paused following a look from Stan. 'Come on, only if he is innocent.' She laughed quietly.

Stan turned his gaze away from them, he needs to think. If he was right about the analysis then there must be something different from the perfect scene. The detective and his team are experts in their field but they are never acquainted with any of their suspect.

'You said you were with him, huh?'

Reb fixed her eyes on Stan then nodded a yes to his question.

'Good,' he said, standing up and walking to the opposite side. 'If you watched the video tape together with him then you should be able to note some strange things about it.'

She jolted, 'strange like?'

'Like behaviour,' he said. 'Maybe something like the conversation the killer had with her,' he added quickly.

She looked at Mart then back to Stan quickly, 'I don't think I understand you, but...' She paused, placed her chin on her palm. 'Oh wait,' she said after few seconds. 'He wasn't the one giving command, but I don't think that is necessary, they never acted like they have a boss.'

'Any other thing you observe from the video,' Stan squatted beside her. 'I

know you are not a detective but you doing this for us, for Tade and Susan.'

'He was the last to enter and Susan was shocked seeing him, just like I was when I watched it.'

He stood up and turned his back to Reb. He needed to find another thing to say, now that she is ready to talk, he turned swiftly to face her and Mart again. 'If he wasn't the one given orders and he was the last to enter...'

'To take the shot.' Reb said cutting him off.

'If they called him in, that means they know about the camera, they have an insider, but they will never use the insider at the crime scene which means...'

'They kidnapped Tade as a distraction.' Mart said.

'Then who will the insider be?' Stan asked.

'Definitely someone close to us, someone snooping on us.'

'That confirmed, Tade was forced to kill her.' Reb found herself adding. 'But we can't use that to save him, we will need to find a convincing evidence to disprove this.'

'We don't have to, the lawyer will have to find a way to pass this to the judge.' Mart said.

Stan teeth sank in his lower lip, his left middle finger tapped his wrist continuously as he waited for another thought to fill his mind. He was silent as he thought of something else. They would take it badly but he knew he had no choice.

'We should call his Mum,' Stan said and fixed his eyes on Reb who was waiting for what he will say next. 'You can call her Reb.'

'No, Stan, I can't do that.' Reb said.

'I think..., ' Mart tossed his phone to Reb. 'This is getting serious.'

Stan collected the phone from Reb and scrolled through, then stopped as his eyes caught the story picture. 'Whether we call her or not, she will still get to know. This story was uploaded about an hour ago.' He passed the phone back to Reb.

'We have to call Tade's Mum but I don't think I can face a mother's anger.' Reb said.

'She will be diplomatic about this, I think,' Mart winked.

'Halt guys.' Stan said as he picked up his phone to call Tade mum. Summoning the courage wasn't easy, but they didn't have more time on their hands. They have to show they care about him and Stan was sure his mother will think of their action the same way.

'Hey Stan, send me your bank details,' he could hear a feminine voice, making him to rechecked his phone, he might have dialled the wrong number. 'Sorry I haven't put a call across to you guys when I read the news, but...' the call

dropped, bringing some relief to him. But that was weird, he never expect to hear something like that, her manner of approach was intriguing but what does she need his bank details for?

'I think the wrong person picked up the call,' he said as he turned towards them, 'she was asking for bank details on the first note then apologetic. If I am to be rational which am sure I am, what she said wasn't correlating with what we have here; apart from saying she read...'

'That's weird, Stan,' Reb said. 'This news has not spend more than an hour.'

'She might be online or someone told her.' Mart said.

'Or maybe...' Stan stopped.

*I shouldn't be the one to do this, Stan thought to himself. Making my intention known would only give Reb something to say.*

They were all startled as Stan's phone began to ring, she was calling again.

'Please I will like to speak to Mrs. Leo.' He said before the caller could say anything. He pressed the loudspeaker key on his phone before a loud sigh came from the other side.

'You are speaking with Mrs. Leo, send me your bank details. I would like to see all you guys here before the week runs out.' She said. 'I will appreciate if it can be Tomorrow.' She added.

'You mean all of us?' He asked calmly, still confused on why she said that.

'Yes dear, all.' She cleared her throat, 'I will text you the address of my chamber now; when should I be expecting you guys?' She asked.

That was too quick to ask, he needed to discuss it with others. 'Tomorrow Ma,' he replied without thinking, he was more eager to find out what made her sound like that. 'We will catch an early flight to Lagos Tomorrow.' He said before placing a finger on his lips.

'Did she just say we should come over?' Mart asked.

'Yes.'

'And you replied yes without thinking, huh? Reb said.

'She can't harm us and to make things easier, she want us to meet her at her chamber. Her tone was impassive though.' Stan said with bewilderment.

If he is to follow his intuition then he has to be there. She had called few minutes after her only son was declared wanted and it seems the fact did not move her one bit.

'Whatever happens in Lagos Tomorrow would only make me to know who to follow.' Stan said in a quiet voice as he returned the phone into his pocket.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

The Detective stopped blinking, his eyebrows were raised as he fixed his eyes on Cyril. Cyril had a puzzled frown on his face, his left hand has been supporting his chin. He held an A4 paper in his right hand. Beside him was someone he didn't know.

Thomas was sure he is in his late twenties, dark in complexion with a medium size afro hair on him. His pimples hide under his complexion and an inviting chinstrap.

'I can't really believe it.' The guy said before supporting himself with his hands.

*Maybe someone on internship,* Thomas thought, trying to guess who he is. He had not seen doctors keeping beards, then why would an intern keep his beard?

'Give a copy to Ken.' He said.

'And where is Ken?' Thomas watched as Cyril asked.

'Went to the state HQ.'

Now, Thomas knew who Cyril is talking to. It must be the man in charge of the fingerprints results found at the crime scene. Thomas lowered his gaze and he observed Cyril's hands had gotten sweaty. Thomas scanned the room for the air conditioner remote control but couldn't find it, he need to move the air conditioner from fan speed. Cyril was perspiring under the A.C.

'This is the Tech man,' Cyril cleaned his face with the white handkerchief and he placed it on a file. 'He's in charge of the school database.' He continued.

'Detective Thomas.' He said extending his hand for a shake.

'Bayo, Tech man.' The young man said.

'I thought you shared network...'

'It would be better to see in person.' Cyril said cutting Thomas off.

'Do you think the print will be of help?' The Tech man asked. He had both hands resting on the table, leaning forward as he faced Thomas.

'You mean?' Thomas asked.

'I mean,' he paused for effect then continued, 'Tade might have visited the place before Susan was killed, he could have left his prints behind just as

anybody who might have visited.'

'Yeah you are right...' he looked at the doctor with a brief smile. 'Bayo, thanks for the insight.' He was sure he knew nothing about the case. Ken only gave him the prints he extracted from the hanky, then sent it to Cyril. 'Thanks for the help.'

'Don't mention, I was only doing my job.' Bayo replied.

He could have been right if there isn't a camera to disprove that, and that also might be used as an alibi by Tade. His lawyer won't stop without using that.

'I have to be on my way.' Bayo announced, as he shook hands with the doctor who had cleaned his sweaty hands and with a nod toward the detective, he walked out.

An eerie silence filled the room for a while. Thomas shifted in his chair. He and Cyril exchanged glances.

'Even though I came here for a reason, I need to know why you are ill at ease.' He studied the doctor as he held his lower lip in between two canine. His eyes blinked rapidly.

'Is this about Tade? Or what?'

'Yes,' Cyril rested his elbow on the table. 'After my presentation at Crossgate yesterday I tried to revisit Susan case.' The detective fastened his eyes on the doctor's lips. 'She had a repeat of psychogenic shock before the gunshot. Some of her capillaries were ruptured; they show evidence of oxygen and nutrient deprivation.'

Thomas relaxed into the chair. He could now understand the reason for the Doc perspiration, emotion had its way especially after the prints had been confirmed. But for him, things were going well. The autopsy result correlated with her action in the video but on the other hand Tade's fingerprint matched the one found at the death scene. Thomas needed to wait for the DNA result and focus on the search for his sinister suspect.

'Any news about his disappearance?' The Doc asked, 'Tade had been declared wanted and finding him will be a good development.'

Thomas gave him a questioning look. The doctor was sounding different. It means he was concerned about the poor boy and he had no emotional attachment.

'Why do you think so?' Thomas asked.

'When we find him we will know the truth.' He answered.

'Are you saying these evidences are pointing in the wrong direction?'

'I'm only saying there will be a reason for this, he could have been compelled to do this or probably the gang members used a look alike.'



This has been one of his reasons of sticking with the doctor, though Cyril was not a detective neither was he specialized in criminal law, he always reasoned like one. There was no proof to back up Cyril's suggestion, these words are not strong to contradict his evidences. And if he wants to follow Cyril's ideology then there should be a proof, strong enough to make the video tape useless. They had to look at this case at different perspective.

'A look alike won't be available within that short time, Susan collected the money on Wednesday evening and died on Monday,' Thomas leaned forward. 'Does that mean something to you?'

'Yeah, the gap between the two events, but that means they planned it well.' Cyril searched for a plain sheet and pen, then placed it on the table. He scribbled on it and tossed it forward. 'If what her father told you is to be followed then we will be fools not to suspect them.'

'Oh!' Thomas said as his mind flashed back to his conversation with the Senator. He narrated the incident to Cyril.

*He had called Senator Obi, Susan's father when he reached his office on Monday and after the numerous pauses the senator had dropped the call. It was expected, a normal reaction. He felt sorry for the Senator, losing his wife last year had taken a lot from him and now his daughter is dead, two deaths in two years. He was amazed when his phone rang fifteen minutes later; Senator Obi called back. Thomas thought he would be overcome with emotional pain, but he realised he was wrong after conversing with the caller.*

*'I caused this,' he could hear that on the phone, he could imagine what state the senator is. The pain and inward tears he will have to bear now. 'I shouldn't have given her the money, but I was in haste and put her life in danger.' Now he was only listening, there was nothing he could say to relieve the bereaved father. But one thing had struck his mind- finding the killer.*

*'You said today, huh?' Senator Obi asked. 'Find the killer ,' he added and the line went dead.*

'What does this mean to you?' The doctor asked.

'Her father was careless and too trusting when it came to money.' He replied.

'Exactly.' Dr. Cyril stood up and straightened his red tie. 'Now you have to work on these two plans,' he pointed to the sheet in front of him. 'You have to do this for the girl and...' He stopped, as including Tade's name will be superfluous.

'I'm finding it easy to believe you.' He said with laughter regarding Cyril's contribution.

Yet he had to be cautious about the things he accepted. If the evidences he had accumulated would be nullified then a positive outcome from interrogating

the Senator business partner must be more than ninety percent.

Cyril brought out a newspaper, the name bright and bold at the top of the paper with a fading date 'I'm sure you have seen it,' he said placing it in front of him. 'You know what they are saying, right?'

'What?' Thomas asked as he picked up the paper. 'Oh!' He exclaimed with the paper now in between his hands. He wasn't surprised as he scanned through it.

'Don't you think that needs to be addressed, I mean before it went out of hand, this is Port Harcourt, people could be...' Cyril stopped, he was probably saying too much.

'They are known for that because democracy allows them to express their views and that we can't dispute. I am sure they are people from Susan's senatorial district,' Thomas said as he dropped the paper on the table. 'They want the same thing we want, they want justice.'

'The country has history,' Cyril said as he walk toward the chart hung on the wall. It had the map of the country. 'Sometimes I think this country is fragile when it comes to tribal differences. Nigeria has over two hundred and fifty tribes of which three is regarded as the major ones,' he ran his left middle finger from the west to the east of the southern protectorate. 'The Yorubas and Igbos occupies the Southern protectorate, and...'

'Each state in Nigeria has more than the three tribes residing in them Doc, what are you saying in essence?' He said cutting him off.

'An half Igbo girl is believed to be killed by a Yoruba guy when her Igbo soul mate is representing the school in an Hausa state. We know that Port Harcourt has traditional link with Igbo's.'

*Tribal fragility? That is an absurd train of thought; this is the twenty-first century this might have been the case in the late 60's and early 70's, no more ethnocentrism.* Thomas thought.

He had his gaze on the floor as he stroked the hair on his chin. This is insane, he had never thought of this, the Igbo's are everywhere in the country, just as other tribes seek greener pastures or adventures in other part of the country. Still, something must have stirred this up within the Doc it is most likely he has undergone some study about the Ojukwu civil war era. The war was believed to have resulted from the Northern anti-Igbo sentiment which lead to death of thousands of Igbo's in the 1960's, which made Ojukwu declare Biafra as a Republic in the '67 and Port Harcourt became one of the Biafra's stronghold. Even though most of the Igbo's wants out, Susan death cannot be enough reason for an anti tribal fight.

'My priority is to demystify this case, I want to know what makes it unfathomable, I need to know...' Thomas lowered his voice, 'don't want the wrong person to suffer and this,' he stood up and faced the exit. "This is not about tribalism.'

'Oh no! Thomas sounded frustrated as he stopped on the last flight of stairs. 'I don't need this.' He said seeing information-hungred journalists in front of him. They had caught him unaware and it was possible that they monitored his movement.

*Is someone giving them information about my whereabouts?*

This time they were few in numbers unlike the previous time. He walked slowly towards them with hands in his pockets.

*I mustn't say a word. A detective keeps information even when he is compelled to.*

'Any information on Tade Leo's whereabouts?'

'What are the police doing about this?'

The questions were deafening as they moved close to him.

'Today we see the people from her district clamouring for quick justice, showing concern about two deaths in a single family within a period of two years. What do you have to say about this?'

He stopped walking as he could now compare Susan's mother death with what the doctor's idea. Susan's mother was shot inside her car last year in one of the south western state. Both deaths involved Westerners.

'This isn't about tribe, this is about coincidence and covetousness. This is one nation, one people.' He said as he find his way into his car.

\* \* \*

'First time in Lagos,' Stan said as they reached the gates of the MIA. Helooked around trying to catch a fleeting picture of the busy commercial city. Walking towards the car parked at his right side, he held his backpack in hand.

'We should sit at the back seat.' He said, after catching up with Mart and Reb.

'I still can't understand why I'm here,' Mart said. 'If she wanted to talk she could have come to see us at school or perhaps one of us could make this trip. You can help with that,' he said facing Stan. 'Reb can follow you even though she is insecure at the moment.' He winked, then pushed her lightly with his shoulder.

'That is what I can't decipher for now, I want to know about Tade whereabouts, I want to trust him to be innocent.' Mart continued his monologue.

Reb laughed out loud, 'I think Mart is right, only one person is enough for the trip. I enjoyed the trip, changing environment always look amazing. But...' She suddenly had a blank look. 'Tade's Mum won't hide her intentions, we just have to hear her out first rather than making stupid assumptions.'

Stan gave her a penetrating look. It was as though she read his thoughts. Her words struck him and Mart was right, only one person should have come.

They all entered the classy red Toyota Vensa which had on it a customized number plate, one he thought was the firm acronym. It was the car Mrs. Leo sent to pick them, it seemed their comfort was important to her. Nevertheless that was enough to inject doubts into his mind but he contained it.

The driver switched on the AC, he was looking well dressed for a driver. Stan had a frown on his face when they were caught in traffic jam at Obalende, he didn't want to spend the night in Lagos.

'How long are we going to stay here?' Stan asked and others burst into laughter. They've all heard news of the legendary Lagos traffic jam, still he care less about their laughter or the stories. They had been stuck here for half an hour, he was getting sick of the car AC. Stan looked out of the car window hoping to explore a bit of Lagos but all he could see was the car beside them obstructing his view. The man inside the other car was sweating; he could spot the suit which the man hung behind himself.

*His AC container is empty.* Stan thought.

'To beat time in Lagos,' the driver said as he turn his head around to look at them. 'You have to schedule your time.'

'Oh.' He said following a brief silence, he then tried blocking his ears with headphone as honking continued on the highway, his action must have been obvious as he saw a blonde woman in a Rav4 scrutinising him.

After about twenty minutes, Stan felt a great measure of relief as the car eventually drove into one of the parking lot.

*Leo P law firm.*

He had seen the firm name on one of the pillars.

'We will make use of the elevator,' the driver said as he alighted. Stan jammed his hands into his pocket as he examined the environment. The law firm had its location on the seventh floor. The ground floor was spacious, at the entrance was a noticeable tag with the word "Stairs" inscribed on it.

They entered the elevator after the driver had pressed a digit. 'Sixth floor?' Stan asked and was disappointed when the driver paid him no mind. The elevator stopped in it shaft and the door opened. Three doors were on both side, with the seventh one facing them.

'Second door by the left,' the driver said. 'Then open the door by your right,

she will join you soon.' Mart was surprised when he left for the elevator again. The room they entered only had one sofa, which enough to occupy three people.

'Are you guys sure we entered the right room?' Stan asked his friends trying to recall the driver's description he tapped his thigh intermittently.

'You should go out and check.' Reb said before the door opened behind them.

'Sorry I kept you waiting,' a woman said as she shut the door. She wore a pink blouse and pencil black skirt that stop just below her knees. Part of her hair was gray, the wrinkles on her face was hardly noticeable. She looked like a woman in her mid-fifties.

'I'm Mrs. Leo,' she said. 'I only had the opportunity to meet Reb in person, come over.'

*Tade must have gotten his dimples from her.* Stan thought as he took a cursory note of her dimples. Kelvin had dimples too but his dimple only shows on the right cheek.

They walked behind her as she led them to her office which looked more welcoming than the first room. On the filing cabinet; a wood carving of a boy beating the Bata drum. On her table was another image; the Edo ivory.

Picture frames were hung on the white walls of her office.

'Sit.' She said, pointing to the settee which was organized in a rectangular shape with a table at the centre.

*This looks comforting.* Stan thought to himself as he sat on a seat. On his left, close to the wall was a shelf with four layers. Books were conscientiously arranged in each of the layers. The office looked more like a library than an office.

She stood between two settee allowing them to sit first.

She sat after everyone was seated. Stan was conscious of everything.

'The press had said theirs, what do you guys have to say about Tade?' She asked. 'I'm on the verge of losing a son, my only child.'

Within the first ten minutes Stan noticed the change in her, her welcoming smile and wide eyes had been replaced with tensed eyebrows and an intense gaze. Mrs. Leo had kept her emotions in check also she sounded bright on phone.

'All these happened in a...!' Stan stopped when another voice interrupted him.

'Good to have friends willing to die for you.'

Stan, Mart and Reb turned to see who had just walked in. None of them heard the door open, that was something Reb does on a frequent basis. The

man had his cheek raised, this made the wrinkles form at the corner of his eyes. He clasped his hand behind his back and his foot well positioned inside the leather slippers he worn.

'Barrister Kunle, we work together. 'Mrs. Leo said facing them, then swiftly turned to the barrister, 'Tade's friends.'

'I'm sorry for coming late, the traffic is really hectic,' he said as he walked towards them with a faint smile.

'What do we have?' He asked.

'Coming to office since the "wanted" announcement on TV has not been easy for me, people might think I'm nonchalant about the news or I'm basically stupid to keep working in this present predicament of mine.' Her eyes still fixed on them, she pushed her head forward. 'I want Tade out of that case even though I don't know where he is now,' she paused as Stan eyes widened, his mouth gaped a little. 'What is it Stan?'

He was embarrass by his actions he tried to say something to cover the moment.

'We are just surprised by your...your...' Reb couldn't find the right words to fill in.

'Your confidence in him.' Mart said saving Reb from her loss of words.

Mrs. Leo nodded her head and as light smile formed from her cheek. 'If you could then why not me.' She looked staring at the table. 'I need your help, I need you to tell me something... anything you think will be helpful.

Stan held the bridge of his nose needed to trust Tade's mother.

*His quote has always been:*

*A friend is more than being mutual nor does friendship start when you accept people for who they are. Friendship starts with regard for another being. A friend might not talk to you for a while but whenever a friend does you see the glaring love and regard he has for you.*

Stan looked at Reb then nodded.

'Tade has been missing since the morning of the day Susan died,' Reb took a deep breath. 'He called her to come over and unfortunately he was her last caller. I mean the last caller we are sure of.' Reb said.

'Where are the others then?' She asked.

'I was the only one around,' Mart said. 'Tade didn't returned home on Monday.'

'And you did nothing about it? Did you inform the police or at least call him?' Barrister Kunle asked.

'We called but Susan and Tade line were unreachable.' Stan said, regretting his

assumption about their whereabouts. 'We only made attempt to do that the following day.'

'I'm not here to blame you guys, but I thought you should have valuable information.' Reb shifted in her seat, her head facing down.

'Do you have something bothering you, Reb?' Mrs. Leo asked.

She raised her head, to look at Mrs. Leo.

'I don't know who to believe, who to hate or blame, but...' tears rolled down her face.

'Oh, Reb! You don't have to,' she walked up to her 'you can hate or blame Tade, but you still have to trust him for the very reason you chose him to be your friend.' She said as she continued patting her back.

'Stan had helped Susan with the installation of a camera on Monday morning, that same camera footage had Tade in it. I saw him with the gun, I saw him pointing it at her and taking the shot. He killed her, he killed Susan.' Reb sobbed.

'Any other evidences apart from the footage?' Barrister Kunle asked.

'The detective talked about the handkerchief his team found at the scene...'

'For finger prints and probably a DNA test, right?' Mrs. Leo asked cutting her off. 'Did he asked for anything?'

Reb shook her head then gaze at Stan who said nothing but gave her a handkerchief to clean her tears.

She went back to her seat, brought out a plain sheet, Mrs. Leo spent almost a minute writing on the sheet.

'If Tade had been the last person to call her before she disappeared, before both lines went off then the detective won't be wrong to assume that. Moreover, the footage played an important role in confirming that.' Mrs. Leo said. 'And if the prints and DNA matched with that of Tade,' she stopped as she tapped the white sheet on her desk for about five times.

'What do you think Mart?'

Mart was so still, his eyes widened when she called him.

'I think he was forced to do it.'

'And you Stan?'

'Maybe a lookalike was the video footage but then that a lookalike will be difficult to find.' He replied.

'Do you agree with them, Reb?'

She raised her head reluctantly, her shoulder slumped. 'I can only believe what Mart said.' She replied.

'Why would you Reb?' Barrister Kunle asked.

She gave a faint smile. 'The cloth the killer wore was...' she pointed her index

finger at Mart, 'you can asked him.'

'OK,' Mrs. Leo said as her eyes was fixed on them. 'If Stan installed the camera then Tade will definitely know which means he can't be stupid to go inside without covering his face. And if he was being kidnapped and compelled to take the shot then the probability of having his prints and DNA on that handkerchief will be high. If we nullify those evidences then we can convince the Judge and make him or her nullify it,' she paused then gaze at the barrister. 'But with Susan family status and the money involve we might need more than just words.'

'Why are you planning this when Tade whereabouts is not known?' Reb asked.

'Good question Reb,' Mrs. Leo replied affably 'If they kidnapped both of them and later killed Susan, then they had planned to fool the police by using a friend as a glaring distraction.'

Reb looked at Tade's mum with surprise readable on her forehead.' What are you insinuating?'

'They knew about the camera installation, they have all the necessary details about Susan and probably about all of you. They knew who her favorite is among you and wanted to use that as the fulcrum of the distraction they needed.

'So?' Mart asked.

'Anyone you think of, maybe she have someone she's dating or a lover?' Barrister Kunle said.

'Kelvin,' Stan retorted. He had begun to buy Mrs. Leo's explanation. He knew she was interested in supporting her son. He was wrong for doubting her from the start.

'Kelvin is out of the state, he is in the north.' He said.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

Stan fixed his eyes on the ceiling and allowed his mind to settle on Thursday discussion. After returning on Friday he had been so busy catching up with school work. He had attended an afternoon class on Friday and another make-up class on Saturday.

What amazed him was the trust Tade's mum had in her son, and how determined she was to get him out of the case even though no one knows where he is.

The poor boy had not been found since Monday but she still believed Tade was kidnapped.

'Nullify the evidences.' He said, mimicking Mrs. Leo.

*How's that going to happen?*

They can't only depend on words to save Tade not when the Detective has physical evidences. An eyewitness had seen Tade entering an old Peugeot car.

Stan jumped out of bed and immediately headed towards the kitchen.

*Maybe we need to see the Detective.*

He thought as he walked to the kitchen. The whole apartment in each floor had a general kitchen. Each general kitchen had four lockers.

Stan entered the room with a plate in his hand, which he placed on the table when he saw Mart awake. He sat down in front of the table, to eat when his eyes caught the dictionary which was opened to the "S" letter. The letter was enough to ignite his brain.

*Shape-shifters*, he thought before flipping the pages to confirm what the meaning was.

'Do you believe in myths Mart? He asked and immediately felt like a fool for asking such question.

Mart whizzed as he tried to sit and rest his back on the wall. He gave him an intense look before stroking his chin. 'In my own world, I believed myths to be folklores. But not in this era anymore. Why do you ask?'

Stan heaped three spoons of rice into his mouth before replying Mart.

'I was thinking of what we discussed about in Lagos then...'

'Then you came across that.'

Stan nodded, 'What do you think?'

'You know what, I think you need more rest. Your busy schedule is telling on you.' Mart said with a wink. 'Even if myths are true, it won't and will never be pragmatic enough for a positive answer.' He paused. 'What are you even thinking of?'

'Shape-shifter.'

'Oh!' Mart said, his forehead and nose scrunched up.

'What I meant by shape-shifter is...' Stan picked up the dictionary which was right before him and gave it to Mart. 'Check this.'

Mart read the definition and handed the dictionary back to Stan.

'This is obvious Stan and anything base on this will definitely be baseless. You shouldn't be in haste to help. But...'

'But what?' Stan asked.

Stan studied Mart, he looked nervous. Mark crossed his arms.

'I don't know if I will sound like Reb,' his voice was low with moderate show of confidence.

Stan lazed on the chair maintaining eye contact with Mart.

'If we can trust Tade, then I think we should be able to trust Kelvin and any one in our group but feel betrayed,' Mart said.

'Betrayal is certain, Mart,' he said. 'But how do we know who betrayed Susan?'

Mart had a small smile on his face then sighed a few seconds later.

'We all believe Sus confided in someone but we don't know who the person is. If we are sure about Tade then how sure are we about Kelvin?'

'Come...' Stan stopped. He was perplexed. He wanted to say something but all he could do was stand and keep looking at Mart. He couldn't see himself agreeing with Mart's idea.

'Mart, what are you trying to say?' He walked to the door trying to get out of the room. The cool Monday morning weather will help him to think about what he had heard. He opened the door but Reb was right there about to knock. She rested on the door frame.

'Oh, Reb!' He said then searched her face. 'You don't have to do this. Stop sneaking.'

'I wasn't sneaking, can't help it if I have a light feet.' She said with one palm on her chest as though she was reciting the pledge. "I caught some things you said though."

'There is high probability of speaking with Kelvin and also a high probability of being overheard, Mart, so I don't think you are right.' Reb said

'What do you mean?' Stan asked.

'I mean he is wrong.' She replied. 'Susan could have called in a public place.'

'Ok.' Stan said before exchanging a look with Mart.

Mart was on his feet with his hands shoved into his pocket. His facial muscles were tight, his lips thinned out.

'Someone's hurting,' Stan joked. 'Mart you care to share?'

'Who do you think you are, Reb?' Mart flared up. 'You showed up here like an eavesdropper, and if my memory serves me right, the last time you were here you accused Tade.'

'That was because I saw proof, Mart.' She retorted.

'Come on, Reb,' he moved towards her but was blocked by Stan 'I'm only raising a point not accusing.'

'Then why did you flare up?' She asked. 'Is it because I'm saying my view?'

Stan glanced at her, she was still at the door; leaning on the door frame. He shifted his gaze back to Mart who was now trying to contain his anger but there was still crease around his eyes.

'You were the first person to see her corpse, you spend most of your twenty-four hours together, you do things in common, Reb.'

'So?'

'I'm saying it won't be wrong to suspect you. She could also have confided in you or maybe you overheard her.' Mart said.

'I see.' Stan said nodding his head.

'Come on guys,' Reb said as she now entered the room. 'Am I now the suspect, the Sleuth believed in me. You suspect me yet many evidences are point at Tade, I'm the...'

'Enough of this madness both of you.' Stan shouted. 'This is not what we need.' *This is the most likely thing they could do - the blame game.*

He thought as he slouched on the bed.

'We can't stop the case but we can help by finding solutions, which will be too late if we can't find any good reason before the police lay their hands on Tade.' Stan said.

'I don't expect this from you guys, we live like family why are you acting like this?'

'This not about family, Stan, this is about the one who raised the gun and fired two bullets on Sus.' Mart snapped. 'You talked about shape-shifter which won't be possible in this age idea that can hold no water in front of the Judge.' He walked up to Reb. 'How would I be wrong to suspect you? You eavesdrop on our conversation today, you could also have eavesdrop her conversation with Kelvin, then set-up Tade.'

Reb let her hands drop to her side, she sat on a chair then began to tap her

feet on the floor for almost thirty seconds.

'Why Kelvin? 'Why do you think Kelvin would have done this? At least you should have a reason for that.' Reb asked, trying to divert the accusation away from herself.

'Good,' Mart said as he returned to sit on the bed. 'She is in a relationship, who do you think she will tell first? And the last time I checked people will always tell their lover things they won't tell a friend and vice versa.'

'And did you believe that, Stan?'

'He has a point but I don't know whether to say yes or no.'

'Okay.' She said, stood up and walked out of the room.

\* \* \*

Reb flung herself onto the bed as she returned from Stan's place. She wanted to defend Kelvin; wanted her friends to be off the police radar but all she had managed to say was an okay. And Mart was right, she is always fond of that.

*I'm not a killer. Can this be true?*

She threw her pillow against the wall and punched the second pillow behind her.

'I need to say something, I need to think.'

She crossed her leg and rested her chin on her palm for about fifteen minutes before heading towards Susan room. She jiggled the keys in her hands as she reached the door, but halted; she need a glove. Even though the robbers did not allow their fingerprint on any of the materials in Susan house, she needs to play safe. She wore hand gloves and unlocked the door. She could still see the patches of blood which had turned dark red on the floor. The smell which pervaded her nostrils almost made her throw up. On getting to the bedroom she reached out for the safe key which she had kept in her bag and then she unlocked it.

She picked up Susan's diary which the Detective had glanced through and returned in her presence. 'Sorry for intruding your privacy Susan,' she spoke quietly. 'I am doing this for you, for us.'

Starting from January, felt the chilling nostalgia.

'January 1:' she read out. 'Reb and I spend the whole day in Cross River State at the Obudu ranch, we started our exploration of Calabar city officially.' She could now remember all she had said at home to miss the New year celebration with her own family in Abeokuta. She celebrated the Christmas there then took a local flight to Calabar on the 29th of December. That was the first time Reb met Henry Obi - Susan's elder brother.

She continued her reading and stopped when she reached January 7th. Susan

had wrote: signing out of Calabar officially, a city which reminds me of Mary Slessor's impact in the survival of twins, which I hope to have someday.

'Pity that you won't.' Reb said.

She changed her posture as she glimpsed through February.

*February 14: Left hostel without informing anyone, it was the best valentine day I ever had. Kelvin and I distributed the little gift we bought to the orphanages. I told him about my dream to be a philanthropist. I have read about Tade's Mum and met her once at a function in Lagos, then I wished to be like her, even greater.*

Reb dropped the diary trying to imagine what Susan thought would be when she was about to be killed. How she will react when she saw the son of whom she admired to be pointing a gun at her.

