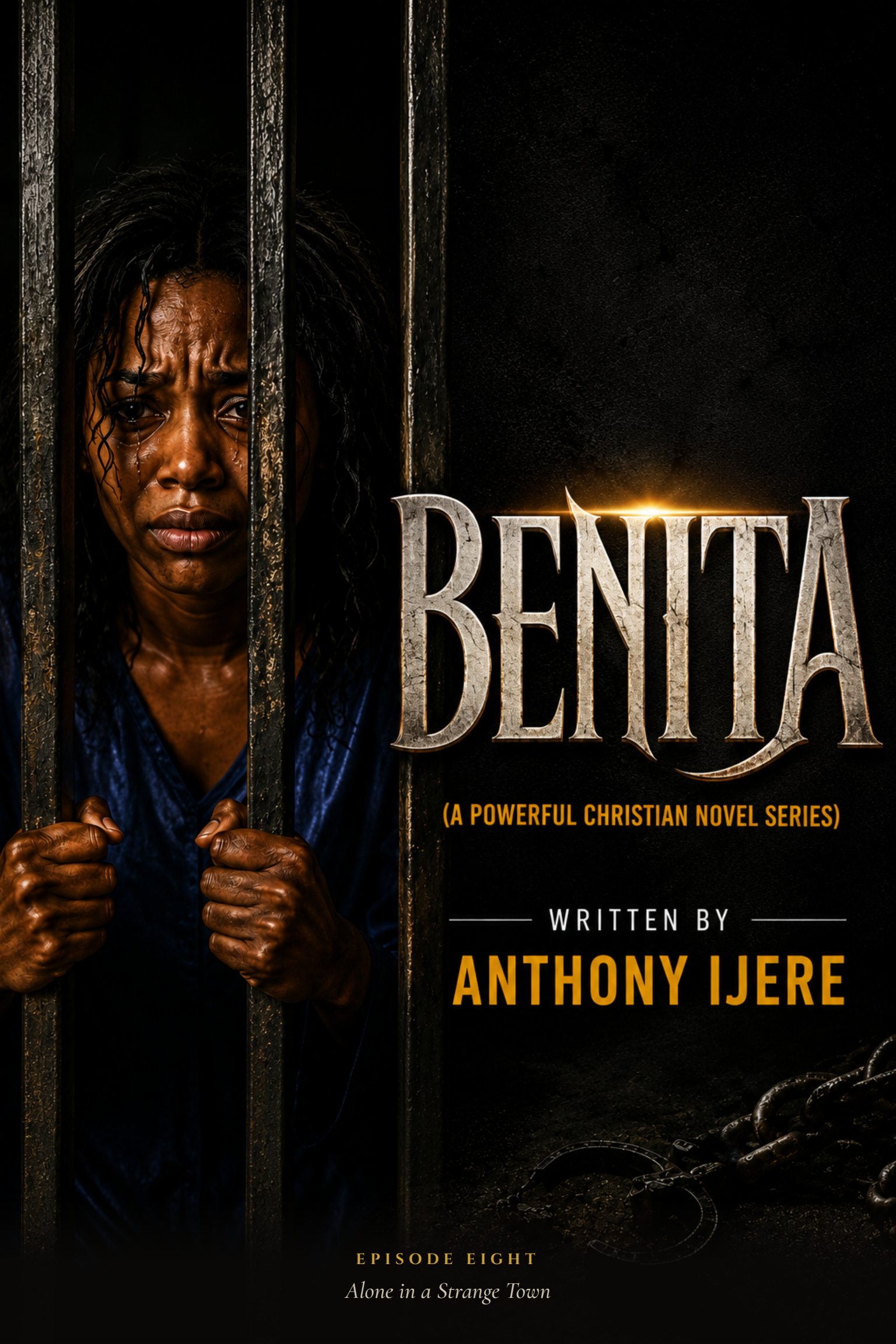


BENITA

(A POWERFUL CHRISTIAN NOVEL SERIES)

WRITTEN BY

ANTHONY IJERE

EPISODE EIGHT

Alone in a Strange Town

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✦ ✦ ✦

"This baby did nothing wrong."

The afternoon sun shone brightly through the small window of Esther's room, but its warmth could not reach Benita's heart.

She lay quietly on the mattress, staring at the ceiling. Her eyes were open, but her mind was far away.

She remembered the first day Eric had told her he loved her. She remembered how he would wait for her outside her classroom during break. She remembered the meat pie and soft drinks he always bought for her. She remembered the jokes they shared while walking home after school. She remembered how he promised, "One day, after school, I will marry you. You are the only girl I truly love."

