



HAPPINESS AJAYI

WILL
I EVER
BE FREE?

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This novel is simply a work of fiction. The story is as a result of the author's imaginations. Any resemblance to actual places, incidents or persons (dead or alive), is coincidental and beyond the intention of the author.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to everyone who has been abused and everyone with a dirty past. I assure you that God will open a new page for you.

Will I ever be free?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to appreciate God who has been my father, Jesus who has been my lover and the Holy Spirit who has been the source of my inspiration.

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Will I ever be free?

FOREWORD

Contrary to the perception of many, freedom in the Christian faith isn't primarily related to one's appearance or what one eats but to the centre where actions and reactions proceed from— the heart.

Freedom is indeed in Christ— the heart dealt with and the yokes of sin broken.

'Will I ever be free?' reveals the bondage sin puts one in. It provides a lasting solution for caged souls searching for the answer to the question of their hearts.

The story you are about to read will open your eyes to the common happenings in many homes. It tells the sad tale of poor parenting and interpersonal relationship. The author has presented the scenarios in such a way that you can easily relate and picture them in your mind. The story has been laced with suspense that would make you to keep reading.

You will come to an understanding of the joy that freedom in Christ brings. You will definitely be blessed beyond measures.

Atere Gbemisola,

Author of *Boys Not Toys*.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

Will I ever be free? This was my thought as I came out of my dad's room.

My mum had always been busy since I knew her. She had always been out of town for one business trip or the other. It had always been my dad and me in that big mansion.

I have heard my dad complain about this, times without number which my mum would always say that she was doing it for the family. My dad once told me that my mum was the reason it was only me. She refused to give birth to another child because she didn't want anything that would tamper with her career.

I had trusted my dad that I believed practically everything he told me. He used to be my shield and everything until the monster in him manifested. He came for me. I had replaced my mum in everything even in the other room.

It started when I was in JSS3, when my dad barged into my room and saw me naked. He could not resist me. I was as beautiful as I am now. I was fair and tall. I took after my mum.

'Daddy, no, no,' I grumbled.

'I won't hurt you, trust me, I will take it slow,' he replied as he found his way in between my thighs.

I cried as he continued his ride and the obstacle was broken. I was made a woman.

I could not even tell anyone. I was young and I didn't know

what to do. My mum would not even listen and my dad was all I had.

It continued day by day and I got used to it. The pleasure, the fun, the ride, in fact my dad was sweet. I could not even have a boyfriend because by the time I was twenty, my libido was already high.

I hated the fact that I was sleeping with my dad yet I loved the pleasure from it.

It happened again on my 24th birthday. It was then it dawned on me that I had been a prisoner, I had been used. I could not be loved again. My life had been a wreck.

I enjoyed it yet I knew I was wrong. I was growing older and it shouldn't continue. Who will I talk to? Who will believe me? Who will help me?

I felt I should scream out loud but all I could do was bow in thoughts as I asked myself that question 'will I ever be free?'

As I stood to freshen up, the black-turned-brown bible on my shelf caught my attention. I didn't even understand why the bible caught my attention. I had been seeing it there for over a year and I didn't even touch it. Dust had covered it which made it turn brown.

I had not been to church in the last two years. The guilt from my actions would not allow me. I used to wonder how my dad could go to church at those times. I opened it and I found my way to a place where some guys were trying to stone a woman for being adulterous. Her story captivated me which made me go

back to the corner of the room I had soaked with tears.

I was surprised at how Jesus reacted to her. He told them not to throw stones at her. That was how I interpreted the passage. That had nothing to do with me. At least, she wasn't sleeping with her daddy. I started enjoying the stories in the bible. It was just a story book to me as I enjoyed different stories from it. It had been keeping me company.

I knew my dad would be surprised because I didn't bother to go to him in his room. Well, he made his move and found his way to my room. He was joking with me but I wasn't responding to him. He saw the bible widely opened. 'So your reaction is about this,' he said, pointing to the bible.

'Dad, we need to stop this,' I said to him as I stood from the bed side to move out of the room. He held my hand and grabbed me tight by my waist.

'My baby, you know I love you. We will stop dear but after this one time,' he said.

'Dad, are you sure?' I asked him. He didn't answer me again as he drew his lips closer to mine. He already knew my weak point.

After the whole show, I returned to my new found friend—the bible. I was not born again but I found comfort every time I read it. Different stories, different words from Jesus and the apostles made me want to read more.

As I read it one day, the words Jesus told the woman at the well hit me. 'If you drink of me, you will never be thirsty again'. I felt I needed to know Jesus from a personal level but guilt would

not allow me. At least, she just had seven husbands and none was her father. My case was worse. Could Jesus forgive me? Hell no! 'Who will forgive a lady who sleeps with her dad? Who will forgive a lady who has sex almost every day? Who will forgive a lady who has committed series of abortion and who will forgive a lady who has a son for her own dad?' I questioned myself as I cried my eyes out that day. I felt forgiveness was not for me. I accepted my fate and continued in my sins.

CHAPTER TWO

Boluwatife is my son. I gave birth to him when I was seventeen. You are probably wondering why I didn't abort him. Well, I tried to but the doctor advised me not to dare it if I wouldn't want to die. I had committed five abortions prior that time.

I cried my eyes out and wished I was dead. I was not only crying because I was carrying a baby at seventeen, I was also crying because I thought of how my mum would feel. My dad had always been my comfort in times like that.

'Daddy, you have spoilt my life.' I knelt before him as I cried in our sitting room. My mum was not around to witness all the drama.

'I am sorry, Janet, I am sorry,' he said to me as he tried lifting me up from the ground. I could feel the guilt in his voice. Was he deeply sorry? I doubt it!

That night was a night of weeping. The weeping endured for all night but joy didn't come in the morning. Yes! My mum had called that she would be returning from Italy. The news was a shock because she wasn't meant to return until the next three months. She said that there was a crisis that occurred in the country which made all business plans to be suspended. She would be home the following week.

I knew my mum to be this action woman. She would skin me alive if she got to know. My world started falling apart before my own eyes. I began to imagine what would happen if my mum got

to know.

The news! It would be all over the news that 'Janet Clement, the daughter of Juliet Clement the business tycoon got pregnant for her dad.' I knew that divorce was knocking on the door. I knew I would have to taste poverty as my mum was the bread winner of the family.

Something was to be done. I could not figure anything out. My dad had better come out with a plan or we would both be in a mess. I knew my dad to be full of several strategies. At least, my mum never suspected he had been sleeping with me for four years as at that time.

'I will come up with something, okay?'

I rested my back against the wall. My heart was beating fast.

'I said don't worry, I will come up with something.' He had reassured me because he knew I was so tensed. What did I even know? I was just seventeen.

I didn't know what my dad would come up with but I trust it would be something smart or else we would both be in soup. I was already three months pregnant and I didn't know what next.

'I am home, *eku ile o*.' The voice of my mum was like a thunder strike in my heart as I was expecting the unexpected.

I ran out of my room and made up my mind that I would have to bear whatever happened afterwards.

'Welcome, mummy, I am so glad to see you.' I lied. Heaven

knew I wasn't glad to see her. She shouldn't have come at that time. At least, she had not been there for me all along so why did she then appear in the middle of this storm?

'You are getting bigger o'. She said as she gave me a hug. I had no choice than to fake a smile. I didn't know what that meant or had she noticed the pregnancy?

'Why won't she?' My dad said from afar.

'You are right, when she is no longer under any school stress.' My mum had been deceived. It wasn't long that I finished writing WAEC which made her think that I was getting fat because of that.

We all smiled at that and she said, 'Thank you for taking care of my daughter for me.' If she had known what the care was all about, I knew she would have torn my dad into pieces. My dad was taking care of me on his bed. What a pity!

I couldn't sleep all night as I soaked my bed with tears. I wished it had never happened. I wished my mum had always been around. I wished I could talk to someone but there was no one. I was all by myself.

I could hear as my dad and my mum were conversing in the middle of the night. What could they be talking about? I couldn't hear them as my room was a bit far from theirs. I hoped that whatever they were discussing would be in my favour.

The next day, my dad came to meet me very early in the morning. My mum was still sleeping. 'Janet, put your mind at rest, I have worked things out,' he said.

I didn't care what it was; my concern was about my mum not finding out about the baby. He left my room quickly so as to avoid my mum suspecting us.

My mum and I were not friends. We barely stayed together to chat as mother and daughter. We were in a formal relationship.

My mum spent two good weeks at home and didn't notice that I was pregnant. She was a mother 'indeed'! I didn't know she would be travelling until I saw her with her travelling box. Where was she heading to this time? I thought she wouldn't be leaving anytime soon. Who cares? At least, my wish was granted. She wasn't going to find out about the baby yet.

What my dad worked out was perfect. He was indeed a smart man. I was happy yet sad because I didn't know when her return would be. It might just mean that we just prolonged the day of trouble.

My dad told me that he persuaded her to go for one professional course that I didn't even know what it was about. At least, she was gone. Words of the mouth could not explain the joy I had when my dad told me that the course would last for a year and half.

Thank goodness! Few months later, I gave birth to Boluwatife. Bolu was growing stronger and fresher each day but he always made me think about how miserable I was to be carrying my father's child. My dad and I had been careful to make sure that we didn't make any silly mistake that could lead to another Bolu. Thank God for contraceptive, it was doing a great job.

Days and weeks passed. I knew the arrival of my mum was closer which means that trouble was knocking. I could not just imagine the disaster that was about to fall. I knew my dad would surely come up with something.

Two weeks to the arrival of my mum, my dad told me that we would be travelling to Ekiti state. How would we travel all the way from Ibadan to Ado-Ekiti to greet my grandmother? My dad had already told me to play along with him. I had no choice than to obey as I didn't know what the plan was.

There we were at Ado-Ekiti in the bungalow that my grandma was living. She was so happy to see us especially me. She had not seen me for over two years. My dad was her first child.

'Ekaabo o.' My grandma greeted us as she drew me closer to see the baby I was carrying. 'Whose child is this o?' I could read meanings to the look on her face.

'Let's go inside mummy, we will talk about it ma.' My father said to his mother. Lunch was already set. She served us pounded yam with egusi soup. I wondered where she got her strength from.

I was shocked when my dad said '*maami*, I have made a mistake, I hope you would cover me up.' Was my dad going to tell her?

'You are my son. I can't help but assist you.' She asked him to continue his speech.

'You see that baby is mine. I wanted another child which my wife was not ready to give me so I looked for an alternative.' I was surprised when my grandma left her food and began to dance.

My dad had told her to help him raise the child. My grandma could not reject as she wanted my dad to have a male child and also because she knew that my mum was the breadwinner of the family. When the bible made mention of the heart of a man being desperately wicked, it was referring to my dad. He was not just an abuser but a liar.

That was how the boy, Bolu, was hidden from my mum till one day. It was a day I can never forget.

CHAPTER THREE

I knew that my dad was not going to stop having me. I had to think about my life. I couldn't continue that way. At twenty-four, I was not in a serious relationship. The guys around me were just the 'chop and go' type. I knew I had to do something smart quickly.

After the birth of Bolu, I gained admission into the University of Ilorin where I studied Mass Communication. I graduated with a second class upper credit and I served my fatherland. I was already working in a radio station as a presenter. Life had been good to me except for my dad who had become a thorn in my flesh.

I decided to leave the house as an escape route from my dad. What could I do? I was tired of the fact that my dad could not resist me and I could not even resist him either. How could that even be possible? I did not have any savings because my parents would always provide everything. I started saving money to rent an apartment so I could leave the house. At least, he wouldn't sleep with me if he does not see me.

Gbenga had been helping out. Gbenga was a colleague at work. He helped me with the interior of the apartment and other things also. I took a room self-contain apartment in a street far from my house but near the radio station. I did that because my mum's car wouldn't be available for me to use again.

Everything was set and it was time to say goodbye. It was time for me to dispose my past and start a new life. I had no choice, I was fed up. I didn't even care about how my mum would

feel when she comes back home and doesn't meet her only daughter. I didn't care about how my dad would feel about not having me on his bed again. I didn't even care about anyone except me. I wanted to be free.