She sat in her room trying to correlate what she had read in Susan diary trying to decipher who planned her death. But none came until 2pm. She rushed out of Susan room and entered her own apartment making her roommates shocked. Then rushed out again. She need to tell them this and see what they will have to offer.

Reaching her friends' apartment, she threw the diary to Mart.

'I read her diary,' she paused. 'Look, Stan, I intruded her privacy but remember she is dead and all we need is to know if Tade or,' she gaze at Mart. 'Maybe Kelvin had planned this.'

'Then what did you find out?' Mart asked before opening it.

'I think I'm wrong about who she confided in.'

'Who did you think she do confide in?' Mart asked with a keen look.

'Kelvin, and I am sure about that.'

## CHAPTER NINE

Reb took a look at the Port Harcourt Police Headquarter before alighting from the cab; it the first time of visiting at this hour. Apart from looking well lit which she had expected before coming, what amazed her was the beautiful picture the light had formed, one which was different from that formed during the day.

The structure had a triangular shape starting with the three storey building which faced the highway. She walk towards the gate and could notice the few number of cars at the parking lot. Though most of the workers uses either the general staff bus or a cab but the parking lot still had good cars which belonged to some of the prominent staffs.

At the number seven of the parking lot she saw the Detective's car. She picked up her phone, punched in some digits and dialled. She returned the phone into her cross bag after several failed attempts to reach the other person. Walking slow, she checked the security post. The blinds were close so was the door, but she could see the reflection of the bulb outside.

'Anything the matter?' She turned to face the direction where the voice came from. 'You look lost.' She had a small smile on her face as her noticed the figure in front of the door was a teenager. She moved close to him, she could see his small beard.

'Tell your father that I'm asking for Detective 'Thomas.' She spoke out loud though the distance between them wasn't much.

'How do you know my Dad is in here?' The boy asked but disappeared before she could opened her mouth for a reply. What shocked her was the fact that his father could allow him to face strangers, then she laughed at herself. It took the boy about two minutes to show up after she reached the Police Headquarters.

'What do you need young Miss?' A man in uniform asked.

'Detective. I want to see Detective 'Thomas.' She replied.

'Oh, but your friends looks unconcerned, are you the only one to see him?'

She turned her back to the man who spoke, not listening to the man. She stood akimbo as she glared at Stan and Mart.

'We came here for a reason.' She said as she returned her attention to the man who still stood in front of the door expecting an answer.

'We all want to see him.' She replied.

'Names? Do you have any appointment with him?'

'Reb,' she paused. 'Just tell him Susan's friends are here to see him Sir.' Without any other word, the man shut the door behind leaving them for what felt like an eternity to Reb.

'You won't be able to see him Miss, he's not picking up the call.' The man said as he opened the door again.

She kick the air with her leg before reducing the distance between them. 'We need to see him, this is important. I don't know if...' she let her voice trail off following the penetrating stare the man was giving her.

The look said "do you want me to leave my duty post."

'Detective Thomas came in around 5 pm with a van, that was strange because he usually closes around 5 or 6 pm.'

Reb tried to check Thomas' car again following the man statement. 'That's his car,' the man said. 'That simply means Oga is busy.'

Reb thrust her hands into her pocket as she walked slowly to meet Mart and Stan. The man had said something before she left, but she wasn't paying him any mind.

*What the hell can make the Sleuth busy? What could be in the van he had drove in?*

'I hope you guys heard the man?' Reb asked her friends.

Mart pursed his lips like he had been chewing a lemon rind. 'How do you expect us to?'

'You seem to be familiar with this place, we can't just follow you around Reb' Stan said. 'Any luck?'

With a heavy sigh she turned so as to be in line with them. 'He said the detective is busy. He entered the station with a van around 5 pm. That means something important is going on in there.' She pointed. 'His car is still in the parking lot.'

'What do you guys think?' She asked.

'We came here without informing him, and now we are trying to reach him. It doesn't make sense Reb, does it?' Mart asked.

She shook her head without saying a word, then placed her hands on her hip, her arm crooked like sugar bowl handles.

'Reb.'

She turned toward Stan who just called her.

'What are you thinking of?' Stan asked.

'I think he has more than one case on his table.'

Stan nodded. 'So?'

'That's why he's busy.' She said.

Stan nodded again. 'Why did I have a feeling that something is amiss.' He paused and looked at her. 'Your nose and forehead is scrunched up.'

She opened her mouth in surprise then laughed. *Where the hell have you guys been?*

She thought and laughed some more. She placed her left hand on Mart's shoulder and her right on Stan's shoulder, with a slow move down she grabbed their hands and walked close to the gate. 'That is his car,' she pointed to a parking lot numbered seven. 'And near the storey is the van the man talked about.'

'Let us not drag this issue for long,' Stan said. 'If he is not picking up his phone that means he is busy. That means he left his phone in his office.'

'The probability of not being in a meeting is high, so something or someone must be inside the van.' Reb said.

'Seriously?' Mart said, raising his hands up as they turned to gaze at him. 'You guys knows I'm poor when it comes to guessing. Yet I don't think "something" rather "someone" is holding him up.'

Reb quickly walked toward the security post and this time around all she could see was a reflection from a screen, the bulb had been switched off. She froze with a feeling of being neglected.

She stopped whatever she could think of as the bulb was switch on and the door opened few seconds after. 'You said you are Reb right?' The man asked. 'And your two friends, are?'

She waited a while before comprehending what the man asked for. 'Stan and Mart.' She replied.

'Oh!...okay.'

'Come over,' he motioned with his index finger. 'Thomas is busy, but follow me.'

All she could notice was the change in route, it was totally different from the place she was familiar with. They reach a bungalow which was painted with the colours on the police flag. The man walked toward the house then punched the keypad to tap in the code which unlock the door. 'Step forward,' he said and point toward an empty room, 'drop your belongings and follow me.'

The inside shows that the bungalow is a jailhouse with three cells on each side. A room was directly facing them, which was entirely different from the other rooms. It was more like an interrogating room. The room is flanked by a cell on each side. Reb wondered why the building is used to detain people.

'I demand answers.' Reb overheard that as they all reached the opposite door.



She turned to face Mart. 'Did you hear that?'

The man opened the door before Mart give a reply. Reb's legs felt wobbly as she entered the room. She couldn't believe her eyes after the shock wore off she glared at him. Reb was surprised when she took note of what Tade wore. He still had the same cloth he wore at the crime scene.

She watched as Stan and Mart walked up to him and embraced him. She felt like doing the same but couldn't, images of Susan helpless body lying on the floor in pool of her own blood flooded her mind.

Gazing at Tade and scrutinising the expression on his face, she could see that he was lost. Even though he was happy to see them he still look confused.

'Where have you been Man?' Stan asked after releasing Tade from the embrace. 'I have the whole time to listen.'

Reb checked on the Detective who now turned attention to their springing conversation incongruous to what she expected.

'We have been...' Mart stopped not knowing how to start.

She studied Tade eyes which was initially fixed on Stan then Mart and it ended on her. She wished she could look away without twinge of guilt.

'I guess he invited you all to confirm what I have told him.' Tade said before sitting. 'And seriously I don't know why anybody seems interested in that, I...'

'Are you kidding?' Reb launched at him.

'You are not yourself, Reb,' he said.

'Leo,' Mart called him. 'Things happened after you entered that old car, so it will be good to answer all questions you are being asked.'

Tade nodded with a smile. 'I was brought here after being found at an eatery,' he paused. 'I initially thought I was safe here until...'

'Safe? What do you mean?' Reb asked.

'How do you know I entered an old car, Mart?' He asked ignoring Reb question, but still exchanging glances between Reb and the Detective.

'Some people saw you.'

'I was kidnapped, Reb.' He now fixed his eyes on her. 'I was well fed but don't know my abductors aims.'

'Nothing different.' The Detective said with anger.

Reb quickly examined him for any bruises or beating and was glad to find none. Neither has the Detective or abductors laid hands on him. 'Susan is the reason we asking you this, Susan is the reason I'm behaving...'

'Wait,' Tade said cutting her off. 'I was kidnapped because of Susan? Where is she?'

Reb glared at him silently. 'She's dead,' she said after about five seconds. 'All evidences found...'

'Leads to you Tade.' Stan said completing the sentence for Reb.

He gave a short laugh. 'Tell me you're joking,' He said with a lot of conviction.

Reb tried to notice his face expressions, apart from the bug-eyed which showed his disbelief, he had cast his eyes down, then a frown appeared on his face before finally drooping his head.

*There is only one thing to do,* Reb told herself. She wanted to know how genuine his words are then she needs to analyze his expressions and body language. No doubt that the detective would have notice something which he would have kept private.

Even though the cuffs on his hands and legs limited his limbs movement, he had done all he could to move them. He had maintained eye contact with all of them and all his gestures correspond with his words. Nothing seems different from the normal Tade she know of.

'Maybe it is too early.' She muffled and sat on a bench which is directly opposite Tade. They had been the one to tell him about Susan death, all the Detective had done was to question him on where he had been.

Thomas brought out his phone and tap it for a while before showing it to Tade. The shocked on his face was obvious, seeing himself pointing a gun and then finally pulled the trigger.

*He could have planned what to say, how to react before reaching here. He would definitely know that the police would interrogate him.* Reb thought.

'Damn it,' Tade said clenching his fist and then hitting the knuckles on the table. 'I didn't do this, I can't believe this, I...' He placed his head on his hand without saying a word.

'This is the same you, the killer used his left hand to pulled the trigger. You also use left hand, Tade,' Mart said.

He raised his head and glared at him.

'Do you see where the gun hit, that is her liver and she was shot twice there. I don't know about guns talk less of holding one.'

'Tade,' Stan called and Tade fixed his gaze on him. 'You called her on Monday morning, since then nobody could locate both you and Susan.' He paused. 'Susan was found dead the next day but for you... I'm just confused Tade.' Stan said. 'We don't know what to think of.'

'You can think of whatever you want to think of, but what I said will remain the same.' He looked at them one after the other. 'You have to believe me.'

"I believed you" Reb felt like saying that word but she couldn't, her tongue seem too heavy to do that. Tade had proved to be innocent to her but what of if he had practiced this over and over.

He will definitely know what criteria will be used for his questions, Reb thought. *No*. She screamed in her head as she remembered Tade statement about where the bullets hit.

'You said the bullets hit the liver,' Detective Thomas said as if he was reading her mind. 'How do you know that is where the liver is if you don't know anything about guns and body anatomy?'

Tade shifted on his seat, then take a deep breath. 'I do follow my Mum court cases and...' he stop and looked at Stan, 'tell him to give me a gun and see how my shooting accuracy is.'

'Cases brought to her right?' The detective asked.

*Maybe going through those case files, carrying out his own research on it coupled with his discipline could have help him with his composure. That could have also help in strategizing his way out.* Reb thought as she continued to analyze his words.

'Tade, apart from following your Mum court cases, do you go through the case files?' The detective asked as Reb continued with finding loopholes in Tade statements.

'Of course,' he retorted. 'I'm studying law, I need to equip myself,' he paused to rubbed his forehead. 'I mean to upgrade my brain.'

'And?'

'And what?'

'How do you get to do that when you are in school?'

'Detective,' Tade said with a slight chuckle 'I don't spend all days in school.'

'That means you share ideas together... when you are at home?'

He nodded, then the smile faded away before he bent his head.

Maybe this is it, Reb thought. Tade's word about the court cases his Mum do receive gave her more reasons not to believe his words. Tade is studying law and apart from that he would had have pragmatic exposures on criminal law thereby incorporating the knowledge to his plot.

'Okay,' Tade said. 'On the eleventh of July, I left the hostel to buy drinks but things change after that.' He sighed and then looked at Reb. 'I know you don't trust me, Reb. It shows in your attitude and I don't blame you for that. I was compelled to enter a Peugeot car by a gun, I was kept in a well-spaced and lit room. I was oblivious to their plan.' He stopped and looked at the detective whose chin was resting on his palm. 'And today at dawn, I found myself on one of the highways...'

'Then to an eatery because you are familiar with the road.' Detective Thomas said.

He nodded slowly, forming a fist and hitting it gently on the chair handle. 'I...don't...know...anything...about...her...death.' He said.

'I think you don't, but I'm not sure if I will believe you. You said it yourself that you do check your Mum's case files, so why will I believe someone who might have practical ideas on defending a client accused of a particular crime.'

'So what are you saying now?' Stan asked.

'This is glaring, Stan, I would have believed him but for one reason I won't.'

'And what reason is that?' Reb asked.

'Getting a duplicate of him within that short period of time won't be easy and look impossible. But compelling you or maybe threaten would have done that.' He paused for a while as he pressed the laptop and replayed the video. 'Look at the accuracy of his shot, and take note of the hand he used. Would a duplicate of him be like him exactly.'

'That's not me.' Tade shouted.

'But you use left.'

'Says who?'

'That won't be needed.' Thomas said, then face his friends. 'You guys shouldn't be here and I'm not suppose to interrogate him in your presence. But I knew your presence would make him talk.' He walked toward the door. 'You need a lawyer and make it quick.'

'We have overstayed our welcome.' Reb said as she made use of the door.

## CHAPTER TEN

Tade raised his head as the door opened. He had been expecting the detective since the last day he had interrogated him. He wish he could talk the detective into believing him.

The detective has enough evidences to nail him, and as for the gun to confirm his shooting accuracy; he knew he won't have it. But that day, despite the stern look the detective had on his face, Tade had spotted a tinge of confusion and the thirst to quench it. Tade couldn't understand the detective's reaction. It was easy for the police to find him. The very thought scared him. He had answered all their questions with confidence, even if it was correlated with his actions it still appeared like he had practiced what to say.

The door squeaked as it opened, and there was a silhouette of two person on the floor. One of the shadow moved forward Tade had eyes on the door waiting for the visitor.

He was shocked to see the people behind the detective. He squirmed in his chair as he saw his mother with another lawyer. He couldn't remember his name. Series of unanswered questions flooded his mind, and he was ashamed of himself and his confidence began to wear off.

'Hello son.' She said. The last word ring aloud in his mind. He was not expecting her to address him as a son.

'Are you ready for a chat?' Mrs. Leo asked. 'I'm here to listen to your own side of the story.'

Her words showed him that someone still trust him. He raised his head to look at her, she had a small smile on her face. She had put on a black suit with a red camisole underneath and no jewelries in her ear or on her neck. He lowered his gaze so as to check her hands, he found none. She must have been in a hurry, he concluded. The only accessory she had on her was her red bag which she put on her lap after sitting down.

He took a good look at Barrister Kunle, he looked more like one who came for a normal visit and not legal one. He wore a brown T-shirt with the freedom statue inscribed on it and a jean trouser. Returning his gaze to his mother he saw

her books, he had no idea of how the books came to be.

*Maybe she folded it in that red bag of hers.*

'I met Susan once,' Mrs. Leo said with a momentary smile on her face. 'It was at a book launching hosted by a senior colleague. She introduced herself as a friend of yours, though I was astounded at how she could recognize me, I was honoured to meet her. She was an aspiring journalist; this was the way she described herself.'

He felt relieved when she stopped talking of Susan, he noticed the exchange of glance between his mother and the detective.

'I saw the news few minutes after it was uploaded online.' He shifted on his chair again and looked away. 'I called your friends over.'

'With Reb?' He asked with astonishment, and his eyes were back staring at her.

'Come on,' she said, 'why the face? Reb has been of help, giving us vital information on what we need.'

'She doesn't trust me,' he paused then asked 'why do you trust me?'

'You are my son besides I didn't train my son to be covetous.'

Tade had a sad smile on his face, he felt at home. She was successful in making him comfortable, he had expected her to vent her anger on him due to the disappointment.

'Tell me about the kidnapped.'

He looked at her without showing how surprised he was. Nobody would have started from there or with that question. He took in a deep breath, one that would be enough to sustain him for all he had to say. He told her nothing different from what he had told the detective but added "I'm sure they kidnapped Susan also on her way and made me the police target."

'Throughout your stay did they beat you or rough handle you?'

'They took care of me, they made me think they would demand a ransom for my release.' He said. 'Now I see I was mistaken. I was meant to be a distraction which I sure am right now.'

'What makes you say that?' She asked.

'They are out there spending the money without the police on their necks, without a fear of being traced. They are free and for me...' he halted.

Barrister Kunle moved closer to him, placing his right hand on his shoulder he asked; 'If you are claiming to be innocent can you defend the evidences they have against you?'

Tade looked at the detective, he had said nothing since, he had been listening.

'At least he should leave for now.'

'Oh!' Barrister Kunle said. 'He won't leave, the detective wants to believe you.'

He wants to talk on two options, so will you give us an answer?'

'I'm sure you watched the tape,' Detective Thomas said. 'There are fingerprints that belongs to you at the scene, the only one found at the crime scene apart from that of Susan and we still have a DNA result we are waiting for. It will be compared with the DNA on the cloth you wore last. Can you disprove all these?'

'The court hearing will be 29th of this month, it's too early but we can make the Judge to adjourn it for a second hearing, we only need your cooperation.' Her mum said.

Tade tried to contain his amazement, the detective agreeing with him sounded as though he had won a lottery. He could still remember the tape he had watched, the images of the scene still looked fresh in his memory. From the video he had entered with confidence, then remove the gun from his pocket and that was when the handkerchief fell on the floor. But for him to disprove all these he need to think, these kidnappers had planned this well. They would have thought about any possible loopholes.

He studied the similarity between the person who had shot Susan and the photograph dropped off his hand. He needed to start saying something, something germane.

He is a left-handed, doing things with his left hand feels perfect except when eating, he uses his right hand. He had never held a gun, holding it and making a shot would be his practical way of proving his innocence. He had never been to a police college or trained with them, for such accuracy the individual must be in the force.

He wasn't with hanky before he was kidnapped and the shirt wasn't his. If the hanky was taken from him, then it will definitely have his fingerprints on it. His slough-off skin cells will be found on it especially after perspiring inside the room he was kept and that will give out his DNA.

'How many prints did the Tech man find?' He asked.

'It's your hanky Tade, how many prints do you expect to be found on it. All prints found tallies with yours.' Detective Thomas replied.

Tade said nothing but only a brief laugh. 'I think my blood should be tested for chloroform.' He said. If his print was the only one found on hanky then whosoever appeared on the camera had taken the hanky with a protective glove.

'Are you saying you might have been drugged?' Detective Thomas asked.

He nodded, 'I need to see the video again. Why would they put me in a room I can perspire and then later in a room with air conditioner.

Detective Thomas placed one of his left fingers on the touchpad of the laptop before him, and then click on the video thumbnail. Fast-forwarding the

video to the point where the killer gently put his left hand into the pocket he said, 'check this out.' He turned the laptop in a way Tade could see the screen.

The back of killer palm was in contact with the hanky and his knuckles gently lift it up when he was removing his hand. This had allow the hanky to be on the floor. It seems like this was intentional but the killer had acted as though he was oblivious to the hanky falling out of his pocket. Tade paused the video and fixed his gaze on Detective Thomas without saying a word.

'Then there is probability of them purchasing a green forest shirt and a black pant, in order to make this convincing.' Barrister Kunle said.

'Testing your blood for any anaesthesia won't be of any help,' the detective said. 'Based on my experience on cases related like this, you should rule that out.'

'I second that.' Mrs. Leo said. 'If Susan was killed on Monday, and you were kidnapped that same day.' She fixed her eyes on him. 'Everyone could assume that the drug was used on you when you entered the car, even if an eyewitness said you entered voluntarily. But on the other hand you could have plan to use the drug by yourself.'

'Why won't they believe in me?'

'Apart from the evidences,' she took a deep sigh. 'You made the searching quest easy for the police, it only took them a week to find you. And where was that again? It was an eatery.'

'If I'm the killer I won't be there. I would definitely put on a mask at the crime scene.'

'We are heading to same place son.' Mrs. Leo replied. 'That confirms my point. What proof do have to convince the judge that you knew Susan installed security camera in her apartment? If you knew about the camera why would you commit a crime in the same venue without a mask?'

'So my point is useless?' Tade asked as he rested his jaw on his two palms.

'It's not, but it can only give you a second court hearing but a Judge won't acquit you for this reason.'

'Then I am doomed.'

'We need to work on many other people before confirming that Tade.' Detective Thomas said, then quickly asked, 'what can you say about Kelvin relationship with Susan. If you want to prove your innocence then you need to tell me the truth.'

Tade looked at him with an agape mouth.

*What has relationship got to do with this? Moreover Kelvin is not in Port Harcourt or any of the southern states.*

'I don't think that has to do with what we have on ground.'



'Everything needs to be followed, Tade.' He replied with a short laughter.

'Who do you suspect?'

The question sounded tricky to him, a suspect would always find another person in his or her stead. But he couldn't come up with anyone and accusing Kelvin would be unfair.

'What do you have with Sus?' Detective Thomas asked.

'Have?'

'I mean apart from being a friend to her, do you have feelings for her?'

Tade change his gaze and focused it on his Mum then back to his lap. He didn't expected such question, he could understand the detective now. The detective had probably one or two other suspect he is keeping tabs on, though his must be the most weighty one to hang around. He was an expert in using one's family and friends to get the best words out of your mouth.

'Susan and I had history,' he said slowly with his gaze still dropped. 'I first saw her at the school bookshop, she was on the queue but behind me.'

'Behind?'

'Yes,' he replied quickly. 'I saw her when I was coming back. I waited till she was through and I got acquainted with her. Our relationship was purely based on friendship but started with lust.'

'So?'

'It was during this period Kelvin approached her for a relationship, Kelvin is always quick with things. So I was forced to be a friend.'

'Forced. Your definition for that.'

'I'm not talking of physical force.' He tried to find the word for what he meant. 'I'm talking about choice.'

'Did you two talk about this, you and Kev.'

'Yes, I later told him I'm not interested.' Knowing what the detective might think about his answer he raised his head. 'I...' his voice went down.

'And the relationship between Kev and Sus, what can you say about it?'

'Normal, just normal.' He said.

'Normal,' Thomas echoed. 'Do you think she confides in him?'

Tade only looked at him without saying a word. His mind on what to say, what his reply should be.

*Saying Susan confided in me, which she does will only add to my sore. And saying a yes to confiding in Kelvin will raise another question.*

'Maybe,' he replied. 'She should, since they have something together.'

'Give me Kelvin phone number.' He said before they all left him, leaving him to his lonely abode.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Thomas knocked the door thrice then pressed the bell twice but he got no reply. He brought out his cellphone to call her but stopped when he was about to tap the green icon, he remembers her phone is faulty.

He placed his hand on the doorknob and twisted it; the door opened. He was surprised but also happy to be finally inside his own house. Throughout the day he had listened to Tade and those who believed in him. He wished someone could trust him like that, a kind of trust that isn't built on the personality of his mother.

He checked the wall clock, which short hand was now fixed on nine and the long hand resting comfortably on thirty.

"They shouldn't be asleep by now." He said to himself. Walking towards the kitchen he saw a red cloth with a needle on it placed on a chair. She was definitely mending this cloth probably minutes or hours ago.

With a swift movement, he pick up the gun in between his waist and pants and head toward the dinner table as the thought of the unlocked door still lingered in his mind. He saw two plates on the dinning table, and now he knew why she had left the cloth on the chair.

*I have to check the food she was cooking.*

She had dished the food into two plates and both contained leftovers, and that has scared the hell out him. The thought of his family being victim of kidnap sent jitters down his spine. On the first plate was half eaten chicken, the second plate had both rice and meat untouched.

He sneaked towards the kitchen whose door was opposite the dinner table. From where he can stood he saw the right side of the kitchen clearly, so he tried using the space from the door hinge to check the left side.

He spot a broken glass on the floor which was near the fridge. The only reason for that could be a shock. He went back to the table, checked the water jug, it was empty.

*She must have left her meal for the fridge to take some water then...then what?* He asked himself. It is possible someone had entered, threatened her with a weapon. The fear would have made her dropped the glass cup leaving it to shatter on the floor.

He turned, going to the bed room in order to confirm his suspicion but he halted seeing George- his son standing akimbo right in front of him.

'George,' he whispered. 'What are you doing here?' The approachable smile on George face confused him.

'I wanted to see if you are around.' The five year old boy said.

'Where is your Mum?'

He noticed as George's friendly face turned sad. He went to him and patted his back. 'Dad was quite busy today.'

'You don't look busy,' George said, raising his head to fix his gaze on his dad. 'You looked worried.'

He smiled, the boy was right. He had been thinking of many scary things, things that scared him. Since he arrived he had been troubled within. Suddenly he remembered he still had the gun in his hand, he detached the gun holster from his waist.

'I need to see Mum, where is she?' He kept the gun in the holster then dropped it carefully into his bag.

'Mum was acting strange, she vomited everywhere; so I climbed the stool to check the number you wrote on the fridge. I called the doctor...' George was raising his small hands and gesticulating in an animated way.

'And?' he asked trying to hasten him to say what he need to hear.

'In the kitchen she was walking like this...' George began to stagger trying to explain.

As George spoke, he felt relieved.

*How will I handle it if my family is a kidnap victim?*

'Where is Mum?'

'She's sleeping.' George said.

Thomas knelt down to the level of his son, held him at his small shoulders.

'That was a brave thing you did today. You took care of Mum for me. You're the best.'

George puffed his chest in pride, smiling.

Thomas went into the bed room to check on his wife, Chinwe. She was still asleep. He didn't wake her instead he sat on a chair to relax. His family was safe but he could not deny his weakness. His family was his weakness, anyone could threaten him by attacking them. A threat from whoever wants to have his way in the case he is currently handling.

\* \* \*

Thomas woke at five in the morning, he switched on the bulb with the bedside switch. He allowed the light to penetrate his eyes. For about ten to twenty seconds his eyes were adapting to the glow. His wife still fast asleep, he wanted to wake her up but didn't. He looked at her baby bump - their child; she would be due next month - August end. Thomas wasn't sure about his availability for his wife at this crucial time.

Last night was one he does not wish to repeat, if not for George's intelligence maybe it would have been a bad night for him. He wished he was there to hold her, pamper her, do the cooking while she watched. He could imagine being the chef for the evening. A pot of rice on one face of the gas cooker and hot oil for frying the chicken on the other. How sweet it will be to share a meal; one meal in between two mouths.

She moaned slowly and turned to face his side, the light illuminated her face, she was his angel. He placed his hand gently on her soft cheek then made an oscillating movement on her cheek with his thumb. He knew she could feel his touch but was too weak to respond.

He remembered how and when they met in Abuja at an eatery close to the crime unit office, she was coming from Uyo. She needed to satisfy her hunger, rest a little before hitting the road. Her face was glowing, she looked and though she was twenty seven then she looked more like a twenty year old. She had a poker face and he didn't know how to approach her. When her ID card which fell on the floor as she was bringing out her debit card to pay for the meal she just got, he got the perfect opening - the perfect excuse to meet her. Even now she still looks younger than her age and he loved that. He liked people who look younger than their age and have lots of money to go with it.

He looked at her again and felt like staying, but he had a murder case to solve and the job pays the bills. *I really want to be a better husband, the selfless husband...*

He couldn't leave her in this state without a good morning or complimenting her beauty. He picked up a pen and a memo to draft a quick note, he could only hope she would be pleased when she wakes up and read it.

*I'm sorry you did not fall on my hands yesterday, for not cradling you in my arms or rest on my laps. When I looked at your face this morning I could see the same face I saw at the eatery years back. The face of the one who believes in me. The one who swept me under her arm with her morning smile. I can see the baby smiling at me (it's all in my head though). I'm sure she can't wait for me to carry her in my arms.*

*I love you.*

T.

He dropped it beside her before he took his shower and dressed up for work.

At 5:45 a.m., he unlocked his phone, checked the calendar for his schedule. He had to place call across to many people. But he had to start with his family's welfare.

'Chioma,' he said as the receiver picked up the call. 'Do you have important things in your schedule today?'

As he listened to her reply, he could sensed the reluctance to speak. That was acceptable, he might have been the one to wake her. He began to analyse how she will react. If she was sleeping, she would have picked the call without checking who the caller is.

'Morning, Uncle.' He heard after a pause. 'I don't have class throughout this week. I have exams next week.'

That was the perfect answer.

'I need your help,' he said with plea in his voice. 'I will be busy throughout today and...' he looked toward the bed. 'My wife is not feeling well, she is not even awake now. George is also at home. He was the one who called the doctor yesterday.'

'Okay,' Chioma said. 'I will be there by 7:30.'

When he ended the call he was happy. He quickly pen down on the note: *P.S - Chioma on her way*. He read it as wrote it.

'Will she stay only for today?' George asked as he stood at the door. He had been standing there for the past few minutes without him taking note.

'I'm sure about today, we will make another arrangement tomorrow if she has other plans.' He said as he walked closer to him. 'You did good yesterday, and Daddy is proud of you. High five!' He knelt and they smacked their palms together. 'If she brings some books and clothing then she will stay.' He dipped his hands into his pocket. 'Take this and give it to your big sis when she arrives.' He smiled as the young boy collected money and went straight to lay beside his Mum.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

After an easy drive to the headquarter, Thomas sat in the comfort of his office. He had spent the most of the night tidying up the house, he made sure that no piece of glass chips was on the floor, he wrote a to do list for the next day before he eventually crashed on the bed.

He picked the telephone which was on the table, dropped it on his lap and punched the keys.

'Can you show up here, right now? Please.' He said before putting the telephone back on the table. He checked his phone book and when he reached the letter "R" he dialled Reb's number.

'I need to see you and your friends.'

'Straight away.' Reb said and he could sense happiness well blended with eagerness in her voice. He had been keeping tab on Tade's friends and Reb. The identity of the killer had been the primary reason for having her around. He believed the killer is within their so called reading group. His plan had been to trust Tade, then find evidences to prove his innocence because the further the investigation lingers the more the mystery attached to the case. If any of his friends is the killer, then he could still use him in finding the real culprit if there is.

'The door isn't locked.' He said he heard the knock at the door. The knock disturbed his thought.

Abigail entered with smile on her face, she was a fair lady with an oval face. Apart from the fine body shape she has, she can easily be identified by the prominent birthmark between her upper lip and nose.

Thomas has always wondered if her smile is one of her assets. He had always admired her for being able to show her mood with her smile and even during investigations.

Interrogating suspects of any criminal charges has become a hobby for the thirty-five year old detective. She always mean whatever she says whenever her smiling face turns stern during an interrogation Abigail doesn't bluff.

'I will need your help, need to run something here.' Detective Thomas told

her

'What would that be?'

She sat on the chair in front of him.

He wrote Kelvin number on a white sheet and hand it to her.

'I want you to get info from his service provider.'

'Okay.' She said, smiling. 'Don't you think checking that of Reb would be important too.'

That was a good point. If Reb called Kev, then having their recorded conversation from their service provider would be of more value.

'I have her digits.' She said.

'Then you work on both,' he said. 'Will you take Jude with you? I want the boy to be occupied.'

'If they will be ready to pay for his flight.' She closed the door behind her.

## **8:00 A.M**

'That is all Barrister Kay. I hope the DNA result would be ready before 29th.' Thomas said, stretching his hand for a departure handshake. Kay is the lawyer standing in for Susan and Thomas had great respect for his achievements. Most of Kay clients are prolific politicians and his CV boasts of many cases won.

