

BEHIND THE VEIL

Bolanle Olosunde-Jenrola

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DEDICATION

To the Lord God Almighty, for the gift to tell stories, and the constant reminder that I must tell them.

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My amazing readers, thank you for choosing my book. I look forward to your feedback for this book and my other titles. I want to hear from you. Please send a mail to bonfamilytribe@gmail.com or a whatsapp message to +2347052419520.

CHAPTER ONE

Mosunmola smiled and looked down at the street from her high rise office building in Marina, Lagos Island. The pretty building housed Freshee Juice, one of Nigeria's leading drink brands, and was situated near the headquarters of some old generational banks. In fact, the tallest buildings in the country were situated there, and your rank in these offices could be determined by how high the elevator took your guests before they saw you. Mosunmola's office was really high up as the cars moving on the road felt like animations in a computer game.

Currently, Mosun was particularly pleased with herself, which explained why she was smiling. She had just sealed another deal for Freshee Juice, and it boosted her ego deeply. Although there were uncomplimentary talks about her ways, she didn't care. She got the job done and no one could argue with results. Two months ago, Freshee Juice was awarded the best indigenous drink brand in Nigeria, alongside Coca-Cola, which was awarded the best international drink brand. Everyone in the company was surprised and with good reason too, but Mosun had been annoyed at their reactions.

It was general knowledge within the company that she was not the smartest in the Brand and Strategic Communications Department even though she was a Senior Manager. When people like Ifelayo, her secretary/assistant went about gossiping about her, it was no surprise that these unflattering discussions thrived. The silly girl had even made a remark to her face that insinuated that she was more of a genius than Mosun, but wasn't holding her boss' position because she lacked the connection. Mosun had been tempted to fire her, but the babe knew the job, and delivered on it. Besides, Ifelayo was right. She was highly connected.

Mosun had never considered herself smart intellectually, but when it came to using what she had to get what she wanted, she was an expert. She had slept her way through school, almost had an extra year in the university, but had been lucky to graduate with a Third Class. She was currently holding her present position as a result of her association with Chief Adeoti, a major stakeholder on the board, who spoke in her favour.

Chief had been her Sugar Daddy since her final year in school, and had always promised her a job once she finished, but two years after graduation, he hadn't done anything about it. As at that time, Chief and his friends had just started Freshee Juice and on one of her visits to his office, she had seen him reviewing documents from an interview for the post of Director, Brand Communication Strategy. Her interest was immediately piqued. Mosun wanted the job even though she had no idea what it entailed. She had a knack of getting what she wanted when she wanted it even when she did not have the

capacity for it. She was your proverbial Eve, who wanted the forbidden apple just because she'd been told she couldn't have it.

A perfect opportunity came soon enough when she was on a rendezvous with Chief. She had satisfied him so skillfully in bed, he was feeling contented and generous, especially when Mosun screamed *"Happy Birthday"* to herself as soon as the clock struck midnight. The unsuspecting Chief had fallen for the lie and instantly offered her a blank cheque: a promise to give her anything she wanted for her 25th birthday. With the wile and guile of Herodias, Mosun asked to be made the Director, Brand Communication Strategy for Freshee Juice. Knowing she was clueless about the job, she had also convinced Chief to send her on a three months course abroad. He did, and as soon as she returned, had given her the job. He had also given her Ifelayo as an assistant. She was well suited for the job, having bagged a First Class from the University of Lagos's Mass Communication department. Unfortunately, she wasn't sleeping with any member of the board.

Mosun suspected Chief gave her such a brilliant assistant to ensure Ifelayo filled in the gaps wherever she was falling short, and she went along with the charade. At first, she wanted to quit because it was frustrating to be clueless, but because she enjoyed the power and money that came with the position, she quickly discarded the thought. Today, four years after graduation, she drove a Mercedes, lived in a house she bought on Lekki Epe Expressway and earned millions every month. Apart from her salary, she made a lot of money getting a percentage of profits from vendors contracted by the organization.

Under her administration, she had employed more qualified and intellectual assistants as a way to close the gap of her ineptitude. This was a smart move as her department flourished and the organization bloomed. Successful in her career, at least by her assessment, she started ignoring Chief. By all standards, she was doing well financially and didn't need him anymore but a demotion quickly set her straight and had her running back to her benefactor.

Chief had told her she would have been completely kicked out if it weren't for him since she did not have the required qualifications to hold such a position. As a way to ensure she kept her job and did not experience further setbacks, she constantly serviced Chief in the bedroom department. Beyond securing her financial stability, she liked the prestige that came with the job. She also knew trying to get a new one would be a daunting task and money had a way of taking flight if you weren't earning more to ensure your stash never ran out. She remembered the days when she had to jump public buses from Abule-Egba to Obalende and trek to Ikoyi club where she waited tables to pay her way through University. Those were times she never wanted to relive.She jolted back to reality at the sound of Ifelayo's voice as it floated through the intercom.