It was a Sunday morning and all arrangement had been made. I had already called a cab man who would help me pack my luggage. My dad had gone to church so he wouldn't stop me.

As I was packing my load, I was so happy because I knew I would be free. I was singing a song by Craig David: 'I'm walking away from the troubles in my life. I'm walking away, oh to find a better place.'

I dropped a letter for my dad and called the cab man.

Zooooooooom! The car moved and I thought I was free but I was wrong. A lot happened afterwards.

'Hey, dear!' Gbenga called as he was entering the studio. I just finished a programme on air. Gbenga had really been good to me. It wasn't too long that he was employed in Green Magic radio station. He was all ladies spec. I didn't even have his time as my dad would not even allow me think straight.

'I am fine. Good morning this morning,' I greeted. He opened his arms wide for a hug. I could not tell him no. At least, it was a harmless one. His red tie was well knotted and was complementing his green shirt which was well tucked into his black pair of trousers.

'You smell nice,' he said, smiling at me.

'Oh! Thanks.' What could I have said? No wonder ladies loved being around him. He really knew how to make a string play in a lady's heart.

Gbenga was dark and tall. His gap teeth would make you want to see him talk over and over again. He also had a good sense of humour. Gbenga was every lady's dream.

I was already looking for a cab when Gbenga drove by. He gave me a ride to my house where we talked over a bottle of chilled coke. We talked about life generally and he told me how his girlfriend broke his heart.

'Why did you leave your parents' house?' He asked me as he was loosening his tie which was an indication that he was ready for full gist.

'Hmmm. Nothing much, just that this place is closer to work.' I lied. That wasn't the reason. I could not just tell him why I left home or who can say she was sleeping with her dad?

'But you have a ride now?' He asked as if he knew that I was lying.

'Ok, ok, I want to know how it feels to be away from home.' That was the truth just that it was half-baked. I didn't give him the full gist.

We had not talked like that since I knew him. It had all been formal but that night it was just as if we had known each other for ages. I really had a nice time that evening, an evening away from my dad. The joy that I wasn't going to be on his bed filled my heart.

It was a harmless one until emotions clouded the air.

Gbenga had this way of sweeping a lady off her feet. There was this sensation about him that I cannot describe. I didn't even know how we got there. We were already exchanging saliva from each other's lips. He was already lying on me on the chair we were both sitting until the alarm I set interrupted the whole show. It was 8pm already.

We both stood hurriedly as if we had just come back to our senses. Truly, we were lost in the atmosphere. I was so ashamed of myself as he was dressing up. We didn't do anything deep but the fact that we were all over each other was choking me. How would I face him at work?

'Janet, I am so sorry. I am not that kind of guy.' He told me with pity on his face.

'Ok, fine, let's just pretend that this never happened,' I said to him with all frankness in me.

'Ok, thanks for understanding.' He said. I didn't even bother to see him off to his car as I was angry with myself. I hope he would not be thinking that I was cheap. I didn't even know what came over me. I was unable to prepare dinner. I was sad all through the night.

I had to face him at work. I already decided to pretend as if nothing happened. I was going to be strong even if it was for once. I locked my door and was ready to give the day whatever it would take.

I avoided Gbenga as much as I could. That was the best I

could do. I kept our conversations brief and precise. There was no unnecessary chit chat between us.

It happened for days until one evening when I heard a knock on my door. I wasn't expecting anyone as I found it so difficult to relate with people around.

It was too late to close the door; Gbenga was already smiling at me. If I had known, I wouldn't have opened. He had this enticing scent from his perfume that made him so irresistible. I decided to bring out the lion in me.

'Yes? I wasn't expecting you,' I said, frowning as much as I could.

'Is that how you greet a friend?' He asked as he removed my hand from the door knob and found his way to the chair. I had no choice than to follow him.

'Janet, I don't understand all the sudden change about you after the other night.' He held my hand.

'Gbenga, there was no other night. I thought we agreed to pretend that nothing happened,' I said firmly as I withdrew my hands from his.

'But it happened. You can't deny the fact that we both feel something for each other.' He was right. I had feelings for him but I didn't want to. I didn't want any emotional stress for myself then.

'Gbenga, I don't feel anything for you. Simple!' I had to pretend even though I was already falling for him.

'Janet, I love you. Not just that I want to marry you, you are

'all I want in a lady.' Gbenga told me passionately. Gbenga was everything I wanted in a man. He was Mr. Perfect.

Will I ever be free?

CHAPTER FOUR

The lion in me was already becoming a cat as I could no longer hold it anymore. I needed to forget the past and enjoy life. I needed to be happy. It didn't take me long to make a decision. I had found what I was looking for.

I didn't know when I jumped on him and said, 'I love you too.' It was a sweet moment. I had truly fallen in love for the first time in my life. That Friday night was short but a memorable one. The kiss was without apology and the sex was passionate. I didn't cry or have any bit of regret like that of my dad. Everything felt new again.

We were so in love and my dream of having a new life was finally becoming real. We had series of outing together and talked about the number of kids we would have. I had finally found happiness and love in a man.

I already blocked my parents from calling me so that they would not disrupt my happiness. I wished that I would have no need to meet them again. I wished I could adopt new parents in their stead.

I was enjoying my life until a Wednesday afternoon at work when that dark man came looking for me. It was my dad. All the agony in me rose again. I wasn't expecting to see him. I walked him far from where anybody could hear our conversation.

'I thought I told you not to look for me,' I said to him angrily.

'Janet, I am sorry. Please, forgive me. Please, my daugh...'

I didn't allow him finish his words when I said, 'Your daughter or what did you just say? I should forgive you? Over my dead body!' I said as I snapped my fingers across my head. 'You see, just move on with your life as you can see that I have already moved on.'

I was about taking a step when he grabbed my wrist. 'Your mum will be back in two weeks time. She will kill me. Please, come home. I promise not to touch you again.'

'God forbid! I will not fall for your lies again. So this is all about my mum's return? You will not have checked on me if she wouldn't be returning. Just leave me alone. Please, leave me alone!' I screamed at him.

That was the first time I would get really angry at my dad and I didn't even know where the courage came from. I could not allow him get me to his bed anymore. I loved Gbenga and I wouldn't betray him.

'Janet!' I could recognise Gbenga's voice without turning around.

'I need to go.' I told my dad as I turned back towards Gbenga's direction. I hoped he didn't hear our conversation. My dad walked sluggishly out of the radio station. He was so full of regrets.

'And who was that?' Gbenga asked me.

'My dad,' I replied.

'You mean you were shouting at your dad like that?' He asked with surprise in his voice.

'Gbenga, don't bother, it's nothing serious,' I said to him and touched his shoulder.

'If there is anything, please, let me know. I will love to meet him soon.' There we went again! Gbenga had not been taking this marriage thing likely. He was all over me. I hoped my dad wouldn't spoil my joy for me.

Everything went as normal till a day when my mum showed up with my dad at my work place. It was a little embarrassing for me that day as my mum would not stop raising her voice and creating a scene.

'Janet, please, let's go home and settle this matter.' Which matter was she talking about? Did she even know what was going on?

'Janet, please, listen to your mummy. Please, come home.' I didn't know what my dad would have told my mum about me but for sure, I knew it would be lies.

'Janet, you are free to marry anyone you want but not this way.' I didn't understand what my mum was talking about.

I felt like I should scream my lungs out. I was so angry with my mum. She never cared for me. She had left me in the hands of that man all alone. I hated my parents for everything they had made me go through. I even hated them more for wanting to cause trouble for me with Gbenga.

I never told Gbenga about what my dad did to me. I never told him about Bolu. I kept everything a secret because I was afraid he would leave.

'Please, leave. You came to my workplace and you are embarrassing me? I will come when I am ready to.' I didn't wait for any response from them before I left their presence. I was not happy about how things went because my colleagues would be asking unnecessary questions, especially Gbenga.

'And who were those?' He asked me angrily.

'Gbenga, they are my parents. I can handle this, please,' I said. I was in a hurry to leave his presence.

'Janet, if there is something you are hiding, just tell me now.' Those words from Gbenga struck my soul. I could imagine the disaster that would happen if he found out. Who was going to tell him?

'Gbenga, there is nothing. You know I can't hide anything from you now.' Those were the words I told Gbenga before he could let go of the issue. I knew Gbenga was curious but there was nothing I could do about it. I could not allow my past with my parents to destroy my future with Gbenga.

I chose not to imagine what would happen by the time Gbenga would decide to meet my parents. I believed that I would cross it when I get there. I enjoyed all my moments with Gbenga. He was everything I could pray for in a man.

After a stressful day at work, I saw my mum's car already parked outside. 'What are they looking for again?' I asked myself

in annoyance. 'Have they come to embarrass me again?'

'Janet, I am sorry for everything. Please, get into the car. Let's talk. As you can see, I came alone.' I didn't even notice that my dad was not in the car. I agreed to enter the car to avoid any embarrassment.

'Please, make it snappy.' I could not withstand her sight.

'Your dad and I love you so much, that is the reason for what he did.' I was wondering what she was talking about because no woman in her right senses would say that abuse is equal to love.

'Mum, do you know what you are talking about?' I asked her.

'Yes, he said you were hanging out with a smoker which he scolded you for and you decided to leave the house to go and live with him. My daughter, that guy will not take care of you.'

'Hold it there mum! Is that what he told you? Oh my God, that man is a liar.' I knew my mum would be surprised at my reaction. She knew I was so close to my dad. I didn't even allow her to say a word before I got out of the car and slammed the door.

I was so mad at myself for allowing that man to deceive me. He was worse than a devil. How could he have said something like that about me? He was the reason for my predicament. I cried my eyes out that night.

CHAPTER FIVE

I was having headache and feeling dizzy at the same time. That wasn't the best time to fall sick. I had to take a break from work. Gbenga was supposed to be a nurse because he knew how to take good care of me.

'Babe, I think you need to see a doctor.' Gbenga suggested as he served me hot noodles that had vegetables parading in it.

'I will be fine,' I muttered. Gbenga insisted that I should go to the hospital. I managed to have a warm water bath the following morning.

HIV is real, use condom. The words from the poster on the wall caught my attention as I was waiting to see the doctor.

God forbid! I said inside of me as if the words were directed to me.

It was my turn to see the doctor. I felt so heavy to stand up as the thought of HIV kept coming back to my mind. Could it be HIV? Gbenga and I have had unprotected sex many times. I didn't know why those thoughts were coming to my mind.

'Good morning, ma.' The doctor greeted. He gave me a paper to take to the laboratory which I did.

Ouch was the sound I made as the nurse dipped a syringe into my arm to withdraw my blood.

'Congratulations ma. You are six weeks pregnant,' the Doctor said with a smile on his face.

'What!' I covered the shock with a smile and asked if I could do a HIV test. He said it was conducted alongside series of test which showed that I was negative. I didn't know if I should be happy or sad; happy because it wasn't HIV and sad because pregnancy was not part of my plans.

Abortion was not even an option. I had no choice than to tell Gbenga. I didn't know if he would be excited or sad. I didn't know how he would react. I left the hospital not happy because I didn't expect a baby as I had been taking contraceptive.

I laid on my chair waiting for Gbenga to come so I could disclose the news to him. I was not young to be a mother at twenty-five but I was not just ready. It wasn't about the shame. At least, I had been pregnant at seventeen.

Gbenga was very happy to see me again. He asked about what the doctor said.

'Hmmm. He said I am pregnant.'

Gbenga couldn't hide his joy when I broke the news to him. He lifted me from the chair and rolled me like a baby. Truly, he was happy.

'I think it's high time you met my parents,' Gbenga said with enthusiasm.

'Not so soon dear,' I objected.

'No, no, no, we need to make the wedding plans before that boy in you begins to grow.' We both chuckled.

I cat-walked in the room. 'So I will be Mrs. Janet Gbenga-Dada,' I said. We both laughed about that. We fixed a date to meet his parents.

The joy that my shattered life was becoming smoothed again filled my heart as we were driving to Ogbomoso to meet Gbenga's parents.

My joy was like the flash of light— it didn't last long. The fire of sorrow was rekindled.