'It would work well with what I have here,' he smiled. 'But that would be a good addition.'

Thomas was stunned as his door was flung open, for the past years he had been working here and no one had ever dared to do that. He glared at Reb who rushed into his office. She left the others behind after seeing the lawyer.

'I'm sorry,' she said as she tried to relax and take in some oxygen. Before she could open her mouth to say a word, Thomas saw Stan and Mart entering. 'What was his mission here? I mean...' She stopped to look at Stan as he shut the door.

Thomas still fixed his eyes on her, looking more angry with the question.

'My sincere apologies Detective.' She eventually said.

Without saying a word he walked toward the filing cabinet, drew out a brown envelope and placed it before them.

'I can still say I know what it means to have only one child,' he studied the expression on their face. No one blinked more than twice, their gaze was all fixed on him. 'And if you are the only child of an important person what would your goals be?'

Without uttering a name and to his surprise, Mart was the first to speak. His voice shows how confident he was.



'To make him or her proud of me.'

'To show him I can be better than him or her,' Stan said with a smile. 'I mean will want to be greater than him or her.' He added to explain further since the Detective narrowed his eyes at him.

'I won't want to disappoint him or her.' Reb said.

He opened the brown envelope and brought out some A4 papers which had the printer ink on it.

'I thought about that yesterday, this would be one of the reasons a mother would trust her son. What I believe about this case is that you guys see the killer or whosoever planned this every day. I'm trying to demystify this case, because it has an element of mystery in itself.'

'Confusion and distraction.' Mart added.

He nodded slowly, 'you are right.' He said. 'This is what I seek to figure out. The man Reb was talking about is the lawyer Susan's father hired, who had taken this case serious. Take a look at this.' He gave them the file. 'That validates the fingerprints found on the handkerchief, you will also see Tade's statement and that of the man who saw him entering the car. The tape and voice record is here, that doesn't mean I trust you too but...' He said pointing at them, 'I'm only saying I am going to find who the killer is. But now I need you guys to do something.'

He collected the file from them and returned it into the cabinet. 'Ken, who happened to be my tech. man is outside the state for a week seminar,' he focused on Stan. 'So I will need you to intrude on someone's privacy, I need Kelvin private details.'

'Tha's against the law.' Reb said.

'This is lawful at the moment. We have to work on him even in his absence.' He opened the bag on his table and brought out his laptop. 'How often did he check his mail?'

'Can't say,' Stan said. 'But we can call him.'

The Detective chuckled then said, 'you are his weakness, that is why you will be doing this work.'

'What do you mean?' Stan asked.

Thomas fixed his gaze on him. 'That shouldn't be hard for you to understand. We have issues on trust, if we think he broke Susan's trust while don't we break his own trust.'

'I don't understand you Detective.'

'You are Kelvin weakness, Reb once told me Kelvin trust you.' He wagged his hand. 'I don't mean he confided in you.'

He studied Stan as he tried to look at Reb who replied with a wink and

then shrugged.

'What do you want me to do?' Stan asked.

'Come over,' he said and waited for him to come to his side. He pointed to the laptop, 'the link I'm going to show you was created by the Tech man.' He placed his right middle finger on the touchpad and moved the cursor to an icon which was on the left side of the desktop. 'This icon contains a spoofed link for Gmail. The guy has worked on it.' Then he placed the cursor on another icon. 'This other icon contains cookies stealer, he used it for Ymail. So if Susan sent an email to Kev we should be able to see it with the help of one of these links.' Stan nodded. 'Which of the email providers is he registered on?' Detective Thomas asked.

'He uses both,' Mart answered. 'Thanks to google play downloads.'

'Good,' Thomas said. 'I'm sure you understand what to do now Stan.'

He expects him to send each link while corresponding with Kelvin; the message must have a convincing body, and to complete the process, Stan would send a text message to Kev telling him to check his mail. The fake Gmail link which has been well spoofed will have the necessary log in details before redirecting to the real site. And for the other link, it will only copy the recipient cookie session giving the intruder a twenty-four hour access for automatic log in.

The Detective sat upright as Stan's phone rang, it was after about two hours. 'What did he say?'

*"Can't understand what I have on my screen."*

Stan read out the message Kelvin sent to him. Kelvin's reply shows that he doesn't know what he was about to do. Stan then replied instantly with working on a theory, gist you on it when you arrive.

'He has used the link.' Stan said after a few seconds.

Stan used the details from the first link as he could now control Kev's account. He began to check from the first message to the last message on the page, he couldn't find any helpful message.

'Check his archive.' Thomas said.

Nothing helpful.' He said after about two minutes.

Now they have to work on the second link, Stan only needed to decode the encrypted cookie for that. The Ymail was time saving though wasn't of any help as no messages were found in it. The archive only contains spam messages.

'If his second mail was empty,' Detective Thomas said. 'There will be only one reason for that.'

'Wiping your electronic messages means you are keeping an info.' Reb said.

'What info?' Mart asked. 'You can do anything with your mail.'

'Have you ever delete any of your e-messages?' Thomas asked.

'That will occur if my saving space is full.'

'Anything we say is now based on assumption.' He said. 'But there is high possibility of having a bulk of implicating messages in it.'

'We can check his phone messages.' Stan said. 'Since he is not using social messengers Susan could have texted him.'

'You can't do that when he not around.'

'I do use Kelvin phone for many things, so I...' Stan stopped not wanting to say any further word.

'I'm 'all ears Stan, we working towards same goal.'

'I have a remote access management tool downloaded on his phone and the log in details are with me. I could access his phone menu from here.'

'OK.' Thomas said as Reb only fixed her eyes on him. The look on Mart face only meant one thing; he was expecting the outcome of this.

Stan brought out his own laptop and waited for the booting.

Thomas phone rang.

'Any information?' He asked. It was Abigail calling.

'No useful information.' She said and paused for a while. 'Susan only said she has an important thing to tell him, but she would send a text. Guess she was cautious of people overhearing them.'

After dropping the phone he stood beside Stan. 'I'm interested in his text messages.'

As the log in page pop up on the screen, Stan typed in the necessary details and waited for a while. He clicked on his call log and checked all call made last week. 'Susan called him 6:35 pm on Wednesday.'

Thomas picked his phone and dialled Abigail number, she picked on the first ring. 'What time did Susan put a call across to him?'

'6:35 pm on Wednesday.' She replied.

'Check his call log again starting after Susan call.'

Their own check took about ten minutes as they both tried to guess what his conversation with the owners of those number would be. He dialled Abigail's number for the second time.

'Please listen to the conversation of all the calls he made after Susan's call.'

*If Kelvin had no implicating conversation then what next?*

He asked himself as he waited Abigail's call.

Stan clicked on message icon to check all the messages between today and the day Susan called. Apart from the message he had sent earlier most of the messages they could see on the screen were alerts from banks and some service provider messages. None linked to Susan.

'Can't find anything,' Stan said as he removed his hand from the laptop touchpad. 'Maybe he is clean.'

'He might have deleted all the important messages. He might be careful to erase any trace. If Tade is compelled to do the killing and we all concluded that whoever planned this is a close person, then...' Reb intense gaze was on Mart. Mart shrugged and continued, 'now all road are leads to Kelvin without him being in the state. Susan won't write lies inside her diary, the conversation on phone can't be altered.'

'You write what happened and what you are about to do inside the diary.' Reb said.

'What if this is what they wanted,' Stan said. 'They want us to be confused about this.'

Thomas returned to his seat, he didn't interfere in their discussion instead he listened and thought about it. Most of the cases he had handled he had come to learn about working with people - listening to their ideas. His phone rang again and the three friends went silent.

'No implicating conversation,' Abigail said. 'Most calls have been to families, and friends.'

'Any call to Susan?'

'Yes,' she replied quickly. 'And that was on Sunday evening, she told him about the camera installation. She also talked about her father anger when she informed him that she had not installed it.'

'Thanks Abigail.' He said before ending the call.

None of her friends knew about the installation even before it was fixed. Reb had been the only one who got to know on the day it was fixed. Then Mart could be right, the orchestrator knew of the camera so he has his strategy well planned and this one thing will definitely give him an edge. Information and distance. For Kelvin, distance would help him not to be the suspected and getting information from Susan will also help him to attack wisely. Thomas gave them a smile.

'Did you notice any strange attitude or strange friends with Kelvin?'

'Yes he has many other friends, but none was strange friend.' Stan said.

'You can't be so sure of that, he might have met some friends during his industrial training.'

'Maybe,' Stan said. 'Apart from Susan and Mart, we all did our IT in Lagos. Though Tade stayed with his Mum.'

'So his training was at his mother's firm?'

'Yes.' Reb said.

Thomas still had one thing to work on, people at the firm Kev worked would

know more about him. His attitude toward work, excuses for not doing a particular assignment or being absent from work with other factors could be known from there.

'The firm name, what is it?' He asked.

'Peter Johnson Legal... Can't recall the full name.' Reb said.

'Location.'

'Victoria Island, Lagos.'

He picked up his phone and prayed Abigail was still in Lagos.

'Sorry for disturbing you,' he said. 'When is your flight?'

'7 pm.' She replied.

Thomas was relieved when he heard that, the time was 11:00 a.m., there was eight good hours in between.

'Can you visit Peter Johnson law firm at Victoria Island? Kelvin had his Industrial Training there, I need to know what people think of him.'

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Stan stood in front of the Mass Communication department block which was approximately five kilometres away from the school senate building. The building was painted in white, the structure looks more like a mansion. It had two column pillars at the entrance, and on the right wings were many varying sized pillars. Inside this building was an intriguing lecture theatre.

Stan thrust his hand into his black trousers as he rested on the wall with his shoulder. It was 6:10 p.m., he had been here for an hour and he could feel the eyes of the people staring at him. Piercing eyes that made him to shove his hands inside his pocket he blamed himself for leaving early so as to get the candles.

In the next few minutes there will be the gathering of melancholic people shedding tears for a friend, sister, and a beloved. He felt a touch on his right shoulder; a gentle one that send signal to his brain. For the past one hour he hadn't extend his hand for a shake nor has anyone tapped him. He raised his head up and his serious face lit up seeing those who could save his evening.

Taking his eyes away from Reb and Co, he could now see different expressions on faces. His eyes couldn't miss those ones giving him the initial piercing look though the number had reduced.

They all walked into the biggest lecture theatre of the department which could contain exactly five hundred people. He took a quick scan of the room which had ten windows; five on each side. He felt like he was in a different territory as he wasn't acquainted with most of the students.

At 6:20 p.m. the course representative walked up to the podium. Susan had introduce him as Stanley the day they met. Stanley Ibitoye. Susan had introduced him as the only Yoruba guy in her department. He could remember they joked about the number of states Stanley had crossed before reaching a South-South state. But Susan didn't introduce him as the course representative.

'It is a sad moment for the department and also the school at large,' Stanley said. 'She died.' He paused as he unfold the banner in his hand, Stan could see Susan picture on it. 'She was gentle, caring, and wasn't supercilious. She had a

great dream, a goal getter.' He lit his candle, and Stan looked as others light up theirs. 'You left us so soon, and now we know you are gone forever, we know that your dream has been stopped and we know that you did not plan for this. Today we stand to mourn you and all we want from you is to reveal who your killer is. Make the guilty suffer and free the innocent.'

Stan fold his hands as Stanley made the last statement, he respected him for it. He had not presented a fine speech, but he had combined the right words to make the students present think on these things. He hoped for a quick answer to Stanley request.

'Hey, Stan,' Vinnie called out. 'Any news about T-man?' He asked. Stan tried to look around trying to check if anyone was listening. Vinnie had always been like that, he is fond of asking private questions publicly.

'Nothing new,' He replied. 'Court case is on the 29th.'

'That's too early. Do you...' Vinnie stop when he noticed Reb. 'Hello Reb, didn't know you will be here.'

Stan shifted a little from him as he tried to hide his laughter. 'Where else will she be at this moment if not here?' He asked.

'Where do you expect me to be White man.' Reb said. She had been the only one to call him that after she knew his parents were dark in complexion. Vinnie had picked up the recessive genes of his parents. 'This is Mart.' She said facing Mart as he was the only one who didn't know Vinnie. 'We lived in same place for our industrial training. Vinnie.' She said as she face him.

'They said a lot about you man,' Vinnie said. 'I have longed to meet you and am sorry for your loss.' He gave Reb a glance then quickly turned to Mart. 'I think she is fond of you, she always stood up for you.'

'Thanks,' Mart replied. 'We always stand up for each other.' He winked at her.

'Come on man that's not what I meant.' Vinnie said.

'Let's now take a walk to the places we agreed on.' Stanley said to the friends, his words putting their discussion on hold and Stan was grateful for that. Vinnie's words was making him sick.

\* \* \*

Thomas stood in between the kitchen's door frame, folded his arms on chest and head tossed toward the right in such a way it rested on the frame. He was checking out his wife's back view as she was busy washing the platters. She had no idea of who was right behind her.

'Didn't know a heavily pregnant woman can have such an amazing back view.' He said with a smile. She had been the reason he changed most of his schedule.

'I didn't know you are in, why sneaking in your own house?' She turned to

face him, her hands had soap suds. 'Oh you have changed your clothes!'

He smiled as she turned to continue washing at the kitchen sink. He walked to her, wrapped his arms around her.

'Where is George?' He nuzzles at her neck. She rested her back on his chest and she absorbed the heat from him as he held her at the pelvic.

'Sleeping. Chioma left an hour ago.'

He said nothing about that, Chioma had already told him about her plan in the morning before he left for work. And he couldn't blame her, she had been here since the day he called her and that had given her little time to prepare for her exam.

'Would you check on him or...?' she stopped as 'Thomas' began to drop light kisses on her neck and shoulder.

'You said he is sleeping.'

'Yes.'

She nodded tried to her continue washing but 'Thomas wasn't helping matters. She turned in his arms to look at him. Those fire in his eyes were something.

'I miss you too,' she pushed him gently to free herself from him. 'Let me finish with this.'

July 31st would make it exactly five years and ten months since his wife had her first cesarean section. The scan had showed that George to be in a breach position and nothing the doctors did helped to change the position of the baby till her delivery time. Thomas had no choice than to allow his wife to go under the knife. This compelled them to wait this long for another baby which would be due to next month end.

Another breach birth after almost six years, and she is likely to have another CS and it will be good to stop child bearing after this. Now if the 'Tade's case isn't solved before the month runs to an end, which he was certain wouldn't then he needs to be prepared for the birth of his child next month.

'I'm not an invalid 'Thomas, I can take care of myself.' She said with her back still presented to him.

Thomas perched on the sink. 'You are not a burden. I just have to do my duty.'

She rinsed her hands in the running water then reach out for the napkin before walking toward the living room. 'We need to talk about something.' She said as she dropped the napkin on the counter and stopped.

He nodded and met up with her then allowed her to grab his hand as they into the living room.

He reluctantly sat down with his left hand resting on the chair handle. He



fixed his eyes on her as she slowly join him, she placed one of her legs on the cold tile while the second feels the weight of her buttock. Her faint smile meant the discussion is about something disturbing her.

'The case,' she said.

'What case?' He asked as her question wasn't specific.

She moved closely to him. 'Why are you still engrossed with the Crossgate University murder case? I read about it in the dailies and I thought the case was solved.'

He knew his frequent lateness has been the reason for this and he is sorry about it. He could understand what her fear was, but he had been doing his best only that she doesn't know. Maybe she bored of being the only adult at home; scared of what awaits her in the hospital theatre room and disappointed because her husband wasn't at home to cradle her, talk to her or even make passionate love to her.

'It only appears solved to the people but not to us.'

'Meaning?'

'I mean whosoever plan this has done a great job in the aspect of strategy. He made the case simple for us when it is actually complex.'

'Simple? Complex? How do you mean?'

'We find our clues easily.'

'Then that sound great.'

Thomas shook his head for a no.

'Easy clues are always laid down by malevolent orchestrators. He would want to give us something to rejoice about, something that is far from the truth but looks like the truth.'

'Meaning Tade isn't the killer?' She was surprised.

'It revolves round many people,' he paused. 'All of them now seems to look innocent but...'

'But you still based it on the clue your unknown subject gave you, right?' She cuts him off. 'So I guess you are busy finding another clue that will lead to your tricky unsub.'

'Yes.' He nodded.

'Who are you working on?' She asked.

He stood up tugging his cloth and then headed towards the room before her voice brought him to a stop.

'We always solve things together, Thomas. And this shouldn't be an exemption, my idea might be helpful.'

Yielding to her last sentence, he turned and walked back to her, sat close to her. 'He has four friends who could be a suspect,' he stroked her hair tenderly.

'And there is a probability that one of them used Tade as a distraction.'

'And who is he? She asked.

'I can't say at the moment, that's what am working on.'

He noticed the look on her face. 'This was different from the initial questioning look she has, but couldn't say what it meant. 'What do you have to say about that?'

'The money was brought in on Wednesday evening and that is a clue. Why don't you interrogate the other party? Why would they bring the money in the evening when there will be holiday for three consecutive days? Did you even think of that?'

That has been the same question Doctor Cyril had asked. Though he is working towards it but his intuition did not agreed with him. The other party has been Susan's father business partner since ten years ago. That partnership had bloomed Susan father business, and the question why would a person of such personality want the downfall of their business. They both contributed for the expenses and also share the income. The money had been a half payment for a contract with the remaining half to be paid in when the work is in progress. And Detective Thomas thought had been if the Senator Obi's partner planned this then it may be the death of their company.

'This isn't the first time of bringing the money by hand. This theft affects both of them.'

'Then why collecting the money by hand, why not through bank transfer?' She asked.

'They have a personal reason for that though Susan's father regrets it now.'

'Then why not...' she let herself stop for a while. 'If this is not the first time, if they own both the loss and gain then why not check out the driver. Maybe if you can find out what he is up to he would allow your team to know what to do next.'

'We have discussed this. I mean my team, Abigail, Jude and I.' He replied with a smile. 'But with all will have on Tade, My boss wants the investigation to stop with him. We didn't inform him on other investigations.'

'Then where do you get the funds from?'

'He doesn't control that.'

'Then do the same to the driver, you need not to leave any heap unturned.'

With his gaze on her and with an approachable smile he dipped his hands into his pocket for his phone.

'Sorry for calling you at this hour Senator.' Thomas said as his recipient answered the call. 'I will like to ask a few questions, I can postpone...'

'Ask me anything Detective.' He said cutting him off.

'You said your partner's driver brought the money late on Wednesday and you have no choice than to give it to your daughter.'

'Yes'

'Can you tell me about the driver movement.'

For a while he heard nothing until he was about to check his phone. 'Yes.' He sound reluctantly, more like thinking on what to say. 'He drove me to the airport.'

That was a good starting point, Thomas thought. If the driver had drove him to the airport then he should be able to say something more than that. 'Does that mean Susan was inside the car with you? And what of your own driver.'

'I don't have any.'

'So you left your car at the office?'

'Exactly. But wait,' he said. 'He also drove Susan to the hostel, does that mean anything?'

'I will get back to you.' Thomas said. 'You don't have to call your partner, I'll be tactful about this.'

She placed her jaw on her right palm and glared. Thomas couldn't do without asking for the sudden mood change.

'Thinking about something?'

She relieved her hand off the weight. 'The dumbest thing to do is what the senator did. Maybe a different angle will be good.'

He collapsed in a chair. 'What are you getting at?'

'Maybe going to the bank is just untrue. Maybe that was just to save himself from scrutiny and to look good in front of his daughter.'

'What you trying to say?' he raised his gaze and fixed it on her.

'I think the money isn't his. He is a senator; stolen money can be channeled that way. Contract might be a covering.'

'I'm investigating murder not embezzlement.'

'I'm trying another angle.'

Thomas stood and still maintaining the gaze, he said, 'Let me finish with the first log.'

'The commissioner wants to see you before 1 p.m.' Judy said as she occupied herself with a newspaper. Her words enough to make him pause, for a few seconds he couldn't decide on what to say or do. The questions that ran through his mind all diverged to that of being called. He shuffled towards the receptionist table and place his bag on it. This is 9 a.m. on Monday, he shouldn't be a priority on the Commissioner list. Not today.

He could now see the answer to his question as he glance on the front page

of the newspaper in Judy hand. The sentence “PH witnessing the trial of Tade Leo” formed on his retina.

'He is having a meeting with each division head and that of the headquarter.' Judy said. 'He called in five minutes ago asking of your whereabouts.'

'And what did you tell him?'

She lift up her head for the first time, with a blank expression on her face. 'I told him you are busy and now am sure am right judging from your face and...'

'Do you have any idea of why he put that call across to you?' He asked, stopping her from finishing her words.

'Not sure, but,' she pointed to the newspaper. 'The reason won't be far from this.'

Walking up the stairs, he tried to avoid the thought of his boss knowing about his tentative state of mind concerning who the actual killer is. He had discussed that with his group, and lately with his wife on Friday evening. That shouldn't have reached any other person.

'I have to follow you.' A Judy's tiny voice stated behind him. 'I need to submit some files.'

'Which files?'

'You guys take confidentially with high esteem, so such is expected of me.' She said as she walked away.

Thomas felt the heat that evolved from the car as he opened driver's door. The sun had successfully baked the car. After he got into the car; he wind down the glass windows completely for natural air. The A.C will only circulate hot air first before blowing out cool one.

He glanced at Judy, she was busy looking the files in her hand. At first he thought she was looking at her watch. But after he had shot her a sideways glance more than twice, he knew what her gaze was fixed on.

'Don't tell me you are serious about what you said this morning.'

She only looked at him for a while before returning her gaze back to the file and then outside the car. 'You know I like it when you try not to make your smile obvious. I should be the least among the people you try to manipulate with your smile.'

'You're bluffing.'

'You must be kidding, Judy, I'm not a newbie in this profession. I read people expressions and make decisions with it because it's one of the stuff a detective got to know.'

'Decisions based on thoughts, Thomas. You must be kidding.'

'Does it look like I'm joking?'

Judy shifted and their gaze met.

'And you've acted on these decisions?'

'Those decisions are from thoughts based on your expressions. But I won't act on that alone.'

'But you still act on them?'

'Yes. To make your suspect say something,' he paused for a while. 'While the detective is sure if the projected expression is real, he uses uncertainty for certainty.'

Thomas took a turn to the left out of Obi road, and then he reduced his speed as he entered Marcus Avenue. It was an untarred street with a lot of bumps.

'I'm not familiar with this street.' She said.

'That's because you use commercial buses. What do you have in those files Judy?' He asked.

'The meeting is basically on security status of the state.' She said slowly. 'Kidnapping is a business here in PH. You know it's crazy when one of your family members is kidnapped. The first thing you are bothered about is whether he or she would be killed, next all you think of is the money left in your account.'

'So?'

'This morning, Michael sent me a mail containing attached files to print out and make photocopies,' she chuckled. 'One of these documents is about the case at hand.'

'There are many cases at hand Judy.'

'Yeah... I know but I don't know why you care about knowing...' She stopped and folded her hands.

Thomas said nothing as he turned right into the expressway that led directly into the Secretariat.

'I think the commissioner has given a mandate that we find how to tackle the menace.' She gave in.

'What are his ideas? Do have them documented?'

'Of course,' was her swift reply. 'I don't think it is complete. They may be running away from it.'

'Running away from what?'

'The truth, Thomas; it is glaring.'

'What are you talking about?' he looked at her.

'I'm saying our security is important and now we don't have to wait for the Federal government when the State government is capable.' She said.

'Okay.' He sounded cold.

'Thomas, I don't know if you will be chanced to enter the conference room

but if you could, you should speak with the commissioner,' she rested her left hand on his shoulder. 'I have spent a lot of time with them to know what their answers will be. I don't even know how serious they are to solve this murder case.'

'What solutions do you have in mind?'

'I'm not saying you guys ain't trying but see this,' she brought out her dairy. 'This is what I wrote in my diary from what a man said 'Tom.' She point her finger to the words. 'Nobody can argue with the truth. Hundreds and thousands of policemen are safe guarding millions of people. Trust me I did my calculations and see what I got.' She turned to the next page and read out. 'There is approximately one policeman to three fifty thousand civilians. What do you think about this?'

'Bad.'

'Thanks for the sincerity.' She retorted.

'What solutions can you proffer? What do you want me to say?'

'Good,' she said. 'You have being sweating to know the actual killer of Susan Obi, though I don't know how far you have gone on that. However, I'm sure something would have given you more hint.'

'What?'

'Surveillance camera. We spoke about this at our meetings, the society has talked about this but they keep turning it down.'

'You should know why, Judy.'

'Yes, this is why the status quo will remain. We are the ever "developing" without an actual development. You could have traced Susan movement with the cameras; you would have known what to do and where to go.'

'We need to increase the workforce and install cameras, right?'

'Yes. What about the case you and Abigail are working on.'

Thomas waited before saying anything. He knew he started this, he had forced her to talk and now she will do same thing.

'You mean the killer?'

'Don't be silly Tom; you know what I'm talking about.' She said with laughter.

Judy, I think we are not on the right track. The case is exacting. Do you have any idea?'

'Of course, I have spent ten years here at the headquarters and I know how things run here.'

'How do you mean?'

'I think Tade moved in exactly on the eighth day after Susan death. I'm not sure if that has anything to with this case though. Many questions run through my mind though.'

'What questions?'

'Why would a thief who had planned out his strategy about having that huge sum of money be caught in an eatery? Do you think your suspect is not the killer because he keeps denying?'

Thomas looked at her longer than the brief glances. He had previously talked on how cautious statement can be used to get fact from a woman whose main job is to deal with documents and files. But seems She didn't waste her years sitting and facing the computer, being in meetings and taking notes had widen her horizon these things.

'But it's possible.'

'I'm not saying it is not possible, but I'm asking why you think so. It was an easy catch for me. I won't stress myself to steal that large sum of money if I know I would be caught no matter how my plan works out.'

'The police are not sleeping, do you know that?'

'Stop being defensive and reason young man.' She hit him with her elbow, and then release herself from the grip of her seatbelt as Thomas parked in one of the lot. 'He might be the killer but with a secret agenda. You don't have to rule out the second option.'

'You have a point.' He said, reluctant to agree her point as she alights from the car.

'Look who's here.' John said as Thomas and Judy entered. 'Only one person is allowed to be in the meeting.'

'They should be through by now.' Thomas said.

'Why would I be here holding files if they are through, Thomas?' Judy asked.

'Secretaries or receptionists have access to bosses than you could ever imagine.' John said. 'You will be able to see the commissioner after the meeting Thomas.'

'I'm quite late I am expected to be here before 1 p.m.' He checked the wristwatch on his left.

'Exercise some patience,' John replied.

Thomas sat on one of the chairs at the reception, trying to reason with what Judy said in the car. If he had a plan then he must carry it out to the letter.

'Your attention is needed inside.' Judy said, disrupting his thought.

Entering and seeing all the people around the conference table, he knew what they expected from him even if they say nothing for the next five minutes. He walked to the left corner, sat in between Michael and the Commissioner. He focused on the sheets which were well placed on the table, in front of him.

'We are discussing on the Security Porosity in Rivers State, we are using

Detective Thomas kidnap and murder case for study,' the Commissioner said. 'People in the state believes the bad eggs involved in this act have allies in other states. They have instilled this act into other people. The people say that the high rate of unemployment is one of the reasons for sinister act such as this. This kidnap, theft and murder cases must end in our state. It must go into extinction. We want Susan's case to be the last.' The Commissioner rested his back on the chair. The Commissioner eyes held that of Thomas for a while, Thomas returned his own gaze to the sheets. 'Detective Thomas, give us the summary of your findings on Susan's case, let know what to expect on Friday.'

The discussion he had with Judy in the car, flooded his mind. He glanced at her, she was seated at the far right corner busy typing certain things and writing into sheets of paper. Judy already knew they would call him in that was the main reason she discussed about the case with him.

'This is the time to value merit more than demerit. We don't have to seat here and discuss on what developed nations are facing despite their advancement in technology. I'm not saying we are lagging behind but I think we need to act more, talk is cheap. If the Federal government is not assisting us in fighting crime, why can't the state rise to the occasion?'

'What are you talking about, Thomas?' Michael asked.

'What I'm saying is that the state should invest in security. The state should act independently in crucial affairs. We need to do things ourselves. We need more infrastructures for the police force here in our state.'

'What infrastructures do you have in mind?'

'We do our best with what we have but not the very best. Policing would be made easier with surveillance cameras, drones and other necessary equipment. We need this from the state. We can't force them to follow us but we can make them follow us.'

'And Susan's case?' Michael asked again.

'I don't think what we believe to be the truth is actually the truth.'

'What are you now insinuating, Thomas? Are you saying you are not sure with what you have?' The Commissioner asked.

'This case is being handled by both the government and the deceased father. But the latter pushed for early hearing, so I think we need more time. There is more to this case; we are carrying out our findings on two other subjects.'

'So?'

'So whosoever planned this is still an unknown subject.'

'Then you work that out. You make sure there is an adjournment. I want you to wait after this meeting.'

Thomas took a good look at the Commissioner then he dropped his gaze and



gave a short nod head to show respect.

'What makes you to be after two other subjects?' The Commissioner asked as they both sat on a sofa in the commissioner office. He had waited for almost twenty minutes for the meeting to end.

'We have clues and distractions.'

'Clues? Distractions? What do you mean?'

'Clue,' Thomas said. 'If Tade Leo is compelled to kill a friend, then our real unknown subject would be someone Tade knows. Tade could lead us to him.'

'And the distraction?'

'Our real unknown subject might be using Tade to buy out time for himself. He might be out there planning another strategy for a kidnap.'

'So you believed Tade is not the unknown subject, he is just a tool.'

'I can only be sure of that when the case is solved.'

'Good,' the Commissioner said. 'That shows how sane you are.' The Commissioner rose on his chair, pick up three pins and walked towards one of the chart on his office wall. 'If the money was left in the office, no life would be lost.' He hit the chart with a pin. 'The real aim of the killer would be known. But think of this, Thomas. Susan was killed and the money was taken away. Tade claimed he was kidnapped while all the prints found at the scene belong to him. Which means only one individual fingerprint was meant to be at the scene. That is what they wanted us to know.' He threw the second pin. 'If they also kidnap Susan then what do you think?'

'They were trying to cover their tracks. If Susan was successful at reaching Tade hostel and did not see him, she would be force to wait. And if he didn't show minutes or hours later then there would be an alarm. She would be more scared because of the money on her.'

'That means she might not stay in that house and many eyes would be on the house.'

'Yes.' Thomas said.

'Then all her friends were at risk. So they kidnapped her also and distract the attentions of her friends.' He finally put the third pin and returned to the table with a slow pace.

'They made her see their faces because it would be obvious if everyone masked their face except the killer.'

'So they decided to kill her, all that was in their plan. I'm sure about that.' The Commissioner said. 'They spared her at first because they needed her. They wanted her to unlock the doors and then make sure most of the fingerprints at the scene belong to her.'

Thomas rose up. 'Then Tade isn't the killer he was only compelled to kill.

'They won't be careless to leave a handkerchief, it was all planned.'

'The Commissioner gave him a thumb up. 'You're thinking in the right direction. Why would they be careless if they were careful from the start?'

