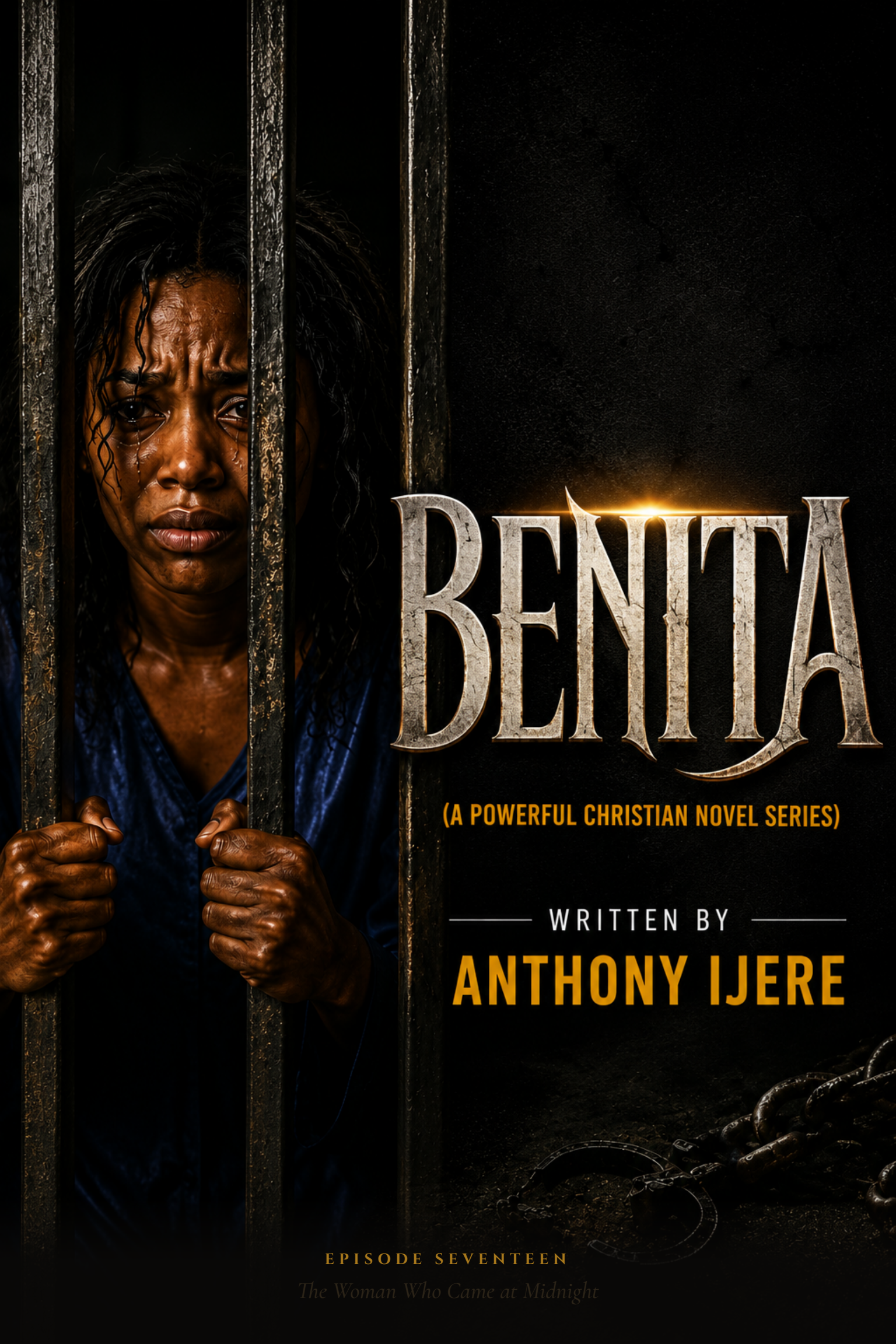

BENITA
(A POWERFUL CHRISTIAN NOVEL SERIES)
WRITTEN BY
ANTHONY IJERE
EPISODE SEVENTEEN
The Woman Who Came at Midnight

EPISODE SEVENTEEN

THE WOMAN WHO CAME AT MIDNIGHT

✦ ✦ ✦

"If I truly belong to God, why has my life become like this?"

Jonathan shut himself inside his hostel room. The curtains remained drawn throughout the day, leaving the room dim even though the afternoon sun shone brightly outside. Books lay scattered across his reading table, but he did not touch any of them. His lecture notes remained exactly where he had dropped them the previous night. His phone lay beside him on the bed, yet he had no desire to answer calls or reply to messages.