“The people from Apple Eye advertising agency are here to see you.”

“Let them wait,” Mosun replied after a brief pause. “In fact, tell them that I am busy, I can't see them today,” she retorted and disconnected before Ifelayo could respond..

In truth, she was not doing anything. In fact, she had been waiting for their arrival before she went down memory lane, after all, she'd fixed the appointment in the first place. Right now however, she wasn't in the mood for business.

She smiled in pleasure, feeling the rush of power. It felt good to be able to dictate whether she wanted to see someone or not. It felt good to have others be at your mercy, yielding to your whims and caprices. It felt good to be able to say they should go and come back and know that they would because they had no choice. They were the ones who wanted to do business with her.

It felt good to be in control. It felt so damn good.

Emeka stifled a frown and smiled at Ifelayo, who gave him an apologetic look, as she awaited his response.

“Of course, we'll come back tomorrow,” he muttered, trying to hide his emotions.

He turned and gestured to his assistant that they should go. Sandra was already on her feet, having heard Ifelayo's message from her boss. She mustered a wry smile for the secretary, knowing it was not her fault as she and Emeka headed for the door. Whatever Sandra had to say, she was forced to contain herself as they made the long ride down since they were intermittently interrupted by the presence of other people. They eventually had the privacy needed for Sandra's eruption as soon as they got into the car.

“Does this lady think we are jobless? How can she tell us to come and then not attend to us?”

Emeka glanced at her, trying to sound casual even though he felt exactly the same way. “It comes with the territory. We are the ones who need the contract.”

Sandra gave him a sideways glance as he started the car and drove out of the car park. Emeka's cool demeanor during annoying situations never ceased to amaze her. “I never understand how you are able to accept this kind of treatment,” she muttered out loud.

Emeka smiled. It was his choice to take up a job instead of running his late father's company, and these were the things he wanted to experience; the rigours of everyday working life, and the hustle of a working-class Lagosians. It was important to him to feel the pulse of the average employee so he would know the way to treat his staff. He wanted to be able to empathise, guide, lead, correct and hire and fire based on an unadulterated experience that he could never get within the confines of men who had served his family all their lives. And he had learnt! He had learnt more than enough on this working field where he'd had to tread on a very narrow line between integrity and corruption.

Apple Eye Advertising Agency, the company he worked for, had lost an account to a less qualified company last year because they couldn't meet “Madam Mosun's” terms. She wanted to take sixty percent of the allocated sum and the only way he could do that was to reduce the quality of the work, which would make his company look unprofessional. Apart from that, what she was asking him to do was bribery and against his faith. He had tried to book an appointment to reason with her, but his efforts had been futile. All communication

had been done through her secretary and now, history was repeating itself. This was the third time she'd sent for them and with no explanation, refused to see them.

He made it a principle to ignore the popular saying that women in power were difficult to work with, especially since he was surrounded by women who have worked very hard to break the glass ceiling in their fields. This lady however took the cake. In fact, she finished it in his opinion. He sighed inwardly at the impasse he was in. If it wasn't a big account, he would have delegated it to a junior staff. He would have to figure out how to work with this madam.

While Emeka was plagued with thoughts of how to scale the mountain called Madam Mosun, Sandra was thinking of something entirely different. Although she stared keenly at a picture on her phone, she was very much aware of the man who sat beside her, deep in thought, as he maneuvered the car through the streets of Lagos and the traffic that was gradually building. She had been very happy when she was made his assistant, hoping it would make room for intimacy between them, but despite his many jokes, their business dates, and helping her with personal problems, Emeka distinctly drew the line between work and friendship. She wished things were more than platonic between them and was hopeful that at some point, Emeka would see her; really see her. For now, she was content to maintain the status quo.

She risked glancing at him and he turned to her simultaneously, giving her that smile that melted hearts. Instinctively, she smiled in

return. How could she not? She was a captive of his easy charm, and a willing one at that.

“We'll be fine,” he said with some assurance.

She gave him a skeptical look in return and he chuckled and turned his attention to the road.

He liked Sandra!

The thought jumped out at him like a zombie startling an unsuspecting victim in a horror movie. He glanced at her again and was glad her attention was riveted on her phone. He would hate for her to catch him staring the way he was now. He quickly turned his attention to the road, while his mind roared with thoughts,

He liked Sandra.