'They wanted us to be distracted at first. They wanted us to think we have one of them when they have the assurance of not being found.'

'Exactly, Thomas that is the reason I want you to find out the real culprit. I don't want the wrong person to be sentenced.'

'I won't allow that.' Thomas said softly.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Tade was sitting up in the jailhouse glowering at the wall clock. His movement restrained as his limbs had been cuffed and he was seated on a chair. Cold ran through his body even though the room was warm. He began to imagine how things will go today and then in few months' time if he hasn't found himself out of here.

He was only twenty-one, and could see the joy brimming on his Mum face. It was the last day he was going to spend at Crossgate. He had a year to before he became a bonafide lawyer - all it took was just an extra year at law school.

*'I can only hope I'm a good mentor.'* His mother had said and he replied with laughter. She has been the one who looked out for him, all she had tried to do was to make him happy after his father death.

He wasn't certain if a wall hadn't been formed between each of his four friends. Reb hates him for Susan's death, Stan and Mart are hoping for his freedom. As for Kelvin, he would be angry that he was nowhere around when Susan died; he was not there to save her. He didn't want to see Kelvin's pain and he knows Kelvin would think the worst of him.

The door opened slowly and he could see a reflection of the jailer. His heart skips a beat. He didn't bother to check the clock again. It was time to face reality, starting from the number of eyes that would pierce his skin.

'Stand and move,' the jailer said as Tade catches a full glimpse of him. The jailer voice was deep, his voice was a contrast to his physique. 'Faster young man.' He said again making Tade wonder how to walk faster with bounded wrists and chained ankles.

He watched as the jailer pressed some digits, the door opened allowing the morning sun into his eyes. He remembered his first day here, there were other two people were also in the cell. They rarely had visitors here. This confinement was only for selected people and not really a prison. He focused on the sky; it was the first time of seeing the cloud covering the blue sky since he had been locked in there.

The breeze hit him and before he took a step further.

Tade hesitated before he was thrust into the car. He was flanked by policemen on each side.

'Are you people going to talk to me?' He asked, wanted to talk to them. He needed to be calm, but none was bothered by his question.

Cameras focused on him as he alighted from the car in front of the court, the logos on the pressmen shirt were prominent his eyes caught it at first glance.

'Don't hide your face Tade,' he said to himself. 'They already know you. They will mock you if you do.' He kept saying that to himself as the cops paved way for him.

The court room was filled with people. It only had three column with two tables in front. Each table had two chairs. He watched as the policeman to his right bent to unlock the cuff from his ankles. Happiness rose inside him, this singular act didn't determine his freedom, but he could walk faster without been scared of being injured on his ankle. In front of him was the witness box, toward his right. His mind was a disarray as he thought of those who will stand inside the witness box to testify against him.

Ignoring the cameras that took hold of the court, he summoned the courage to scan the court room. He wanted to have memory of people gathering to witness his fate. People who have different relationship with him, though in his mind he knew that all of folks here had different reasons of being here.

*Some believes the police has the wrong man while some bear animosity towards him for killing their friend, sister, or maybe family. Some are here to gloat, and some are only here to bear the court jurisdiction,* he said to himself.

Facing the people behind, on his left - at the back seat of the last column was Vinnie, Stan was seated behind him . A small smile was radiating on Stan's face, Tade smiled back at Stan who waved at him.

*The poor boy still believes in me.*

Reb sat in between Mart and Stan. With the little time he spent looking at them, he could spot Reb's attire and how different it was from others attire. She wore a black blouse with a black scarf around her neck. It was symbolic and Tade didn't know if it had anything to do with him.

Moving his eyes to the right, on one of the seats close to the door his gaze fell on his Mum. He wished she was the one standing to defend him. What about the shame he had brought to her? What about the emotional pain she gets through every day? What about what those working in her firm? They would only respect her for being their boss, and they will talk behind her back.

At 10 a.m., he was standing beside his lawyer - Barrister Kunle.

'Your defenses,' the Judge said. 'Starting from the left.'

The left table only had two lawyers on seats. One Lawyer was standing for the government and the other for Susan. Tade could recognize the second lawyer, he has been the alumni president of Crossgate for two years. The first time he came in contact with him had been when he was in his third year. The lawyer came to lecture his class on criminal law.

The first lawyer from the right side stood up, tug his overall and adjusted the files on his table.

'Apart from the fact that this case is a sad one, it is also a shameful one since his mother is a criminal defense lawyer.' The statement was enough to make him grind his teeth. This case is all about him not about his mum personality or job, the lawyer should respect that. 'I have the necessary evidences with me and I will start with the one I got today. The DNA result.' Tade raised his head again and now apart from the lawyer name, the lawyer had prominent tribal marks that screamed the state he originates from. Tribal marks vary depending on states and even towns. In this age people won't even allow a blade scratch on their child's face. People don't even appreciate this anymore, they believe it misshapen the face. Acculturation and civilization has changed people perspectives. This has given them ground to fight against it. Apart from human right of the baby, would aseptic techniques be carried out? Would the child not be infected with a terrible blood transmissible disease? Tribal marks is fast fading in the Nigeria of today.

Tade paid close attention to the evidences the lawyer was building against him.

'The only object which was found at the crime scene.' The lawyer said raising an envelope. 'A white handkerchief with many finger prints. A DNA test was run on the handkerchief because it also contain the killer epithelial cells. In confirming the prints I have here, it was checked with thousands of prints in the school database. The prints belongs to Tade Leo. For authentication, it was also checked with prints in the National Identity board database. I'm aware of the un-dependableness of fingerprints when it is to be use as an evidence of a crime event. I know the hanky can easily be contaminated. But this particular hanky was brought in by the killer himself and the police gave us a report that took away any grain of doubt. The detective in-charge who talked about how careful the killer and his group were with prints was quick to write full details of this in his statement.'

'What details Barrister?'

'The detective said the prints on most of the apartment belong to Susan. Friends and anybody could have their prints there also. Prints at vital places, places important to criminals only have a specific prints though might not

belong to a single individual.'

'How sure are you that this handkerchief you are talking about wasn't dropped intentionally?' The Judge asked.

'Your Honour, from the clip gotten from the camera, the hanky was dropped when the killer removed the gun from his pocket. He might have been careless with it because he was familiar with the deceased. The group made a mistake by not allowing him to enter with them at first. This would have calm him down.'

'That is wrong your Honour,' Barrister Kunle said abruptly.

'Objection overruled.'

'The doctor stated that the killer was a professional with guns; because of the accuracy of the shot and the position where the two bullets hit. A newbie won't know that one of the delicate place for a bullet to hit is the liver if time factor is to be conceded. Two bullets aligning at the same place in the liver means professionalism. A killer who is good at what he does doesn't need time to calm down because of familiarity between him and his victim, your Honour.'

The Judge turned toward the first Barrister. 'If the hanky you talked about mistakenly fell on the ground, don't you think those who are careful not to have their prints on vital places will see that quickly? I'm talking about others in the group, the remaining gang members.'

'After the shot, my Lord, they all rushed out and closed the door with the foot. This means they were careful when they walked into the apartment but they were not meticulous when they went out.'

The Judge returned his eyes to his book for a jot, Tade hoped he won't believe what the lawyer had just said.

'And the DNA, how do you confirm that?'

'Before the killer was found, your Honour,' he said. 'The camera had helped us in taking some steps. We have to asked for and got one of his cloths in order to carry out a DNA match.'

Tade could give an answer to that, but couldn't say anything. He knew his friends didn't have a choice, they had to provide the police what they needed for a successful investigation. Folding his hand on his abdomen, he was amazed as a witness walked toward the box.

'This man is the shop owner Tade went to visit,' the lawyer stopped and faced the man. 'You said you saw Tade before the incident.'

'Yes,' the man replied. 'I saw him.'

'Tell us more about it.'

The man searched for Tade's gaze, held it for a while and immediately he focused back on the lawyer.

'He entered a car. An old Peugeot car, it was painted brown. Tade entered

voluntarily and even shook hands with one of them.'

The lawyer faced the Judge, his eyes off the witness who had just left the box. 'This man stays few blocks away from Tade's hostel. He has just said something I want everybody to take note of. 'Tade shook hand with one of them', that shows the level of intimacy between them. It shows cordialness and this means a lot your Honour.' He walked toward the judge. 'Here are the evidences which back my words your Honour.'

The court room was in a deathly silence except for the movement of the cameramen who were giving live transmissions. Standing in there and changing his gaze between the two lawyers and Judge, he knew many would care more about the Judge last words.

The second lawyer stood up. Tade smiled a little. He could appreciate the arrangement. Even though that won't determine his fate; he was hopeful.

'I stand in for Susan Obi.' The second lawyer said. 'It is unfortunate and sad to handle this case. Crossgate is my alma mater and the deceased was a student of that great institution and the man standing over there is a student.' He pointed to Tade who wasn't even looking. 'I have done my findings and gone through the tape which I have here. On Wednesday, 6th of July was the day the deceased was given a sum of 250 million Naira. The deceased was expected to save the money on Monday but that particular day was announced to be a work free day. This long break gave the killer enough time to act. On Monday, 11th of July the kidnap and murder of Susan was carried out. With this tape, I think the killer wants to put us into the dark, he wanted us to call the dark light. He want us to be confused even after knowing the truth.'

'Can you justify that?'

'Yes, my Lord.' He moved out of the space in between the table and chair. 'Putting the case of shooting professionalism aside, Tade placed the call in the morning when he knew that two of his friends were with Susan. He had also called in the presence of another friend which makes it a three people witness. This shows that he wasn't secretive in his dealing, he wanted his friends to know about the call. I'm also sure he knew that a camera had been installed in Susan's apartment, but he didn't covered his face. Susan was kidnapped to pause the game and on resumption it brought in the needed confusion. The pause had brought in doubt and heartache to the remaining friends who were ignorant of the blackout phase. The killer then transferred them to the shooting scene not minding their state of mind. He did not care about what people would say because he knew what he was giving them. He entered the apartment with the necessary precaution and shot her because nobody knew about his dexterity in handling of guns. An handkerchief was dropped which could implicate him, but

he cared less. Can anybody guess why? It simple, your Honour, he wanted the police to find him. He knew when they do, they will be confused because they will believe he could not be stupid. But that is what he wants, he want them to think he is not stupid. That was the weakness he hoped for and what he hoped to prey on. I know you will agree with me your Honour when you see the tape.' He picked up the small envelope on his table and placed it in front of the judge.

'Are you saying the first lawyer analysis are wrong?'

'No, I'm only saying that this is what the killer want us to think because bad guys don't play by the rules. That is what makes them more dangerous.'

Tade's was shaking as though he had spasm. He zeroed his mind concerning his own lawyer, not hoping for anything positive. He hoped his lawyer would put in the right words. The only thing which would take him out of the prison cell will be his words.

'I think the lawyers standing against this case has spoken well. They have said what is needed to be said. The analogy was awesome, but what if they were wrong. I'm sure it was based on dexterity in handling of guns and professionalism. But one thing is important when handling a case like this. I would like to ask for permission to call people your Honour and would also want my client to say something.' Barrister Kunle said.

'Granted.'

Within a minute, Tade saw the detective inside the witness box. His heartbeat increased as he couldn't trust the detective would be on his side. Most of what the previous lawyers have said were things the detective have worked on.

'Detective Thomas, for how many years have you been in this profession?'

'Twelve years,' he replied. 'I was twenty five when I joined the force.'

'How many cases have you handled?'

'Many criminal cases,' he replied.

'You have to be specific.'

'This will be the sixth one since I have been in this position, but in general twelve cases.'

'Have you being successful with all?'

'Two pending.'

'Which and which?'

'That's a confidential info.'

'Very well then, Detective,' the Barrister said, 'in all of your conversation with these people you should have notice a common feature they possess. You should be able to know the authentication of their statements judging from their body language.'

'Yes.'



'Did you evaluate the body language with the outcome of the court cases too, detective?'

'Yes I did.'

'In your present position, you handled six criminal cases and two is pending. This means you were privileged to assess one of your skills with the Judge verdict four times.'

'Criminal cases.'

'Tell me Detective how would you rate yourself. If you used this skill of yours effectively during your interrogation session with this suspects, then their body language should be one of those things you used in nailing them.'

Detective Thomas waited for a while before he replied.

'It worked for all.'

'Did you use it with my client? Do you think my client is guilty of this crime?'

Tade studied the detective as he cleared his throat. It took him few seconds before saying a word he must be planning what to say.

'My team and I always work in a way that we are sure if our apprehended suspect is guilty or not. But in respect to this case and what the previous lawyers have said. I will say this case revolves around confusion and distraction. This needs to be eradicated first before we can have the best in this case.'

'Are you saying you can't...'

'No.' Thomas said cutting him short. 'Facial expression and in general body movements are important factors when it comes to interrogating a suspect. On the other hand, this gives a clue not an evidence. In this present case, we have an intelligent suspect. He is also a law student and my continuous conversation with him allows me understand his interest. Someone who is interested in criminal law and wants a master in criminology would be meticulous with facial expressions and body movements if he is guilty.'

'Do you believe him to be guilty?'

'I worked with evidence and I don't judge.'

'But you have various evidences, are you doubting your work?'

'I'm not doubting my work. The lawyers knows how to make proper use of the evidences but I think what we have is not strong enough to pronounce the suspect as guilty.'

As the Detective walked back to his initial location, Tade fixed his eyes on the next person.

The first time he got to know Cyril was doing his medical checkup as a new student. They had not crossed paths since then until during the conclusive day of his department primary quiz.

'What do you have to tell us Doc?'

'I'll give answers to questions Barrister.'

'You removed the bullets from Susan's body. Do you believe the killer was an accurate professional?'"

'Yes I believe so. It was definitely not his first kill. I'm sure many people had being shot by him. I'm sure it was done with a high level of confidence.'

'So do you believe that Tade is the killer?'

'No. I don't. I believe there is more to this case.'

'I don't think the doctor has the right to say that your Honour,' The first lawyer said.

'Respect your time Barrister,' the Judge said.

'Thank you your Honour,' Barrister Kunle continued. 'Doc what makes you think so?'

'Maybe intuition, maybe experience. I know he can't take any shot now because the police will believe he can do anything with it. Moreover a professional with such plan, who wasn't compelled to kill his friend doesn't need time to calm down.'

'So what do you believe?'

'I believe the killer is relaxing out there and having fun with how the case is going.'

'I want to hear from the young man with no interference,' the Judge said.

Tade shifted a little, this is a rare opportunity to defend oneself. The whole world had been listening to the lawyers. Now he had the opportunity to say something that would help him.

'After I was kidnapped, they dragged me into a well lit room with no windows. I couldn't differentiate between day and night. I didn't know what my abductors plan was but I kept thinking they would ask for ransom. A ransom for my release. I was dropped on a highway when they eventually released me,' he said slowly. 'On the day of my release, I was given a little sum of money to visit a nearby eatery. I thought it was over then,' he paused. 'I never knew I had more episodes coming. I was arrested by the police few minutes after entering the eatery. Here I am, the story continues,' Tade said.

'I need enough time so I can go through all the evidences here,' the judge said. 'At the moment, I'm convinced that we are yet to get to the root of this matter. My mind is filled with doubt on the identity of the killer. So, by the power conferred on me I hereby adjourn this case to Monday, August 29<sup>th</sup>.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Reb stood to look at Tade as the officer stooped in front of him. She couldn't see what he was doing, but was sure he was returning the cuff to Tade's ankles. She quickly walked toward the door and waited for him to reach the door. No one talked to him and the camera was off him.

Calming herself, she tried to search his face but he was facing down. She could understand the shame of being the talk of the nation. When he was about a few centimetres to her, he raised his head.

His eyes were not focusing on her. His teeth were resting on part of his curled lower lip. She took her gaze away and scanned the court room, beside one of the tables; she could see a lawyer giving answers to a journalist.

As Tade headed towards the car, she allowed the distance between them to be about two metres. She felt sorry for him, she has been one of the factors that pushed him here. She could remember what the doctor and detective said when they were called out. Thinking on the doctor's point of view, in the past years, Tade had spent more months in PH city than he spent at home. Those few weeks he spent in Lagos had been because of the call he had received from his Mum. She always calls him over whenever she has a case.

Tade had compelled his mum to call him when handling any case, he had told her some people spend months or years in the prison. They are being punished for what they didn't do because they did not have someone to stand for them. He needed to have the necessary exposures to do this.

*Tade is open minded.*

Reb thought as he entered the police car. She watched with keen interest as the three officers beside him entered using three different doors.

Turning back, she saw Susan's Dad. Throughout the Court case, she didn't see him. She had thought he wasn't here, but now he is granting a journalist interview. She tried to walk toward them, but she stopped when she heard Stan's voice.

'We have been waiting for you.' Stan said.

'Sorry, I kept you waiting,' she said. 'I'm feeling sorry for Tade. I am not

happy about what we are all going through. I don't think I can contain this within me.'

'We?'

'We, Stan.' She said.

'I don't know that you are still one of us, Reb.' Stan said. 'You started this. If you had not said anything, if you have not brought the police to our place then... then maybe we won't be here. But you have been the one with a loose mouth, you have been the one forming ally with the police. Now you are scared that an innocent soul would be killed. Why should you be scared Reb? Are you afraid of having his blood around your neck? Are finding solace in his imprisonment?'

'Stan?'

'I'm saying what you have done, Reb. Can you prove any of it wrong.'

'Stop, Stan.' Mart shouted. 'This is not the right place for this.' He looked around. 'People are staring at us. Reb didn't bring the Detective to our place, he followed her. I can't blame her for that. She had to explain certain things to the Detective. She didn't expect this nor call for this, Stan. She was scared and depressed.'

'Stop defending her, Mart.' Stan shouted back. 'She doesn't trust any of us. She has a feeble mind. She can change side anytime.'

'I think I should go.' Reb said, her body shaking. She didn't see this coming.

'Stay there, Reb,' Mart said. 'If you go, never mind coming back.'

'The detective granted you free access to his office because he knows how to take advantage of your weakness. Susan is ours too. We feel the pain, Reb. You are not the only one,' Stan said pointing a finger at her. 'What do you think about us? And you,' he turned to Mart. 'You stood there giving commands, supporting someone who does not trust us.'

'We are us, Stan.' Mart said. 'And that is what we need to defend.'

'The detective helped Tade today. Can't you see that? He gave room for more investigation, more time. Hope still hovers over us.' Reb said. 'Why did he call you over to intrude Kelvin privacy.'

'Yeah. I think that is obvious. But he worked with those baseless evidences. He is not on anyone side.'

'Those evidences are not baseless.' Mart said. 'Whatever you think those evidences are, it will take a good lawyer no time to use it against anyone. And for Christ sake act sane.'

'Tell me, Mart, who is sane and who is not?'

'You guys need to calm down,' Reb said. 'This a public place.'

'Doesn't matter,' Stan retorted.

'I told her to shut up, Stan, and she controlled herself. Can't you do same?'

'I can't,' He said. 'I don't just want her with us.'

'Think of this, even though Susan is dead we still got ourselves and that's a good news. Reb spent most of the night in her apartment. She was worried about Susan movement that same day she died just as we were worried. I think if there is a night Reb shouldn't sleep there, it should be that night. Think of what would have happened if she was there. Think of what she had gone through, put yourself in her shoes.'

'Probably dead by now kiddo.' Vinnie answered unannounced.

'However, one thing is sure, we have an obligation to fulfill. We must find the killer. Even if the killer is among us. Sus won't want us to be like this, Stan. Having a misunderstanding is normal, but having it in public is insane.'

'Absolutely,' Vinnie said. 'I have waited for eternity outside the gate waiting for you guys but here you are...' He stopped himself.

'Vinnie, we don't stay in same place.' Reb said.

'You wrong about something sweetheart,' Vinnie said. 'The last time I checked, we came together.' He walked toward her and raised her chin. 'I'm sure you don't know.'

'Know what?' They all asked.

'Oh!' He said with laughter. 'Pardon me for laughing, I don't have to laugh because I think its a bad news. Though I don't have a view of it myself but I'm pretty sure its bad.'

'Why you sure of that?' Reb asked.

'What are you talking about man?' Stan added his.

'Outside.' He pointed. 'All cars have stopped moving before I stood there.'

'We knew about that before coming back for Reb, Vin,' Mart said.

'Then maybe we should have a look.'

After a trek of about 500m, they stood in front of all the parked cars. Reb tried to find her way through them as anxiousness went through her nerves. She stopped when she reached the cleared space, what she saw was more than what she had expected. She wondered why this was happening today. She had just seen one of her friend being escorted back to the jailhouse, one which could turn a prison in couples of weeks. She had been scared to her bones about what Stan might cause out of anger.

*I deserve it. No I don't deserve to be an object of his anger. If Stan was in my shoes or maybe of the same sex with Susan, he would act same way.*

She stepped forward a bit and a hand drew her back.

'Careful Reb.' It was a low voice. She turned back and she gave him a fleeting smile. 'I don't think you would want to know what happened.'

She nodded, not bothered by the statement. She was not shocked or

surprised. Looking toward the ambulance, she could see two bodies from the place she stood. Each was on a stretcher. The first one only had an oxygen mask on. Then the second has a paramedic attending to it. She was not sure if the two accident victims were males or females or maybe mixed sex. She returned her eyes on the floor, flashes of Susan helpless blood filled her head. The images of blood all over the right side of her chest and body responding to mortis.

She could see Sus standing and saying something. She was letting her in, allowing herself to think much about her and allowing her to muddle her mind. She closed her eyes and made a countdown of five, saving herself from her own hallucination. The body on the road was a man, she couldn't tell if he was just an ordinary bike rider. Blood wasn't on him, but it surrounded him. His helmet was right behind his occipital. He was a lanky fellow just as Susan but a gross mismatch in complexion.

Her primary knowledge about blood came into being as she fixed her eyes on the blood.

The human blood ranges between five to six liters and maybe about 5.6 liters in a 70 kg man. She could remember what sudden loss of excess blood brought could force the heart into.

Within few minutes the body was packed into a body bag. She had watched the police as they carried out their duties. The helmet was taken, and all his pocket was checked for personal belongings. He had no cut on him and she wasn't there when the accident happened, but it was her nature freak out when she sees gory things. The rider had all his protective measures on but he still, lying dead on the road.

'He is dead,' Stan said. 'Hell of tragedy. I can't understand why he didn't make it.'

She looked at him and was glad he didn't return the gaze. His hands were well shoved inside his pocket.

'Luck, maybe grace or destiny,' Reb said.

'Destiny?'

'Yeah.' She said.

'You can't be serious. Are you saying he is ill-fated? I don't even believe in such things.'

'Maybe he deserved it, maybe that is his destiny.'

'Then that is not destiny.'

'What do you call it?' Vinnie asked after finding his way out to join them.

'No one is ill-fated, but you can work towards it.' Mart said, making them complete at the spot.

Few meters from where the ambulance was packed few minutes ago was the

police car with a man handcuffed behind.

'I recognise the detective beside that man,' Reb said.

'You always do Reb,' Mart said. 'You have an edge over us in that aspect.'

'It's Abigail,' Reb said as she walked closer. 'She works with...'

'Detective Thomas.' Stan concluded, cutting her short.

'Yes.'

'Reb,' Abigail called before she reach her.

'What happened here, Detective?'

'Reb, trust me, you won't want to know.'

'I want to know,' Reb replied, then looked at Mart. 'We all want to know, Detective.'

'Accident, Reb, and I need to interrogate this man.'

'Interrogate?'

'It looks intentional.'

'I saw three people,' Reb tried to calm herself and reduce her voice. 'One is dead...'

'Two was in the ambulance that left,' Vinnie concluded the statement.

Reb watched as Abigail thrust her hand into her pocket. 'This isn't a good year for your school, Reb. Trust me when I say so. The three guys who fell from the bike are from your school,' she removed her hand. 'This occurred few minutes before the court case came to an end.'

'Is Tade still in the traffic?' Mart asked.

'They had to find their way out. One of them is not really injured and for the second person, I can't say if he will recover quickly,' Abigail said, then headed toward the car.

'The second?' Reb asked.

'You can find out about that in the hospital.'

'Please.'

'In coma, Reb. He is in a coma.' Abigail removed her hand from her pocket and brought out three ID's. She gave it to Stan and collected it within few seconds. 'You can tell them about it when I leave.' Abigail walked to her car, she looked out of the car window before the driver drove off.

Reb fixed her look on Stan, more like he hold her hope. 'Are you telling us now?'

'You can discuss it when you get to the hostel.' Abigail said from the car.

'What did you read, man?' Mart asked.

'Stan, are you going to say something now?' Vinnie asked as Stan failed to reply the first two questions.

'Stan, we need to know who owns those ID cards the detective gave you few

seconds ago,' Mart said.

'She gave me because of a reason,' Stan said. 'Let's follow her instructions.'

'We weren't deaf when she made mention of that, Stan.' Vinnie said.

'Then you should all respect that.'

'Stan,' Reb said. 'We've passed through worse than this.'

'Trust me, Reb,' Stan said. 'I think the detective loves you that's why she showed those ID's to only me. It's disheartening I must say. It will do us more good than harm if we follow what she had just said.'

Reb said nothing. The detective had said that because she knows Reb knew the victims.

Reb tried to recall all her conversations with the detectives, she didn't tell them about any of her friends outside the group.

*They only know about those in the group. Then who are these people?* she asked herself. *Could it be Kelvin? No, it can't be Kev not even in my dreams. The competition ends today so it can't be him. If they leave by land they will be in PH tomorrow. They won't even leave today.*

Reaching the hostel, Reb tried not to start the conversation. Stan had done what surprised her when they were on their way. He was successful in making them reach home an hour late. He had brought the idea that they needed to calm down before reaching home. He talked them into trekking.

'I'm not sure they did the test Tade requested for,' Stan said.

'What test?' Vinnie asked.

'Chloroform test.'

'What is that used for? Why would Tade requested for that?' Vinnie asked.

'Chloroform is a colourless and poisonous chemical used as anesthetic.' Mart said. 'It is poisonous depending on the quantity inhaled.'

'So he thought they gave him that. Why would they?' Vinnie asked.

'We just have to forget about this stuff. It's of no use.' Reb said.

'The detective knew talking about that is worthless because of the time of release. The abductors won't release him if there was any trace of anesthesia drug in his system,' Mart said.

'So why are we talking about this?' Vinnie asked.

'We are discussing this because I want to know why this wasn't mentioned in the court,' Stan said.

Reb turned her focused to Mart who was trying to control his laughter.

'What is the problem, Mart?' Reb asked.

'I know what Stan wants. He started all this because he wanted to stall us. I would analyze this for you guys and then you will tell us what was on the identity card, Stan,' Mart said facing him. 'Deal or no deal?'



'Deal.'

'These people have been detective for long and they reason in a wise way. I'm sure they formed acquaintance with us at first not because they trusted us. But they did that because they wanted to know us, they are studying us and we are part of what they are investigating. According to what Tade's Mum told us, Tade raised the point of testing for chloroform. But I think they knew that it will be waste of resources because the result would be negative. And you know why Tade said that? It is because he could smell it.'

'It has a smell?' Vinnie asked.

'Yes Vin, a sweet smell. Chloroform doesn't act quickly, it takes about five minutes. So Detective Thomas would think he knew what he was saying. Then what happened next? He will try to imagine how this will happen with the statement Tade gave.'

I don't get you,' Reb said.

'Tade said the room was well lit. So there could be two rooms, two rooms beside each other. One saturated with chloroform and the other could be chloroform free.'

'But you said this chemical is poisonous, why would they want to use it?' Reb asked.

'Because...' Mart paused for a while. 'That is what most kidnappers use. They are expertise in this field. They know the exact concentration that won't harm him. They will only allow him to spend five minutes in the first room. So when he is unconscious they will put him into another well lit room which have similar design with the first one.'

'Does that mean that the Detective want this case to be adjourned?' Vinnie asked.

'I think that is why Tade sweat and prints was on the handkerchief found at the scene. I think the Detective trusted Tade.' Mart said and turned to Stan. 'Stan you have to honour your words now?'

'Mart, how do you know this?' Reb asked.

'I know how chloroform works and I know each anaesthesia have their mode of operation. The kidnapper would use what they know of even if it's dangerous.'

'When would the school representatives be back from Kaduna?' Stan asked.

'Saturday or Sunday, they will be coming back by land. Why are you asking this?' Vinnie asked.

'I think they came back today.' Stan said.

'That won't be possible, Stan.' Mart said. 'They went by land, so they are coming back by land.'

'Maybe or maybe not guys. But what I saw on those ID's proves you guys wrong.'

'Who owns those identity cards?' Reb asked.

'Crossgate students.'

'Of course we don't need a clairvoyant to tell us that again,' Vinnie said.

'Why don't we check if there is any news about this online,' Mart suggested.

Reb brought out her phone; slide it forward and press some digits. In her browser, she selected the search box and typed in current news on Crossgate students. As the suggestion page showed, she clicked on news and waited for few seconds before strolling down.

'Think I got something here.' She said.

'What? Stan asked.

'The sponsors are paying for returning flying tickets for the best three schools.'

'Is Crossgate there?' Stan rose to join her.

'Yes, Stan, overall third.'

'So they are coming back by air. Vinnie said.

'They are already back Vin.' Mart said.

'Meaning the three of them came to hear the court hearing but were not allowed in so they left in haste,' Stan said.

'Why are you sure about that?' Reb asked.

'There was traffic on the highway before the court case ended.'

'Who are these people, Stan.' Mart asked.

'One is a geology student; one petroleum engineering student and...' He stopped. 'Maybe we should checked the hospital tomorrow.'

'Stan, you need to honour your word.' Vinnie said.

'You guys don't understand, this is not about honour.'

'Then what is it all about?'

Reb could only see the tears on his face, Stan had tried hard to keep this away from them. Even if it is only for today. She went closer to him and extend an handkerchief.

'What is it, Stan?' She asked.

'The last student is from the law department, representing only in academics.'

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

'I can't believe I am here Thomas,' Abigail said. 'I was heading to...'

'I know about that. But this is also important. We need some catching up to do.' He said as he reduced the distance between them.

'What do you have here?' She asked. 'Don't tell me you called me over because of a car. If this is another case count me out. I have something more important to do than this.'

'What if this is more important?' He asked, as he halted and stood akimbo.

'Then I will listen to you on the criteria you based it on. We are not still sure about who the killer is, Thomas. And here we are for something different,' she said. 'You can pass this to another detective.'

'Are you sure this car didn't trigger your memory? Just because there is change in colour... Just check it out.'

Thomas watched as she walked toward the car, it was an old Peugeot model. This time around the colour wasn't brown, It's a blue. Beside the car was a policeman's car - 'Thomas' car.

'Thomas,' she called out.

'Yeah?' He answered as he walked towards the car. 'Have you changed your mind about the importance of the car?' He asked.

'Who called to inform you about this car?' She put on a glove on her right hand then opened the door and poked her head inside.

'I can't give you an answer right now.' She picked up the wallet left on the back seat. 'I don't understand why this car is parked here.'

Thomas let in his hand slowly into his pocket. 'I received a call few minutes before the court case ended. The caller said he saw an old car parked on one of the dead end streets.'

'Do you asked him the day he saw the car? Maybe that was the time if he took note of that.'

She closed the car door and opened the wallet.