He replayed every moment in his mind. He remembered the dream, Benjamin's warning, the strange vision another brother had shared after fellowship, and above all, how he had ignored Benita when she needed someone to talk to.

"What if I have made a terrible mistake?" he whispered to himself.

He buried his face in his hands.

His appetite disappeared. He skipped his morning lectures and ignored the knocks of classmates who came looking for him.

"Jonathan!" one of them called from outside.

There was no reply.

"President, are you inside?"

Jonathan remained silent.

After waiting for a while, the students assumed he had gone somewhere and quietly left. The room became silent again.

Jonathan sat on the edge of his bed, staring blankly at the floor. He wanted to pray, but the words refused to come. Every attempt to concentrate ended with his thoughts returning to Benita.

BENITA'S OWN STRUGGLE

Meanwhile, on the other side of the campus, Benita's own struggle had become even heavier. She had returned to her hostel late the previous evening with swollen eyes and a troubled heart. Her roommate had noticed immediately that something was wrong.

"Benita, are you all right?"

"I'm fine," Benita answered with a forced smile.

"You don't look fine."

"I'm only tired."

Her roommate wanted to ask more questions, but Benita climbed onto her bed and turned her face toward the wall.

The following morning, her roommate dressed for lectures while Benita remained under her blanket.

"You are not preparing?"

"No."

"Are you sick?"

"No. I just want to rest."

Her roommate looked at her with concern.

"If you need anything, call me."

"I will."

After her roommate left, Benita remained in the room for several hours without moving. She stared at the ceiling while countless thoughts battled inside her mind.

By afternoon, her roommate returned briefly to pick up a few books before another lecture. Seeing Benita in the same position, she sighed.

"You have not even eaten?"

"I'm not hungry."

"Please don't stay like this."

Benita only nodded.

As soon as the door closed behind her roommate, she stood up. She suddenly felt suffocated inside the room. She wanted to be alone. Without knowing exactly where she was going, she left the hostel and began walking through the campus. Students hurried past her on their way to lectures. Some laughed with friends. Others argued about assignments. Vendors called out to customers near the school gate. None of those sounds entered her heart.

THE STONE BENEATH THE TREE

She kept walking. She crossed one road. Then another. Soon she found herself outside the university gate, following a road she had never taken before. She had no destination. Her feet simply carried her forward while her mind remained trapped in painful memories.

She remembered Eric, the restaurant, Didi, the operation, the doctor's words, and every humiliation she had suffered. Then her thoughts turned to Jonathan.

She closed her eyes for a moment.

"Have I disappointed God again?" she asked herself quietly.

She continued walking until she reached a lonely junction. A large stone stood beneath an old tree, and only a few people

passed through the area from time to time. She sat down. The place was quiet. It was exactly the kind of place she had been looking for. She folded her arms around herself and stared into the distance.

"If I truly belong to God," she thought, "why has my life become like this?"

> *"If I truly belong to God, why has my life become like this?"*
>
> — Benita

She remembered the joy she had felt when Jonathan taught her the Scriptures, how eager she had become to pray, and the peace she once carried. Now everything seemed different. She knew how difficult it was to escape sexual sin once someone became trapped in it.

"What if I fall again?" she wondered.

She lowered her head. The questions came one after another, but no answers came. Time passed without her noticing.

CLARA

Just as she stood up to return to school, a gentle female voice interrupted her thoughts.

"My dear, why are you sitting here all alone?"

Benita turned. Standing a few steps away was a beautiful woman who looked to be about thirty-five years old. She was fair in complexion and neatly dressed in a simple but elegant outfit. Her smile looked warm, and there was a calmness about her that immediately put people at ease.

The woman walked closer.

"You look troubled."

Benita quickly forced a smile.

"No, I'm fine."

The woman smiled.

"My dear, I am also a woman. Sometimes all we need is someone willing to listen. If there is anything bothering you, tell me. You never know. Maybe I can help."

Benita hesitated. Then she asked softly,

"Can you really help me?"

The woman laughed gently.

"Why not? At least let us begin by knowing each other. What is your name?"

"My name is Benita."

"That is a beautiful name."

"And yours?"

"My name is Clara."

She stretched out her hand.

"I am a nurse. I work in a hospital not far from here."

The moment Benita heard the word nurse, something inside her relaxed. She had always believed nurses were naturally caring people. Perhaps this woman truly wanted to help.