A bitter smile appeared on her face.

"What a liar..." she whispered to herself.

Tears slowly rolled down her cheeks.

She did not even notice when Esther entered the room carrying a small tray of food.

"Benita."

No answer.

Esther placed the tray on the table.

"Benita."

Still nothing. She moved closer.

"Benita!"

Silence. She became worried and gently shook her shoulder.

"Benita!"

Benita jumped in surprise.

"Ah!"

Esther held her chest.

"You nearly scared me. I've been calling you for a long time."

Benita wiped her tears quickly.

"I'm sorry. I was just... thinking."

Esther sat beside her.

"You've been doing nothing except thinking. You don't eat well. You don't sleep well. You hardly smile."

Benita forced a weak smile.

"I'm trying."

Esther sighed deeply. After remaining silent for some moments, she finally spoke.

"Benita... We need to talk."

Benita looked at her.

"What is it?"

Esther hesitated.

"I don't even know how to say this."

"Just say it."

Esther lowered her voice.

"You know your condition..."

Benita nodded slowly.

"You are still very young. You have not entered university. The man responsible has disappeared."

She paused before continuing.

"I've heard some girls in situations like yours say... maybe ending the pregnancy would make life easier."

The room became silent. Benita slowly turned to face her.

"What did you just say?"

Esther quickly replied.

"I'm not saying you must do it. I'm only saying... people talk about it."

Benita sat upright immediately.

"No." Her voice became firmer. "No, Esther. I have made many mistakes. But I will never kill an innocent child. This baby did nothing wrong."

Tears filled her eyes.

"If everybody has rejected me, I will not reject my own child."

> *"No, Esther. I have made many mistakes. But I will never kill an innocent child. This baby did nothing wrong. If everybody has rejected me, I will not reject my own child."*
>
> — Benita

Esther stood up in frustration.

"You are not understanding me! I'm thinking about your future! You don't even have a house. You don't have money. The father of the baby has abandoned you. How do you expect to survive?"

Benita also stood up.

"God will help me."

Esther shook her head.

"God helps people, yes. But you must also face reality."

The argument continued. Both ladies spoke out of pain. Neither of them truly hated the other.

Finally Esther spoke quietly.

"I'm sorry, Benita. I cannot continue like this. My parents are already asking questions. They don't even know you are pregnant. If you decide to keep this baby... I don't think I can continue keeping you here."

Benita looked at her in disbelief.

"So... you also want me to leave?"

Esther looked away.

"I'm sorry."

Those two words broke Benita's heart.

Without another word, she quietly packed her few clothes into a small travelling bag.

She looked around the room one last time. This little room had been her only refuge.

Now…

Even that refuge was gone.

She carried her bag. As she reached the door, Esther called softly.

"Benita..."

She stopped. Without turning back, she said,

"Thank you for everything."

Then she walked away.

INTO THE UNKNOWN

Outside, the afternoon breeze blew dust across the road. Benita walked without knowing where she was going.

She was angry. Angry at Eric. Angry at herself. Angry at her father. Angry at Benedict. Angry at her mother, Evelyn, who had abandoned them many years ago.

"If I see my mother today... will I even recognise her?"

"No... I don't think so."

She continued walking until she reached a motor park. Several buses were loading passengers. Conductors shouted from every direction.

"Port Harcourt! Port Harcourt!" "Ahoada! Enter with your load!" "One seat remain!"

Benita looked around helplessly. She simply entered one of the buses heading to a nearby town.

She sat quietly beside an elderly woman. The journey began.

Throughout the trip, her mind wandered. She had no destination. She only wanted to disappear.

As the bus approached the final stop, the conductor began collecting transport fares.

"My money! Bring your money!"

Passengers paid one after another. When he reached Benita, she froze.

"My sister, your money."

Benita swallowed hard.

"Please... I want to ease myself, I'm pressed. I'll be back immediately."

The conductor frowned.

"Nah wah oo, abeg do fast oh."

She nodded.

The moment she stepped down…

She ran.

She ran through one street... Then another... She did not stop until the motor park was no longer in sight.

Back at the park, the conductor waited. Five minutes. Ten minutes. Fifteen minutes.

He scratched his head.

"Haa! That small girl don use style run."

Another driver laughed loudly.

"Oga, today na your turn."

The conductor shook his head.

"Na experience be this."

MAMA GRACE

Night gradually covered the town. The unfamiliar streets became quieter.

Benita's stomach growled with hunger. Her legs ached from walking. She hugged her small bag tightly.