'This belongs to Tade, right? The witness said it was a brown car.'

'I think that is what they want. We have checked the car and found the wallet in it. The caller said he saw it yesterday evening,' Thomas said.

'The tracks are still fresh. The grass did a pretty good job helping with the tracks.' She kicked the short grasses with her boots and faced him. 'What do you say?'

'Yeah. I noticed the tracks, hence it means the caller is lying or the weather is giving us a wrong information to work with.

'I think the caller want us to see it and that's all,' Abigail said.

'You saw the wallet, Abigail. The car was the one the witness was talking about. The only difference is the colour. It's glaring. Can't you perceive the smell?'

'This mean they want us to find it and that is why am not buying the idea of checking it out. Can't you see what they want us to do?'

'What is it?'

'The same thing they made us do from the onset. They want to be the dictator here.'

'They are not dictating. This is just another clue.' Thomas said.

'Come of it, do you think they will be so stupid to leave Tade wallet?'

'They are not stupid and I agree with you on that. The car is of no use to them but it can be used against Tade.'

Thomas walked to his car, opened the front door and sat in the driver's seat.

'We can trace the registration number,' he said.

'Thomas, the caller parked this car here because it will also be a dead end,' Abigail said, trying to talk him out of what he was about to do.

'Of course it won't. But why not try to know who the caller is. Check if his service provider is the one your friend worked for. He could help us with that,' Sam, another partner said.

'Got that,' he replied. 'I think today also has something positive to give us,' Thomas said after checking his caller's number.

'I need you to check a number for me. It is urgent. Can I trust you to do this for me?' Thomas said after his receiver had picked the call.

'OK,' the receiver said from the other side. 'You just have to hang on and give me details when I ask for it.'

Looking back, Thomas saw Abigail and Sam talking. He had to use the time for something else. The car still looked new even without the paint. The car interior was intact. It means that the owner of the car valued it.

He got out of the car and walked up to them.

'The car looks new even if it is an old model. The owner valued this car and took good care of it. Don't you think so? Whoever parked it here might have

stolen it from the owner,' Thomas said. Thomas phone began to ring; he took a swipe at the phone to pick the call.

'The owner of the line is Albert Samuel. Age, 28 and he is a banker. He registered this line seven years ago. His line is always active. Would that be all for now, Thomas?' He asked.

'Yes,' Thomas answered.

'When did he call you?' The man on the other side asked.

'This morning, 11:50 a.m.' Thomas replied.

'Yeah? I mean if he called you around 11:50 then Albert should be in the bank.'

'Yes. I think so. Thanks.' Thomas dropped the call and approached Abigail who was still talking to Sam.

'It seems we have many things to be bothered about.' He said.

'And what would that be?' Abigail asked.

'I've gotten the name, but is weird.'

'Weird? What is that supposed to mean?' Abigail asked.

'The owner of the line is a banker. A banker won't have the time to call me at 11:50a.m. He won't even see the car he claimed he saw yesterday,' Thomas said.

'He could call you if he is not on the counter,' Abigail said.

'Maybe he is on leave. But if he isn't then seeing this car yesterday would... did you manage to ask about the time he saw the car?' Sam asked.

'No, but he said he saw the car in the evening,' Thomas said. 'We need to check on him.'

'Maybe you should call your men to run a search on that name. We can visit the bank, there is still time,' Sam added.

'Good,' Abigail said.

'That is under control. I have called Ken,' Thomas said after few minutes before heading to the Peugeot. He dipped his left hand into his pocket to pick up a glove.

'Sam, are you with the fingerprints scanner?' Thomas asked after putting on the glove on his left hand. 'What do you think of, Abigail?' He asked. 'Are you having second thoughts?'

'It depends on what you get from the scanner.'

Thomas picked up the wallet and held the scanner Sam brought with another hand. After booting, he placed it over the wallet and waited for a while. The scanner automatically checked prints against a database held by the National Identity Board. He entered the Peugeot from the front door and sat in the car facing the steering wheel. He runs the scan on it.

'Same name with that of the wallet,' Thomas said.

'You mean the prints on the wallet are the same with that on the steering wheel?' Sam asked.

'Exactly! The prints belong to Desmond Samuel. Age is 27 and he lives here in Port Harcourt.' He brought out a pen with a sheet to write down his address. 'What do you think?'

'The car might have been hijacked, used and dumped by the kidnappers. Why would they park the car in a place like that? These guys are not bird-brained fellows.' Sam said.

'What is his occupation?' Abigail asked.

'He is an entrepreneur,' Thomas said.

'This could be his business. Any report of missing vehicle to any Precinct?'

'I can't say.' Sam said. 'We need to check.'

'We will...' Thomas stopped as his phone rang.

'What did you find, Ken?'

'He graduated from Peacemaker University, Kaduna six years ago. Did his NYSC in PH at Guide bank. He was employed by Guide Bank two years ago, he works with them presently.' Ken said.

'Thanks.' Thomas said. 'Please run the same check for Desmond Samuel.'

'Okay,' Ken said before dropping the call.

'Now we need to cover three places, but...'

'We drive each car to the headquarters,' Sam said cutting him off. 'We can't come back for this.' He pointed to the Peugeot.

'No key in the car ignition.' Thomas said. He had opened the door to check.

'I can hot-wire it, that won't take long,' Sam said. 'That won't be a problem if you want me to.'

'That would be perfect. What next?' Thomas asked.

'Sam will park the car at the headquarters, and then join you in the car. You guys will check the entrepreneur address while I check on Albert.' Abigail said.

'Then we will all converge at the licensing office after that. If you are opportune to be there first, you call us.' Thomas said.

'Which licensing office?' Abigail asked.

'The one at Abia road.'

Thomas parked a block to the house corresponding to the address he had. The front of the four-storey building was designed with green marbles. The front shops in the ground floor were filled with electronics. He opened the door to check the remaining three floors. The pictures and writings on the signboard image formed on his retina showing him what most of rooms in the first floor are used for. Both first and second floor were phone shops. The last floor looked different. It has a different design- a brown paint; purely free from

publicising boards.

'This is expected,' Thomas said as he got out of the car making his observations. 'This place doesn't look residential.'

'Check the address again or maybe you should ask,' Sam said as he moved closer to Thomas. 'Or what do you think?'

'I think,' Thomas paused and waited for a while. With his right hand on the bonnet and the left inside his pocket, he picked up his phone as it rang.

'A message from Ken,' he said.

'What did he say?'

'The whole building belongs to Desmond. If he could have this then of what use is an old Peugeot?' Thomas asked.

'We can't confirm that if we don't check who the number plate belongs to,' Sam said. 'If the whole building belongs to Desmond then maybe he stays on the last floor.'

The only stairs found outside join the ground and first floor. Inside the first floor is the stairs which lead to the last floor. The railings were coated brown and on it is a polished wood which was painted cream.

Reaching the last floor, they removed their pistols from the holster and walked toward the door. Thomas stood at the front of the door and Sam behind. Then Thomas moved to the right side of the door while Sam stayed at the left side.

Thomas knocked the door thrice before a teenage girl opened. She looked sleepy and her eyes bulged when she noticed the gun in their hands.

Thomas put his gun behind him.

'Are you the only one in here?' His eyes fixed on the girl. He looked pretty disappointed when the girls gave a yes answer.

'Is there anyone with the name Desmond Samuel here?' Sam asked.

'He owns this building,' the teenage girl replied.

'Would you let us in for a little chat?' Thomas asked. He brought out his card to show the girl as the girl was reluctant to give an answer.

'How can I be sure the card is valid?'

Thomas allowed her to read his identity card. She squinted as she read it though.

'We are here for a good reason,' Sam said.

She let them in, Thomas and Sam sat on a sofa which directly faced the one the girl sat on. Thomas could see she was not comfortable as she continued to squirm in her seat.

'Who are the occupants of this apartment?'

'My aunt and I stay here for now,' She replied.

'Now? What do you mean by that?' Sam asked. 'Do you mean more than two people were living here before?'

'They are still staying here, but not around at the moment.'

'So how many people in general?' Thomas asked.

'Three.'

'And who is the third person?'

'See,' the girl said. 'I shouldn't have allowed you in or spoken with you. My aunt has gone to the station to make a report. We don't feel safe here and now I have two strangers questioning me.'

'We here for the best girl, we are detective working in the Nigerian Police force,' Sam said.

'What happened?' Thomas asked.

'Her husband should have returned yesterday, but he did not. She had tried his lines, none is reachable.'

'Your aunt's husband is Desmond Samuel, right?' Thomas asked.

'Yes.'

'He went on a business trip.' She said.

'On what day of the week?'

'Monday.'

'What is he selling?' Sam asked.

'Phones... electronics in general.'

'That sounds interesting,' Sam said.

'What is so interesting about this? Please don't gloat at us.'

'Don't get us wrong kiddo,' Thomas said. 'Give us your aunt's number and we will take it up from there. You should just try to trust us. We work at the headquarters also.'

'I don't want to think about kidnap,' Sam said after they had spent about five minutes inside the car.

'It seems these people kidnap to cover up,' Thomas said.

'They waited for about thirty minutes before Desmond wife called to inform them about her return to the house.'

'We need to know if your husband drives or own a Peugeot. An old model to be precise.'

'No,' she replied Thomas. 'He only has two vehicles. A bus for business and a car we both use. This is the key,' she picked it up from the table. 'Is this really necessary?'

'We found his finger prints on a car steering.' Thomas said.

'You mean the old Peugeot?'



'Yes. Also on a wallet which is not his.'

'Where?' She asked.

'Here in PH, and the car was parked on a dead end street.'

'That can't be.'

'Why?' Sam asked.

'He is conversant with the major roads here in Port Harcourt. He can't miss his way. He should be in his bus not in a Peugeot.'

'He travelled with the bus?' Thomas asked.

'He buys his things in Lagos and clears some containers also at the Port,' She replied. 'I need you to find my husband. I don't need questions again.' She snapped.

**3:30 PM**

**Front of Licensing Office.**

Thomas alighted from his car and walked up to Abigail. She perched on the car bonnet. She had waited for the past twenty minutes.

'It wasn't what we expected, Abigail. What did you gather at the Bank?'

'Let start with yours,' she said.

'It just like where the car was parked.'

'Dead end? Are you kidding?'

'This won't be the best time for that,' Sam said. 'It seems Desmond was kidnapped.'

Abigail unfolded her hand. 'Seriously?'

'He was kidnapped because of his print, I guess,' Thomas said.

'Are you saying he will be back soon?' Abigail asked. 'Don't you think that should be followed up with a serious hand?'

'We can snoop on him.' Sam said. 'That would be after having a chat with him.'

Thomas watched as Abigail turned and walked toward the passenger door, opened the door and brought out a brown envelope.

'What is that for?'

'Albert got himself a strong alibi,' she said. She brought out the sheets that contained all the Staff sign in and sign out signatures since Monday. 'Here,' She pointed. 'That is Albert signature from Monday till Friday. No sign out for Friday yet.'

'And here,' She said as she brought out some document that had Albert writing and his signatures on it with the dates.

'All these documents are for this week.'

'Seem Albert is off track,' Sam said.

'I sent some videos to my phone. It is from the surveillance camera.' She gave Thomas the phone. 'So Albert wasn't the one who called.'

'But that was his line. Didn't he say something about that? Did you ask him about that?'

'I did.' She replied.

'And what was his reply?' Sam asked.

'He lost his phone on Wednesday night when heading home. He hadn't got the chance to do a Welcome Back. So I think that gave whoever stole the phone the chance to call with it. It had no password.'

'They knew about his job,' Thomas said. 'They knew he won't be chanced to visit one of his service provider outlets for a Welcome Back. So they did whatever they wanted with it, as long as it covers up their tracks.'

'They also knew we will make our enquiries and that will be a dead end,' Sam added. 'So they intentionally parked the car there.'

'He could have called his service provider to block the Sim card.' Thomas said.'

'He won't, Thomas,' Abigail said. 'He won't be able to use the line again.'

\* \* \*

Reb opened her eyes, shut it and opened it again. When she got up she saw her friends in the exact position they were before she fell asleep.

'Can we go now?' She asked. For the past few hours, they have compelled her to relaxed her mind. They had told her none of them would step out of the door if she did not calm down herself. Stan had suggested she should sleep and then she had reluctantly agreed to it.

'This is four, if we leave now we will be there in the next few minutes,' Reb said.

'Is not a matter of being there early, Reb,' Mart said.

'Then what is the matter?'

'No one would attend to us. They will be focusing on those patients in critical conditions. And unfortunately Kev is among. So I will...'

'Are you saying he is the one in coma?' She asked, cutting him off.

'I won't give you false hopes,' Mart said. 'Why would the Detective chose to give Stan the ID cards? Why not you? Why would Stan try to change the topic when we asked him about the ID cards?'

'But we were hoping Kev would give us some answers.'

'Reb,' Stan called for her attention. 'You need to calm down. Kev will be fine.'

Many people come back from coma and they are doing great.'

'You full of false hopes, Stan.' She snapped. 'What of those that didn't come back to life?'

'You don't have to be pessimistic,' Stan said.

'I'm not. I ju...' She let her emotions in.

'Nobody wants the bad side for him, and this is what you have to understand,' Vinnie said. 'We have to hope for the better and if we are hoping for that,' he paused; 'we also have to be in good condition.'

'We can go now. We can stay at the OPD. We will wait for him there, for the doctor to come out,' Reb said.

'Let us wait for his Mum first,' Vinnie said.

'His Mum? Come of it, Vin,' Reb said. 'Kev's Mum stays in the east. Kev is an Igbo man. You can't expect her to be here so quick. The doctor won't inform her about this now.'

'Why do you think so?' Stan asked.

'For her own good. Because...' She looked at Stan face as her tears increases. 'I know how she will feel.'

'Really?' Mart asked.

'Then let's wait till tomorrow. Don't you think that would also be good for you?' Stan asked.

'Few years before I entered the university,' she started her history. 'My mum got an accident and she..sh..was in coma for months. She didn't make it Stan. So she was among those who didn't make it. She left me, my Dad and siblings. So if you guys are not going I will go,' she pointed to herself. 'If I can handle my Mum then I can handle this too.'

She walked towards the door and stopped as Mart blocked her path.

'Let me go Mart. You can follow me if you care for me.'

'I'm sorry for your loss. I don't...'

'Don't be sorry for anything,' she said.

'We should go,' Stan said. 'She will be fine.'

'And who do you say you are again?' The doctor asked as he take off a pen from his overall. 'This is 8 p.m., I will only spend a few minutes listening to you.'

'Kev's friends,' Reb said. She cleared her throat and sat up. 'Close friends, we do things in common and we are all in same reading group. We are from Crossgate.'

'So in what way can I help?'

'We want to know about our friend. His present condition and any other thing you would like to tell us,' Vinnie said.

'Any other thing.' He repeated. 'Have you ever heard about confidentiality?' He asked.

'Yes,' Vinnie nodded following his answer.

'We know about that and how important it is in your work. But all we asking for is his present state.' Her voice was low and sound more better than the previous. She was now controlling her emotion and getting herself back. She was still afraid about Kev's position. She didn't want to agree that Susan had choose bad fate neither did she want to believe fate is against Kelvin too.

'Please,' she said softly.

'For the past few hours, we have been trying to do the best on your friend. He had subarachnoid haemorrhage. I will try to explain what that means to you.' He said. 'Between the skull and the brain, and between the vertebral foramina there are three layers of tissue called meninges. From the outside is the dura mater then the arachnoid mater. The last layer which adhere to the brain is the pia mater. According to the report I have with me,' he picked up the green file on his table, pulled out a drawer and carefully put it inside it. 'Kelvin hit his head on the road gravel, and then his head was also hit again by that of his friend. This force had effect on his head. There was an internal bleeding which made the subarachnoid space to be filled with blood.'

'So this cause his coma?' Reb asked.

'Yes. The force exacted on the brain was enough for this.'

'Then what have you been doing to salvage this?'

He laughed. 'Arrest the bleeding, then evacuate the blood.'

'So he will be fine?'

'We need to monitor him. There is a probability that the bleeding might resurface, form haematoma which is capable of causing herniation.'

'Herniation?'

'Literally, is when part of the brain is displaced. So your friend needs your prayer. And...' He stopped and brought out Kelvin phone. 'I need to speak to any of his relative but the phone is locked. Will you help me with that?'

'Of course.' Reb said as she quickly locate Kev's mum number on her contact list and showed it to him. 'I haven't speak with his Mum before, so she won't know me. What of the other two?' She asked.

'You mean the remaining two?'

'Yes.' She replied as fast as she could.

'The bike rider wasn't lucky. But the third person only had a fracture but not a serious one. He will be fine.'

'Okay.' She managed to say that after few seconds. She wished the sand of time wasn't fictional, that would have been her only means of reversing this.



## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Thomas pulled to a stop in front of Abigail's house. It had been raining all night. The clouds had pocketed the sun. It looked like it would rain, but it didn't pour. That had brought them here today. The two of them needed to find out what they can concerning the car owner. He wind down the car glass for the natural air which was humid.

The number plate which ends with GBB had been linked to Prof Eze. Thomas had tilted his head when the clerk helped with the name yesterday, that was the third name linked to the car.

'Early bird,' Abigail grinned, and her eyes sparkled; crinkling around the edges. She placed her folded hands on the driver's door.

'I got some information about him,' she paused. 'I hope it will explain why he owned the car.'

'What do you know about the Professor apart from being late?'

Of course both knew about how late their subject could be. Thomas had caught the amazed look on the clerk face after tracing down the number plate.

'I think I knew him,' the clerk had said. 'The Professor got this plate in 1988. And...'. She then slow down her pace. 'He is dead. I can remember reading his obituary about five years ago.'

Thomas thrust his hand into his pocket trying to link everything.

'Yes,' Abigail said. After opening the opposite door for herself. 'The clerk opened her mouth in surprise.'

'Yeah, five years,' Thomas said. The conversation with the clerk was still fresh in his mind. 'I can't help you with the newspaper... that's a long time. We don't run a library here.' The clerk words resounded in his mind.

He ignited the car before Abigail continued their conversation.

'He lectured people on Art - historic art and present art,' she laughed. 'People thought of him as a conventionalist.'

'Conventionalist? Do people with such ideology still exist?' Thomas asked.

'You will be surprised. Why would he own that kind of car?'

'There are many answers to that,' Thomas grinned. 'If what the clerk said is

anything to go by, then he bought the car when it was still appreciated. The fact remains that he had a maintenance culture. He could love seeing the car around since people don't pay tax for cars here.'

'So how did the car ended up with...?'

'I can't believe you are asking that,' he said.

Thomas reduced the car speed as he spotted a road signboard. Flipping his memo open, he checked the address he wrote on one of its page. Turning to where the signboard arrow pointed to, he felt the cool breeze which was more humid. He tried to look around. Most of the houses were a storey building. Trees aligned in front of most of the houses.

'I would be convinced if an airport is here,' he chuckled.

'Nay,' her brows knitted into a frown. 'The airport is miles away from here.'

Checking on their roofs, few of the buildings had rusted sheet metals. He could also spot those with modern roof. Most of the houses had beautiful ancient designs. The new buildings also had traces of those designs.

The low point was the untarred clay road. Yet he could feel more life in the environment. It look more like a sculpture haven. The houses enjoyed spaces between them and could also boast about beauty of horticulture.

'I guess they were abandoned, but they didn't abandon themselves,' Thomas said.

'Our Professor got himself a place which looked best for him,' Abigail said.

Thomas nodded in agreement before stopping the car.

'This is number 38,' he pointed at a mansion. 'The clerk said 38. But this...'

'You expected an old house,' Abigail said. 'I'll use the word renovated. Still I think it lived up to the Professor's taste. Lower your eyes to the fence.'

On the left side was a demarcated rectangle on the brick -bricks were used for the house fence, not more than 70 meters. It contained many shapes. On the right side, he could see what it meant. It was a puzzle, and the answer was right there on the right side of the fence.

After leaving the gate, Thomas pressed the door bell twice before it was opened. A young boy of about twenty-two years or thereabout stood in front of him. His hair was curled and he had blue eyes.

'I'm Detective Thomas and this is my partner Abigail.' He showed him his badge. Any adult to speak with? Maybe your Mum or...'

'Come in.' A voice said from inside.'

'My first name is Cynthia, Detectives. But you can address me as Mrs. William.

'Detective Thomas,' he said. 'My partner is Detective Abigail.

'I was coming toward the door, Detective, so I overheard you. Why are we

having you here Detectives?' Mrs. William asked.

Abigail fixed her eyes on her.

'I expected to see a white. Was your husband a white? She asked.

The first ten seconds Thomas spent inside he appreciated the beauty of the house, than the minutes he had spent finding the house. The inside started with an hallway. And on the walls were frames of varying sizes containing art works in them.

'People always asked questions about my boy,' Mrs. William said as she lead them to the living room. 'The hair is natural, most of guys in the family have it. But for the eyes doctors said it is due to mutation.'

'Mutation?' Abigail couldn't help how surprise she was.

'Yeah. Mutation. My husband was scared and so was I, because we don't have any idea about what it could mean. The Doctor said during translation of the bases in messenger RNA in the ribosome's error could occur. This bases line in threes when forming an amino acid that make up a protein. An error in the arrangement bring about the formation of the wrong protein or halt it production.'

'So that was enough to confuse your husband?' Abigail asked.

Thomas was tired already of all the explanations she gave. It wasn't what he was here for, but only waited for Mrs. William to be through. He had wondered how many years she had been saying that before mastering the explanation.

'It was,' she crossed her legs. 'Sorry for boring you with my talk Detective Thomas. How can I help you guys?'

'I asked for it.' Abigail said.

Thomas tugged at his suit and pushed his head forward after seating. 'We need to know if you are related with Prof. Eze.'

'Of course. I'm his in-law,' she said the last word softly. 'He's late, what do you want to know about him?'

'We found one of his properties on a dead end road here in Port Harcourt,' Thomas said.

'That cool.' She tilted her head to one side when listening. 'Which of his property?'

'A car. An old Peugeot version. Can you tell us when this car left your custody?' Thomas asked.

'Why not,' she placed a sofa pillow on her legs. 'Two years ago when we...'

'We?' Abigail questioned.

'My husband and I.' She answered. 'It was during the course of renovating this building, a big metal fell and hit the car roof. So I drove it down to the panel beater workshop.'



'And what happened next?'

'The car was stolen, the workers couldn't find the car the next morning.'

'Workers? Does that mean you didn't meet the workshop owner?'

'Yes I did not.'

'Any step taken?' Thomas asked.

She uncrossed her legs; walked toward a table which was half covered by a curtain. Thomas heard the sounds made from flipping books, and he knew what to expect.

'Here,' Mrs. Williams said as she walked closer to them. She handed the book over to Abigail since she was close to her. Thomas joined her Abigail quickly.

'That list contain lists of art works in this building. My father-in-law's dream is to have a building filled with this. But that wasn't the dream of his son. He wanted a museum.'

'How did he intend to go about this?' Thomas asked.

'Affiliation with the government and the school his Pop lectured. The dream could not be realised because of the school's requirement.'

'And what was that?' Abigail asked.

'The car. He drove the car always when he was alive unless he was compelled not to. The school wrote his biography and wanted it to be here.'

'So the car is needed to be here?'

'That shows how much we needed it,' She replied her. 'That means all necessary steps were taken.'

'Can you take us to the precinct you reported to?' Thomas requested.

'My pleasure, if that is what will make me have the car.' She collected the paper and let them watched as she sashayed across the room.

Thomas picked up his memo book from the car safe before alighting. He tried to look up, the sun was now coming out after it long absence. Weather was cool and the air had a humid feel because of the downpour. Thomas waited for the women to precede him and then follow them up to the entrance door of the precinct.

'Detective Thomas,' a voice called out before the owner emerged from the building.

'To what do we owe this august visit?'

Thomas could recognise the face. It was the officer in-charge, and that would make his work easier here. He walked faster leaving the women behind.

'I need to check a file here.' Thomas said.

'A file? What file is that?'

He pointed to Mrs. Williams, and waited for her to move closer.

'She reported here two years ago about a stolen car.'

'Peugeot 504.' Mrs. Williams said.

'Yeah. I remember.' The Officer said, he signalled the moved in, before he turned his back at them.

They all walked into the building.

'Okay. You have to stay here Mrs...' the Officer said.

'Mrs. Williams.' She offered.

'Pardon me,' the Officer said and then turned toward the detectives.

'You guys should stay in here,' he said as he opened a room for them. The room was almost empty room except for the long table there.

'This place is good for the needed privacy if you wish to talk. I will be back in a few minute.'

Thomas pored over the file the Officer brought for fifteen minutes. He summed up why the shop owner was free when the search work rested on the police here in the precinct. The shop owner alibi said that the man was absent from work when the car was brought in, and Mrs. Williams testified that it was true. The report on the next page was about how the gate was vandalised and possibility of the car been hot-wired.

The key was said to be with the Mrs. Williams. At the end of this report was the last sheet with the two pictures showing the vandalized workshop gate.

'These people, the whole members of the gang who planned Susan death, do you think they are students?' Thomas asked.

'Are you having second thoughts?'

'They put on a black coverall and didn't face the camera, do you remember?' He asked. 'The car they used got stolen two years ago, and it wasn't linked to anyone from Crossgate.'

He dropped the file to face Abigail, perching on the long table.

'If this car was used to kidnap Tade according to his statement and for two years no one had seen the car around this vicinity until Tade was kidnapped. Don't you think they might have put a tail on him?'

'There could be possibility of these kidnappers being hired. A criminal case has not been linked with Crossgate, apart from this case; there have been no case of fight or cultism. If these people could drug Tade to get his prints and DNA, if we follow the shot accuracy theory and these people did not face the camera at the crime scene,' he paused. 'I think only two types of people could be involved.'

'The partner's driver or...?' Abigail asked.

'Kelvin. Kelvin's parents are not living in Port Harcourt but...' he brought out his memo book; 'When I asked Reb about the movement of everyone in the reading group both when the school is on break or...'

'How will she know about the movement of her friends anytime they are on break?' Abigail cut in.

'Read,' he said as he gave her the book.

*Kelvin always talked about having fun at the Art village anytime we are back from holidays. He usually returns to school a week before anyone of us. He said he has an uncle near the Art village, and since the environment is fast developing to be an Art centre he always loves to have a view.*

'Coincidence could play out; how can you be sure he knew anything about this. We are just making guesses all this while.'

'Not all people guess. When you always guess right, that means you have great instinct and that my dear friend is a virtue.'

He collected the book from her.

'Anybody from this vicinity could be schooling at Crossgate but they were not linked with this case. The car was stolen by people who stay around here. They knew when the car was driven to an auto body mechanic workshop, and thought that would be the best time for them to have it. Kelvin meeting them in one of his visit here could be a coincidence. But if he is involved in this case,' he wagged his head. 'That is no coincidence.'

'We need evidence or maybe evidences to exonerate Tade and if we don't, he might end up in prison. And all you've been saying can't help him out.'

'Yes we can't base this on assumption. We need prove, and we have none. We can't nail Kelvin and unfortunately he is in coma.'

He opened his memo book again, unfolds a page and gave her to read.

*Tade spend most of his holidays in Lagos because of his ambition. Mart spends only two weeks at home during the long breaks. He spends most of his breaks at a local library he registered with. And Stan he always prays for a break.*

'What of her?'

He opened the next page for her.

*I spend most of break in Abeokuta where my parent stays, I'm more like Stan. I need to help my Dad, since my Mum is no more.*

'So she can say about their movement.'

'Yes,' Thomas replied even though she wasn't asking a question. 'With those movement, we can still rotate the suspect list among Tade, Kelvin and the

driver.' He said.

'But Kelvin is...' she trailed off.

'If the lawyers work with this, then Reb could be a witness.'

'How certain are you that you are not helping the criminal out.'

'Because,' he shoved his hand into his pocket. 'The killer made his face known when others didn't. And this case isn't about the one who pulled the trigger; it is about the one who planned it.'

'And you are putting that on Kelvin?' Abigail said. 'Kelvin wasn't in PH, he wasn't in our zone when this case happened. He was in the North. I think we should discuss this at the office Thomas,' she said.

'Stan installed the camera but didn't know the reason for installing it. Susan loved Kelvin and liked Tade. Who do you think she will tell about the installation?'

'Kelvin, but how would you prove that. You shouldn't clone anyone's phone, that's illegal!' she raised her voice.

Thomas returned the file inside the box the officer gave him. He knew he was only assuming based on what he has with him. Kelvin could be in Kaduna before Susan received the money. But all it takes for him to know is just a call from Susan. There was no mention of money in all Susan conversations with Kev. His messages only contain bank alerts and service provider messages. The only way is for him to check Susan's phone but that won't be possible, the thieves already took it.

'What if Sus sent a message to him telling him about the money and told him to delete it after reading. That could have given Kev the reason to call these people because he knew them. It only takes a call to do all this. Kelvin might have been the one who gave them all the needed information.'

'Why are you saying this now?' Abigail asked.

'They have given us everything to work on. They gave us an answer to the identity of the one who killed Susan according to the camera, but then camera can be manipulated. It was easy for us to have Tade in our custody, Abigail. Can't you think?' He hit his hand on the table. 'Why would the shooter make himself known while facing the camera? Why did he not use a mask?'

'The driver drove Susan dad to the airport and also drove Sus back home. Doesn't that mean something to you? I understand that you believed Tade isn't the...' She paused. 'Who do you think the shooter is?'

'A spitting image or there was another face under the one we saw,' he replied.

'What is the probability of having a spitting image?'

'Kev could know of someone before that time,' he said. 'But more odd, is that a rubber clone of Tade's face could be used.'

'We have nothing implicating Kev we hope he is in this, but in this condition he is, the chances of survival are slim. He could even come back to life with his memory wiped off - amnesia. I'm only saying the truth,' she said.

'All we need to do is find this criminal group.'

'Perhaps the driver could be helpful too,' Detective Thomas added.

\* \* \*

'On the 6th of July, you dropped Senator Obi, Susan's father at the airport. About ten minutes after, you drove Susan to her own apartment. 29th of July you hit a motorcycle. I'm sure you remember the number of people on the bike,' Thomas pulled a chair.

'This same day was the court hearing of Tade Leo, a friend of Susan who was accused of murder. Can you tell us why you were on the highway on the day the hearing was in progress?'

'I was sent out on an errand,' the driver replied.

'What errand?' Abigail asked.

'To buy things at a supermarket – not far from the court.'

'Where was your boss then?'

'At the office,' he replied.

'So he wasn't in the court room?'

Thomas sit on the chair, resting his elbows on it handle.

'Apart from your boss, who else knew that you brought in the cash late?'

'I can't say,' he sniffed. 'The secretary, maybe the accountant. Anybody could know about it. I am a driver. I follow orders, and that shouldn't be a crime.'

'But you dropped her.' Abigail said.

'That was an order.'

'How many times have you carried cash from one place to the other instead of using the bank?' Thomas asked.

'Three times,' he retorted.

'Where were you at between 10 p.m. and 3 a.m. on 11th of this month?' Abigail asked.

He spoke to himself for a while and he was barely audible as he looked down. He was thinking, doing the math, when he supposed to give quick answer.

'Sleeping, where else should I be?'

'Sleeping? Where? At your own house or that of your boss?' Abigail asked.

'Who and who was there with you?'