CHAPTER SIX

The compound was beautiful to behold. The green flowers complemented the paintings on the wall. The house was well furnished and the tiles were shiny. The look of the house wasn't like an average Nigerian own, it showed wealth and prestige.

'*Ekasan ma.*' I greeted the woman that came out to welcome me with my knees kissing the ground. She must be his mother because there was so much resemblance.

'Good afternoon, my daughter,' she responded with a smile on her face. 'My husband will soon join us, make yourself comfortable.'

'Yes ma,' I answered her, looking at the glass of water I was holding.

'Gbenga, *omo mi*, you resemble your father, your wife is beautiful just like me.' We all laughed about it.

'Hope the journey was not too stressful?' A tall and lanky man asked as he moved towards the chair in the sitting room. My knees touched the ground to greet my father in-law.

'No, daddy, just the jumping up and down in the car due to the jollof rice pot on the road.' We all laughed as Gbenga made that statement. He has a good sense of humour. We all knew he was talking about Nigeria's bad road.

The usual interrogation started.

'What's your name? What do you do? You are from which

town? What makes you think that you will be a good wife?

The questions were coming back to back as if it was an oil company interview. I was on a hot seat. I gave them the answers as best as I could. I hoped they would accept me.

Gbenga's father called his wife aside to have a word with her. I was unable to hear their discussion as Gbenga was already engaging me in a chat.

Like a volcano eruption, I heard the mother. 'God forbid! My son cannot marry her!' She shouted.

I was shocked when I heard that, I didn't know what was going on. I didn't know when I stood in fear. What could have happened that would make a gentle dove turn to a roaring lion?

'Have your seat, Janet.' His father told me.

The heat in me was as if I was in hell. Everywhere suddenly became hot. I was now able to trace why Gbenga's father was looking at me awkwardly. I still didn't know why the change in atmosphere.

'Are you the daughter of Mr. Olajide Clement, the husband of Juliet Clement?

Fear gripped me as Gbenga's dad popped that question. Surely, he knew me very well.

'Yes, no, yes, yes sir.' I was stammering. My brain couldn't figure it out.

All that Gbenga's mum was saying was, 'My son cannot marry her, God forbid!'

'Daddy, mummy, what's going on here?' Gbenga stood to ask his dad.

He came to me, faced me and said, 'Babe, what's going on here?'

'Calm down, my son.' His father was trying to calm him down.

'Can someone just explain all this to me?' He asked in anger. I had never seen him that furious. Everything was just like a dream.

'My son cannot marry this empty basket!' The mother shouted as she readjusted her wrapper.

What did she mean by empty basket? I was trying to trace things in my head but I failed. My brain went blank.

'How would you of all the ladies in this world want to marry an after one?' The father asked calmly.

Then it dawned on me that nothing can be hidden forever. My little secret had been revealed. My question was how he knew. Boluwatife had been with my grandmother since when he was very young.

'Which one? Who is the one? Janet, tell me this is a lie. Tell me!' He screamed at me. I didn't know what to say. I became dumb. Tears were flowing down my eyes like a stream.

'She didn't tell you?' I could see the surprise on his dad's face. 'Ask her about her son, ask her about her relationship with her father. Ask her.' Those were his father's words to him.

What would my answer be?

I felt like the ground should swallow me. My ankle bones could not even hold my body as I fell to my knees with tears and said, 'Gbenga, I am sorry.' My hands held his ankles tight.

'Don't touch me!' He screamed as he kicked my hands off his legs.

'You are nothing but a liar and a prostitute. I am not even sure that the pregnancy is mine anymore.' The fury in him became greater.

'Is she pregnant and are you sure that the pregnancy is yours?' The mother asked curiously.

'I doubt it.' The father responded.

How could a day that was supposed to be the day of happiness turn to a sad one?

'It's yours. Please, don't do this to me. It's yours.' I couldn't even control the tears.

'No, Janet, I can't believe you. I don't even know you. Can you imagine?!' Gbenga was not wrong to say those words to me. My past had finally caught up with me. My life was over in my own very eyes. I thought everything that happened was supposed to be a secret. Truly, like they say, nothing is forever hidden.

My legs shook as I stood to leave the house. I could imagine what would be going through Gbenga's mind. I didn't need a new

I didn't need anyone to tell me that the relationship was over. All my dream of a happy future was just a mirage. My hope of

spending my life with Gbenga was nothing but a shadow.

As I found my way to the door to escape the torture from Mr. Dada's house, his father's last word was like a bomb as I never expected it. How did he know? How come a stranger could know so much about me? I didn't even know him. Finally, all hope of winning Gbenga over again was gone. Yes! All gone!

'Hope your father is not responsible for the pregnancy this time?' My legs crossed each other in shock when I heard that.

'Had she been pregnant for her dad?' I could understand how surprised Gbenga was.

My daddy had to tell me who Mr. Dada was to him. I couldn't wait for the vehicle to get to Ibadan. I needed to vent all my anger on him. He had to explain whatever he knew about all what happened at Mr. Dada's house.

Gba! Gba! Gba! That was how I was banging the gate of my father's house.

CHAPTER SEVEN

It was my mum that came to open the gate. We didn't have a gateman because my mum felt that he might be an abuser.

'Janet, welco...' She said smiling at me and opening her hands wide. I didn't go there to joke. I didn't even allow her to finish her words when I pushed her away from the gate.

'Where is your husband? Where is he?' I asked my mum without expecting an answer from her. I was walking as fast as I could with all the anger in me. My mum was walking fast to catch up with me.

'Where are you, you old fool?' I lost control of my mind and allowed the anger in me to have its way. I didn't see him in the sitting room so I headed straight to his bedroom. He was so surprised to see me.

'Who is Mr. Dada? Who is he?' I screamed at the top of my voice.

'I don't know what you are talking about,' he replied in defence of himself.

'You don't know who?' I asked as I held his cloth.

'Janet, leave your father alone,' she said authoritatively. Who did she think she was talking to? I was ready to cause my dad pain because of the pain he had caused me. My mum also would regret for not being a good mother.

'Your husband is nothing but a dog!' I told my mum to her

face. She didn't understand anything. She was put in the middle. Her mouth hung open as she wasn't expecting any drama.

'How did Mr. Dada know about us daddy? Answer me.' My dad was already shaking. I was ready to spill it all. I wouldn't be the only one in pain. We would experience it together.

'I don't know. I don't know any Mr. Dada.' My dad said to me, pitying his own life and the evil that was about to befall him. I knew my dad to be a liar. He wouldn't say the truth. He would do anything to cover up his little dirty secret.

When I discovered that he wouldn't say anything, I left the room and was running down the staircase. The staircase also felt the terror in the house as six feet were running on it simultaneously. My dad and mum were trying to catch up with me.

I headed straight to the kitchen and went for a stainless steel that had a sharp side with a wooden handle. Yes! I took a knife.

'Will you tell me now or I kill myself?' I screamed pointing the knife towards my stomach. We were all sweating profusely. My parents knelt almost immediately and started begging me. I could see the look that my mum gave to my dad.

'Please, Janet, please, okay, I will tell you. Just drop the knife.' My dad was persuading me.

'Who is Mr. Dada?' My mum shouted at my dad. I was sure she was curious also.

As my dad heard that, he was ready to tell me who Mr. Dada was, I dropped the knife. My parents stood on their feet and came near me. Anger and pain were mixed together in me. I was hurt.

My mum led me to the sitting room so that my dad would explain who Mr. Dada was.

'Janet, I will not lie to you, I don't know any Mr. Dada.'

'What!' I interrupted my dad. Could he be saying the truth? I doubted it!

'Ok, let me help you.' I remembered that I had saved a picture of Gbenga and his father from his WhatsApp status. I unlocked my phone and searched for the picture and showed it to him.

'Are you saying you don't know this man?' I asked in annoyance.

'Oh, the doctor,' he replied.

'I am lost here. Why am I the only one who doesn't understand what is going on?' My mum was already fed up.

'Which doctor?' I asked curiously.

'Ehm, ehm, Janet, can we talk about this later?' My dad requested.

'Hell no! We are saying it here now or I kill myself,' I said with all seriousness.

'Say it now o, say it now, I don't know what you are hiding. Say it now.' My mum was already angry at my dad maybe because I was talking about killing myself.

'The doctor, at the hospital, that day, then, you remember.' My dad started stammering. His words could no longer find balance.

'What are you saying? I will kill myself also.' My mum said as she locked my dad's cloth. My dad struggled to push her away from him. My dad could not afford to lose two people in a day so he had no choice than to talk.

'You know when you were at the hospital and you had complications. He was the doctor who helped you out.'

'Can you make yourself clear?' I asked with no iota of respect. My dad summoned the courage to say what we had been hiding for seven years. 'He was the one who delivered you of your baby.'

'Which baby?' My mum asked.

'Janet's baby!' My dad screamed. He was already frustrated. I knew he was ready for the worse.

'You mean Janet has a baby?' My mum could not control herself as she kept shouting. 'Jide has killed me. You have killed me.' She grabbed my dad's cloth.

'So how did he know that you were responsible for the child?' The question I asked my dad caught my mum unaware as she left my dad's cloth.

'Who did you say has the child? Who?' My mum asked as if she didn't hear what I said earlier. Tears were rolling down my mum's cheeks, she had been shattered. Her only child has a son for her husband.

'Tell me more, Jide, tell me more.' My mum kept crying.

'You had not woken up when the baby needed blood. He said they didn't have his blood group in the blood bank and he

requested for the father of the baby to donate blood. I deliberately kept it from you so that you won't feel bad. I am sorry, please forgive me.'

'Forgive you? You mean I should forgive you after you spoilt my life and destroyed my future?' My mum and I kept crying as I was saying those words.

'After I lost my virginity to you, after sleeping with me countless times, after carrying a baby I could not show to the world? Mr. Dada was supposed to be my father-in-law before your wicked act spoilt everything. I am already pregnant for his son and he is not going to marry me. Now, I am going to have two children with no father. Over my dead body will I forgive you!'

Before we knew it, my mum was already dragging her travelling box on the tiles.

'Juliet, where are you going to?' My dad asked as he was trying to stop her.

'I'm leaving you to enjoy your useless world. You betrayed me after all I have done for you. Men are evil!' My mum kept crying but I didn't care. At least, my mission was accomplished. We were not all going to be happy.

My mum ran out of the house with her box as my dad was unable to stop her. I walked out of the house with tears as my mum drove aggressively out of the house. The Clement's family had already been destroyed. It remained my dad in that whole big house.

The thought of how I was going to face Gbenga at work filled

my heart. I decided not to return to that radio station again.

The sun had already returned to its origin as I walked through the street of Ibadan with the aid of the street light.

I already found answer to the questions of my heart. I would never be free. Different thoughts kept running through my heart. I decided to settle for that popular saying: 'Rest comes only after death.' I needed that rest and I was going to get it that night.

CHAPTER EIGHT

I kept walking like a mad man as I thought of my suicide plan. I didn't want my death to be traceable to anything. I was avoiding news and the likes. I had a perfect plan.

I had bought rat poison on my way. I would take it in the bush where nobody could find me, then I would be declared missing. Wow! A perfect plan indeed!

I had seen a bush where my plan would be executed, where I would say goodbye to all my pains, where I would cross over to the other side.

'Yeh! Yeh! Leave me! Leave me!' That was all I could shout when two hefty men carried me from behind. They had covered my face with a cloth and I didn't know where they were taking me to.

The next thing I heard was 'gba' as the boot of a car was closed against me. I could only hear the noise of the wheels and tyres. Before I knew it, I was already in a room filled with different charms. I knew I was in for it.

It was as if there was a crying competition as different people continued to cry. I needed no prophet to tell me that they were ritualists.

Who did I offend that has not forgiven me? Why was I always running from one trouble to another? Truly, I wanted to die. That

was because I needed rest, not walking from one place to another to bring money for people. That meant that the pain still continues.

One old dirty looking man came in and scolded the guys who had left us to mourn for ourselves by ourselves.

'Why are they shouting? Don't you know that this place is a sacred place for the gods?' He said as he spat on the ground. No wonder the place was smelling.