If he was truthful, he had known for a while now, but just never admitted it to himself. She was quite beautiful, and very cultured, not to mention he enjoyed working with her. To him, she was the perfect girl; charismatic, intelligent, fashionable, warm, and very desirable. Whether she was the perfect girl for him though was a different thing entirely. As a matter of principle, he had a policy against dating a colleague, but even that principle could be amended if he was compelled by the Holy Spirit to take the relationship further. Right now, he had no such compulsion, so Sandra would remain just his assistant; someone he believed his role in her life was to help her grow her faith.

The house was quiet.

Mosun hated quiet environments. It made her think, and she didn't like thinking because it made her guilty and guilt took away the fun. It was why she never came home early. Usually, she would go to a club or some relaxation spot after work and not come home until she was really tired.

But not today.

Today, it was raining heavily and she did not have a driver. Her driver had resigned because he couldn't cope with her demands. The man had to resume 7:00 am daily to take her to work, and closed 10:00 pm, which usually extended to 1:00 am on days when she went to the club, which was often.

She glanced at the beautiful wall clock adorning her pretty wall. It was just 8:00 pm. She rolled her eyes in annoyance, willing the time to speed up, before turning her attention to her phone. She had been on Instagram for over an hour and had gone over her timeline from top to bottom about twice. Now, she was just fiddling with the phone, waiting for recent posts to load when the silence in the room was shattered by the shrill ringing of her other phone.

Mosun's eyes darted to her bag, which was sitting pretty on her dressing table. It was her official line and she was tempted to let it ring as she did not feel like leaving the comfort of her bed. The thought that it could be her boss however made her change her mind, especially since the caller was persistent. She sluggishly left the bed

and fell on the ground mid-way, tripping on the duvet she had flung across the room when she woke up late earlier that day. She angrily picked up the duvet and flung it on a pile of clothes in a corner of the room, walking past the towel she used that morning, which was partly on the mattress, and on the floor. She equally ignored her body lotion and the basket she kept the fancy body oils and perfumes she used. She had picked it from the dressing table whilst looking for the second pair of her pearl earrings the day before and had tossed it carelessly on the floor in the middle of the room.

She arrived at the dressing table and reached for the phone in her bag, almost overturning her overflowing jewelry box, which was precariously close to the edge of the table, and if not rescued in time, will have its content spilling all over the floor. The room was in a state, but Mosun couldn't be bothered. It was her room, and she didn't need to keep up appearances for anyone here. The real truth though was that she was unrepentantly nonchalant, and could not be bothered to lift a finger.

She finally found the phone and stared at the caller's number. It was not familiar. She frowned, debating whether to take the call or not then decided to, just in case it was her boss who was playing pranks. The guy had been a thorn in her flesh since he resumed. It wasn't enough that he took her job and she was demoted to his assistant, he wanted her completely gone and she wasn't going to make it that easy for him. Taking a deep breath, she accepted the call, trying to sound professional and inject some enthusiasm into her voice.

“Hello! Mosun Olalere on the line, how may I help you?”

Emeka's deep voice came over the line. “Good evening Mrs…”

“Miss…” Mosun supplied, frowning as she tried to figure out who she was talking to.

“I apologize. Good evening Miss Mosun. I am Emeka Obiagu from Apple Eye Advertising Agency.”

Mosun's frown turned to a mixture of annoyance and disgust. Why in the world's name was the guy calling her? She gave them an appointment for the next day, why couldn't he wait till then? And how did he get her number?

“I'm sorry for calling you without prior appointment…” Emeka was saying but Mosun cut in, her voice filled with irritation.

“I gave you an appointment and it's for tomorrow.”

“Yes but…”

“This conversation is over.”

“I just want to be sure you'll see us tomorrow,” Emeka quickly chipped in, sensing she was about to disconnect. She was.

Mosun took in a deep breath, thinking of an appropriate retort. She came up with nothing. What if she didn't see them again tomorrow? So? The guy was insolent. *And you're being difficult, her conscience pricked her*. How? She argued. He was the one who needed something from her. If he hadn't been difficult and had agreed to her terms when he bid for the last account, she wouldn't be giving him a tough time now.

“Hello! Are you there?”

“Mr…” She couldn't remember his name.

“Emeka…” Emeka supplied.

“I will see you tomorrow at noon. Good night.”

Before he could get in another word, she quickly disconnected and hissed in annoyance as she headed back to bed. What effrontery!! Calling her to ensure she saw them. Who did he think he was? Some middle-aged man who thought he could handle her the way he handled his wife at home. She scoffed in annoyance. She was going to deal with him. She would increase the percentage of her cut on the job, and knowing how chauvinistic, egotistic men like him think, he would refuse the offer like he did the first one, which was exactly what she wanted. She had her own agenda and the Mr. Emekas of this world couldn't interfere with it.