'Who else do you expect?'

'Will you say something?' Thomas said. All he wants was an alibi from the driver.

'My family,' he said.

'Why don't you introduce them to us officially?' Abigail said.

He opened his mouth, then raised his head to look them squarely in the eye before hitting his fist on the table.

'Why am I here?'

'You are here because you confirmed one of our theories of being the murderer,' Thomas said.

'Are you accusing me of murder?'

'No, I'm not. You are a suspect.'

Thomas stood up from the chair; he folded his hands to the back and walked to and fro the room before squatting in front of him.

'Your family?'

'My wife and my daughter,' he replied.

'How did you enjoy the day? 11th of this July was a national holiday, right?' Thomas asked.

'Monday was a free day for civil servants, especially Muslims,' he tilted his head and shifted back on his chair. 'I was at my boss place. I left home 6 a.m.'

Thomas dipped his hand into his pocket and brought out a phone. Pressing the side button, the light was on, the display showed that it wasn't locked.

'Those excuses aren't enough to save you,' Thomas said. 'You can be an informant, or maybe you have an informant. I have gone through your call log,' he chuckled.

'Who is Kelvin to you?'

'Kev is a friend,' he replied with laughter. 'I occasionally visit Susan both at home and school. Don't you think I will know him through that way?'

'You called Kev on 6th of July, you also called him on the 11th and 12th and then on the 25th. I'm convinced you have great camaraderie with Susan when she was alive, but you didn't call her since 1st June. You called Kev twice in June and thrice in July. I guess you called her on the first of June for a happy new month greeting. Why didn't you do so this month? Why calling Kev and leaving out Sus? On the 11th was Tuesday, you might have called Kev concerning Susan death. But you did not call Reb. If you know Kev, then you can't deny knowing Reb.'

'Is all of this necessary?'

'Of course it is,' Thomas said. 'If you called Kev about Susan on 11th of July, then you should do same for Reb. So tell me what do you discuss with Kelvin when you called him.'

He raised his hands, more like stretching his body and then he dropped them. The brightness on his face turned dull.

'Maybe I called at the wrong time but I have nothing to do with Susan death. She is my boss daughter,' he said. 'I might not have called her Dad, brother, even Reb because I know where to see them in person. Kelvin was out of PH. This is just a coincidence.'

'Coincidence? Was it coincidence that led you into hitting a motorcycle on Friday? Was it coincidence that made you send Kelvin to the hospital?' Thomas asked.

He jumped out of the chair.

'No, don't say that. Kev wouldn't be in Port Harcourt yesterday, he will return to PH today.' He said.

'It seems you know a lot about his schedule,' Thomas said. 'You don't care about all those on the bike, you cared about Kelvin. Why? Are you working out a deal with him?'

'Why don't you tell us about your gang? The gang both of you are. Tell us this people and we can help you out,' Abigail said.

'Gang? What are you talking about?' He asked. 'Look,' he said softly. 'I'm being sincere with you. I cared about them. I mean the guys on the motorcycle, it wasn't intentional. It might only look like that to people.'

'Kelvin is in coma, the bike rider is dead, while the last person is severely injured. All thanks to you,' Thomas said.

'Give us names.' Abigail requested. She put in front of him a sheet with a pen on it. 'Names of those who knew about the money. Will you do that?'

He nodded slowly before taking the pen.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Reb walked to and fro in the hospital hallway. She had waited for today. Five nights ago, her sleep had been ruined with thought of Kelvin's survival. She had not seen him and or known about his current condition. When her Mum was ill she spent months with her Mum in the hospital and she was updated on every progress she made or didn't make every day. It was boring to sit down besides an unconscious being, but that was nothing when compared to the expectancy - the hope that he would wake as she read and or say good things to him.

Her Mum was strong; she kept fighting, giving Reb such unwavering hope. She would visit her mother, massage her hands for hours and read funny stories to her, hoping she just blink her eyes to show that she was still in that body lying ever still.

Her Mum had failed; she wasn't strong enough to return to life. Reb fell on her seat and soaked herself with tears when she confirmed her mum was dead. But now as she walked in the hallway, with her hands in her pocket, she hoped Kelvin will keep on fighting. She wants him to come back. She did not want to tell a story of losing three friends while in school.

'Come and sit,' Stan said. 'You said you can control yourself, but... see, the doctor would call for us when he's free Reb.'

'We are all in this together,' Mart added.

She removed her hands from her pocket and swings it slowly, though she stood as they spoke to her.

'You have to be mindful of those passing. The doctor's message will bring you relief when the time comes,' Vinnie said.

She stopped to swing her arms when a nurse walked down the stairs. The nurse held a tray which had two kidney dishes. Whatever the dishes contain, Reb best guess is that one of the container had used material, as the nurse had already climbed up the stairs with only one dish.

She climbed the stairs and placed her left hand on the railing, then drew it as



she walked up the stairs. The warmth produced as her palms grazes the rails, lightened her mind and gave her more strength to continue. When she eventually stopped, she rested both hands on the railing and peep downward. She could count four joints of the stairs starting from the ground level.

'This is the fourth floor,' she said to herself.

As Reb walked through the hallway, she returned her hands into her sweater pockets. The hallway was silent and she maintained her casual pace. Each door on the right has an opposite door. After the fifth door, she branched into another hallway and stopped when she reached a transparent glass. She checked the door, it was close. She could see a patient on the bed, but not the face.

'Kelvin would also be in a place like this,' she muffled.

Reb walked back to the door and turned the handle. The door opened. She could feel a leap of joy, though she was scared of intruding on a patient's privacy.

She scanned the room which was illuminated, then moved toward the bed.

'Kev!' She stared in amazement as her eyebrows were raised, her forehead furrowed. On his chest was the EKG wire which she traced to its screen. She could see his heart rate and rhythm, and that gave her the hope she needed.

She touched the NG-Tube which was passed into his nose and was about to place her hand on his head when a voice halted her.

'The doctor said that is the intracranial pressure monitor.' A voice said behind her. 'Who are you?'

'Rebecca.' Her heart pounded as she turned to give a reply. 'I'm just a friend of his, and I'm sorry for...'

'You shouldn't be, I should,' The woman replied.

'Why?'

'I should never have left. I told the officer I won't. I can't recall his name,' she said. 'I'm his mother. Have you come for a visit before? I mean to visit him before I...'

'Not really,' Reb said.

Fixing her eyes on Kev's Mum for few seconds, she could spot the difference between them. Kev doesn't have any physical resemblance with his mum. His mum was fair with a round face and chubby cheeks. Her chin curved on the edge. Kev has an oblong face with a noticeable cheekbone. He also has a red spot beside his right eyeball, and he is dark skinned.

'He has been using the ventilator even before I reached here. I hope he will be free from all this attachments soon,' Kev's Mum said.

'Of course he will,' Reb said, hoping for the best.

'Thanks for the Mrs. Eze's number, Reb,' the doctor said as he removed his white overall, he had his stethoscope firmly in one hand.

'Any complications?' Reb asked.

The doctor gave her a piercing look she shifted from one foot to the other.

'I just want to know,' Reb was not easily deterred.

'You seem to be bothered a lot. What other relationship do you have with Stan apart from being his friend?' He asked.

'You can play an important role in hastening his consciousness,' the doctor was quick to add.

'We are just friends,' she said.

'There are some complications, but we got it under control,' the Doc said.

'What is the complication?' Vinnie asked.

'Herniation,' he said. 'Haematoma developed few days after the surgery. And this resulted from another haemorrhage.'

'So?' Reb asked.

'The haematoma increases the pressure in the cranium.' He looked at her for the second time within four seconds.

'It dangerous, but the ICP monitor helped with that, so we were able to help your friend.'

'The pressure and herniation, what is the relationship?' Reb asked.

'The brain is covered and protected by the cranium, but the fluid in the subarachnoid space maintain the uniform pressure around the brain. The pressure increases then the brain is affected. The haematoma shifted his brain that why there is herniation.'

'When will he be okay?' Stan asked.

'Days, weeks, months, years? I can't say precisely, it varies with individuals,' he said.

After a few seconds, Reb stood up and said 'Going up to see him again.'

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

'Case Number 522035PH120 - the government, Obi family Versus Tade Leo,' the Bench Clerk read out.

'This case is based on kidnapping and murder of Susan Obi. How do you plead Mr. Leo?' The Judge asked.

'Not guilty,' Tade said.

'Will the defendant lawyer be first heard on this case?' The Judge asked.

'Yes your Honour.' Barrister Kunle said. 'My client had been wrongly accused of committing a crime he knew nothing about. The evidences wind around him during the first hearing could be planned by someone who knew about him. You Honour.'

'You can't call those evidences a mere one, Barrister Kunle.' Barrister Kay snapped - the lawyer standing in for Susan.

'These evidences were gotten from the crime scene. Since when do you think any handy material at a crime scene should be discarded?' He asked.

'I'm not saying materials like these should be discarded when found at any crime scene, your Honour. What I'm insinuating is the authenticity of the materials found on the 12th of July at Susan Obi's apartment,' Barrister Kunle said.

'Do you believe that your client don't have anything to do with all these evidences?' the Judge asked.

'My client was played into this even without his consent. And it will be unfair to deprive him of his freedom, your Honour,' he said.

'Murder, this is murder, Barrister!' Barrister Kay raise his voice a notch. 'A murderer deserved the hammer of the government, your Honour,' he faced the Judge.

'People like Tade Leo are devilish and won't be satisfied until their sinister act has been carried out. It would be dangerous to disregard the evidences found against him. Allowing people like him in the society would mean that potential

great people would be eliminated in our society.'

'Your Honour,' Barrister Kunle said. 'My client made mention of being knocked out for some minutes after he was kidnapped. He is the victim here and not an orchestrator of all these. A white handkerchief can be bought anywhere. Would Barrister Kay be sure if this hanky wasn't placed in my client hand? Would he be sure if it wasn't used to clean the sweats on his face and other parts of his body when my client was knocked out? They needed his epithelial cells and they must have gotten it through contact with his clothes and skin. I would like to remind us your Honour that two of the evidences used against my client were gotten from the hanky.'

'It was obvious from the tape your Honour,' the lawyer representing the government said. 'The members of the group were not facing the camera but Tade Leo was. He did that because he thought he could talk himself out. In regard of the defendant discipline we know he is confident and have a high level of dexterity. That is exactly what he showed when he pulled the trigger.'

'It is not proper for any lawyer against my client to talk like that,' Barrister Kunle said.

'The tape showed that before the killer took the shot, he waited a while just to balance himself. That shows lack of confidence. My client never feels this way even when he needs to face the crowd.'

'Your Honour, would you please remind Barrister Kunle that this case isn't about crowd. It is all about life. Killers do have feelings for a known person who misfortunately become their victim. The killer used his left hand to take the shot, this might be argued to be a coincidence by the defendant lawyer. But let's check the days in between Wednesday evening and Monday evening. Five days.' The Barrister representing the government said, lifting his hand to show what he is saying. 'Five evenings to find someone who uses left hand, someone who look exactly like Tade Leo and also have an accurate shot.'

'Who says there isn't a face underneath?' Barrister Kunle snapped.

'Your points aren't different from that of the first hearing,' the Judge said.

'A witness was called out to testify that he saw my client entering an old Peugeot car. This car was found few weeks ago and the owner has been traced. Your Honour, I would like to call out a witness,' Barrister Kunle requested.

'Allowed,' the Judge said.

Mrs. William walked up to the witness box.

*How will this save me?* Tade thought to himself

Everyone gaze was on her, this signifies that her words will mean a lot to them and the Judge.

'Please introduce yourself,' Barrister Kunle requested.

'William Cynthia,' she said.

'You claimed to be the owner of the old Peugeot. Are you really the owner of this car?'

'I'm not really the owner,' She said. 'But I have the right to claim it.'

'Why do you say so?'

'The owner of the car passed away five years ago and being a daughter-in-law I have the right and necessary documents.'

'You said daughter-in-law.' Barrister Kunle said. 'Why not the son? He should be in position to claim this car. When was this car left your custody?'

'My husband is out of the country,' she said calmly. 'The car was stolen two years ago.'

'Where do you stay?'

'Art Village. A community street, five kilometres from here.'

Barrister Kunle faced the Judge after allowing her to leave the witness box.

'Mrs. William Cynthia claimed the car. She had been cleared to take what was stolen from her,' he paused and faces the other lawyers. 'Kelvin who is a friend to my client and soul mate to the deceased, visits the Art Village when the school is on holiday. The car was stolen two years ago from the same location. Your Honour,' His focus now on the Judge. 'Why don't we wait for the detectives to question Kelvin and see how things go from there? Nobody knows the reason why the deceased installed the camera. But won't Kelvin know? Why was he hit by the man who was sent to give the huge sum of money to Susan?'

'Your Honour,' Barrister Kay said. 'How sure are we that what he said is true? How are we sure that Kelvin visit the Art Village when the car was stolen?'

'Your Honour, I would like to call Rebecca Shittu- a close friend of the deceased.'

As Reb step forward, Tade tried to locate where Stan is.

*Why her?* He asked himself.

'Your name, please.'

'Rebecca Shittu.' She said.

'And who are you to the deceased?' He asked.

'A friend. A neighbour. But stayed together almost every time.' She replied.

'Can you confirm where Kelvin always spends part of his holidays?' Barrister Kunle asked.

'Yes,' she answered softly. Her expression showed she was reluctant. 'Kelvin always spend a week at the Art Village. He usually stays with his uncle whose house isn't far from there.' Reb said.

*She gave me to them. Now she wants to save me.* Tade was amazed at the turn of events

'Your Honour.' Barrister Kunle said. 'My witnesses confirmed that we still need Kelvin to be conscious or wait till the detectives find any of the gang members. One of the gang that would snitch on others - without this my client shouldn't be sentenced. There should be more proofs apart from those available to the court,' he said.

'The lawyers had given their statements,' the Judge said. 'I would agree with Barrister Kunle, this case needs the necessary fact and I haven't found any so far. Within the needed time frame Tade Leo would remain in the police custody.'

Tade rose on his feet, his legs were deprived the necessary freedom before he was marched to the car. The Police flanked him on each side.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

What Tade was scared of was the change of route. Both sides of the highway which was filled with buildings and people were now replaced with rain forest trees and grasses. It was windy and most of the trees were bent.

*The Hilux car in front won't have more than ten cops inside excluding the driver,* Tade had thought. And that is one of the reasons he knew there was something he wasn't informed of. In the car he was, there were four cops. To his right was Detective Thomas, on his left was another detective he wasn't familiar with.

After his first hearing at the court, there wasn't any car in the front or behind. This was the first time Detective Thomas would ride in a car he was in.

*Why is he now here?* Tade asked himself.

He drifted his mind to the court hearing, two people had struck his mind when the hearing was in progress. Reb didn't give him up. The camera did. Reb only did what she had to do. She didn't expect the death of her friend, so she would do anything to see that Susan have the justice she needed. Even if she didn't tell the detective about the call, the camera would still link him to the case.

Today he had seen how unhappy she was. She is now living without her friend, and she had to testify against a friend to also save him.

*Does Reb still believe in me? Or is this just a fight for justice?*

The sad news of Kev, being unconscious struck him more. Reb had told him about her mother and he did not wish same for Kelvin. It would really be a bad fate for Kev if he joins Susan at the other side.

'What did the doctor say about Kev?' He asked the detective. 'Anything about recovery?'

'Nothing,' Detective Thomas replied. 'You should know about coma. You can't predict when someone in coma will be conscious. It's just a game of uncertainty.'

"Uncertainty." Tade echoed. This is the same thing happening to him now.

He did not know when he will be free from this or when his lawyer would be able to convince the Judge for his release. Reb is not certain about when Susan's justice will come. Stan and Mart do not know how long they would hold on to hope. It looks as though the lives of the remaining four revolve around uncertainty.

'Where are we going now?' He asked.

'You need few minutes to see for yourself,' Thomas said.

'Road block, someone have to get down.'

Tade could hear from the walkie-talkie held in Thomas held in hand. Tade raised his head up and shifted to the right. The whole road had been blocked, and he could see a cop coming out to unblock the road.

After few seconds, the policemen in the Hilux came down, some took cover. The policeman who tried to unblocked the road had been gunned down. A bullet hit him on his frontal bone, blood gushes and poured on the hot asphalt.

Tade looked at both sides, there was no trace of someone with a gun, but a policeman was lying dead on the tarred road.

Few seconds later more policemen went down as they continue to shoot into the forest.

'A sharp shooter is taking them out,' Tade muffled.

Each of the men were going down on both sides of the Hilux. Still, he had not caught a glimpse of whoever was taking them out.

Detective Thomas opened the door gently and brought out a 9mm pistol, even though there was still no target to aim at. Two minutes later, none of the police in the Hilux was standing. They were drenched in the pool of their own blood, some had their guns clutched loosely in their hands while the others had their guns above their head.

Tade ducked his head as a bullet aimed at the car found its way through the back glass.

He raised his head up and saw a man, one he was sure would be in his late twenties holding a Heckler and Koch UMP machine gun in his left hand. He was damn sure of what he saw, that had been one of the guns SWAT use in their rescue missions. Looking at his left, the detective on his left had manage to get down and then aim his 9mm. The detective tried to aim another part of the huge man with the Heckler, when a bullet from the forest hit his leg. Then another man surfaced right from where the bullet came from. He looked huge and had a mangled face. Detective Thomas aimed to give him a shot when his own leg was also shot, he crumpled to the floor. It was like a chess game. The Pawn comes out for the Knight when he knows that the Queen is protecting him. And the Queen is out when she knew that the Bishop or King will cover



her flop.

The huge man was had a Dragunov sniper in his grasp, one he had commonly see in movies. Tade watched as he takes out a single colt revolver as he was a few steps before reaching the detective. He shot him twice on the chest, one on both limbs and same also for Detective Thomas.

'Come over,' the huge man said.

Tade went through the right door, dipped his left hand into Thomas left pocket, to find the cuff keys. Blood dripped from Thomas mouth and the other detective as he passed beside them. He threw the cuffs into the bush and kept the keys inside his pocket.

'Let's go,' The man with the Heckler said.

*He is lucky to be alive.* Tade thought, but said nothing. The detective had only fired a bullet on his chest. He had bullet proof on his chest, it is possible that the detective took note of the bullet proof on him, that is why he wanted to change his aim. He wasn't fast enough

'Tade,' a lanky guy said behind him. He was also coming out of the forest. Camouflage leaves were still on him. 'We have a long run, and we start now,' he said.

Reaching the Hilux car, pool of blood was all over the tarred road. The target varies, starting from head shot to the chests. On the Hilux are bullet holes resulting from the continuous spray of bullets from the machine gun.

The driver of the Hilux suffered same fate with their own driver, the bullet had pierced his frontal bone and come out from the occipital.

Then the policeman who wanted to unblock the road had his weight rest partly on his shoulder in the position he slumped - his head rested on both the temporal and parietal. Small hole was on the frontal while the occipital busted open. The large opening created a disgusting space on his head. The whole space had a smell of blood. Tade had to rein in his nausea.

In front of him, about four metres away was a barrel. It was off the road. Then about fifty metres was a Toyota Corolla car parked to the right side of the road.

'Walk faster man, unless you want to return to prison,' the lanky guy said. An escape was what Tade wanted returning to the prison wasn't an option for him. Tade knew however, that no matter the mutual relationship you have with criminals, in as much they held the guns then your life is in their hands.

Another car meets up with them.

'Hop in guys,' The driver said. 'No cops coming yet, but they will soon be on their way.'

'And they will be pleased with our gifts,' the huge guy said with laughter.

'Tade,' the lanky one called. 'We are using the cream coloured car in front.'

'Where are we going?' Tade asked.

'Lagos,' he replied. 'Others stay here in PH.'

'Why Lagos?'

'We will talk in the car.'

Few minutes inside the car, Tade couldn't help himself. Flashes of the dead policemen flooded his mind - the gory picture of busted brain, the dripping blood fast sinking into the tarred road. His charges will now increase, starting with illegal possession of guns and then with killing of fourteen cops. He wasn't sure about the actual number of the cops, but he hoped Detective Thomas would survive this. There were also a few with no headshot, he also hoped they will survive. He relaxed on his seat after a while in order to make use of the seat belt.

*Detective Thomas didn't deserve this.*

He should have told them not to shot him, but he didn't. He had failed him. Thomas had been one of the main persons who made sure he had not being sentenced by now.

Tade looked at the guy behind the wheel, his eyes were focused on the road and didn't say a word since.

'How do you know about my movement?'

'This is part of the deal we sign,' the guy said as he pressed the tape button on the car media player. Falz "Soft Work" filled the car through the speaker. He reduced the volume to a medium level. 'You will find your answers in the song,' he said.

'I don't understand you,' Tade said.

'We signed a deal to save you. That means we have necessary information about you. Sometimes we pay our way through,' he said.

'What deal are you talking about? And who did you pay to get info about where the cops were taking me to?' Tade's voice gained more confidence. If the driver group had signed a deal for him to be alive, then he won't shoot.

'What is your name?' Tade asked.

'Name? Call me Jay,' he said.

'Jay,' Tade said, 'I need you to answer my question.'

'We always cover our tracks.' Jay said. 'And to do this, we use people. We use people because we don't care about them.'

'Then why do you care about me?' Tade asked.

'Because we know we have taken a lot from you, we've stopped your dreams, damaged your name and that of your family.'

'But...'

'We have denied you your freedom Tade.' Jay chuckled. 'We don't apologize. We only apologize to the dead and you are so lucky to be alive.'

'Why me?' Tade asked.

'You are the best candidate to cause the needed distraction. You have smooth relationship with Susan. She trusted you and liked you for who you are. And moreover you use left hand. Most of us do,' Jay said.

'So you kidnapped her when coming over to my house and you also waited for me to come outside. You kidnapped me and make it look like I planned it. I'm the victim here but you guys made me the kidnapper.'

'As I said earlier, that is what we do.' Jay chuckled.

'Who sent you?' Tade asked. 'I know whosoever sent you knew about me.'

'This isn't a matter of who sent us. It is a matter of saving your life.'

'You put my life on the line. My future,' Tade snapped.

Jay removed his left hand from the steering and dipped it into a holding space attached to the driver's door. He pointed the 9mm at Tade.

'I have the say here young man,' he said. 'I have to take you to Lagos, from there you can cross the border to Benin Republic. When we reach there, you are free to go to any country you want. That is the deal. And for me to drive down to Lagos for almost ten hours or more, means my group value deals. Do you understand that?'

'Who sent you?' Tade asked without been frightened by the gun.

Jay reduced the car speed, then opened the save in front of Tade. He brought out an international passport and also a brown envelope.

'This is for you.' Jay said.

Tade opened the envelope in haste, all he could see in there was bundles of money. He checked the passport, it wasn't a new one and it was his own.

'Who knew where I put my passport?' He asked himself. Looking at Jay for few seconds, he asked 'where did you get my passport from? Who is the guy that sent you? Is it Kelvin? Is that why you hit the bike that carried him? Is it because you don't want to pay his percentage?'

'As I said earlier,' Jay said. 'We honour our deal. Where do you keep your passport before being kidnapped?' Jay asked. 'Kelvin returned to Port Harcourt last month; same day your second hearing was being heard; same day he had an accident. Do you think he will be chanced to search for your passport? Maybe he did,' Jay said. 'But he won't be opportune to give it to us.' He chuckled.

'Then who?' Tade asked again. This time with a loud voice. He made a fist with his right hand and hit it on his thigh, not minding the pain.

'Save yourself the pain man. All you need is the Passport. You can go to a faraway country. Gambia will be good for a start.'

'Why Gambia?' Tade asked.

'The locals speak English and they won't know anything about your wanted status.'

'After that?'

'You request for visa of any country in Gambia. Maybe Philippines. The country is far enough. And you can cross over to Hong Kong. That's a new life.' Jay said. 'You have fifteen thousand dollars in that envelope for a new life.'

'I don't need this money.'

'Yes you do. Trust me you won't want to be stranded in a foreign land,' Jay said. 'That would make sure the deal is settled,' he added.

'So we are going to spend ten hours on road?' Tade asked.

'Maybe more.' Jay retorted before turning on the Radio. 'In the next few minutes all check points in PH will be hell because you are now a wanted figure. A journey to the border during the day would be a suicide mission. So this is the only escape plan we have for you. Are you satisfied?' Jay asked. 'I need no questions again.'

Tade nodded, opened the safe and dropped both the envelope and the passport in there.

'Breaking News.' A voice from the radio said.

*Tade Leo, a murder suspect who is still undergoing trials in the Law court have escape from the custody this afternoon. Twelve policemen are confirmed dead while two others are receiving treatment.*

Jay turned off the Radio.

'They gave us the chance to have you just because they want you to be safe,' Jay said.

'I'm safe,' Tade snapped.

'Of course you are,' Jay said. 'But you are not. Everybody knew you are in there. They can do anything stupid.'

'How do you know that I would be moved?'

'An insider. Don't ask me who,' Jay said. 'They want your safety. On the other hand, maybe they thought a different cell in a different state will make you say the truth.'

'But I'm saying the truth.'

'No you are not. The evidences didn't correlate with your statement,' Jay chuckled.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Thomas groaned as he turned to his left side, he had survived the shots on his chest because of the bullet proof vest. Though the two bullets fired at his chest didn't touched his flesh, but the pressure was enough to silence him for a while. He placed his two palm on the bed, then shifted his body for his back to fully relaxed on the bed. With the help of his palm, he raised his buttock and back up. This now gave him a better view of his leg. White bandage had been wind around it, and the bullet entry point was soaked with blood absorbed by the bandage. This was same with his right hand.

Abigail stood on his left side, in her hands was a flower, and it rested on her abdomen. Thomas gave her a fleeting look before fixing his eyes back on his wound.

'I take that as something.' Abigail said.

'Pain,' Thomas said softly. 'Any movement initiate a pain.' He said.

'It will take time to heal Thomas,' Abigail said. 'But it will be quick.'

'Is it fractured?' Thomas asked.

'No.' She smiled. 'I'm happy you survived this Thomas. Twelve cops died.'

Thomas nodded, then fixed his eyes on her. 'I saw them dying. It was gory,' Thomas said. 'How many survived?'

Abigail gave him a questioning look. 'I should have doffed my hat for you if I have one on,' she said. 'You don't know how many cops followed Tade?'

'I can't think straight now,' Thomas said.

'Two,' she then look across the aisle. 'Only two survived.'

'I was trying to protect him,' Thomas said. 'But seems the attackers planned this a long time ago. They were prepared.'

'They prepared for this because of Tade, right? You have trusted him, but now we have to start from the beginning.' She said.

He looked at her, then gurgled. On his first visit to Cyril's office, when he went there concerning Susan case. Cyril had talked about the shot; the accuracy; the alignment of the bullets vertically forming a 180<sup>0</sup> angle. Cyril had also talked

about them leaving her to bleed out since they knew she won't survive if more pints of blood leave her system. Cyril had supported Tade amidst that. And now he will be doing same.

Tade's lawyer had also talked about that, dwelling on that point to save his client. Today he had seen it. The guy with the Heckler and Koch UMP had made same shot with his left hand. The headshot of the driver had been his handiwork.

'I don't know why it took me so long to unravel this,' Thomas said.

'Unravel what? Huh?' Abigail asked. 'That he will betray your trust, right?'

He tilted his head toward her side and rested it on his palm.

'Tade didn't betray me,' Thomas said.

'Look at me,' Abigail said. She had the daze look on her face. She pulled a seat for herself. 'I can't believe you are saying this after you got shot.'

'I saw them,' he paused to look at her, now obeying her instruction. 'They use left hands. I should have known that there is a face under.'

'Are you saying Tade is innocent now?' She asked. 'Nobody would ever believed you Thomas, not after what happened to you and also to him.' She pointed to the detective across the aisle. 'Don't also forget the other twelve who lost their lives. The same Tade you are talking about is a lefty.'

'Nobody would, but you would, right?'

Abigail stood up with a look which was puzzled to him. 'You don't know what I'm thinking Thomas. Did you ask yourself,' she said before flitting within the bed perimeter. 'Where is he now?' She asked. 'If he is so innocent, won't he pity your life. At least he knew that you are helping him.' She paused her movement and then dipped her hand into her pocket. 'After two failed attempt on the one who parked the Peugeot at the dead end road. You never give up the search because you wanted Tade out. But it is now time to give up on him.'

'You don't understand,' Thomas said.

'Understand what?' She snapped. 'Understand that your life would have gone. Understand that you will leave your family behind because you want someone out of the crime you think he didn't commit.'

'Tade didn't have choice. They would kill him if he didn't want to follow them.'

'They won't kill someone in their group. Tade gave them the money. He killed his best friend because of them.' She walked closer to him. 'The cuffs key where are they? The police couldn't find it on you. Tade took it because he wants out. He had completely fooled you and now he is smiling.'

'Abigail!' Thomas shouted, not minding others who are in the ward. 'I can't believe you are saying this.'

'Not after what happened,' she snapped.

'I want us to think of something,' Thomas said.

'What?' She asked, then sit.

'If the driver's alibi was enough to save him, if no worker of both establishment can still be traced yet.' He stopped for a while. 'If the killer isn't Tade then who do you think it will be?'

'I did not say the killer is not Tade,' She said.

'Think Abigail,' he didn't look at her.

Thomas was quiet waiting for her reply. She had covered her face with her hands, while her legs did the tapped the floor. For the whole moment, his thoughts were about how to convince her into believing him.

'If Tade is innocent, then who do you think did this?' She asked him.

'No one,' he said. 'Maybe his friends.' He quickly added as Abigail squeezed her face.

'Starting with Reb?' She asked.

He raised his brow. 'Anybody could. But can't think of Reb doing that. We got the needed information from her.' Thomas said.

'Mart speak less words, but Stan always have something to say and defend. Reb was our main informant and she was the first at the scene. Keeping a tab on her won't be a bad idea.' Abigail said. 'They now have a new friend moving with them. Vincent, that his name. But none of them have a link with this case.'

'That is why we need to work things out now,' Thomas said.

'Why do you want to work things out when our main suspect is on the run. Tax payers money is only spent on needs not wants' Thomas.'

'I can fund it. I only need you to prove he is innocent,' Thomas said.

'Tell yourself that, Thomas. The police are in search for him,' she said. 'Trust me, he is going to prison this time. Maybe he won't because he might be given a death sentence.'

'The flower,' Thomas pointed. 'Who owns it?' He tried to change the topic.

'I think you survived this for a reason Thomas,' Abigail said without bothering on the change of topic. She extended the flower. 'I expect a smile full of mockery from you,' she said with a warm smile. 'But the flower isn't from me.'

Thomas stretched out his left hand as the pain in his hand won't allow him to.

'Who?' He asked reluctantly.

The smile on her face deepened. Thomas could see that. And that was enough to put him in the cloud.

'Stop being irrational.' He said.

'I'm not,' she chuckled.

'Then why the profuse smile?'

'I said you were meant to survive the attack Thomas, didn't I?

He fixed his eyes on his leg, then gently nodded his head. 'You did.' He said.

'Your little boy brought the flower this morning.' she said.

He changed his position. 'My wife,' he said. 'How is she?'

'Immediately after the incident, Jude knew it would be announced, so...'

'Did he get it covered?'

'Yes.' Abigail said. 'But...'