He went outside and came in with a man who had a red cloth around his waist.

'You see, these ladies are the ones who will bring wealth for you. Can you still remember what I told you?' The old man asked him.

The man picked up a calabash and placed it on one of the ladies head. To my greatest surprise, I saw the lady fall down flat. He carried the lady, placed her on a mat and undressed her. I couldn't believe what I saw when he slept with her.

I wept as I began to hate myself for wanting to die in the first place. I didn't want that kind of death. I didn't know when I started saying beneath my lips 'Jesus, Jesus.' That was all I could say, at least everybody knows that Jesus is powerful. I wondered why I remembered to call Jesus. I hadn't called on him for a long time.

The calabash then went from the second person down to the sixth person. They were all dead. As the man stood up from his action upon the sixth lady, I knew death was knocking. It was my turn to cross to the other realm.

They were all surprised when I didn't fall down. I was

surprised also. What could have happened?

The old man was reciting different incantations as the man was panicking. The old man instructed him to try again but it was all the same.

'Aje ni e.' The old man said, touching my forehead with his index finger. How could he have called me a witch? I also didn't know what was going on.

'Are you pregnant?' He asked me. I knew that telling a lie was not going to save me as it had not saved me in the past.

'Yes, no, yes, yes.' The fear and the tension didn't allow me to get myself.

'No wonder!' The old man exclaimed. He turned to look at the man and said, 'We can't use this one o. She is carrying the precious gift of God. We dare not hurt her or else the god of children will fight against us. You will have to look for another lady who is free between now and daybreak to replace her so that you can finish the ritual or else, madness is calling o.'

I could imagine the horror in the man's face. He was scared to the earth. He was shouting '*Baba, Baba*, I didn't know it would be this hard.' The old man neglected his words as he went out of the room and the man followed him.

I didn't know if I should scream or cry. I was the only one left out of seven ladies. I was kind of happy for being pregnant as the pregnancy saved me. Wisdom demanded that I leave the house. I found my way out as the old man was busy with other things.

I left that house with nothing, I was all by myself. I didn't know that it was already day break until I felt a tap on my leg.

'Aunty, what are you doing here?' A dark short lady woke me up.

I had slept under a kiosk and I was looking like a mad woman as my cloths were tattered and rough. I didn't know the perfect answer to give her. I just nodded my head and said, 'I am fine.'

'Are you sure? Then why are you here?' She asked me out of curiosity.

I wondered why she was so concerned about me. A lot of people had passed and ignored me. I knew some would have thought that I was mad.

'Aunty, please, I am thirsty.' I was already drained and I needed strength.

'Ok, you know what? Can you wait here for me? I will be back in thirty minutes,' she replied as she hurriedly turned to go. It was then I thought I could still find my way home.

I quickly stopped her. 'How can I get to Challenge from her?' I asked.

I was shocked when she looked at me with surprise and said, 'You mean in Ibadan?'

'Yes'

She smiled. 'This is Oda town in Ondo state.'

CHAPTER NINE

'I need to go now. Please, I will see you soon.' She walked away.

Tears welled up in my eyes but I was not going to let them drop. I was not going to draw attention to myself as people were passing by my side with different colours of turban and tie. It was obviously a Sunday morning.

I could not even imagine that I had been brought all the way from Ibadan to Oda. Oh! What a wicked world! I didn't understand why the world had been so cruel to me. I was still lost in my thoughts when the dark lady tapped me again.

'I am back,' she said as she gave me a bottle of water. She was neatly dressed for church. Her blue turban was complementing her black blazer.

'Where are we going to?' I asked as she held my hand and started walking.

'Don't worry, you will be fine,' she replied.

I wanted to run because I didn't know who she was but I feared getting into a bigger trouble. At least, she was dressed for church.

'I can't follow you to church like this o,' I said as I called her attention to my shabby look. My hair was rough and dirty. Some parts of my cloth were torn and I was not even having a shoe on.

'Don't worry, I brought something for you.' She said as she

was showing me something from her bag that I didn't see.

'Oh! Thank you.' I just had to appreciate her for even helping out. I began to wonder how a total stranger could be nice to me.

'I am Joy Ademola. It's nice meeting you,' she said as we kept walking to her church.

'I am Janet Clement. The pleasure is mine,' I said before I drank the last portion of water I was holding.

'You must be from a rich family o,' she said, teasing me.

'Yes now, only rich people bare names like that,' she said. I had no choice but to smile.

She was talking to me as if we had known each other for ages but I wasn't too free with her. I had always had this trust issue. It wasn't my fault. My father that I trusted so much ended up hurting me.

I could see people in their twos and threes at the entrance of the church. Their service had not started.

I felt bad again when I saw the name of the church, 'Jesus loves you gospel church.'

It's a lie! Jesus could never love someone like me.

She took me to the church's restroom where she gave me a green long gown and some other toiletries.

'That's so thoughtful of you, thanks ma.' I was really grateful for her kindness towards me.

'I know it will be short on you but please manage it,' she said

as she hurried out of the place.

She was right. A long gown was looking like a three-quarter gown. I was indeed tall. I took all my time in the restroom because I just didn't feel like entering the church. I was able to cry my eyes out as there was water to clean it.

They had connected the sound system to the restroom also as the sound of 'praise the Lord, Hallelujah' kept ringing in my head.

I heard a knock on the door. 'You have missed half of the service already. Why did you take so long?' I guessed she was worried. I didn't have an answer to her question. I came out of the restroom and found my way to a corner at the back of the church.

A hymn book was passed across to me as somebody announced that it was time for hymn.

I was surprised when I saw Joy holding the microphone. I had always thought that choristers are proud people. I felt like I was the only one left out of the church as they were singing the hymn with joy.

'Yes! Jesus loves me. Yes! Jesus loves me. Yes! Jesus loves me. The bible tells me so.'

Series of activities like testimonies and choir ministration happened. It was time for the pastor to preach. I was so vexed when the pastor said 'the message for today's service is the love of God.'

'Why must it be about love? Why?' I kept wondering as it was as if the pastor was referring to me in his message.

'God loves you so much and he does not condemn you. All you need to do is to believe that he loves you and promise to love him in return. No matter where you are, who you are or what your life has become, the love of God surpasses it all. He is calling you to his kingdom so that you will experience love. He is not going to betray you...' He continued his message and he kept piercing my heart with those words.

'If you want to accept Jesus as your Lord and saviour, come forward.' I saw as some people were going towards the pulpit. People were clapping and shouting 'glory'. I began to wonder why they were so happy like that.

I didn't know if to go outside or stay back. A part of me said I should go out while a part of me said I should not. I remembered my life, my journey, the abortions, my family, Bolu, Gbenga and the pregnancy. I concluded that Jesus was not for somebody like me.

CHAPTER TEN

The service finally ended by 11:30am. I sat still, looking at those who were leaving the church when an usher came to meet me. I had filled the first timer form after I stood up for recognition.

Joy finally came to meet me some minutes to twelve. She had been in a meeting.

'Hope you enjoyed the service?' She asked me with enthusiasm.

'Yes.' What more could I have said? I didn't know why she didn't have a second thought about me. She didn't think about me hurting her. She was a reflection of her name. She was Joy indeed.

'Here is my humble abode,' she said when we finally got to her house.

'It's nice,' I replied. I sat on the black leather chair. The sitting room was a bit small but neatly arranged.

'I am still going to know more about you but not now,' she said as she moved towards the kitchen.

'There we go again! Why is everyone so concerned about my life? Can't we just erase this part of my life?' I was speaking to myself.

'That's impossible! It's your mess and you have to deal with it.' I replied myself.

It was as if there was a conference meeting in my mind as different thoughts filled my heart.

'Food is ready.' She served me noodles with water.

I ate like a hungry soul that day. Indeed! I was hungry. I took all my time in the bathroom after I finished my food. Crying was next to my hobby. I cried at every slightest opportunity I got. I was going to say the truth but not everything. I could not allow her see my dirty linen.

I explained to her how I was kidnapped and found myself in Oda town. She was touched by my story. She just kept saying that all is well.

'When do you plan to go back home so that I would be able to raise the transport fare?' She asked me.

'I'd go as soon as possible. Thanks for your care so far.' I was indeed grateful for the help.

'Okay then. Maybe you will take your leave the day after tomorrow because I will be so busy tomorrow,' she said.

I was watching a television programme when I heard a knock on the door. She was in her room that time. I went to tell her that somebody was knocking.

Guess who I found sitting on the chair? It was Tunde, one of my course mates in school. He was one of the people that disturbed me with Jesus talk those days.

'Tunde!' I exclaimed.

'Janet!' He replied as we hugged. 'What are you doing here?'

The noise from the sitting room made Joy to come out from her room.

'You two know each other?' She asked with surprise.

'Yes.' We both answered.

There was laughter in the atmosphere. Truly, they say that the world is indeed a small place. I could never imagine that I would see Tunde in Oda town.

'Wow! That's good. Anyways, Tunde here is my fiancé,' she said with a smile.

We all laughed and talked about how life after school is. Joy had explained to him how I was kidnapped and found myself in Oda. Tunde felt sorry for me.

The thought of Tunde and Joy getting married soon made me remember how good things were between Gbenga and me before my past intervened. At twenty-five, I didn't have a stable life. It was from one trouble to another.

I eavesdropped when Joy and Tunde were discussing about me. I had quickly gone to the toilet.

'How could you have let a stranger into your house? She might be harmful.' Tunde was confronting Joy.

'I am sorry but I just felt she needed help and I have this peace concerning her.' She defended herself.

'Ok dear, I just want you to be careful next time,' he said.

'Ok. Thank God you know her. I believe everything is not

coincidental. God is surely involved.'

I walked into the room and pretended as if I didn't hear anything. I was so happy when I knew Tunde was not mad at her for letting me in.

We continued our conversation when I teased him about how he used to carry bible round in school. He also teased me about how I didn't have time for God in school. Nothing had changed. We were both the same as we used to be. His life was better, mine was worse. The difference was clear.

I couldn't control how I was feeling. I felt like throwing up. I didn't want to mess up the place so I ran to the toilet. I managed to vomit on the tiles.

Tunde and Joy ran to me in the toilet. I washed my face with water and I used the helm of the gown that Joy had given me to wipe my face. Joy was nice enough to clean the toilet. I could hear the sound of the scrub on the bathroom tiles.

'Are you pregnant?' That was what Joy asked me immediately she came out of the bathroom.

How could she have thought that way? What if I was just sick? There was something about Joy that I could not trace. I could not hide my tears again as I began to cry like a baby. They were wondering why I was crying.

They kept on asking different questions. 'Is it the baby or the father? Is it financial issue?'

'It's not my fault. I don't know what to do.' I kept on crying as I was saying those words. They allowed me cried.

'You will be fine dear.' They kept consoling me.

I knew that I needed help and I could not help myself. I had to speak to someone. I could not cover up for long. I could not allow my life to continue in mess. I decided to open up.

I explained everything that had happened. I explained how my dad started sleeping with me since when I was thirteen. I told them how I had my first child. I told them about Gbenga and how the meeting with his family went wrong. I told them how I had caused separation between my dad and mum.

'Am I going to give birth to another bastard? Who will marry me? My life is just a waste.' Tears kept rolling down my cheeks as I said those words. They were dumbfounded. They didn't even know what to say.

'All is well, dear,' they kept saying but I doubted if all could ever be well.

'Let me just die and forget my sorrow. Let me die,' I said as I wept.

'You won't die, dear, you won't die. You shall not die but live to declare the works of God,' Tunde said as he patted my shoulder. My life was indeed a pathetic one.

I slept off on the chair and when I woke up, it was already 5am. I could hear Joy praying in the room. What amazed me was that she was crying at the same time. She came out of the room around six o'clock.

'Good morning. I didn't want to disturb your sleep that was why I left you on the chair,' she said.

I didn't see Tunde in the house and I wondered why he didn't sleep over. I smiled. *All these spirikoko people*, I said within me.

Joy was already dressed for work. She is a fashion designer. She told me how she needed to finish sewing a dress for her customer who would be travelling the next day.