Emeka was ticked off.

He had gone through so much stress getting her private number, only to be disregarded rudely. Although he knew such a cold call may not be welcomed, he was still upset. If she had just seen them like she said she would, he wouldn't need to go to such lengths. He didn't like being a pest either, but the meeting was necessary if they were going to have a chance to win the contract. Or how was she going to appraise them without listening to their presentation? He had accepted the loss of the first contract with folded arms, but not this time. This time, he was going to fight, even though he didn't know how.

The aroma from the kitchen veered his belligerent thoughts towards a warmer direction, and a fond smile lit his face. Living with his mother had its advantages. He didn't have to bother about things that plagued other bachelors, and if he was honest, it was why he refused to get a place of his own at thirty-three. Although his mother harassed him over getting married, he was not in a hurry. When he eventually made that choice, the woman had to emulate some of his mother's fine qualities: loving, selfless, godly, hardworking and resilient.

At sixty-two, his mother was still running his late father's company effectively, even though she constantly complained that sixty didn't look good behind a desk, but looked better taking care of grandchildren. She was ready to retire but wasn't willing to hand over to anyone except Emeka. Yet, Emeka wasn't ready to leave Apple Eye Advertising when he still couldn't figure out how to deal with people like Madam Mosun. At the thought of the woman, all fuzzy feelings disappeared and a frown creased his brows.

“What are you bothering your little head about?” His mother's voice interrupted his thoughts.

He was lost in his musings and didn't know when she walked into the room. She took a seat across him, staring at him in concern. He managed a small smile as he responded.

“I'm fine.”

His mother continued to stare at him, not buying the rhetoric response. Emeka sighed. She could read him like a book. It was why

he never got away with lying or playing pranks as a child. She just knew when he wasn't saying the truth. He sighed.

“Okay, it's this woman I have to work with, but everything is under control.”

He couldn't imagine how one statement could transform a face. He was about to ask the reason for her smile when he realized what she was thinking.

“It's okay to be in love,” she stated, confirming his thoughts.

Emeka scoffed in a mixture of amusement and mockery. His mother thought there was something going on between him and this woman. He had not even met her in person, and he already disliked her. He wasn't quick to judge people or write them off, but Madam Mosun had proven how wicked and insensitive she was, he wasn't even willing to give her the benefit of doubt.

“When you meet a woman who keeps you thinking this way, she is probably the one,” his mother stated, jolting him from his thoughts.

His eyes widened slightly in amusement. He couldn't believe his ears. “Nne, what do you mean? Are you insinuating I marry a woman I know nothing about?”

He felt a weird sense of triumph as the smile slowly faded to worry. His mother always thought that she had him figured out. Not this time.

“What do you mean, you know nothing about her?” his mother queried. “I thought you said you work with her.”

“I said I have to work with her. I've never met her in person.” His mother's frown deepened.“There are chances she's even closer to your age than mine.”

“Ha!”

Emeka smiled at his mother's reaction, unable to help himself. “I know nothing about her, except that she's a very difficult person.”

“Biko, biko, biko! Must you do business with her? I don't want anybody that will give you wahala o!”

“Don't worry, mummy, I'll handle her.”

“You're sure? Or you want me to talk to her for you?”

Emeka gave her an incredulous look. “Nne! What am I, twelve?”

“If you like, be ninety, you are still my son,” she retorted as she got to her feet. Emeka laughed but she wasn't smiling. “And here I was thinking you have found me a daughter-in-law,” she said as she walked back into the kitchen.

Emeka rolled his eyes at her retreating back. He knew it would come to this. Every conversation boiled down to marriage. He was tired of being single, but he wasn't rushing into marriage just to be frustrated for the rest of his life. He was going to take his time to find the perfect woman for him, but he couldn't dwell on that now. There were more pressing issues.

CHAPTER TWO

The room was chilly. It had rained the night before and rather than turn on the air conditioner, Mosun had decided to open the windows and let in fresh air. The smell of rain, mixed with the scent of green plants and soil, a product of the fallen leaves from the mango and paw-paw tree in the backyard, filled the room. It was the kind of morning you wanted to snuggle under your duvet and stay in bed, and Mosun was sorely tempted to give in to the desire. In fact, waking up every morning was a chore. Not only was she not a morning person, she didn't like going to work. She liked the perks and comfort her job offered, but doing the actual work was a challenge. It reminded her of her inadequacies; reminded her she was no good at this job, and was just pretending to have things under control.

Her phone alarm went off again, forcing her to remove the duvet over her head. It had gone off the first time at six-thirty. Now, it was seven o'clock. She heaved a sigh as she rolled across the bed to pick her phone from the side table, and end the shrilling sound of the alarm. Rather than get out of bed, she sat up and rested her back

against the headboard as she performed her early morning ritual of checking *Instagram* feeds. For her, it was the best way to wake up properly and rid herself of sleepy eyes.