'But what?' He asked as she let her words trail off. He never want his worst fear come to pass. Abigail had talked about his son bringing in the flower in the morning. That means he is okay. But she hasn't talked about his welfare. His son is not even here now. He should be here if he had brought the flower in the morning.

'She was in labour when Jude arrived. George wasn't back from school lesson.' Abigail said slowly.

'Where is she now?' He asked.

'She is good, Thomas. But you need to be fit before seeing her.'

'Did she know about what happened to me?' He asked.

'She knows about everything,' Abigail answered.

Thomas looked beside his bed and was happy to see a pair of crutches. He shifted his body on the bed, then moved it forward and dipped his feet inside a flip-flop placed on the floor. Then he picked the crutches with his left hand.

'Do you know the ward she is?' He asked.

'You are not going like this Thomas,' she said.

'Don't tell me what I can't do,' he snapped. 'Just show me Abigail, that's all.' He put one of the crutches under his left arm and leave the second. 'Can we go now?' He asked.

\* \* \*

Tade blinked his eyes twice before eventually opening it wide. He had crashed on the back seat since midnight. He couldn't believe he would have had a sound sleep, not after yesterday horrible event. Apart from the event, he had been scared anytime they reached a checkpoint except during the night. Though Jay do settle them before they stoop for an inside check.

Tade had decided to sleep when they reached Lagos around 11 p.m. but the flashes of the noon event had kept his eyes open for the additional two hours journey to the border. During the trip, the only stop over they had was when they needed to take dinner. Jay had parked the car and entered a mini-mart for some fast food, leaving only him for a long wait inside the car.



'Take and eat,' Jay had said after opening the door. 'We only have twenty minutes to spend here.'

Tade collected the food since he had no choice. Spending years in the prison for a crime he didn't commit or receiving a bullet maybe bullets if he decided not to follow Jay won't be a story he would live to talk about.

After stretching his hands, he wind down the door glass for the morning breeze. Then the thought of his future struck him, he was leaving his mother to care for herself and hopes that her son would come back.

Tade dipped his hand inside Jay's jacket which he had dropped on the driver seat. He allowed his hand to absorb it warmth before bringing out the wrist watch he needed.

7:30 A.M.

That was the time when he looked at it and before he returned it. He expected to hear a voice which would be that of Jay when he returned it, but heard none. He was about to check the driver seat when the front door opened.

'We will continue our trip in the next few minutes,' Jay said as his head popped in. Jay shirt was unbuttoned and a chain with dollar pendant oscillated on his neck. 'You have to check this man.' He threw the newspaper in his hand to the back seat. 'That stuff have your picture and that of the cops inside. You are now a valuable commodity man,' Jay said.

Seeing the page number where the needed information is, he opened the paper. More images welcomed him as he did. Pictures of dead policemen on the right side of the Hilux was what really make a difference to what he saw yesterday.

'Two are alive, they would do well in telling others how we strike,' Jay said. 'They were lucky to have a bullet proof vest on.' He added.

'Don't know that anyone did.' Tade said without showing how happy he was when he saw Detective Thomas is still alive. He was thankful for his efforts.

'I saved one of them, never want to give a headshot so I only release a bullet each on his hand and leg.' Jay said. 'I had a sniper on me, remember?'

'You did not tell me who sent you,' Tade said.

'Sorry?'

'I mean I would be out of the country, probably the continent, so why don't you tell me who sent you?'

'Probably?'

'Yes.' Tade said.

'You haven't made up your mind man.'

'I won't get a visa immediately,' Tade replied.

'Come on,' Jay said. 'It's a small country with small population. So you will get

it immediately.' Jay got down from the car and head toward the boot.

'You should take this,' Jay said.

Tade was surprised Jay threw him a backpack. He had not been thinking of one. He opened it without hesitating.

'You need some clothings man, hope that will be okay?' He asked. 'Put on the pullover inside and cover your head with its cap. The weather is harsh,' Jay said.

'Is it not harsh on you?'

'It's harsh on everybody man. You should understand better,' Jay said.

'When are you going to answer my question?' Tade asked as he still fixed his eye on the pullover.

'Hey,' Jay looked at him with a piercing look, and his once friendly face turn stern. 'If you ask me that again I would care less about you.' He took the paper which was in between the two seats and threw it out. 'Everyone here would recognize you once they see you, thanks to the fast means of communication. And I'm sure you know what that means, prison or death sentence,' Jay said.

Tade put on the pullover, then cover his head with the cap. 'So we going in by car or what?' Tade asked before putting on a sunshield.

'Nope,' Jay said as he brought out a thousand naira bundle. 'The central gate has been shut for now.'

'So?'

'That gives you room for many routes.' Jay said. 'You can pay your way through in most of these routes. But...' He stopped after removing twenty notes of a thousand naira.

Without showing patience Tade packed the remaining eighty notes into the safe.

'But what?' He asked.

'It would be dangerous for you to pass most of the this routes. They might decided to check you. But the back routes would be a good ground for us.' Jay said.

'And the money?' Tade asked. 'What will you do with it?'

'Niggas always have people at coded places,' Jay replied. 'The back route has only three checkpoints, maybe four.' He said. 'I can't say. So I will give five notes to niggas at each checkpoint.'

They both alighted from the car, and he watched as Jay closed the door and locked it automatically. Tade couldn't imagine going on a journey without saying his goodbyes. Few drops of tears rolled down his cheek and he quickly cleaned it off.

After few steps, he could see the gate Jay talked about. It was a single one, and it fence enclosed a small building. The paint was uniform. On top of it was

a welcome note.

"Bon Arrivee."

On the right sides are buildings within the height of three storeys. The buildings belongs to banks, and the ATMs of those ones facing the highway has many people queued in front of it.

'How many banks are here?' Tade asked.

'Five or more. Not sure about that. But I'm sure its not less than five. Don't tell me you want to withdraw.' Jay said.

'I'm not daft Jay.'

A bike man approached them and said 'Bros na two of you dey go?' The bike man asked in pidgin.

'People converse more in pidgin here,' Tade said.

'Many tribes are in here man.' Jay replied as he took another step near the bike man.

'Yes now big man.' Jay replied. 'I won make you pass the back route. You get Pass?'

'Boss I get o.' The bike man replied. 'Just enter.'

The route was totally different from the highway. It was a plain soil, the desert type of soil with no drainages. On each sides are dirt, of which more of it are groceries packs. The route has three checkpoint as Jay had said. Each checkpoints have a small thatch building, besides it are cement filled barrels. In between the barrels is an iron rod with about hundred of pointed sharp edges.

'How many years have you spent here?' Tade asked as they both get off the bike.

Now behind them was another closed gate facing the first gate he saw. The highway asphalt still link up with that of the country he is now. Small scale shops also have lands for their self as well as money changers.

'I spent two years here before I left for PH,' Jay said.

'Then you joined the group?'

'Yes.' Jay answered. 'And now I'm back to see my people.'

'Abeg change this to Togo currency for me,' Jay said as he faced one of the money changers. He then handed it over to Tade after collecting the money. 'Take this 10k naira. You will need to change it to that of any country you reached till you stop in Gambia. If you stay in Ghana you are in greater risk. Make yourself invisible in Ghana,' Jay said.

'Okay.' Tade replied, then kept quiet till they reached the bus station. 'How will I start the journey?' He asked.

He watched as Jay dipped his left hand into his pocket and brought out a folded paper.

'This have the description for your journey,' Jay said. 'Bon voyage.' He added in French.

Tade collected it and dipped it into his left pocket without reading it. 'Merci.' He could still remember a bit of his high school French.

'An advice.' Jay said.

'What?' Tade asked.

'Do not call your mum. I'm sure you know her phone number off-hand but,' he paused to clear his throat. 'The police will be monitoring your Mum calls. Your friends too.' He added. 'All eyes will be on them. So stay put and talk less.'

Tade eyes became heavy with tears as Jay left.

'Going back would be a suicide mission,' he said to himself as he waited for the car to fill up.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Thomas sat directly facing the CP as others in his team sat on the side chairs. His boss, had his own chair next to the CP. Everyone's eyes on the table, but for Thomas he knew most of them thought was far away from it. Nobody want to say a word again. At least not after the CP last sentence. The CP had said his last sentence with an high pitch and he didn't stop there. He had hit the table with his tightened fist, and Thomas could spot the CP flaring nose.

'We worked collectively sir,' Abigail spoke up and Thomas agreed within him that she being meticulous note judging from her mellow yet firm voice. She had a book in front of her with a pen in hand.

'Lives were lost,' Abigail continued as she fixed her eyes on the CP. 'Two of our men survived.' Thomas folded his hand, she is now talking about him and... He stopped, trying to fully comprehend her words. 'They knew the risk associated with their work and they were always prepared to face it. I respect those who are dead and the two detectives who survived the attack. The team working on this case have her members all seated here today,' she paused then look at Thomas. 'The survivors are also here. I'm sure no one would give out information at the detriment of others,' she said.

'Why would I trust you guys not to have spilt out the sacred information? Two weeks ago, which was a week before the attack, we discussed and agreed on transferring Tade to Aba. This isn't because PH does not have the facilities to restrict prisoners, but to prevent any attack from whatever group he might belong to. Now are you saying the force can be trusted?'

*Yes, the CP is right.* Thomas agreed with him.

They have the facility to keep him. The isolated bungalow behind the main building has its own alarm system installed in the viewing center- its own viewing center, which is approximately four metres away from it. Apart from that the viewing center is monitored from the central room. For access into the jailhouse you need to know the password, the password which is usually

changed every week. Thomas had been in-charge of changing the password

Irrespective of that, they unanimously agreed there might be a loophole they needed to cover. They would send Tade to the neighbouring state while everyone would be made to believe that he is still in PH was the best solution they also had agreed on. However, one thing which amazes Thomas about the CP statement was his new belief about Tade and not trusting the team.

Thomas squeezed his left hand in his right. If the CP is rescinding his belief, then the CP trust in him has depreciated. He released his left hand from the squeeze as frown grew on his brow. He had convinced the CP about the group that set Tade up, by saying they won't be satisfied with the case pace. The group might want to attack and then find an insider. Now he needs to convince the CP he was right and find out who the insider is. He has to act fast and do it alone as everyone is changing their mind about the team.

'Now some of my men are dead because the murderer needed more blood to show how vicious he is. What will the people say?' He asked as he looked into their faces. 'We are trying to protect these people, but now we are harming them,' the CP said.

'We did not leak any information out,' Abigail said.

'At the onset,' the CP said pointing at Thomas. 'Thomas and his medical examiner friend granted the journalist what they asked for. I have reasons to doubt the team, Abigail.'

'They said what they had to. The journalists were at the hospital because they knew what happened. They have an informant at Crossgate, and Detective Thomas did that to inform the people because that is what the people need.'

'What are you trying to say?' The CP asked as he hit the table thrice. He squeezed his face for a while and then released his breathe.

'Maybe the staff in-charge of the IS building should be called up,' Abigail suggested without looking into the CP eyes.

'We should,' Jude said.

'Yes we should.' Thomas said.

'Where are you starting from?' The CP asked.

'This should be a private approach with a time known only by those in the team sir.' Thomas said as fleeting smile formed at the corner of his lips. 'No offence sir.'

'If you and your team do not find a solution to this,' the CP said. 'I will see to your suspension, personally, because by that time an offence would have been taken.'

'Okay sir.' Thomas said.

'Thomas,' the CP called out his name with a strong intonation after he stood

up. 'If you don't find a solution to this, I will be the one to suspend you indefinitely.'

Thomas wasn't aware when his mouth opened in surprise as the CP walked out of the conference room.

*The CP is taking this personal.*

For about thirty minutes, Thomas remained seated on the same chair he sat on during the meeting. He had expected someone to come over and talk with him, but no one did. And that was enough to pass the information to him, that no one believed Tade is innocent.

'It seems something more important than resting your chin on your palm just came up,' Abigail said as she sauntered into the room like she had the whole time in the world.

Thomas glanced at her and returned his eyes back to the table.

'Is this a kind of joke? Are you gloating because of what the CP said?' Thomas asked, his eyes still off her.

'I will take that as...' Abigail reduced the distance between them. 'You believe that Tade does not have a hand in the killing,' her brows furrowed. 'That is obvious for people to see.'

She sat beside him. 'Still, I'm interested in knowing who did this, so that we can work together again,' Abigail said.

'Does that mean you believe he didn't?' Thomas asked.

'I already gave an answer to your question,' she said.

'I'm asking to confirm before leaving you here.'

Abigail stood up, then sat on the table to look at him. Thomas angled his body to the side, he didn't want her to read him.

'Why do you believe so much in Tade?' She asked.

'I have answered your damn question before,' Thomas retorted.

'I'm asking again to be sure,' she said.

'I know what freedom is to a prisoner - guilty and innocent.'

'Okay?' Abigail said to spur him on.

'A guilty prisoner will be happy when his time for escape comes. He will be anxious to talk about it and then laugh the cops or warders who are with him. He would have a scornful expression on his face.'

'But the innocent one won't do any of these?' Abigail asked.

Thomas looked at her as she stood up and walked toward the exit.

'I think you need to see something,' She turned back and their gaze met. 'I'm deadly serious, Thomas.' Her stare was strong. 'This will surprise you,' she said and left the room.

Thomas pressed the combinations that unlock the isolated building door.

Two people apart from his boss has the password. And today, Abigail should have a germane reason for bringing him here. The door opened immediately after the pressing the last key that complete the combination.

'Something or someone, Abigail?' He asked.

'I'm not allowed to answer that.'

'Why?'

'I want you to be surprised,' she replied.

'Are you surprised by...?' He pointed to the door.

'No. I was confused. I don't know who to believe. Don't know if I should trust your...'

Thomas paused his movement and draw her back. 'Who is in there? Tade?'

'I'm not allowed to say.'

'Who gave you that order?'

'Myself,' Abigail said as she turned to open the door.

Entering with her, Thomas stopped on his way. 'How did you get him?' He asked.

'Same way we got Tade? Things getting pretty easy, right?' He looked at Abigail whose face was expressionless.

'Things are pretty different now,' Abigail said. 'Sit.'

Thomas shoulder slumped as he saw who Abigail talked about. He sat in front of Thomas, and all he could asked himself was "why them." The murder case started with only one of them, then the second and now he is facing the third.

'What is your name?' Thomas asked basically for the purpose of recording, he already knew all their names and can also recognized them.

'I think you already know that Detective.' His subject replied pushing his right cheek with his tongue.

'Just because you came here voluntarily doesn't mean you should be arrogant,' Abigail said. 'We need your cooperation.'

'And will that save me?' He asked.

'You should be able to answer that yourself.' Detective Thomas said. 'Why are you here?'

'I have answers to all your questions,' he replied.

'Why don't you give us those answers now?'

'Detective Abigail,' he addressed her with her title. 'If you ask the appropriate questions then I will give you answers.'

'Does Reb and Mart know about you coming here?' Thomas asked.

'Why did you start with her?' He asked.

'Why don't you answer his question as you said?' Abigail hit the table beside



the subject hands.

'Vincent Uche.' He said.

'State and occupation?' Thomas asked.

'Student at Crossgate,' he replied.

'And state?' Abigail asked.

'Not necessary,' Vincent retorted.

'Why are you here, Vinnie?' Thomas asked.

Vinnie didn't reply rather he scanned the room, Thomas followed his gaze. He wanted to study him and know how true his words will be. Vinnie stopped as he saw where the camera was placed, Thomas took note.

'Would you believe me? Would you believe what I have to say?'

'Why are you here if you don't trust us?' Abigail snapped.

Vinnie raised his head. 'Like I said before, I have answers. I know many things about Susan's murder starting from how the group knew about the money.'

Thomas sat straight in his seat and adjusted his tie. Vinnie words struck him.

*If he knows about this, then why is just coming now? Thomas thought. Why didn't he come when Tade was still in the jailhouse? Why is it after his escape?*

These questions filled his mind as he waited for Vinnie next words.

'Few weeks ago...'

'Can you be more precise? Abigail abruptly cut him off.

'I am precise,' Vinnie said.

'Date or time, defines the word precise,' She said.

'6th of July, which happened to be Wednesday was when everything started. Susan's Dad was dropped at the airport and later that same day Susan was dropped at her apartment,' Vinnie said.

'How do you know about this?'

Vinnie grinned. 'I saw her entering her apartment immediately after alighting from the car. She didn't stop to wave at the driver.'

'Did she see you?' Abigail asked.

'I called her, so she knew I saw her.' Vinnie said. 'She was holding a portfolio.' Vinnie looked at them for a while. 'That was totally strange.'

'Why would her carrying a portfolio be strange and what where you doing there at that time?' Thomas asked.

'She usually carry her books on her hand when going for lectures. Most times she slings a small cross bag on shoulder. I was there because I planned to visit her,' he said.

'So how did you know that the Portfolio contained money?' Thomas asked again.

'Her expression was different when I called her, she was shocked and all she could only utter was "hey" after some seconds. She said that after opening the door.'

'How does she greet you on a normal day?'

'She would address me by my name, invite me in, sometimes for dinner,' Vinnie chuckled.

'But she did not?' Abigail asked.

Vinnie nodded slowly, then gave a thumb up which she disregarded.

'Why should I believe you?' Thomas asked. 'You could have planned this before coming here.'

Vinnie placing his hands on the table, pushed his seat back then he raised his left leg and right leg and placed them on the table.

'I know you cuffed Tade. But I have no cuffs on me, which means I'm different and free to make use of the exit door,' he shrugged as he lifted both hands to emphasise his point.

'You are not the one saying this, Vinnie.' Detective Thomas said.

'You can let me go then.' He chuckled. 'For the fact that twelve cops lost their lives doesn't mean the community would be quiet about the case,' Vinnie said. He stood up.

'And...' Abigail stopped, intentionally leaving him to complete it.

'And I'm the best shot.' He said.

'You are not off the balance.' Thomas said. 'But I have been thinking of something, Vin. Maybe you are compelled to say this.'

'Are you sure of that?'

'I am sure that you knew about Sus' movement and that of her dad on the 6th of July because you followed the case. Isn't it?'

'Who did they use to threaten you, Vin?' Abigail asked. 'Tell us the truth and we will help.'

Vinnie fell back to his seat, his eyes on the table and his hand was doing some imaginary writing on the table. Nobody spoke a word. Thomas watched Vinnie's face but there was no expression to read on his face.

'I walked into your building to give you this information and it seems you don't value them,' Vinnie said as he still continued his writing.

'Why are you coming now? Why not before Tade's news of escaping from the police custody reached the people?' Abigail asked.

'I thought the court would at least allow a bail for him, maybe give him house arrest. But none came, so I thought I would be the best witness for you guys concerning this case.'

'What you are saying in particular?' Abigail asked.

'I'm saying that Tade is innocent. Tade knew nothing about this case. All your evidences against him are planned work.'

'And you want us to believe this hypothesis of yours?' Thomas asked.

'Nobody would ever come here to tell you this.' Vinnie exchange look between them. 'Do you think I will risk my life here if I base all this on lies?' Vinnie asked.

'What group do you belong to?' Abigail asked.

'Group?'

'Are you in the killer group or...?'

'That won't be necessary.' Vinnie said, cutting her off.

'Of course it is,' Abigail retorted.

'How do you know about the camera?' Thomas asked.

'I never told you I was in. I told you I have details.'

'You will only have details if you are in Vin, don't you think so? How do you know about the camera installation?' Thomas asked.

'From Stan. He installed it.'

'And you are sure about that?' Abigail asked.

'Maybe I eavesdropped then,' Vinnie said as he looked to his side.

'You speak with confidence Vinnie,' Abigail called for his attention. 'How did your group planned the kill? Did they really kidnapped Tade?'

Abigail last question prick Thomas on his seat. He had assumed that question to be as a result of an empty vacuum inside of her. But he had done well not to show on being on Tade side.

'The witness said it was mutual,' Thomas added.

'It was mutual because there was a gun that his myopic eyes didn't see. Tade had no choice,' Vinnie said.

'The prints, DNA and camera, you said all are planned work, Vin.' Thomas said. 'You said you're not in any of the group, yet you know all these things. How do you expect me to believe you Vin?'

'Tade's friends are intelligent,' Vinnie chose his words carefully. 'They solved that mystery on their own,' Vinnie shrugged after saying that then give a cocky wink.

'Meaning?'

'No offence,' Vinnie raised both his hands.

'They have a knack for things like this - I mean his friends.' Vinnie said. 'The kidnappers had two rooms for this.' He said.

'Rooms for what?' Thomas asked.

'Rooms for knocking out victims. One of the rooms is always filled with chloroform and the other isn't.' Vinnie said.

Thomas could do the maths. The rooms are definitely alike and equipped with same thing. Then if chloroform is in one, that would be where Tade was first kept. He thought as his mind flashed back to Tade words about testing for chloroform when he was still in their custody. He had only discarded that because he was sure the chemical won't be in his system again. But if Vinnie is right, then it means Tade knew how chloroform smell. He had perceived it before he was completely knocked out by it. And then what? He asked himself. They then clean his face with the white handkerchief for his DNA and then put it in his hand for his prints too.

Thomas nodded.

'I understand you,' Thomas said.

'Anything about the attack?' Abigail asked. 'You can start with whosoever gave your team information about that.'

'Someone else was in-charge of that, not me.'

'You should know.' Abigail said.

'But I don't,' he snapped. 'It was a secret.'

'You said your primary aim here is to tell us about Tade being innocent,' Thomas said. 'Yet you have failed to give us the necessary information, Vin.'

Thomas took off the cuff on his waist as he walked toward Vin.

'I have to put you in detention,' he said as he successfully clamped the cuff on Vinnie wrist.

'Wait,' Vinnie said when Thomas told him to move. 'I'm not really in the group because I'm on trial. I am still more of an informant.'

'So you started with Susan?' Abigail asked.

'Yes,' he replied. 'I made them promise not to take her life, but they did.' Vinnie paused for a while. 'I also told them to hid under Tade face.'

'So you came here because they killed Susan and you can't find Tade, right?' Thomas asked.

'I came here because I feel guilty, I betrayed two friends. I destroyed Tade's image and that of his family. I gave his mother a bad name in the society,' Vinnie said. 'And for Susan,' he continued. 'I shouldn't have told them she had the money.'

'I don't believe you, Vin,' Abigail said. 'I think you are not just satisfied with what they gave you. I guess the percentage was low, and that wasn't the deal. Right?'

Vin shot her a wicked look from his dark eyes as his forehead furrowed.

'You might not believe me, but you will soon,' He then looked at Thomas.

'Please promise me Tade would be saved. Promise me the public would know the truth.'

'I can't make promises Vin,' Thomas said. 'I can't unless you give me all necessary information.'

'I have told you the truth, what else do you want from me?' Vinnie asked as he kick one of the table leg with his leg.

'You should be able to give us description of these people, or at least their names. Phone numbers would certainly be of help.' Thomas said.

'Don't you have their pictures on your phone?' Abigail asked. 'That will help too.'

'I cut loose from them. I didn't come here because they paid me less. Nobody cared for me since I got admission into Crossgate. Tade and Susan had paid all my bills. I'm doing this because I betrayed them,' Vinnie said as tears trickled out of his eyes. 'I don't have their numbers nor pictures.'

'What do you know then?' Thomas asked.

'Nickname of one of them,' Vinnie answered. 'And that won't be of help.'

'How do you reach them?' Abigail asked.

'By phone.' He replied. 'But they collected my phone shortly after the incident.'

\* \* \*

Reb fixed her eyes on the books which were kept on the table. Her lips puckered as she turned her phone upside down, holding it by its tail. Her right hand was firm on the door knob. She was oblivious to her surrounding till Mart threw a pen cover at her, her phone fell to the ground as she looked at Mart.

'You've been standing there for more than ten minutes Reb. Are you thinking about Tade?' Mart asked.

She shifted a bit, and bent to pick up her phone, leaving the pen cover.

'What do you think Mart?' She asked without answering his question.

'Nothing,' Mart said. 'Actually I've been wondering about where he could be.'

'Where else, if not PH,' Reb said as she sat on the bed, right beside Stan.

'Stan hasn't said a word since yesterday after a dispute with Vin. I don't know what it was all about but I'm quite sure he wasn't happy with whatever Vin had said,' Mart said.

'And where is Vinnie?' She asked.

'Maybe you should ask Stan because Vinnie is not picking up his phone,' Mart answered.

Her mind was filled up with thoughts leaving her undecided about what she should say first. She couldn't decide, whether to tell them her reason for being here or she should listen to what they have to say. Detective Thomas had called her yesterday and told her what he thought and believes about Tade case.

'You been here for a while Reb, and you didn't receive our call,' Mart said. 'Your number has not been reachable for three days. What is the problem, Reb?'

'I...I...' She didn't know what to say. Reb walked to a chair and sat down. She wouldn't have visited her friends if Detective Thomas had not talked her into coming. He was the one who woke her from sleep - she had found it difficult to sleep every night. And coming here today she expects more sleepless nights. She had believed Tade is the green snake under the green grass after the August 29th shooting event, which helped him to escape. Though that didn't make her furious than the fact that she had spent years with a murderer. A murderer who claimed the life of her friend and that of twelve cops.

'I'm only here to prove if Detective Thomas is right.' Reb said as she places her both elbows firmly on her thigh and her jaw on her two hands. 'He called...' She stopped.

*Wrong choice of words Reb. Stupid girl.* She cursed herself.

Mart turned to give her an unrelenting stare.

'Don't tell me he is using you again, Reb,' Mart said.

'I wasn't working for him before, never mentioned that.'

'You don't need to Reb, because it's obvious.' He moved close to her and squatted in front of her and he took her hands in his. 'You need to let him work on this case without you. I know you have been giving him information that... I know you care for everyone, Reb.' He paused for a while as he looked into her eyes. 'You testified at the court last week before the gory incident to save Tade. I saw the real you in that box. But now,' he started designing on her hand with the marker in his hand. 'Everyone's eyes would be on us. Those working with the Detective will certainly know what his plan for Tade is, before the attack. Any attachment with Detective Thomas could be detrimental, Reb. He survived the attack because he put on a bullet proof vest and wasn't shot on the head. You should know how many questions people can ask from that.'

'He wasn't the only one who survived this, Mart.'

'But he won't be enjoying a smooth relationship with all his bosses now. You will do him a lot of favour if you cut off things with him. We can work things out.'

'Things like?' Reb asked.

'I only need Stan to talk, then we can know what to do.'

'And Vin?'

'Can't include him now,' Mart replied. 'Unless we are able to reach him.'

Reb took off her hands, Detective Thomas had told her Vinnie was at the headquarter under a charge he didn't talked about. And now, Stan didn't say anything just because of his dispute with Vinnie. Reb allowed herself to think on

that. Stan would definitely know where Vinnie is but the outcome is what he is scared of. She shifted on the bed and stopped until she reached where Stan placed his head.

'I know what happened between you and Vin,' she said slowly. 'I would like to hear it from you Stan, you need to talk.'

Mart stood up; rested on the wall with his arms folded at his chest. 'You can't trick him,' he said.

'Shut up, Mart.' She shouted, then faced Stan again. 'I knew that you had a fight with Vin.' She said. 'And this is why I am here, Detective Thomas said he did not trust Vin. He thought Vin is only doing that for Tade to be out and he sound unconvincing. So you have to talk if you want us to help.'

Mart keen look intensified his questioning look when Reb gaze met his.

'What are you talking about?' He asked.

'Vin thinks he can save Tade.' Stan said. 'He would be in detention presently for what he would have told them.'

'And what did he say?' Mart asked without thinking on all the clues on ground.

'Vin would claim he gave them up. He will now be the betrayal and orchestrator of everything that happened. He would be charge for planning the kidnapping and death of Susan with that of the cops too.' Stan said.

'Vin is gone, that is the meaning. That's a suicide mission Stan and you didn't say anything,' Mart said as he pound the table with his fist. 'You should have told me all this before...' He poured all the books on the floor and Reb tried to catch Mart laptop in the air.

'I can't also stop him, Mart, I blamed myself for that. I should have told you but I think I won't be able to.'

'What are we going to do now?' Reb asked.

'We?' Stan asked. 'I'm not sure if Tade is innocent. All I can say to myself is that I believed a murderer and now I'm regretting it.'

'You of all people shouldn't be saying this.' Reb said.

Stan walked towards the wardrobe and brought out a bag that belongs to Tade after taking off the cloth carefully placed on it. Part of the dust on the bag formed a shape of a hand.

'I found this two days before the court second hearing, but can't find a meaning to it until few minutes after Tade escape. I knew this was carried out with a glove hand.'

'What does this mean?' Reb asked as she looked into his face and checked out that of Mart also.

'Tade use to travel with his Mum on some of the holidays, so that means he

has an international passport.'

'Do you see him putting it inside the bag?' Reb asked.

Stan looked at Mart. 'Did you open this bag?'

'No,' he replied.

'Nobody would, unless someone else entered here. Who will that be? Maybe a member of the gang Tade belong to,' Stan said. 'Why will a member risk coming here? Only one thing would be the reason.'

'The passport.' Mart said.

'And Vin is only doing this because of what Tade and Susan means to him,' Stan said.

'Tade's Mum is averagely rich, why would he do this?' Mart asked.

'Tade is leaving the country with Susan father's money,' Reb said as she flung the door opened.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

The shape formed by the dark red blood still looked fresh to her as she stood in between the door frame. She had made a promise not to come here until the killer is found, but now she had to break her own words. The room was completely dark - void like the world was before God pronounced light and life came into it. Reb fumbled her hand on the wall of the dark room searching for the switch. When the light came on she could see the room just as the last time she left it.

The only difference is the cleaned floor, but she could still see traces of blood at the edge of the tiles. Reb blinked twice to stare at the floor and then she realized she just imagined the blood at the tile edge. She walked into the apartment at a slow pace and the first flash of memory was that of Tade coming into the room in the black trouser and forest green shirt he had always put on. She closed her eyes and took two steps forward before opening it. Just as she noticed the presence of the spiders, a web stuck to her forehead and she brushed it away in one quick motion with her hand before taking steps further.

To her left which was closer to Susan's bedroom is the reading table, and from her vantage point, she could see how dusty both the table and books were. She walked closer and then carefully flipped through the pages of some of the books to save herself the anger and depression fighting to get in. Tade had intentionally put a break to the happiness which once filled here.

Turning the pages of the fifth book which was a personal development workbook that belongs to Susan, she halted. In between the tenth and eleventh page were two passports-size photograph. One was that of Susan mother and the second belonged to Kelvin. Kelvin smiling face made the red spot in one of his eyes less obvious, a good and innocent face, she noted. She closed the book as Kelvin image in comatose took hold of her mind. Now she could see the hope of his survival fading.

Reb walked toward the bedroom, and sat on it after switching on the dull bulb.

'This is where she kept the money,' Reb whispered to herself. As she opened the wardrobe door creaked. The wardrobe had a mirror attached to its door. Reb looked at the mirror and she saw Susan image instead of herself. She removed the mirror and placed it in a vertical position on the bed. Susan wore a white robe which started to turn into brown and blood was still dripping from her chest.

'Help me,' Susan said with a low pitch. 'Help me.' Reb took a long wrapper and covered the mirror. She turned away and her body began to shiver, but Reb decided to stay.