'Please, make sure I meet you at home when I am back. Make yourself comfortable,' she said before she left the house. She was joking. I had concluded in my mind that I was going to leave the house no matter what.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I didn't want them to make me a laughing stock. They had known everything about me. I had prepared rice for myself and was ready to leave. How could Joy have left her house to a stranger? I had picked some money from one of her bags hanging on the wall.

It was time for me to leave the house and say goodbye to Ondo state. I was already buckling my shoes, the one she gave me the previous day.

'Janet, where are you going to?' It was Joy's voice. I didn't want to offend her so I had to lie.

'Ehn, I was bored and I decided to take a stroll. Why are you home? I thought you said that it's going to be a long and busy day.'

'The woman said she won't be travelling until next week so I decided to check on you,' she said as we both entered the house.

'Are you trying to run?' She asked.

'No, why would you say that?' I wondered how she knew I was lying.

'What's that in your hand?' She asked as she grabbed the money I was trying to hide behind me. I didn't know what to say again. It was too late to tell a lie, she already caught me.

'You stole from me? Why are you trying to run? You can't keep running Janet, no wonder my mind was here at home. Thank

God I yielded to the Holy Spirit.' I knew she was disappointed.

'I am sorry but I didn't want to inconvenience you. Please, forgive me,' I said as I knelt before her.

'Oh, good! By stealing from me *abi*? Just get up, please and try not to run next time.' She said as she tried to lift me up.

Tunde entered the house not quite long. 'I have been to your shop and it was closed so I decided to check you at home'.

Joy had to explain everything that happened to Tunde. He was really disappointed.

'Janet, you don't need all this, you can't keep running,' he said to me.

'I am sorry. I was just fed up.'

'All is well, dear. Anyways, I bought you this. I hope you like it.' He said as he gave me a blue polythene bag. That was so thoughtful of him. He bought me some clothes. I was indeed grateful.

'Thanks so much but I will be leaving tomorrow,' I said.

Tunde sat beside me. 'Don't you know you need help?' He asked. You have been running from the person that can help you. Do you know that you caused everything you have gone through?'

What was he trying to say? I could take anything except that. How was it my fault? And more so, there was no one to help me.

'No, Tunde, it wasn't my fault, I had nobody to help me.' I said in defence of myself.

'What about us? We were trying to help but you wanted to run,' Joy said as she came to sit beside me too. I was in the middle.

'We know that our help might not be all you need but there is a greater help that is available to all, only if you will allow him to help you.'

'I don't have a choice, I will allow him. Please, take me to him.'

'He is Jesus. He loves you so much and He is ready to help you only if you will allow Him and accept Him into your life.' Tunde said.

'No, Jesus is not for me. My life is miserable. How will He help a sinner like me? He is holy but I am stinky.'

'No, Janet. The doctor is not for a healthy man but a sick one. Jesus didn't come to save the saints but people whose lives are in a mess like yours. Jesus came for you and for everyone who cares to know,' Joy said to me.

'Yes, He is ready to give you a new life. He will not just open a new page for you, He is also going to give you a new book. He is ready to give you a life. All you need to do is to believe and accept him, Janet,' Tunde said.

I knew I could not run again. I knew I could not help myself. I kept crying. 'Jesus, help me. Help me, Jesus.'

They held my hands and Tunde asked me to repeat after him. 'Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner. Please, forgive me. I know and believe that you came to die for me. I want you to come into my

life. I want to accept you as my Lord and Saviour. I want to start living for you. Thank you Lord for saving me. Amen.'

I could not explain the joy that filled my heart that day. The day I got born again was a day I would never forget. I was grateful to God that I met Joy and Tunde. Their lives were a reflection of Jesus.

They both hugged me and encouraged me in the Lord. Joy taught me a song by Israel Houghton and it kept me going:

I'm not going back, I'm moving ahead. Here to declare to you, my past is over in you. All things are made new, surrendered my life to Christ. Moving, moving forward!

I was ready to live the past behind me. I was ready to face the world. I was ready to show the devil that he could only have my past, not my future. I was ready for the new me. I was ready to write a new story on a new page in the new book of my life.

Welcome the new Janet!

PART TWO

CHAPTER TWELVE

I didn't return to Ibadan the following day. They wanted to make sure that I was fine and I didn't go back to my vomit. I had found both God and true friendship in Oda. Joy and Tunde showed me the true definition of love.

I began to follow Joy to her shop where I started to learn tailoring. The baby in my womb was growing and my spirit man was growing also. I could read the bible not as a story book now but as a medium to hear from God. I had believed that when I opened the bible, God had something to say to me.

Everything was going on well with the three of us until I was in my third trimester. My pregnancy was close to nine months when I started feeling a sharp pain in my stomach. I went to the hospital for the regular ante-natal on Wednesday when I told the doctor about the pain.

A scan was done and the doctor told me one of the saddest things I have ever heard.

'I'm sorry to tell you this, the baby is dead.' I didn't believe my ears and I wanted to be sure if I heard him clearly.

'Which baby?! Doctor, which baby?! I shouted.

'As it is now, can I see your husband so I can discuss some things with him?' The doctor requested.

'No, doctor. He is not around and he is not coming around

soon. Please, speak to me. Please, doctor.' I had to be a strong woman before the doctor so I held myself from crying.

'The baby needs to be evacuated as soon as possible so that you will not lose your life but there is one more thing—'

I interrupted him. 'Which thing? Which thing?'

'Ma, you need to calm down. You might not be able to conceive again because your womb is already weak,' the doctor said.

'So you mean I won't be able to have a child after the evacuation?' I asked him as I held myself from crying.

He didn't answer my question but only said, 'I am sorry ma'.

My body was too heavy for me to lift due to the news I heard but I had no choice than to go home.

Joy met me crying in the sitting room when she came back from work. 'Why do you like crying this much? What is wrong this time?' She asked. She was right. Crying was the only thing I did anytime I was fed up.

'I thought you said I will be free. Joy, why am I still in bondage?'

'You are not in bondage in Jesus name. What are you talking about?' Joy asked out of curiosity.

'The doctor said that it's either I lose my womb or I die.' I continued to sob.

'God forbid! You shall not die but live. Tell me exactly what the problem is,' Joy said as she tried lifting me up from the ground to the chair.

I explained everything the doctor said to me and kept crying. 'If I lose my womb, who will marry a barren woman? Also, I don't want to die.'

Joy was indeed a strong woman. She went into the room and brought out my bible.' Open Jeremiah chapter 29, verse 11. Open it and read.'

'For I know the thought that I have towards you, the thought of peace and not of evil to give you an expected end.'

'Yes, that is God's plan for you. He has you in mind. His plans for you are good. You are not going to die neither will you lose your womb and I don't believe the baby is dead. That is the doctor's report, not God's report.' Those were the words of Joy to me that day. I didn't know where she got her faith from.

She had told Tunde about the new development and he encouraged me also. Those two were fire together. I didn't have that kind of faith because I was so scared. They kept praying and asking me to claim different promises in the bible.

'Do you believe in miracle?' Tunde asked me.

'Hmmm, yes, see, I don't even know. I am scared.' I was indeed scared. It was the fourth day after I visited the hospital.

'Janet, you are now a child of God, you have not been given

the spirit of bondage to fear,' Tunde said.

I couldn't help myself. I didn't want to lose my womb and death was the last thing I wanted to experience. It seemed as if I was the only one in the battle of life.

Tunde had barely completed his words when I felt a very strong sharp pain in my stomach. It was a severe one. Tears started dropping as I was screaming. 'My stomach! My stomach!'

Joy started basking in tongues as they were trying to lift me from the ground.

Thank God Tunde had a car. He drove speedily. In a minute, we were at the hospital. I kept screaming. Joy kept speaking in tongues. 'Jesus, Jesus,' Tunde kept saying.

It was a day to remember. I knew that all hope was gone. I was silently praying that God should save my life even if it would cost me my womb. Death is not an option.

I lost all hope of living when the doctor looked at me, shook his head and said, 'Madam, I warned you.'

I was taken to the theatre and I didn't know what happened afterward. When I woke up, I saw that a caesarian section had been done on me. The cries of babies around made me notice that I had been moved to the ward. I turned to look around when I saw Joy smiling at me. I didn't quickly know why she was smiling until I heard a crying baby near me.

'Whose baby is this?' I asked. I was curious.

'It's yours. Congratulations,' she said as she smiled at me.

I was in awe. I could never imagine that I could make it through. I was surprised because the doctor said the baby was dead.

'What happened? Joy, what happened?' I asked her. I needed to know more.

Just when Joy wanted to answer me, the doctor walked in and said, 'Congratulations ma'. I asked him what happened and he said, 'This would be one of its kind that I have ever seen since I started practising. The operation done on you was to remove the dead baby only to find out that she was alive. I am sure she was dead when the scan was done. That was the reason you were having severe pain in your stomach. More so, your womb is perfectly fine. Just take enough rest. Indeed, I must tell you that your child is a miracle.'

Those words from the doctor made me shed tears. This time, it was the tears of joy. Joy faced me. 'Didn't I tell you that we serve the living God? I told you that there is nothing that will not subject to the name of Jesus.'

I could not express my joy as we were leaving the hospital the sixth day. Tunde had come to pick us. I was leaving with my miracle child.

'Tunde, Joy, thank you for everything. May you never lack help when you need it. God will make the big day glorious and your union shall be blessed.' I prayed for them from the bottom of my heart.

The following day was the naming ceremony. Joy had bought me a gown. She and Tunde had been taking care of all my expenses those while. The ceremony was a four-man own—Tunde, Joy, my baby and me.

I named her Freedom because it was during her pregnancy that I met Christ. Joy named her Iyanuloluwa because she was a miracle child. Tunde named her Jesudunsin. Indeed, there is joy in serving Jesus.

We all prayed for her that she would be the reflection of her name.

Just after the prayer, I looked at Freedom and said 'How I wish your father was here.'

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Freedom was growing older and Joy's wedding was fast approaching. I needed to earn a living because I could not put all my responsibilities on Tunde again. Joy advised me to go get my credentials from Ibadan before my two years rent would expire.

We travelled to Ibadan to get my things. We looked for a truck to help me pack everything to Oda. That was how I officially moved to Oda.

Joy's big day came. It was her wedding. I was so happy for her but I felt like she should not go because I was going to miss her. She had been taking good care of Freedom and me.

'I will miss you. Hope this won't be the end?' I asked her a week to her wedding.

'No, my dear. I will come and check on you. More so, Akure is just some minutes from here.' She assured me.

I watched the two as they exchanged the marital vows. 'To love and to hold, for richer or poorer, for better or worse.' I watched them as they said, 'I do'. It was a beautiful thing.

The couple went on their honeymoon. Freedom and I were the ones left. Tunde had helped me to sell most of my loads as Joy already had them. I used the money to start up a business. I took over Joy's shop and I continued selling tailoring materials that she used to sell there before she moved to Akure with her husband.

I knew that only God could restore my shattered life. Different thoughts were coming to my mind. Thoughts of how I would never survive as Joy and Tunde would never remember me. What if Freedom dies in the middle of the night? I thought of how I could not find a better life unless I move to Ibadan. Thoughts of how I would remain single for life were coming.

I knew that was the devil's strategy to bring me down and I refused to give in. I decided to cast down all imaginations and everything that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ. I decided to bring everything in obedience to Christ.

I knew I was in for battle and I was ready for it. I made prayer my lifestyle and I made the study of the word of God my priority. I would pray for Freedom and myself. No one would fight this battle for me but me with God on my side.

'Father, there is nothing you cannot do. I know my life has been shattered but not beyond what you can amend, oh Lord. Father, no one could ever imagine that anything good could come out of Rahab. My father, if you did her own, you can do mine also. Lord, give me a life, give me a future. Lord, I can't afford to remain single for life, please, help me. Open a new page for me. The thoughts you have for me are those of peace and not evil to give me an expected end. Father, give me a new life.'

Those were some of my words during my prayer time as I would weep in the place of prayer. I believed my tears would touch God. I continued in prayers and kept trusting God for a change.

It was a Wednesday morning when Joy called me. 'Guess what?' I told her that I could not guess. She told me that Tunde read on the newspaper that a radio station would be coming to Oda to establish and that they were in need of staff.