Clara looked at her carefully.

"You look hungry."

Benita tried to deny it.

"I'm fine."

"No, you are not."

A KIND STRANGER

Without waiting for another answer, Clara smiled.

"Come with me."

She led Benita to a nearby restaurant. It was a modest place with plastic chairs and tables arranged neatly under large umbrellas. Music played softly from a speaker in one corner while customers quietly enjoyed their meals. They sat opposite each other.

Clara ordered a plate of rice, chicken and a chilled bottle of Coke for Benita.

"You need to eat first," she said. "Problems become heavier when we face them on an empty stomach."

Benita smiled for the first time that day.

"Thank you."

As she ate, Clara watched her kindly.

"You must have gone through a lot."

Benita nodded slowly.

"A little."

"You don't have to tell me today."

Benita looked up.

"Really?"

Clara smiled again.

"When your heart is ready, you will talk."

For reasons she could not explain, Benita felt unusually comfortable with her. They talked for almost an hour. Clara spoke about life, about being strong and about never giving up. She avoided asking too many personal questions, which made Benita trust her even more. Before they left, they exchanged phone numbers.

"When you get back safely," Clara said, "send me a message."

"I will."

"If you ever need someone to talk to, call me."

"Thank you so much."

Clara gently touched Benita's shoulder.

"Take care of yourself."

SOMETHING FOLLOWED HER

Benita watched her walk away before beginning her journey back to campus. Yet something continued troubling her. She could not explain it. Everything about the woman had seemed kind—her smile, her voice, her generosity.

Even so, Benita felt as though something unseen had quietly followed her from that meeting.

"I'm only imagining things," she whispered.

By evening she returned to the hostel. Her roommate looked relieved.

"Thank God. Where did you go?"

"I just went out."

"You look better now."

"A little."

"Have you eaten?"

"Yes."

Her roommate smiled.

"That's good."

That night both young women prepared for bed. For the first time in many days, Benita lay down without opening her Bible. She did not pray. She simply closed her eyes. Sleep came almost immediately.

MIDNIGHT

Sometime after midnight, she suddenly felt someone touch her shoulder. She opened her eyes. The room was dark. She wanted to turn toward her roommate, but discovered that she could not move. Her entire body felt unusually heavy. She tried to call the name of Jesus. No sound came out. Fear gripped her heart.

Then she noticed someone standing beside her bed. It was Clara. The same woman she had met earlier that day.

Benita's eyes widened.

"How... how did you get in here?"

Clara smiled strangely.

"You ate my food."

Benita frowned.

"What do you mean?"

"The food I bought for you."

"Yes... you bought it for me."

"You ate it."

"Of course I did. You offered it to me."

Clara's smile became colder.

"Then return it."

Benita stared at her in confusion.

"How can I return food that I have already eaten?"

The woman laughed. The sound no longer resembled the gentle laughter from the restaurant. It echoed unnaturally through the room.

"If you cannot return my food," she said quietly, "then you must come with me."

THE PRICE OF THE MEAL

"You ate my food."

"Then return it."

"If you cannot return my food, then you must come with me."

Benita wanted to refuse. She wanted to scream. She wanted to wake her roommate. Instead, she watched herself stand up from the bed without making a single decision.

It was as though another force had taken control of her body.

She looked toward her roommate. The young woman slept peacefully, completely unaware of what was happening only a few feet away.

"Wake up," Benita wanted to shout.

No words came out.

Clara walked toward the door.

"Follow me."

Benita followed. The hostel door opened by itself. They stepped outside.

THE REALM OF THE SPIRIT

The moment Benita crossed the doorway, a strange cold wind swept across her face. She blinked. Everything around her changed instantly. The familiar hostel building disappeared. The campus was gone. The roads, the streetlights, the trees and every familiar landmark had vanished.

She stood in a place she had never seen before. The air felt unnaturally heavy. A strange mist covered the ground. The sky above was neither day nor night. It glowed with an eerie reddish light that cast long shadows across the landscape.

Benita's heartbeat quickened. She slowly turned toward Clara. The woman was no longer smiling. Her eyes were fixed ahead as though she had finally brought Benita to the place she had intended all along.

Benita suddenly realised one terrifying truth.

She was no longer in the physical world. She had crossed into the realm of the spirit.

END OF EPISODE SEVENTEEN

BENITA · A POWERFUL CHRISTIAN NOVEL SERIES

She was no longer in the physical world. She had crossed into the realm of the spirit.

WATCH OUT FOR THE NEXT EPISODE

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