"God... Where will I sleep tonight?"

As she turned into another street, she noticed a modest restaurant. The aroma of fresh soup drifted into the road. Customers were finishing their meals.

She gathered courage and entered. A middle aged woman stood behind the counter supervising her workers. She noticed Benita immediately.

"My daughter, welcome. What can I do for you?"

Benita struggled to speak.

"Ma... I..."

The woman looked at her carefully.

"You have been crying. What happened?"

Benita lowered her head.

"I don't have anywhere to stay. I don't have money. I'm looking for work."

The woman remained silent for a moment.

"What work can you do?"

"I can cook. I can wash plates. I can clean. I can serve customers. I can do anything."

The woman folded her arms.

"You have experience?"

"Yes, ma. My mother taught me when I was little."

The woman smiled faintly.

"My name is Mama Grace. I already have workers. But... I'll give you a chance."

Benita's eyes brightened.

"Thank you, ma!"

"You'll receive five thousand naira every month for now."

Benita hesitated.

"Five thousand?"

Mama Grace immediately replied,

"If it's too small, you're free to look elsewhere. I didn't advertise for workers. You came looking for help."

Benita quickly shook her head.

"No, ma. I'll work. I'll do my best."

Mama Grace nodded.

"You'll eat here. You'll sleep inside the restaurant after closing. It isn't luxurious. But at least you'll be safe."

Tears gathered in Benita's eyes again. This time... they were tears of gratitude.

"God bless you, ma."

Mama Grace smiled warmly.

"Don't thank me. Thank God. He is the One who brought you here."

> *"Don't thank me. Thank God. He is the One who brought you here."*
>
> — Mama Grace

A FATHER'S SEARCH

Back in Omoku, Mr. Paul could hardly sleep. He had searched almost everywhere. He and Benedict walked from street to street asking questions. Nobody had seen Benita.

Mr. Paul sighed deeply.

"I shouldn't have driven her away."

Benedict lowered his head.

"Dad... I'm sorry. I shouldn't have reported everything the way I did."

Mr. Paul looked at him.

"No. The mistake was mine. I was too angry to listen. My daughter was trying to explain. And I never allowed her."

> *"The mistake was mine. I was too angry to listen. My daughter was trying to explain. And I never allowed her."*
>
> — MR. PAUL

His voice broke.

"I only pray she is still alive."

THE NEIGHBOUR'S REBUKE

Their search led them to Eric's house. Eric came outside looking innocent.

"Good evening, sir."

Mr. Paul asked immediately,

"Have you seen Benita?"

Eric pretended to be surprised.

"No, sir. I haven't seen her. Not since she left school."

Mr. Paul sighed.

"If you hear anything... please let us know."

"I will, sir."

After they left, Eric smiled to himself.

"Thank God. I've escaped this trouble."

Just then, an elderly neighbour walked up to him carrying a bucket of water. He looked at him with disapproval.

"Eric."

Eric forced a smile.

"Good evening boss."

The man clicked his tongue.

"O boy, wetin you do that girl no good at all."

Eric looked around nervously.

"Boss, which girl?"

He hissed.

"That girl wey come dey cry for your gate that day. You tell me say make I tell am say you don travel. I help you because I think say na small misunderstanding."

He shook his head.

"But the way that girl cry e pain me. If you no love am, why you deceive am?"

Eric scratched his head awkwardly.

"Boss... Abeg no vex."

The man pointed a finger at him.

"No dey play with people life. One day, truth go catch person."

He walked away.

Eric remained standing there silently. For the first time... his conscience troubled him.

AN EMPTY HOUSE

Later that evening, Mr. Paul and Benedict arrived at Esther's house. Esther welcomed them respectfully.

"My daughter," Mr. Paul asked anxiously, "where is Benita?"

Esther's face changed.

"She... she left."

Mr. Paul stepped forward.

"Left? To where?"

"I don't know, sir."

"What do you mean you don't know?"

"We had a misunderstanding. When I returned... she had already gone."

Mr. Paul removed his glasses slowly. His hands trembled.

"She's gone..." Benedict whispered.

Nobody spoke again. Silence filled the room.

Outside, darkness continued to spread across the town.

And somewhere far away... a frightened seventeen year old girl prepared to spend her first night in a strange town...

END OF EPISODE EIGHT

BENITA · A POWERFUL CHRISTIAN NOVEL SERIES

Outside, darkness continued to spread across the town. And somewhere far away, a frightened seventeen year old girl prepared to spend her first night in a strange town.

WATCH OUT FOR THE NEXT EPISODE

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