As she scrolled through her IG feeds, she liked celebrity photos and videos, sending some to her friend, Glory, so they could have a laugh. A good dose of comedy memes, celebrity scandals, and wedding glams had her thinking of what to post on her page to *pepper dem*. Inspiration came when she saw her friend, Damilola's latest picture post, celebrating her first day at her new job with Mobil Oil with *#newbeginnings,* and *#greaterheights*. Mosun commented immediately, *"Congratulations, let's hook up sometime."* She then went to her photo gallery, retrieved an old picture she took after a board meeting in Dubai the previous year, and posted it with *#bosslady, #communicationguru*, and *#Ilovemyjob.*

Feeling satisfied, and now fully awake, Mosun dropped the phone to think of what to wear, sighing. Going to work was stressful, and she missed the aristo sugar daddy days. Then, she had enough time to sleep, while still living the life. Now, she had to work to enjoy her life, but most importantly, to earn the respect she desired. Sighing again, she sluggishly rose from the bed, undressed and walked into the bathroom to have her bath. Within five minutes, she was out. She wasn't one to waste time washing her body. Getting dressed and making up however were a different ball game. She could spend hours and still second guess how she looked.

On weekdays, she tried to keep it simple and quick. She couldn't afford to get to work late, not when she had *thorn in the butts* in her

butt. That was what she called her boss. She rolled her eyes at the thought of the guy as she carefully drew her eyebrow in front of the dressing table mirror. The name best described a man who was transferred to head her department three months ago, thereby relegating her to the position of Deputy Head. Although it didn't affect her salary, it reduced her authority and increased her responsibility. But she couldn't complain; she was living the life she wanted.

Liar! Her conscience pricked her. *If you are really living the life you want, why do you sometimes feel empty?*

Mosun sighed.

No matter how many things she acquired, she wanted more. The concept of happiness was always fleeting, replaced by a heavy feeling of emptiness. She wished she could talk to someone, but it seemed all her friends were happy people. She scoffed, knowing she was lying to herself again. The reason she couldn't talk to them was because they weren't really her friends. She met most of them at one club or the other. Others were business people she kept on her contact list for the purpose of connections and invitations to prominent social functions, and the rest were friends or fans on social media.

The people she could really call friends were some of the girls from her university days, but she knew they weren't real to one another. Their conversations were centered on the hottest bags, clothes, guys, cars, and celebrities. No one wanted to have real, deep

conversations. They all put on a façade and in some way, Mosun preferred it although it was becoming increasingly hard to keep up the pretense that she was happy and had a nice close-knit family that cared for her.

The thought of family darkened her mood. She grew up knowing only her father, who was never around. Her mother died during her birth, and her father blamed her for it. He had once told her she was an unwanted liability who he wished never came. Even now, the words stung. Her parents were both undergraduates when her mother got pregnant. She heard her mother was on the pill, so the pregnancy was a shock. If not for the love between them, her father would have thought her mother was cheating on him, so instead of dumping her, he made her use pills to abort the pregnancy. Sadly, it didn't work.

The lovers decided to go for an operation, but the doctor warned them against it, saying her mother might lose her life in the process.They agreed to have the child and give it up for adoption as soon as it was born, but her mother lost her life in the process. This raised a lot of rancor between the two families, as her mother's family blamed their daughter's death on her father, and he, in turn, blamed it on her.

Mosun often wondered if her mother shouldn't have taken her chance with the abortion. At least, her father wouldn't loathe her. As if his girlfriend's death was not painful enough, her mother's family told him to keep the child. To them, it was cruel for a girl who lost her

mother to be rejected by her father. Although their concerns were genuine, Mosun believed her fate would have been better had she been placed in an orphanage, because her father, though alive, was almost as absent as her dead mother. To him, she was a reminder of the woman he loved and lost.

Raised by their neighbours, she lost her virginity to their first son, a twenty-one-year-old Law student at the age of twelve. She had indulged him because he was the only one who gave her attention, and in her naiveté, she assumed it was love. Consequently, sex became a symbol of love, and for a while, she used it to curb loneliness. As she grew older, she discovered that the boys who slept with her didn't love her since they were quick to sleep with the next available girl. Sadly, this didn't stop her from having sex; she was already an addict, but rather than do it for nothing, she started doing it for something. There were times she wished she could be different; act like some of the decent or religious girls and be pious and chaste. Sometimes, she even pretended to be a serious-minded, principled person, like she was doing now at her company since the new boss resumed, but like a Yoruba adage says, *"Your character is like smoke; it cannot be hidden."* He knew her for who she was, but she didn't care.