'Joy, I am not interested *jo*. Let me just face my business *jare*.'

'What are you saying? How much are you making from that your business? At least, you should apply for this and merge the income together. Come on girl, you are applying for that job.' Joy had this way of talking me into doing something.

She sent me the e-mail address of the radio station and I submitted my CV and cover letter. My hope of getting the job was gone as I didn't receive any message from them after three months of sending my CV.

I had gone to the shop after I took Freedom to school. She was already two years old when I received a mail that I had been invited for an interview at Life Moves radio station the following Monday. I called Joy to share the good news with her and we were both happy. I knelt in a corner of my shop and said, 'Thank you Jesus.' I knew my prayers were working already.

I hurried to drop Freedom at school and headed straight to the radio station. The interview was scheduled for eight o'clock and by seven-thirty, I was the twentieth person. I knew that I had a long time to stay at the radio station.

Each person was going for their interview and it would soon

be my turn. A thought flashed through my mind that I would not get the job. Almost immediately, I started to rebuke it and spoke in tongues in my mind. I could not afford not to get the job as my bills were already increasing.

Finally, it was my turn and I entered the office just to meet no one on the seat. I was surprised and wondered who conducted interview for the rest. My mind was a bit at rest when I heard the sound of water from the restroom. I guessed he or she must have gone there to get some ease.

I was still contemplating if I should go out or stay inside when somebody that looked like Gbenga came out of the restroom. Oops! It was him. I knew my thought was finally going to come to pass. I wanted to go out of the office when he said, 'Ma, sorry I delayed you. You can have your seat.'

I was surprised at Gbenga's reaction. He pretended as if he didn't know me.

The interview went on normally and I was wondering why Gbenga would react like that. I lost my confidence in the presence of Gbenga. I was just acting awkwardly. I knew I could not get the job. Soon, my interview was over.

I called Joy immediately I got to my shop. I told her everything.

'Are you sure it was Gbenga you saw? She asked me.

'Won't I recognise Gbenga? Won't I?' I asked.

'Janet dear, you know what? All is well.'

'I was not willing to go for this job before if not that you insisted. Now, my past is here again after I am already healing.' I lamented.

After two weeks, I received a mail that I had got the job. It was like a dream. I picked my phone and called Joy as usual.

'Hello, I got the job,' I said, not out of happiness but surprise.

'Wow! God is good,' she said.

'Why are you happy now? I don't think you should be happy about it after everything I told you.'

'Janet, what exactly is your problem? You've got to be grateful. You can't spend the rest of your life in bitterness, my dear.' Joy loved to act like a mother to me.

'Joy, you know what? Just forget about it. It's not possible for me to be working under my ex-boyfriend.' I didn't end the call well that day.

'How will I face him at work and everything? God forbid! Gbenga belongs to my past and that is where he will remain,' I said to myself.

The thought of Gbenga and everything that I had gone through was on my mind. I stayed in a corner of my shop and prayed.

I said, 'God, help me to let go of my past. Help me to let go of bitterness. Lord, help me.'

I went to pick Freedom from school and continued my life.

After two weeks, I received a call from a number I didn't save. I didn't know who it was until I picked it.

'Hello!' I said.

'Hello! How are you?' It was a masculine voice. Who could it be?

It was Gbenga's voice over the phone. I didn't even allow him to say a word more.' What do you want from me? Why are you calling me? Just leave me alone!' I shouted and ended the call.

I sat on a chair as I was tapping my right foot on the floor. I was indeed angry. Why would Gbenga be calling me after he had neglected me and my baby?

I was still boiling when I received a message. 'Hello, just wanted to ask you why you haven't resumed work. Hope you are fine? How is my baby? Please call me as soon as you read this text.

His baby? He must be joking. The baby he didn't accept or which one? It wasn't his fault. If I had not gone to that radio station, he wouldn't be telling me trash.

I started feeling bad about how I reacted to Gbenga over the phone. The Holy Spirit was drawing my attention to it. I wanted to ignore it but it kept coming. My flesh didn't want to speak with Gbenga again but my spirit wanted me to. There was a battle in my mind and one had to win.

I just said, 'Lord, help me to do the right thing. Help me to let go.' Though it wasn't easy but I made a decision to let the flesh lose. I picked up my phone and replied his last message.

'I am sorry for how I reacted to you.' That was all I could say. Not more than five minutes, he called me. I was ready to speak to him in a normal tone.

'Hello,' I said.

'How are you, Janet? He asked.

'I am fine and I am sorry about the last time,' I said.

'You are forgiven.' He chuckled at his end and I smiled at my end. Gbenga still had that sense of humour.

'How is my baby?' He asked.

'Her name is Freedom and she is fine.'

'Janet please, let's see and talk. We need to talk.'

'No, nothing to talk about,' I told him sharply.

'Please, Janet, please, please, please, please and ple...'

'Ok, ok, you won.' At least, he would stop begging.

I called Joy to tell her about it and she told me to apply wisdom in dealing with him.

Tomorrow was near and I imagined how the meeting would go. Was it going to end well? Would it end in tears?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The following day was Sunday and I was already prepared to meet Gbenga. I promised myself that I would be strong. We had already agreed on where to meet.

'I am here.' That was what Gbenga said as I turned around to look for him. Gbenga had always been handsome as before. It had been three years that I saw him. He was still looking so elegant and his dress sense was still amazing.

'Thanks for coming,' he said as he smiled at me.

'You are welcome. So why am I here?' I already concluded that I was going to keep all our conversations short and precise.

'Janet, I am so sorry for everything. Please, forgive me. I am so sorry.' I didn't know what to say. I sipped the bottle of coke that was in front of me. I didn't say a word.

'Janet, I know you have the right to be offended but please, just hear me out.' I didn't say a word which made him continue to plead.

'Please, hear my own side of the story.' That statement got me angry. Why should I hear him out? What did he have to say?

'Gbenga, you see, I don't seem to get your point. Hear you out for what? Answer me! After you humiliated me in front of your family? You didn't care about me Gben...' He cut in.

'I care about you. I looked for you, Janet, as much as I could. I didn't see you.'

'Really? Go on, go on,' I said without any iota of belief.

'Janet, I know you might not believe me but that's the truth. I went to your house the following day and I was told you didn't go back to that house since we left together. In fact, they were thinking you were with me. Janet, you blocked me on all social media platforms. How do you expect me to have reached you? How Janet?'

I could feel the pain in Gbenga's heart. It wasn't his fault indeed. I was wrong for running away totally. I needed to apologise also.

'Gbenga, I am sorry, sorry for hiding the truth from you all the while. I am sorry for not trusting you enough to accept me for who I am. I am sorry for running away from everything.'

'Janet, does that mean you have forgiven me?' He asked eagerly.

'Yes, I have. We need not play blame game anymore.' I felt a relief in my heart. I had completely forgiven Gbenga.

'How about my child? Hope she looks like me?' He chuckled.

'She is fine, she looks like her mother.' We both laughed.

'Janet, and there is something I need to tell you o,' he said. What could it be?

'Ok, go on,' I said quickly.

'Janet, I know a lot has happened in your life and things may not be going as expected but I want you to know that God loves you still. God can give you a new life only if you accept Jesus

his....' I was really surprised, not because of those words but because it was coming from Gbenga. What could have happened?

'Are you trying to preach to me?' I interrupted him.

'Yes, that is the best gift I can offer you now. You don't know how happy I was when I saw your CV for the job,' he said.

'You mean you are now born again?' I asked again in surprise.

'Yes, I am. I know you would be surprised.' He was right. I was indeed surprised.

'Wow! Wow! Wow! Gbenga, I am born again too.'

'Are you serious?' He asked in awe.

'Yes!' I explained everything to him from how I was kidnapped, then to Joy's house, then to the baby.

'I am happy for you, Janet.' Indeed! We were happy for each other. I asked him how he got to Oda and about his radio station.

'It all started two years ago when I accepted Christ. I felt God was leading me to have my own radio station. God wants me to make a difference in the broadcasting sector. I had wanted to have it in Oyo state but I kept hearing Ondo state. I didn't know why. Though it wasn't easy for me to leave Ibadan, thank God I am here now.'

'Wow! God is good,' I said as I sipped my coke again. We talked about different things— the baby, career and even spiritual life. He had said that he wished to see Joy and Tunde for helping me in reshaping my life.

'So, how are your parents?' He interrupted the discussion with that. Could I even say it out that I had not spoken to my parents for three years?

'Gbenga, let's not go there. Please.' I begged him.

'Talk to me now, let's go there o.' Gbenga just has his funny ways of conversation.

'I don't know,' I answered sharply.

'You don't know?' He raised his brows.

'Yes, I don't know and I don't want to know. You know what? This conversation is over!'

My parents were the last thing I wanted to talk about.

'Janet, we are talking about your parents here, you know? Do you mean you have not spoken to your parents since then?' I could see the surprise on Gbenga's face as he asked me.

'Gbenga, I am sure you heard me clearly. I said yes!' I snapped.

'Janet, you said you are now a child of God, aren't you supposed to forgive your pare...'

'Gbenga, just hold it there! I didn't even know why I came here in the first place. If you were in my shoes, I know you would have done worse than that. Gbenga, have a wonderful night.' I took my purse and left the restaurant angrily.

I shouldn't have done that, right? It wasn't my fault. I had been really hurt.

Getting home, I met two pairs of shoes in front of my apartment. I was wondering where it came from until I opened the door to meet Joy and Tunde in my living room. I remembered that she had a spare key to my house.

'And where is our mummy coming from dressed like a queen?' Joy had always loved to tease me.

'We decided to pay you a surprise visit. Where is my Jesudunsin?' Tunde asked.

'She is with the neighbours. Thanks for coming,' I replied.

'How did it go?' Joy moved closer to me as if she was expecting a full note of gist.

'Nothing much happened *jare*.' I explained how everything happened between Gbenga and me. They were really happy that Gbenga was saved but they were displeased at how the meeting ended.

'You shouldn't have done that, Janet. Learn to be more patient.' Joy always scolded me whenever I was wrong.

'More so, what he was telling you is for your good. These are your parents here,' Tunde said.

'In fact, God cannot entrust you with big things if you fail in this. You need to forgive your parents,' Joy told me.

She was right. How would I move into a realm of new page when I was still holding on to the formal chapter? I knew I needed to let go but it was not easy.

'Joy, it's not easy for me. I have tried.'

'Lord, we pray that you help your daughter let go of the past. Father, help her to forgive her parents.' These were the words from Tunde as we prayed together.

That was how my journey to forgiving my parents started. It was not as easy as I thought.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I knew it was right for me to apologise to Gbenga. I decided to send him a text.

I am sorry about today. I didn't mean to be rude. Thanks.

He replied almost immediately: *Apology accepted. Have you thought about what I told you?*

'Yes, I have.' The reply was in my mind.

I knew I needed to do the right thing. I needed to make peace with my family. I had already prepared to go to Ibadan the following weekend. I took Freedom to Joy's place.

On Saturday morning, by 8, I was already at the car park at Akure. I was sitting at the front seat and was looking forward for the next passenger to come. I didn't want to get to Ibadan late because I was going to return that evening.

It remained five people before the bus would move when my phone rang. It was Gbenga.

'Hello, good morning,' I said.

'Hope you are good? That place is noisy. Can you please move away a little?' He was right. The noise of the traders and the conductors could not make a melody.

'No, I can't, I am at the park. I will soon be on my way to Ibadan,' I answered.

'Ibadan? What are you going to do there?' He asked.

'Didn't you say that I should forgive my parents? That is exactly what I am going there to do.' I told him.

'Wow! Wow! Wow! The funny thing is that I have a conference to attend at Ibadan, if you don't mind I can give you a ride. I am dressed up already,' he said.

He promised to join me in the next thirty minutes. I left the bus and was standing close to the road to wait for Gbenga.

A red car parked in front of me. It was Gbenga. I entered the car and we zoomed off.

I enjoyed my first ride to Ibadan after a long time. The journey of three hours was like twenty minutes as we talked and talked. I had never gone on a long journey with him aside our journey to Ogbomosho then which later ended in tears.