'Help me,' the voice said again after a few seconds with a louder voice. Reb could hear her though a cloth covered the mirror.

'How can I help you, Sus?' Reb asked as she moved closer to the mirror. 'Kev is in coma, Tade is on the run for murdering you and the whole group doesn't know who to believe,' Reb said.

'Help me,' The voice repeated again, though it wasn't loud, but the echo vibrated in her ears.

'How?' She said in a loud pitch as tears began to flow down her cheeks.

Reb removed the cloth but she was scared with what she saw. Susan's blood was now dripping from her mouth. Reb touched the blood on the bed with her hands to confirm it was real. Her hands were stained immediately.

'You have to talk now Sus. You have to tell me who the killer is,' She said as she took steps back carrying a pillow in front of her as though it was a shield. She moving when the dull light changed to the brighter one.

'Who are you speaking with, Reb?' Mart asked. 'And why are you taking steps backward? See, you are about to hit the wall,' he collected the pillow from her.

Even though she was scared to look at the mirror she still found the courage to look at her hands and the bed sheet.

'Blood,' she said. 'The blood has disappeared. I saw blood on it.' She pointed to the bed. 'Blood was on my palm too,' she opened her palms to show it them.

'You are hallucinating, Reb.' Stan said as he sat her down.

'Everything you saw is not real.'

'I'm not,' she protested. 'I saw her in a white robe which was turning brown. Blood also dripped from her chest, even her mouth.'

'What did she say to you?' Mart asked. 'Did she tell anything valuable, huh?'

'Help me, that was all she could say. She repeated the word more than twice.' Reb turned to Stan and placed her right hand on his thigh.

'Don't you believe me?' She asked.

'You were only hallucinating Reb,' Mart said as he pulled her out of the bedroom.

'Sit down,' he said after cleaning a plastic chair. 'Relax,' he said. 'You spent more time with Sus, especially together in that room.' Mart pointed to the bedroom. 'I'm sure that was enough to bring the memories back.'

'You are really affected by this case,' Stan said. 'Maybe you should just give yourself a break and you will be fine.'

She said nothing as Mart picked one of the books on the dusty table to fan her.

'I think you should do as Stan says,' Mart said.

'Is that why you wasted your energy in coming here?' She asked.

'No,' Stan answered. 'We are only concerned about you, you look exhausted and...'

'I have had enough of your lecture Stan,' she snapped. 'I will be fine. You guys can go.'

'Why don't you rest in your own room? There may be a difference.' Mart said.

Reb smiled fleetingly. 'I'm safe here,' she said. 'Why are you here?'

'We found a way to get him,' Mart said.

'Him?'

'Tade,' Stan said.

Reb adjusted her sitting position, with her hands to her chest and a smile on her face she asked 'How?'

'We will inform the cops about the passport,' Stan said.

'Do you think that will be fruitful?' She asked.

'The cops will believe Tade is here in PH or somewhere in the country. They won't think he has an active passport, because using the airport for an escape would be the last option he will choose.'

'I left your apartment because I believed what you said. But how do we find Tade with the large population of people and numbers of lookalike, do you think there is chance of finding him?'

'Lookalike can be differentiated by genetic make-up,' Mart said. 'I've done the Maths concerning the passport.'

'How?'

Mart brought out a sheet he had rolled like a scroll. The sheet was coloured and its texture was like that of a newsprint.

'This is a map,' he said as he spread the map on the table. 'Since he can't use the airports within the country, he can use that of other countries. On the East is Cameroun, which has a boundary with Calabar. The South-south of Cameroun have more of the Calabar people, this means there is probability that the news will reach there. Tade would be at risk if he uses that route. In the

North is Niger Republic and Northeast is Chad. If he is to use road transportation from PH to the North,' Mart paused as he looked at Stan. 'That would be a risk too.'

'Why would the North be a risk?' Reb asked.

'Jos is in the North central.'

'So?'

'So,' he moved his index finger to Jos. 'At least he needs eighteen hours on the road. How many hours will he use to reach the boundary? And I'm sure he won't want to use the North east too.'

'They have to stop over,' Stan said.

'The car would need petrol, maybe water too. The driver will also need to rest,' Mart said.

'That will be a dangerous path then,' Reb nodded in agreement.

'All we have left is the last route.' Mart said.

'What is the last route?'

'The west boundary,' Mart replied. 'To the West of Nigeria is Benin Republic- a French country. There is probability of not being identified at the border.'

'Easy pass for any citizen of Nigeria in the west zone, I know that,' Reb said.

'That would hasten his journey.'

Mart folded the Nigerian map and unfolded the World map. He placed his index finger on the map. 'Ghana would be a country he won't want to stay because they know what is happening in our country.' Mart turned to her. 'What do you think?'

'Staying in a francophone country would be good because of the high probability of not following news from Anglophone countries .' Reb said.

'A far English country in the west zone will be of help. Right?'

She nodded twice.

'Then Gambia would be a country to check out.'

'All we need is to inform the police,' Stan said.

Reb flitted across the sitting room without saying a word. She was sympathetic when she believed he was innocent, she had entered the witness box just for him. Now agreeing with Stan and Mart will only mean she had done all that in vain. As for Detective Thomas, he still believed Tade is innocent and that is why she went over to their apartment.

Reb went to the wardrobe, checked the keys in her hand, before finding the right one for the wardrobe's third door which was below the two bigger doors. After opening it, she picked up a photo album which was carefully laid inside. Then went back to the reading table.

'Would Detective Thomas be convinced about what we think of Tade?' She

muffled.

Opening the album to a group picture which had all of them in it, she stops to see her answer through it. The smiles on their faces were affable and it shows how happy they were when they posed for the photograph.

She let her hand rested on the picture for a while and then ran her index finger across it. One is dead, another is in coma while the third is on the run. She said that to herself for the second time. The third had successfully put the remaining three of them in a despondent state.

'The only answer to that question of yours will be to tell the detective about what we've found,' Stan said.

Reb closed her eyes, then inhaled a sharp breath following Stan statement. His voice was too close, and when she turned, she saw Stan standing behind her, he had been there for a while, trying to guess her thoughts.

'You still hold to that word,' she said as she still fixed her eyes on the photograph.

He nodded lightly. 'It seems like you are unsure about what to say.' He left her back, then sat in front of her. 'I don't really understand you, Reb.' He admitted. 'Your mood is changed. Do you have feelings for him?'

'I think I do,' she said as she kept staring at the picture in front of her. 'I have feelings for him just like I have for you and Mart.'

'Us?'

'Yes.' She said. 'Because that is what friends are expected to have for each other.'

'Oh camaraderie!' Mart said as he busted into laughter.

'I said I don't understand you and I think you are giving me another reason to stand on my words,' Stan said.

'Detective Thomas believes Tade is not guilty, and that is why I came to your place today,' Reb said.

'You working for him now?' Stan asked. 'You still give him information about us.' Stan faced Mart. 'I told you who she is after the first hearing Mart. Now can you see what I talked about?'

'Calm down and hear what she has to say.' Mart said. 'You can't do this all alone, you still need her help to reach the detective.'

'I'm not doing this because of Detective Thomas. I'm doing this because of you all,' Reb said.

'Really?' Stan asked scornfully.

'Even though I have my own apartment which I share with three other friends. I always stay with Sus, because she and the rest of the group gave me one thing I need.'

'And what is that?' Stan asked.

Reb removed the group picture meticulously from the album and show it to them. 'This,' she pointed to the photograph in her hand. 'This has given me the answer I needed, Stan and I'm sure about my answer.'

'And what is your answer?'

'Smile,' she answered.

'That's weird.' Stan said.

'Not weird,' Mart said. 'Just subtle and interesting.'

'We are only six in this group. Six different people from different tribes who became friends here in Port Harcourt and care for one another. Sus and Tade care for Vin, and Vin reciprocates this. That is what friendship is. Tade and Vin won't plan anything against Sus because of her large heart would be enough for God to save her,' she looked at Mart. 'Tade is like his mother, he wants to care and work for the people,' she said. 'I don't have only feelings, I have respect. And for my answer I think Vin just gave us one.' She added.

'What do you say, Stan?' Mart asked.

'I will agree with her only If she can prove how the passport left our apartment,' Stan said. 'You might not want to go to the state headquarter, but I will.'

He headed towards the door.

'Okay Stan,' Mart said. 'Reb will speak to Tade's Mum on phone, she will discuss this case with her. Only Reb.'

'In what state of mind?' He asked after hesitating for about fifteen seconds.

'Unhappy state of course,' Mart replied. 'Nobody will talk apart from her. Deal?'

'Deal,' he replied.

Mart brought out his phone. 'You put her on loudspeaker,' Stan said.

'Are you sure about this, Reb?' Mrs. Leo asked. 'I don't think Tade would take his international passport to school. It may be in his file at home, I just need to check and confirm.'

'We are sure about this Ma, Stan said Tade talked about bringing his international passport to school but Tade did not show him where he kept it.'

'OK, Reb. I have heard you,' Mrs. Leo said. 'Let me get back to you on this.'

'This isn't the matter of getting back to us ma,' Reb said quickly. 'I'm going to tell the police what I know and that means they will intensify their...' Reb stopped. She couldn't believe she was saying this, it showed that she cared less about Tade.

'I will just report this to the detective.'

'You don't have to Reb,' she said. 'If Tade is found now, that will be the last

hearing and you sure know what the Judge would say. And to avoid this you guys will have to keep that as a secret, you need to allow the Detective and his team to find the culprit on their own.'

*Obstruction of justice*, rings in Reb's mind.

'You still believe Tade isn't the murderer after all these?' Reb asked with anger.

'Tade is your friend,' she said, trying to calm her down. 'And he is my son too, Reb. I'm quite aware about what you guys are facing. And for Kelvin, I know you are unhappy because of his present state,' she paused then continued. 'I'm at the verge of losing my only son; only child, Reb. He is the only reason I'm working, I'm alive because God gave him to me. I should be in a depressed form since this case started. Reb,' she called her name for the third time. 'I face ridicules everyday because of this, but I still believe my son is innocent. I am not saying this because he is my son, I am telling you this because he won't ever lie to me Reb. Tell your friends to halt their plan for now.'

'And Vinnie?'

'What happened to Vinnie?' Mrs. Leo asked.

'You...!' Reb stopped as Mart placed his index finger on his lips, then wrote a sentence on a cardboard and lifted it for Reb to read.

"The police won't make Vinnie's case known to the public now. You have to be prudent with your words."

Reb read the words, closed her eyes and opened them. She could hear Mrs. Leo voice on the phone as she awaited Reb's reply.

'Vin has been arrested because he claimed he was the one who gave the gang all needed information.'

'Poor Vinnie,' Mrs. Leo said. 'I'm sure he wouldn't be able to convince the detectives. Vin doesn't know about the group.'

Stan stretched his hand for the phone before Reb could think of what to say.

'Vin would perish in jail if Tade isn't found Mrs. Leo. How can you help us with that?' Stan said.

'Do you have any idea?'

'I do and that is what I'm about to do. If I tell the police about all I know about the passport, they will surely find Tade and release Vinnie,' Stan said.

'He claimed what he didn't do,' she said. 'In this case whatever Vin had said won't be discarded. Can I speak with Mart?'

Mart collected the phone with no stress.

'This is Mart,' he said.

'Place the call on speaker,' she requested.

'It is already on speaker,' Mart replied.

'Tade is on the run, and I know what the passport information will do if the police is told about it. It's pretty good because you called my office here,' she said. 'If Tade returns back to the state HQ, he will be sentenced to death. But before that all he will say would be what he had already said.'

'What are the driving at?'

'That means Vin won't be released, because he already implicated himself. To the best of my knowledge, no lawyer will want to stand in for you guys because they won't believe your story. So if Stan should tell the cops, you guys will lose two innocent friends to this case.'

'What do you want us to do?' Mart asked.

'Tade only followed the group because he knew with God on our side we will find a proof to prove that he is innocent. What you guys need now is patience.'

'If Tade is innocent, how about Vin? Will he be release also?' Mart asked.

'Tade's proof will cover both of them.'

'And if not?'

'I'm a lawyer, Mart. Trust me,' she said. 'Vin won't stay in the prison.'



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Henry walked into Detective Thomas office with a broad smile on his face. His physical look was optimally different from that of his first visit.

Apart from looking happy, he had put on a different tribal cloth, a Hausa traditional wear. A white Zariya with an Igbo black cap.

'You seem happy today, Henry.' Detective Thomas said as he extended his hand for a warm handshake.

'I am here to give a vital information,' he said as he released his hand after a firm handshake. Detective Thomas' pupil dilated as he intensified his look on him.

'You've got my attention, Henry,' he said.

Thomas watched him as he thrust his hand into his pocket to bring out a phone. It was a java phone with a black case.

'Here,' Henry said as he handed it over. 'This phone belongs to Bimbo.'

Detective Thomas pressed the red key which was at the upper right side.

'Who is Bimbo?' He asked.

'My sister. Third in the family.'

Detective Thomas brows bumped together in a scowl following what Henry had said.

'Bimbo is a Yoruba name, Henry. Please explain the phrase, - Third in the family.'

'She was adopted two years ago by my Dad.'

'And the phone?'

'Sus gave it to her when she came home two years ago with a promise of buying her a new phone,' Henry replied.

'So what information is on this phone?' Thomas asked. 'This phone seems to be relevant two years ago and not now.'

Henry adjusted on his seat and placed his cap on the table.

'The phone sim is Sus browsing line, and since the phone isn't with her

anymore she connected it with her new phone.'

'That's vague, Henry.'

'2 p.m., today, I received a text from a security App. I think the information on it will explain what it means.' Henry said as he pointed to the phone. 'You can check it yourself.'

Thomas unlocked the phone, then pressed the center button again before using it arrow button to select the message.

Phone name: Infinity

Name: Michael James Opara

Phone number: 07061000000

\*\*some text missing\*\*

Thomas felt a knot untie in his belly after reading the message. He knew this was enough to trace Sus phone. Whosoever has the phone now will definitely lead to the killer. He thought before dropping the phone on his table.

'Do you find it useful?' Henry asked.

'I do,' Thomas replied. 'Susan definitely helped in solving this case.'

He said that because he knew Susan had registered with a security App on her phone using the number of the sim with Bimbo. And now that a new sim had been inserted into Susan phone, the App had secretly connected with the service provider of the sim and sent the necessary details here.

'Do you know her email password?' Detective Thomas asked.

'What do you need that for?' Henry asked.

'For bearing.' He said. 'The App would have send the bearing to her mail.'

'I can help with that, but I have to reach the house,' he said as he stood up. 'When will I get the phone?'

'As soon as the case is solved,' Detective Thomas replied.

'Thank you Henry,' he said, then stretched his hand for another handshake. 'I owe you for this.' He said.

'You don't detective.' Henry replied with a slight smile. 'I owe you.' He said.

\* \* \*

Thomas drove near Crescent Avenue which distance from the state HQ was about twelve kilometres. He had successfully worked on the bearing Henry sent to him. Though it wasn't precise but the service provider helped with the full detail.

*This will be the biggest mistake in their lives.* Thomas thought as he kept driving.

Abigail sat beside him smoothening her gun with her left hand.

He parked in front of the house which registered number correspond to that on the slip he held in his hand. The building is a three storey, and there was a

supermarket beside it. The building had a fence which length is about 1.6 metres away from the ground and a gate which had more of opened spaces.

They entered the compound with their guns conscientiously kept in between their waist and trousers. Stairs reaching each storey was fixed outside and from the ground floor, each apartment was locked. The floor looked clean an evidence that people lived there.

Thomas dipped his hand into his pocket to bring out the slip, he unfolded to crosscheck.

'We are at the right place,' he said facing Abigail. Her hands on her hips as eyes widen and the muscles of her eyelids enlarged.

'The supermarket might help,' Abigail suggested.

Thomas agreed and walked toward the supermarket as Abigail followed. In the aisle, he tried to find something edible and less of a junk. Picking up two long breads he returned to the counter.

'How much is this?' he asked.

'Six hundred naira,' the salesman replied.

Thomas opened his wallet he angled the wallet in such a way that the salesman could not see the contents of the wallet.

'Keep the change.' He said as he gave him a thousand naira note. He then walked toward the exit before heading back to the counter again.

'Can I ask you something?' He asked.

'Shoot.'

'The storey building beside here seems to be empty. Do you know anyone there?' He asked.

'I live there, why do you ask? Do you want to rent an apartment?'

'But...' He stopped. 'The tranquility.'

'Kids are on vacation, so they traveled. And for the adults, most of them are entrepreneurs. Some of them work with the government.' The salesman turned his back to him. 'Some of us, like me work for other people, you know employees group.'

'That's cool. It will be good to rent an apartment in same building with you guys,' Thomas said. 'I think my friend live there.'

'Think?'

'Yeah,' he replied, then gave the salesman the slip with him. 'You understand why I said that?'

'You should call him.'

'I wanted to make my visit a surprise,' Thomas said.

'I see.' The salesman focused his eyes on the computer screen. 'What is his name?'

'Michael James. You know him?'

The salesman nodded as he attended to another customer. Thomas spot the name on the salesman uniform, which he tried to read but didn't form well on his retina.

'Sorry man.' The salesman said as he increased the proximity between them. 'Like I said, most of them are entrepreneurs. I'm sure you know your friend is an entrepreneur?'

'Yeah. He told me.' Thomas said, covering his lie with another.

'This is 4 o'clock,' the salesman pointed to the wall clock behind Thomas. 'He will be back around 6 p.m., you should be able to wait for two hours, right?'

'Yeah, thanks.' He said. 'His floor and room number?'

'Last floor and apartment five.'

'Thanks,' Thomas said again before facing Abigail, and they left for the car together.

The gate became busy about 6:15p.m., but they didn't get down from the car until an hour had passed. Six apartment on each floor making a total of eighteen. Thomas did the Maths.

On getting to the room number the salesman told him, he knocked the door with his fist as there was no knocker or door bell. Thomas was surprised as the door was opened immediately after his first knock.

'Detectives.' Thomas said showing him his badge. 'Few questioning just to save you from trouble.'

Michael motioned with one of his right fingers beckoning at them, then closed the door behind them.

'Drinks or what?' Michael asked.

'No thanks,' Abigail said as she took her seat. 'Let get down to business.' She waited for Michael to retire to his seat.

'You inserted your sim card into an Infinity phone today Michael. When did you buy the phone?' Thomas asked.

'Yesterday evening and that was when I inserted the sim card too.' Michael said after his puzzled looked was ignored.

'I see,' Thomas said. 'How much was deducted from your prepaid balance?'

Thomas studied his look which changed from a questioning one to a confused one.

'You said you guys are detectives?'

'Yes.' Abigail answered.

'What do you want?' He asked.

'We want to know about the phone,' Abigail replied. 'Who do you buy it from?'

'I bought it yesterday.' Michael replied.

'Who Michael, not when? Can you take us there?' Thomas asked.

'Why is this necessary?' Michael asked. 'Any problem with the phone?'

'Why would two detectives showed up at your doorstep out of the blue?' Thomas replied with a question.

Michael brought out the phone from his pocket and placed it on the table. 'The phone, this is the phone.' He said.

'Hold it between your fingers and palm.' Thomas said after bringing out his own phone.

'What are you using that for?'

'To snap the phone. Any objections?' Thomas asked.

Thomas snapped both the phone front and back and send it to Henry, then waited for reply.

Thomas watched as Abigail brought out a transparent nylon.

'Put it inside.' She said.

Thomas checked is message when his phone beeped few seconds after. 'The pink love sticker and that of the football club are also attached on Susan phone.' He read in his mind.

'Do you know anybody by the name Susan Obi?' Thomas asked.

'Of course I do. The senator's daughter.'

'I guess you also know where she is?'

'Dead of course,' Michael answered him.

'And you said you brought this phone from a friend, right?'

'I didn't say a friend.' Michael corrected quickly.

'Then who?' Thomas asked again.

'You will be doing yourself good if you cooperate with us, Michael,' Abigail said. 'Susan was murdered because of money. An innocent girl which could be anybody daughter. Do you have one?'

'I'm single,' Michael replied with a firmed voice.

'Tell us who sold this phone to you and be a hero to your future daughter then. Do you wish this for her?' Thomas asked.

'You have Sus phone with you which also makes you a suspect Michael. Talking now will be what can save you.' Abigail said.

'I will take you there.' Michael said.

'Good choice.' Thomas chuckled.

\* \* \*

'Time is fast and the world is small man,' Thomas said as he held a truncheon. 'Two weeks ago you and your team led in the race, but now, look how the

table's turned. I have all of you here in the State HQ. But I think the team is not complete because I can't find the murderer. 'Tade Leo. He is the boss, right?' Detective Thomas asked. 'Because you guys risked your lives for him. I need words from you guys and I'm not taking No as an answer. I might have taken No on Friday, but not today,' Thomas said.

'I'm not in position to say a word.'

'I'm not talking about position, I'm talking about what I expect from you,' Thomas said. 'Who sent you to kill Susan and how do you know about the money?' Thomas sat on the table in front of him, then crossed his leg and dropped the truncheon on the table. 'Answer me please.'

'I said I'm not in position...'

'You won't hear that word again from me.' Thomas said cutting him off.

Thomas stood up and flitted from the table to the wall with his folded limb on his chest.

'What do you say?' He asked.

'You can beat the hell out of me, I don't care.'

'I won't also,' Thomas said. 'You already have marks on your head and hand while would I give you another. Just answer my question.'

'Screw your ques...'

Thomas cut him off as a blow from his fist ended on the mangled man's chin. 'Would you like to receive more?' He asked. 'You are not in charge big man. I am calling you that because of your stature. Now I need answers.' Thomas said with a louder voice.

'I don't care about where you hit neither will I care if all your energy are wasted on...'

Thomas placed another blow on the other chin, and then allowed him to spit out the blood in his mouth.

'Will you talk now?' Thomas asked.

'Your blows are soft.'

Thomas moved back to the table and picked up the truncheon then threw it to the far end.

'I don't think that will be needed.' Thomas said. 'I didn't want to be inhumane, big man. But I think that the word order should be erased from the dictionary if I'm left with you. Two weeks ago after I received a shot on both limbs, you wanted me dead.' Thomas opened the tool box on the table. 'Two bullets is what I received from your revolver.'

'Be thankful you didn't receive a headshot from my sniper.'

'Yeah.' Thomas said. 'I won't believe it if someone had told me that a phone will bring you and your team here.'

'You are lucky no one spotted you guys when you entered.'

'Why don't you have a camera outside? that would have saved you guys,' Thomas turned and moved away from the tool box. 'I need to talk less.'

He held in his hand a scalpel, one he had initially stored in a sterilized dish. He sauntered toward him. 'I'm not a torturer nor seeking revenge but I think you gave me what I needed to torture you by pulling the trigger.' He squatted in his front. 'The scalpel and everything in that box is sterilized, fear not.'

Thomas ran the blade on big man's right thigh for a length of 1 cm.

'The cut is small, but I can still increase the length.' He showed him a first aid box which he had placed behind the tool box. 'After enough bleeding I will take care of the cut. But I'm afraid if you will let me do that big man. Will you?' Thomas asked.

'I won't let out the name, Detective,' the big man said. 'And I'm sure you won't let me bleed to death because the government needs me alive.'

'Maybe, biggie.' Thomas dropped the scalpel on the table and watched as clot formed on biggie thigh. 'Seems your clotting factors are working properly. The government wants you dead and they want that to be soon, but I'm here delaying their wish. You and your team have caused enough pain.'

'I'm not new to detectives like you. You say more than you can do,' the big man said.

'You are right.' Thomas said. 'That you can tell from the healed wounds on you. It's a pity that you haven't met me. And right now I'm going to show you how brutal I can be.'

'You can't be brutal like me.'

'But I can after all you have done. You killed twelve cops, planned Susan murder and implicated Tade Leo.'

'And who told you Tade Leo isn't part of us?'

'Then why don't you want to tell me the truth?' Thomas asked as he picked ten toothpicks. 'This,' he showed him. 'After I'm through using this on you, you won't pray for any other one.' Thomas walked up to him and inserted one into the hole between one of his finger and its nail. 'How do you feel now?' Thomas asked after retreating.

'I think you are wasting your energy,' the big man said.

Thomas picked another scalpel as he had dropped the first one on the table. He extended the cut on Biggie thigh by another centimeter and made another cut in the other thigh.

'What did you do with Tade Leo? Where is he now?' He inserted two more toothpicks. 'You are going to break man,' he said. 'I want to stop this, but you are not cooperating with me.'

'Tade is safe, probably enjoying his life now. And that is the deal. We implicated him and we also plan to take him out,' the big man chuckled.

'So you have an insider here, right? What is your insider name?' Thomas made another cut beside the initial ones.

'If I want to take him out of the isolated building you called jail house, who do you think I will use?'

'Anybody biggie. You can use anybody. The isolated bungalow is used for those having pending case. I'm not talking about ordinary pending case.' He inserted the fourth toothpick. 'I'm tired of the sound you make Biggie, you can make it stop. Just answer my questions. Who gave you the information you needed on Reb and Tade? Who is your insider in here?'

'Tade Leo,' he replied.

This time, Thomas extended the cut on Biggie thigh and then inserted the fifth toothpick. 'I know that face first isn't real, it is not the face of Tade Leo. So speak now.'

Thomas dropped both the scalpel and toothpick on the table. He then opened the first aid box to bring out an alcohol bottle. He uncapped it and poured it on Biggie thigh.

'First aid box can save your life and can also take it.' Thomas said. 'I have a lighter but you know that there is no extinguisher here. Will you dare me to use it on you?' He brought out the lighter. 'I have no fire extinguisher, Biggie.'

'Release my hand and give me a pen, I'll write the name of whosoever you need.' He said.

'You take me as a fool.' Thomas said.

'I don't. I'm dead serious.'

Thomas hesitated for a while before untying his hand. He then gave him a pen and a paper before folding his upper limb.

'And you are sure about this?' Thomas asked after having the paper.

'You raided our house, Detective. Bring me my phone and I will unlock it. I can play the voice record for you.' Biggie said.

'The voice can be different on phone.'

'He called me on Wednesday evening telling me about the money.'

'He called you with which line?'

'He didn't use his own phone number, and since an unregistered line can't call he used that of his friend.'

'And who is this friend? Did he tell you who the friend is?' Thomas asked.

'Kunle Jacobs from the faculty of engineering.'

'Department?'

'Civil Engineering. He is one of representative of Crossgate,' the big man said.



'Why would I believe what you are saying now?' Thomas asked.

'I need to know the owner of the line that called me, this is also for my own good.'

Thomas packed all what he used after tying Biggie hands. 'Someone will come to clean your cut Biggie. See you later.' Thomas said as he left the room.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Detective Thomas entered into the private office and then sashayed to the table which was filled up with materials gathered in course of the case. With his hands still inside his pockets, he looked at the few writings which was on the wall. Many pictures were taped on it. Thomas then removed the photograph which had Tade on it, this one was taken on the 29th of August.

Returning to the table which was at the center, he opened the drawer and brought out a brown envelope. The envelope contained all evidences to be used against Kelvin even though he is still in coma.

Susan had sent a text to Kelvin on the same day she brought the money home; money Biggie believed was stolen from government purse. That was the same day he had called Biggie with Kunle Jacob's phone.

Thomas opened the envelope and brought out Biggie phone to transfer all the recorded conversations Kelvin had with Biggie.

He replayed the conversations after sending all of it directly to his flash. And what had impressed Thomas had been Kelvin idea of introducing the service of a prosthetic and makeup artist. That was where Tade name had been included in the plan.

Thomas returned the phone, then returned the envelope into the drawer.

\* \* \*

Tade sat on the chair beside his lawyer with a calm mind he knew he had lost his freedom for more than two months. His hands and legs were now free from the cuffs. The only thing he expected today would be the redemption of his family name and tainted personality of her mother.

Behind him were the four gang member and also another man who made the fake face and had claimed Kelvin sent him the picture around 11 p.m. on Wednesday.

Tade looked straight at the Judge; the other lawyers had nothing to say. And

he knew his lawyer was also expectant as his eyes were fixed on the Judge while listening.

The judge dropped his pen and Tade followed his look which was fixed on the five men standing behind him.

'Kelvin is believed to be Susan soul mate,' the Judge paused. 'Kunle Jacobs had testified that Kelvin used his phone for most of his calls when they were still in Kaduna. I have all evidences to nail Kelvin but unfortunately he is still in coma,' the Judge said. 'And here is my verdict.' Tade looked at the gang fleetingly. 'The gang members who killed twelve cops on the 29th of August are hereby sentenced to death by hanging.' He switched his gaze to the fifth man. 'As for you Mr. Felix, you are sentenced to twenty years imprisonment with hard labour.

'As for Kelvin, I will pass my judgment now. When he wakes up from the comatose and no amnesia is recorded. I want him executed just as the gang members. But if he has amnesia, the police should study him for two years and if no progress is recorded, Kelvin should spend all his life in the prison. He must not be listed on the pardon list.

## EPILOGUE

Tade threw his cap in the air as he rested his left hand on his Mum's shoulder for a photograph. His eyes focused on Reb who came out of the room in a purple gown. The cap fell on him as he opened his hand for a warm embrace. This has been one of the moment he had imagined; graduating from school with all his friends.

*This is not complete*, he thought as he released her from his embrace.

'Thanks for everything,' he whispered. 'I've searched for you everywhere couldn't find you since,' he said.

'Tidying up things. This isn't really important,' She replied jokingly.

Tade watched as Reb found herself in his mother's embrace.

'Thanks Reb,' Mrs. Leo released her. 'I need to talk to you guys,' she said.

Reaching Susan apartment, they waited for Reb to unlock the door. Tade was the first to enter, and then waited for everyone to enter before closing the door.

'Hello Tade,' Detective Thomas said as he stealthily showed at the doorstep.

'Come in,' Tade said, his eyes smiled up at him. 'I'm sure my Mum invited you,' Tade said closing the door behind him.

Tade could imagine Susan being in their midst as all of them stood in her room, silent for a minute paying respect to her. He could imagine her standing among them with smiles on her face.

Tade smiled back, even though he knew it wasn't real. But the joy of having her friends back would definitely make her smile.

The door opened and Vincent entered with a black trouser and forest green round neck shirt on him.

'I hope I'm not too late for the meeting,' Vinnie said.

'Not at all,' Tade replied as he walked up to him. 'Who gave you my clothes?' He asked

'I just hope I won't be arrested because of this cloth,' Vinnie joked.

'I really want to thank you guys,' Tade's mum said. 'Even though I trusted my son not to commit the crime, your support and sacrifices were more than what I expected,' she held Reb both hands. 'Your friends were angry about most of your actions, but now I think they will respect you more than before.' She let go of Reb's hands and held that of Vinnie. 'Sus is no more, but I'm still much alive. You did what nobody expected from you,' she said.

'I can't compensate you enough, but trust me with everything you need, Vinnie.'

She turned to Stan and Mart.

'Thank you for everything. Thanks for believing in us, Detective.' Mrs. Leo said as she extended her hand for a shake.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

AROWOLO AYOKANMI was born and raised in Ile-Oluji, Ondo State. He is a medical laboratory technician and also a writer of fiction. “THE MURDERER” is his debut novel. He reads medical books or novels after work. He also loves to stay indoors to watch movies. His favourite genre being mystery, inspirational, comedy and fantasy.