Are you sure?

She ignored the prompting as she checked her body in the full-length mirror, done with her make up. She liked what she saw and smiled at her reflection before strutting to her massive shoe rack to pick her

red designer shoes. She however didn't put them on as they were quite high, and she couldn't drive in them. Instead, she put on her flip flops, and walked out, thoughts of her past discarded to a far compartment in her brain as soon as she shut the door behind her.

Emeka glanced at the clock for the third time in thirty minutes. It was 9:15 pm. As he had imagined when he arrived, he was going to be sitting idle for at least an hour before he would be lucky to see Madam Mosun. He had woken up that morning with a strong nudge to be there by 9:00 am. He could only hope it wasn't a huge mistake as he had arrived earlier than the 12:00 pm she agreed to meet him and Sandra, who had to take the day off because of her father's birthday party later that evening. He made a mental note to call his friend, Charles, to go with him, as he observed his environment.

The waiting hall attached to the branding department of Freshee was very quiet except for the occasional opening of a door somewhere to his far right, and the soft humming of the air conditioner. The marble floor had just been mopped and was looking pristine. The waiting chairs were made of leather upholstery and looked cozy and comfortable. There was a TV that was currently switched off and various magazines were on the stylish coffee table placed in the middle of the room. The place oozed money and affluence

The shrill sound of his ringing phone permeated the silence, startling him. He quickly muted it before checking who was calling. It was Sandra. He paused, not sure whether to take the call in the room,

even though the secretary's seat was empty. He decided to step out. She would ask him questions and he wanted to be able to answer freely without choosing his words. He got to his feet and reached for the door, his gaze on his phone. He was oblivious of Mosun, who had opened the door, her eyes fastened on her red heels, wondering how the stain on it got there. They collided, with Mosun almost losing her balance. Emeka however caught her in time, and tried to steady her, only to realize she wasn't getting off him. Mosun, who was now bent at an awkward angle, wasn't finding this funny.

“What the….?”

“Just calm down, okay?” Emeka interrupted her as he quickly tried to figure out what was wrong. Mosun's next statement supplied the answer.

“My hair…”

Emeka soon realized that her hair pin was hooked in his collar. Holding her steady, he carefully removed the pin, freeing her. She sighed in relief, looking slightly embarrassed at the incident as she touched her hair. She was feeling a slight sensation due to the pull and winced in pain.

“Are you okay?” he asked in concern.

“I'm fine,” Mosun replied briskly.

As she spoke, Emeka noticed a red stain on her front teeth, possibly a smear from her lipstick. He wanted to call her attention to it but

Mosun was already walking past him, only for her to slip on the wet floor, her arms flailing. Emeka, who was watching her as she walked away, caught her just in time to prevent her from falling flat on her face. Now more embarrassed and humbled, Mosun let him lead her to the waiting chairs while he towered over her, looking at her in concern.

He glanced meaningfully at her red shoes. “You want to take that off?”

“And walk barefoot?” Mosun retorted, finding the whole incident annoying. “I don't think so.”

“Just want to be sure you don't have a sprained ankle.”

“What?!”

Emeka chuckled at the look of mock horror on her face as he squatted in front of her.“May I?”

She nodded, looking worried, as he carefully removed her shoes and examined her ankles. After a few seconds of observing him, she asked, “What are you? A doctor?”

Emeka chuckled in response. “I wish.” He carefully put her feet back in her shoes as he declared with a smile, “But they look fine to me.”

Mosun returned the smile. Emeka noticed the smear on her teeth again and wanted to point it out but decided against it. The lady was

already embarrassed enough. Growing up with his sister had taught him ladies were usually sensitive to things like that. He watched as she got to her feet now, trying to muster as much dignity as she could.

“Thank you… For helping.”

“You're welcome,” he replied as he watched her go, turning away when he realized he had not taken Sandra's call and needed to call her back.

Mosun was grateful no one had been around to watch the ordeal, especially Ifelayo. It would have been very embarrassing. She sighed in relief as she scanned her I.D card and clocked in. It was one of the annoying things she had to start doing since *thorn in the butts* became her boss, while her eyes strayed to the man who had literally caught her from falling. He was now on the phone, his back turned to her. There was something about him that beamed with confidence, and it created a yearning in her; a desire for a strong, thoughtful man like him.

He's the kind of guy you can never have.

The thought came from somewhere within her spirit and she wondered why she would think that.

But you know why.

Mosun sighed. She did. A deep look at her past, and even her present, would naturally send most eligible men running away from her. She

had never deceived herself into thinking that one day, a gentleman would fall for her, and waltz her down the aisle. Those fantasies were enjoyed by certain girls in whose clique she did not belong. The clique she belonged to took all they could from men and left the rest for the “happily ever after girls.”