'Janet, I am happy for you. Just be strong, okay? Everything will be fine.' Gbenga had begun to take the place of Joy. He was acting like a father, not my dad.

'Okay, I will. Thanks for the ride, bye.' I stepped out of the car and headed straight to our house.

Everywhere had changed. It was over three years. I knocked the gate.

I waited for close to five minutes before someone came to open the gate. It was my dad. He was surprised to see me.

'Janet! Janet!' My dad called me in surprise.

'Yes daddy, it's me,' I said as I opened my arms for a hug. My dad hugged me in return and he started saying, 'I am sorry. Janet, please forgive me.'

We walked through the compound to the living room and he kept on saying, 'please, forgive me'.

'Dad, if I hadn't forgiven you, I wouldn't be here,' I told him as tears dropped from my eyes. The view of the house brought back memories.

'Janet, thank you for coming. My life has already crumbled and I kept thinking if I would be lonely all my life.' There was sympathy in his voice.

'Daddy, I am sorry for destroying your marriage. I am sorry for handling everything carelessly. I am sorry, daddy,' I said with tears in my eyes. There is nothing indeed like having a family.

I explained how everything happened and he really felt for me. I didn't bother to ask of my mum because I knew it was going to cause him more pain.

I knew there was no better time to introduce Jesus to my dad than that time. I said, 'Dad, do you know why I came back and was able to forgive you?'

'No, Janet, I was surprised when I saw you today,' he said.

'Dad, it is because I have met Jesus. Jesus has turned my life around and opened a new page for me. He will also do the same for you only if you give him a chance. Daddy, Jesus loves you irrespective of what you have done. He is ready to forgive you only if you allow him.' These were my words to my dad that

Saturday afternoon.

I wasn't surprised to see my dad crying like a baby. He had done a lot of things that could make him cry like that.

'Janet, I have not been a good father neither was I a good husband. I have committed a lot of atrocities and my hands are full of blood.' He kept crying as he said it. I doubt the saying that men don't cry.

'Dad, Jesus has come for you. Just accept him,' I told him as I tapped his shoulder as if I was petting him not to cry again.

'My life is miserable, Janet. Leave Jesus out of this, let me suffer for my sin, let me suffer.'

Why would my dad want to suffer for his sins after Jesus had done that for all mankind? Truly, it's easy to convince a child than an adult.

Around 5pm, Gbenga called me. He told me to get set as he was about leaving the venue of the conference. He asked for the house address which I did. Gbenga arrived in thirty minutes time and I bid my dad farewell.

As we drove, I started to think about how Gbenga appeared into my life again. Was he up to something? I didn't want to insinuate that his act of kindness meant something else. Before I knew it, we were already at Akure.

'Gbenga, just drop me at the park. I will find my way home,' I told him because I didn't want to be a burden to him.

'No, no, no. I will drive you to Oda and drive back here to avoid another story that touches the heart.' He chuckled as he said that. I knew he was referring to the kidnap incident.

'That's so kind of you. Thank you so much. God bless you.'

Gbenga dropped me at the front of my house and zoomed off. I got home around half past eight at night. I began to thank God for the strength he gave me to forgive my dad. I knew it was only prayer that could turn the heart of my father to God and I decided to keep doing that.

Gbenga came around the next day. This time, Freedom was around. I had gone to pick her from Joy's place after church.

'Wow, my baby is all grown o,' he said as he saw Freedom.

'Good afternoon sir,' Freedom greeted even though her words were not so clear.

I placed Freedom on my laps and said, 'Freedom, this is your daddy. Call him daddy.' At least, she had the right to know her father. Gbenga was so excited when Freedom muttered, 'Daddy.'

In my heart of hearts, I wished it could last forever. I never wanted Gbenga to leave but obviously, he didn't feel the same way. He came for his daughter. I just kept trusting God to give me my own man. Though it looked impossible, I had decided to trust God to give me the best.

I kept checking on my dad to know his well-being and kept

reminding him about Jesus. I never stopped praying for him and my mother that God should save their souls too.

Six weeks after the first visit to my dad, he called me. I had missed his calls and he was calling for the seventh time. I didn't know why he was calling me like that.

'Janet, there is fire on the mountain,' he said.

'Fire? How? Where?' I asked him hastily.

'Just come and see me, please. We can't talk about it on phone.'

I could feel the urgency in my dad's voice. I decided to travel to Ibadan as I kept wondering.

What could the fire be?

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

I had dropped Freedom with Joy as usual. I left Oda as early as 7am and headed straight to the car park at Akure. I got to my dad's house some minutes to noon.

'My life is completely over now, Janet. My world is crumbling right before my eyes,' he said, panicking.

'Dad, please, stop speaking in parables. Come out straight,' I told him as I had no idea of what he was saying.

'I heard from my lawyer friend that your mum will be getting married to one man next month,' he said as he kept shaking his legs.

'Married? Were you officially divorced?' I asked him surprisingly.

'No! Janet, no! I didn't sign the divorce papers. I didn't!' My dad said at the top of his voice.

It got to my heart as I felt that I had destroyed my parents' home. I knew it was time for me to be strong. I needed to put all my faith to action.

'Dad, you are not going to lose her. She is your wife and nobody is taking her from you!' I told him boldly.

'Are you sure?' He asked in doubt.

'Yes, only if you allow Jesus to help you. You can't keep running from the only one who can heal your wounds. Now is the

best time to accept Jesus.'

'I can't run. I can't run. I need this Jesus. I need help,' my dad said as he kept sobbing. No one could imagine that he had loved my mum that way. I led him through the sinner's prayer.

'Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. Please, forgive me. I believe that you died for my sin. I want to accept you as my Lord and Saviour. I want to become your son. I promise to live for you and please you as from today. Thank you for saving me.'

I took my dad through some minutes of bible study. I let him know who he is in Christ. I told him about how God is interested in every area of his life and that his marriage is not left out.

'Dad, your wife is coming back. We will keep praying.'

'I pray so. My daughter, I pray so,' he said.

I could not contain the joy that I had in me as I stepped out of the house. I called Joy and said, 'Daddy is now born again.'

I had no choice than to pray. I knew things had gone bad but I didn't want it to get worse. I knew it was only prayer that could bring my family together.

The following day, I decided to call my mum. I didn't know if she had changed her number that I knew by heart. I had to give it a try.

The person you are calling is on another call... That came from the service provider. I was happy that it went through. I hoped she called back. My phone rang and she was the one

calling.

'Hello, mummy,' I said.

'Is that Janet? Janet, where and how have you been?' I could sense the surprise in her voice.

'Janet, I am sorry for everything. I am sorry for not being there for you. *Ma binu, omo mi*,' she said.

'Mum, I have forgiven you but we need to talk ma,' I said.

'Ok, my dear. I will be at my office tomorrow,' she said.

'No, mummy. Send me your home address. I will see you by weekend.'

The conversation ended well and I received a text afterward. I had dropped Freedom with Joy as usual so I could travel early the following day.

I had left my house as early as 6 o'clock so I could get to Lagos early. Yes, Lagos! My mum had relocated to Lagos. I got to Lagos some minutes to noon. I found my way to her house. I was just praying in my heart that God should take control of everything.

The gateman allowed me in because my mum had told him that I would be coming. The compound was beautiful to behold.

I couldn't imagine what I saw when I entered the house. I saw my mum and one short man kissing in the sitting room. They didn't even notice that I had entered the house until I screamed. 'Mum! What's this?'

They both readjusted after which my mum said, 'Janet, oh, you are here?' In my mind, I felt like replying her that, ' No, I am there.'

The man was not even as handsome as half my dad. I didn't even know what my mum saw in him.

'Mum, what is this? How could you have done this?' I asked angrily.

'Janet, it's not what you think. It's not what you think, my dear,' she said.

'Ehn ehn! Like seriously? When did you turn to this?' I asked. The reply I got from that question struck my heart.

'I turned like this when you started sleeping with my husband, when you decided to have a baby for him, when your father cheated on me with you, when I walked out of that house.' Her words were like sword that opened a healing wound.

'Mum, why are you talking like this? I was young and innocent. I knew close to nothing. You were supposed to be my best friend but I didn't see you. You left me in his hands.' My words came out of pain and anger. Why would my mum blame me for everything?

'I was out for you. I wanted the best out of life for you. I wanted you to live so comfortably. I wanted the best for my family.' I could see pain in the eyes of my mum as she said those words. We were both in pain, the pain of the heart.

'Live comfortably? By making me have a baby at seventeen? By making me to sleep with that man every night? Answer me,

mum! Answer me!' My mum could not say a word again as she bent her head in shame.

I had to quickly get myself back. I didn't go there to blame anyone or bring back the past. The past is meant for the past.

'Mum, you can't marry him.' I was trying to point to the man when I discovered that he had gone.

'Why?' She asked me in a way that I felt that my opinion didn't count.

'Mum, you have your husband, lawfully wedded husband!'

'You call that dog a husband? You are so funny!'

'Mum, I should feel worse than you but I have forgiven him. You should do the same.'

'No wonder! So this whole thing is about your dad? No wonder you called me. You see if that is the plan, then you have failed. I mean a total failure!' My mum was this action woman so I wasn't surprised by her reaction.

'Mum!'

'Don't mummy me! Please, tell that your stupid father he has failed. In fact, just leave my house.'

'Mum!' I called her in a way that indicated that I didn't get her point.

'You heard me clearly. Bye.' My mum left me standing as she walked away.

The meeting that was supposed to be for reconciliation

became indignation.

I walked out of the house confused. I didn't know what else to do. I knew I needed to see my dad. I went to the park and headed to Ibadan. I got to the house and was knocking the gate but nobody came to open. I decided to call my dad on phone but he didn't pick.

I was already worried if all was well. I wanted to turn back when I felt I should send him a text which I did. In less than two minutes, he replied.

'I will join you soon.' I was thinking that it's possible he went out when I saw his message. Not quite long, he came to open the gate.

'Dad, what happened to you? I've been standing here for over thirty minutes now.'

'Sorry, my daughter. I was just praying and I didn't want to be disturbed,' he said.

'Ehn ehn! *Baba aladura*. I am so happy for you, dad. May the good Lord answer your prayers.'

'Amen o,' he said as we walked together into the house.

'Why are you here? You didn't tell me that you would be coming.'

'Hmmmm, dad a lot happened today.' I narrated the whole drama that happened at my mum's house at Lagos. He was a bit sad.

'Janet, I believe God will touch her heart. But your mum shouldn't be doing that now?' He asked me rhetorically.

I ate dinner and went to bed. I heard a knock on my door and for sure, I knew it was my dad. I didn't know why he was knocking. The memory of how he abused me those days came back again.

No, no, no. This is not happening. No!

He kept knocking then he said, 'Janet, open the door. Let us pray.'

I felt a relief in my heart as soon as he said that. I didn't even know why I had that dirty thought in the first place.

We prayed for about two hours. We didn't have any other prayer point than that my mum would come back to my dad. My dad was praying with so much energy and I felt for him. The devil had really taken from him but he was ready to take it back.

I went back to Oda and my normal life continued. Day by day, the wedding of my mum was close. My dad had given me the venue of the wedding which he got from his lawyer friend. My faith was already fainting and my dad had already lost hope.

The Friday to the wedding, I found my way to Ibadan. I had to convince my dad into praying against the wedding. He had lost hope.

On Saturday morning, I got dressed and was ready to go for the wedding. I wasn't going out of happiness but I was going there to see if the Lord would perform a miracle. I was hoping for

a last minute miracle as I journeyed to Lagos.

Will I ever be free?

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The wedding was indeed going to hold as the court was already decorated. As the couple was dancing in, my mum sighted me. I saw the shock on her face which she tried to hide.

'Is there anyone here who has any reason these two people should not be joined? Let him speak.' That was the announcement that was made by the registrar. He made the announcement the second time. In my heart, I already gave up. I knew nothing could be done again.

At the third time of the announcement, a woman ran into the court room and said, 'Yes, this man is already married.'

The whole court was in a state of hullabaloo. People started murmuring. The woman explained that the supposed groom is her husband. She said that they were both in the United Kingdom when he came to Nigeria to start up a firm about two years ago. She said a friend of hers had informed her about the wedding. She brought out her marriage certificate which showed that she wasn't telling a lie.

Indeed! God is good. I could not but appreciate God as the wedding ceremony didn't hold. The man walked out in shame and tears started dropping from my mum's eyes.

I went to meet her and said, 'mum, it's okay. Please, don't cry.' I took her to her car and drove her to her house. She kept crying. She was indeed heartbroken. She kept saying that men are wicked. She said the man had told her that his wife had died in a

car accident. Can you imagine? The heart of men (both man and woman) is desperately wicked.

I allowed her cry then I said, 'mum, do you know why the wedding did not hold?'

'No, I don't know. I'm seriously pained,' my mum replied.

'Mum, it was because we prayed. Dad and I prayed. We want you back mummy. We need you in our lives back. Mum, please come back home.' I begged her.

'No, I can't. It's hard for me. I just can't get myself close to your dad. He betrayed me. I don't even know how you got yourself to forgive him,' she said.

'Mum, it wasn't easy but I was able to because Jesus helped me. Dad is a changed person now, same as me. Mum, you need to give Jesus a chance too.'

'Janet, please spare me this Jesus talk. In fact, I want to be alone.'

'Mum, I am just saying—'

'I said I want to be left alone!' She shouted angrily.

I knew a further stay would only make things worse. I headed straight to Ibadan to share the good news with my dad. Yes! Good news indeed!

'I never knew he would answer us this way, I never knew he would answer us this way, I never knew he would answer us this

way, as you answered us this way, thank you Jesus.' This was the song I sang as my dad opened the gate.

'Janet, what's going on? Why so happy?' My dad was surprised at my reaction.

'The wedding did not hold!' I jumped on my dad as I said. He was so happy and he kept saying, 'thank you, Jesus.'

I told my dad the full gist. We were both happy and grateful to God. I didn't return to Oda that day. I attended my dad's church then left for Oda after the service.

I continued with my life and kept praying that my family would be restored. A month from my last visit to my dad, he called me.

'Janet, I will be coming over to your place on Friday.'

'Dad, why? Is everything alright? Should I come instead?' I asked.

'No, dear. Is it bad for me to know where my daughter is staying?' He asked.

I sent the description of my place to my dad. I was anticipating his visit.

'Grandpa will be coming here, my baby,' I told Freedom. Freedom was so happy. She was always happy whenever she heard that we would be receiving a guest.

The D-day came. I was expecting my dad. I kept calling him to know if he was near. I heard the horn of a car which made me know that he was around.

I was surprised when I saw my dad and my mum coming out of the car. I couldn't contain my joy as I screamed. 'Mummy!' I ran towards her and gave her a hug.

'What happened, mum? Dad, what happened?' I was eager to know what had happened.

'Let's go in first now,' my dad said and we all laughed.

When we got inside, my dad explained how my mum came to beg him. My mum explained how she decided to give Jesus a chance as soon as I left that day which helped her to forgive my dad.

'Janet, I know I have hurt you. I know you have forgiven me but I still need to say that I am sorry,' she said.

They were so happy to see Freedom. She was growing bigger and stronger.

As I saw the happiness between my dad and mum, I asked in my heart, *Lord, when will my own come?*

I served them dinner and the conversation continued. My mum felt bad when she got to know about how I got to Oda. She was really eager to meet Joy. I was still wondering why they both came so I decided to ask them.

'Dad, mum, you still haven't told me why you came all the way from Ibadan to this place.'

'Hmmm, you see, we were thinking that we should all go to grandma's place,' my dad said.

'You mean in Ado? To do what?' I questioned.

'Janet, don't you think that it is time for mama to know the truth?' My mum asked me rhetorically.

'Mama needs to know about Boluwatife, my dear.' My dad hit the nail on the head.

'What! No, no, no. How would mama feel? Ah! Bolu is going to be mad at me for neglecting him.' I knew they had just said the truth but sometimes, the truth could be bitter. I was not ready for that.

'Janet, I want to take responsibility for my action, for not taking care of my home. I want Bolu to come and be living with us,' my mum said.

'You see, Janet, we are going to prayerfully do the right thing. The devil has torn us apart for a long time. We have to unite this family, my daughter,' my dad said.

'Hmmmm, okay. I pray for strength o,' I said.

'God will definitely help you, my daughter,' my mum said.

We prayed intensely that night. That would be the first time that we would pray as a family. Truly, there is nothing as good as family members that pray together. One shall chase a thousand and two shall chase ten thousand. Can you imagine how many three, four, five and more people would chase?

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

It was dawn and we started getting set for Ado. I had dressed Freedom. This time, she wasn't going to be with Joy. She was going with us. My mum and my dad sat at the front seat while I was at the back with Freedom. Ado was not really far from Oda. We got there in an hour and thirty minutes.

'Who am I seeing? This is a full house o,' my grandma said with excitement.

We all greeted her and went inside. She was happy to see Freedom too.

'Juliet, you are so lucky to have married from a good family or else, we wouldn't have taken you back after leaving my son,' my grandma said.

Why wouldn't she speak like that? After all, she didn't know one-quarter of what happened. I am sure she wasn't expecting the shocker she was about to get.

Boluwatife was all grown. He was almost as tall as me. He was already thirteen years old. I felt bad that I had neglected my son.

'Aunty Janet, what did you bring for me?' He asked me. Imagine! My child was calling me aunty.

'This one that you all came now, hope all is well?' My grandma asked. She was right. The visit was unusual.

'We came to take Bolu along with us,' my mum said. We were

all shocked at how she had said it frankly.

'Which Bolu? Jide, what is your wife telling me?' My grandma asked angrily.

'Ehn, you see mama, what happened is that my wife and I have decided to let Bolu live with us.' My dad addressed the issue calmly.

'I didn't know that you have concluded to have two wives but at least, you should have brought the mother to me,' my grandma said. She still believed the lie that we had told her thirteen years ago. It was time to tell her the truth.

'Ahhh! Jide, ahhh! *odoju timi*, you disgraced me.' My grandma jumped up and re-tied her wrapper. She was really surprised when my dad told her the truth about Bolu.

'Ahh, Jide, you are a wicked man. You deceived me.' I could imagine the way she felt. She was really lied to. We had told her a big lie.

'*Maami, Ema binu*,' my dad said. He prostrated and gave us a sign to join him. We all got on our knees including Freedom. Freedom had always loved to imitate people.

'Mummy, daddy.' Boluwatife came to us with tears on his face. He was supposed to be with his friends in the next house. We didn't know he was eavesdropping.

I stood up, hugged him and said, 'I am sorry, Bolu. I am sorry. Please, forgive me.' Tears plopped out of my eyes when he said, 'I love you, mummy'.

We were all quiet for a while before everything came back to normal. We had a reunion that day. We experienced what I call painful joy. It was a day to remember.

Bolu started to pack his loads and was ready to leave Ado for Ibadan. We were about leaving. He hugged my grandma and said, 'thank you mama for taking care of me all this while.' He was surely going to miss her.

We all talked in the car as we drove to Oda. They would be travelling to Ibadan the next morning. When it was time to sleep, I prayed to God saying, 'Lord, thank you for restoring my family. Father, this family is not complete if I don't have a husband. God, please give me my own man. Lord, please, restore to me the years I have lost. Father, please...' I soaked my bed with tears that night.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Aside from the fact that I had different suitors, my life continued as usual after my family had gone back to Ibadan. Different men started coming my way to seek my hand in marriage. The annoying thing was that those men were men I could never imagine spending the rest of my life with.

Some of those men were divorcees, some were already married, and some wanted sex from me. The ones that didn't fall into these categories ran away as soon as I told them that I have given birth.

Days turned to months then months turned to years. Nothing seemed to change. Age was not on my side. I was close to thirty-five and my mother's 60th birthday was already at the corner.

Different *agbadas* were in competition with themselves as the D-day came. It was my mum's birthday. The compound was looking like rainbow as the ladies had different colours of *gele*.

Joy, Tunde and Gbenga had come with me. Freedom was there. The occasion was graced by elite in the town.

'This woman has gone through a lot for me. I owe her more than a world...' My dad spoke about my mum.

Everyone clapped after my dad's speech. The party was indeed glorious as the live band kept everyone on their feet as we all put on our dancing shoes.

It was time for my mum to give her appreciation speech. She was looking radiant and was looking sweet sixteen in her Italian lace that was blinking like a twinkling star.

'I want to appreciate God for his faithfulness over my life. Only God could have made this possible. I want to appreciate everyone that has come to grace this occasion. I pray that celebration will never cease in your house,' my mum said as everyone applauded her.

'I want to appreciate my one and only daughter, Janet, because God has used her to restore my family. The devil had torn us apart but thanks to Jesus who brought us back together. I want my family here beside me, my daughter Janet, my granddaughter Freedom, my son and my grandson Boluwatife, and my most loving husband, Olajide Clement *temi nikan soso*.' The hands of the people were making noise as we were stepping forward towards my mum.

'These ones are the best that ever happened to me. Thank you all for...' The speech was a bit long as she acknowledged every dignitary that was present.

As we all posed for a photograph, something we never expected happened.

We were all shocked when we saw Gbenga coming out. Nobody had an idea of what he was up to until he got to us and knelt down.

'Janet, I know that this may look unreasonable but sometimes love is unexplainable. I want us back. I want to be the father of our baby and a husband to you too. I want to join this

family also. No other lady can fill into your space in my life. Please, be my wife.'

I was so shocked. Tears started rolling down my cheeks. This time, it was the tears of joy. I never expected it. I didn't see it coming. I had always loved Gbenga and wanted to spend the rest of my life with him. I didn't say yes because he proposed publicly but because I was convinced that God had answered my prayer.

I didn't take too long before I said, 'Yes! Yes! Yes!' The people applauded us as Gbenga put a ring on my finger and gave him a hug. My mum's birthday party was the best so far because God answered my prayer there.

In three months, we had our wedding. God had answered my heart cry of ten years. The honeymoon was sweeter than honey. That night was sinless and passionate as we both felt the heat of our bodies and as Gbenga rode down the road of pleasure in me. The last time was a long time ago.

I conceived after few weeks and a baby boy was born into the family. I named him Bliss because God had really brought bliss into my life.

I looked back at where I was coming from and where I was that day and I came to the conclusion that only Jesus can make the impossible possible.

I want to tell you that no matter how bad your life might have been, I want you to know that only Jesus can turn around your life like mine if you give him a chance.

I have found an answer to the question of my heart which was, 'Will I ever be free?' Now, I can boldly say that I am free. Jesus has set me free!

I can now sing this song by Timothy Reddick:

I'm free indeed!

In Christ, I'm free indeed!

No chains are holding me!

It's whom I choose to be!

You can sing along with me.

THE END

If this book has blessed you, please, pray for the author.

God bless you. Thanks for reading.

You can connect with the author:

Whatsapp/call: 08103412252

Facebook: Hapinessvlogs or Ajayi Happiness

Twitter and Instagram: Happinessvlogs

Email: Happinessajayi5@gmail.com



THE BOOK

Janet's dilemma started at 13 when she became her father's mistress. It seemed the whole world was against her when her little secret was opened. Yes! A child for her father. In the midst of the run, suicidal thought, kidnap, heartbreak and a lot more, would she find an answer to the question of her heart, "Will I Ever Be Free?"

THE AUTHOR



Happiness Ajayi is a seasonal writer of prose, novels and articles. She holds a bachelor degree in BIOCHEMISTRY from Ondo state university of science and technology. Happiness has written several prose of high intellectual imagination to the glory of God. Happiness came first at the ACTS CHALLENGE COMPETITION '2020 organized by the DaPreacherz Ministry Int'l. She has a You tube channel (HAPPINESS VLOGS) with hundreds of subscribers. Happiness has contributed to the growth of the young and adult through her various Prose, Novel and Article writings. Happiness versatile wisdom and passion to write and act script has been noticed from her secondary school days of which she took the same passion to university where she was made Assistant Drama unit Head at RCF OSUSTECH. Happiness first novel to be published is

"WILL I EVER BE FREE?"