Yet…Yet, when she looked at this man, she felt a tug at her heart. It had been years she'd felt that way for any man. This man had held her carefully, as though she was more. It was unexplainable, but there was something soft, smooth, polite and feathery about him. He didn't just leave her after saving her from falling; he had genuinely asked if she was okay as though it meant something to him. The concern went beyond his lips to his eyes. And it had been touching. Having survived lack of care from childhood, it was something she had conveniently lived without, but this guy's action pushed at the locked door where such yearnings had been carefully hidden.

It would have been understandable if it was any other male staff. They would do anything just to be in her good books or bed, but this one didn't know her. He was probably there to see *thorn in the butts* and thankfully, he had not arrived. She hadn't seen his car in the car park. She adjusted her hair and told herself all this sweetness towards him wasn't a big deal. It was because she was carried away by his good looks, not to mention he dressed nicely. She glanced at him one more time; he was still on the phone and on the other side of the door where she had collided with him. She quickly put on her professional face when Ifelayo walked in.

“Good morning.”

Rather than respond to her greeting, Mosun gave her a look of disapproval. “Are you just coming?”

Ifelayo frowned as she replied, displeased with Mosun's bitchy attitude towards her. “No. I went to IT.”

Mosun studied her, trying to decipher if she was saying the truth. Since she couldn't refute it, she let it go. “Cancel all my appointments till 1:00 pm today.”

“But you told Apple Eye Advertising to…”

Mosun interrupted her. “I know. The man called me yesterday to remind me.”

“So, why are you cancelling?”

“Because I'm not available,” Mosun retorted, giving her a baleful look. “And when the boss arrives, let me know.”

She turned, only to see Emeka now standing behind her. He had heard her conversation with Ifelayo and was trying hard to keep his annoyance in check. So, this was the Madam Mosun he had been trying to see. She was nothing like what he had imagined. He expected a middle-aged woman of average height, with wide-rimmed reading glasses and zero fashion sense. She was the exact opposite; petite, her height elevated by the almost six inches heels she was putting on, her eyes striking, thanks to the contact lens she

was wearing. She smiled at him now, and even though it transformed her face and made her look more striking, Emeka wasn't fooled.

“I know you're here to see Mr. Ojekunle, but since he's not around, perhaps I could entertain you in my office.” She scoffed nervously, clarifying. “You know, just have coffee and laugh over the awkward situation.”

Ifelayo glanced at him, giving him a quizzical look. Emeka ignored her, instinctively responding. “Coffee sounds good.”

He would play her game and reveal his identity later if that was what it took to get an audience with her.

Thankfully, Ifelayo did not bust him. Instead, she winked at him as he followed Mosun, mouthing the word, “Enjoy.”

He doubted he would.

Emeka closed the door to Mosun's office and hid a sigh. Like the waiting hall, Mosun's office screamed money. From the quality of the leather couches to the glass table, cabinet, and the exotic window blinds, everything complimented perfectly. The chandelier dropping from the pure white ceiling bounced off the wall, making it difficult to decipher the exact colour the walls were painted in, even though it looked green. A small bar was at the corner of the room, and on the adjoining table, a jar of coffee was already brewing. The room looked like the V.I.P of an exotic restaurant. He didn't need to be told that an interior decorator must have had a good month when

this place was put together. He made a mental note to inquire about the person's contact from Ifelayo after he must have tipped her on his way out. He definitely needed some of this touch in his own space; apart from the fluff and excess of course.

He made a move to sit by her desk, where she had just dropped her handbag, but she motioned for him to sit on the couch and went to the coffee table to get two mugs from the cabinet. As he sat down, he had the urge to relax, but quickly reminded himself he wasn't there for comfort; he was there to do business. He sat up and picked a copy of the Business Review on the coffee table, flipping through, but not reading a word. He was aware of Mosun's every move and wondered how such a young woman rose to this kind of position so early in life. Emeka had no choice but to look at her when she addressed him.

“Do you take your coffee black or with cream?”

“Black, please,” he replied, his gaze lingering.

He however quickly turned his attention back to the magazine when their gazes locked briefly. He wondered if he should let her know about the red stain on her teeth, but dismissed the thought again. Hopefully, the hot coffee would melt it away. He sighed, wondering why that mattered to him. He should be more concerned about how she would react when she found out who he really was.

Mosun stole a glance at the man who made himself comfortable on the couch as she poured the hot water into the coffee. She had invited him on impulse and was now at a loss on what to say to him.

Suddenly, what happened between them was not a big deal anymore. Really, a person hits you, you say sorry and life goes on. There was no need to make a big deal out of it, yet she had. She didn't even know this guy, yet, she was making coffee; something she would naturally have asked someone else to do. Mosun sighed. There was something about this guy that wanted her to make a good impression on him.

As Emeka adjusted the collar of his shirt, he saw Mosun staring at him. He knew she was pretending to be nice. The lady wasn't as soft and good as she was acting to be since he wouldn't be in her office right now if she knew who he was. Then it dawned on him that it wasn't just something that brought him here earlier than the appointed time, it was the Holy Spirit. He couldn't help but smile as he said a silent thank you to God. He remembered something the Pastor said the day before in church from Exodus 33:14, *"The Lord replied, I will personally go with you Moses, and I will give you rest, everything will be fine for you."* He had prayed seriously about that verse, asking for God's guidance in every one of his moves, and this was obviously the beginning of the manifestation.

With the knowledge that God was with him, he decided he wasn't going to win this contract by deception; he would just come out straight and tell her who he was. Unfortunately, she beat him to it, introducing herself first as she handed him the cup of coffee.

"My name is Mosun Olalere, Deputy Head of the Brands and Communication unit."

It took Emeka a moment to respond as he took the coffee from her, completely thrown off that she spoke first. “Err… Nice to finally meet you. I am Emeka Obiagu from Apple Eye advertising agency”.

At first, Mosun just nodded, more preoccupied with what to say to take the conversation to the next level, but after processing what he said, it dawned on her that this was the man she had been carefully avoiding. A frown appeared on her face, replacing the pleasant smile she'd had on a few seconds ago. Emeka noticed and looked her straight in the eye. He felt no remorse or regret.

“I overheard your conversation with Ifelayo, and considering the fact that you've been avoiding us, I didn't bother to correct you when you assumed I was here to see Mr. Ojekunle.”

Mosun cringed inwardly, putting on a fake smile as she dropped her cup of coffee on the table. It was all she could do to avoid spilling it. She berated herself for inviting him into her office. If she hadn't, he wouldn't be mocking her now, would he? What insolence! She thought with a surge of annoyance, yet, she knew it wasn't his fault. She had allowed herself to be carried away by how handsome he looked, but more importantly, it had been about making friends with her boss' client so she could score points with *thorn in the butts*. Now, she was paying the price.

She stared at him, thinking of how to respond without embarrassing herself further. But oh boy, the guy was really fine. The Emeka she was expecting was supposed to be old and principled-looking, not this Idris Elba with an Igbo name. And wasn't he supposed to be here

by noon? The guy could take liberties, just like his annoying call the day before. The stubborn streak in her wanted to send him out, at least until she could compose herself, but the sensible one told her it would be rude; she had to attend to him.

She forced a smile, and with as much dignity as she could muster given the circumstances, she said, “I'm sorry. It's not that I don't want to attend to your company; it's just that I have been very busy. Let me see your file.”

“We left it with Ifelayo last week, and she told me yesterday that she had given it to you.”

Mosun recalled collecting the file, but she didn't know where she'd left it, and she couldn't tell Emeka that. She wished she had time to prepare for the meeting rather than this surprise she'd sprung on herself.

“Yes, you are right, she gave it to me,” she said, and wished she had lied since he would expect that she had gone through it. Before she could utter the next word, the intercom rang, and for the first time in a long time, she appreciated the interruption of the ringing sound. She quickly rose to her feet. “Excuse me.”She went to her desk and picked the intercom. It was Ifelayo. “Yes?”

“Mr Ojekunle has arrived and wants to see you immediately.”

Mosun pursed her lips in annoyance. She hated being summoned to *thorn in the butts'* office. She hated it more that Ifelayo knew it and

relished informing her that she was being summoned. Ifelayo had been her secretary when she was the Head of the unit. Now that *thorn in the butts* occupied that position, she was his secretary as well as hers. It was another reason she couldn't fire the rude, snobbish girl. Right now, however, going to see Ojekunle was better than sitting foolishly before this man. It was semi-heaven.

“Okay, I'll be there shortly,” she said into the intercom and replaced the receiver, before turning to Emeka, “I'm sorry Mr…”

“Obiagu, Emeka Obiagu.”

Mosun gave him a tight smile. “Forgive me, I'm bad with names.”

Emeka returned her smile. “It's fine. Hopefully, you'll get used to mine.”

Mosun chuckled mirthlessly. The man had a nerve, and there was something both challenging and annoying about his confidence. “I have a meeting now, so I guess you would have to come back for this meeting.”

Emeka got to his feet, business-like. He wasn't going to let her dismiss him again. Not when he finally had an audience with her. “I can wait.”

“That would not be necessary…”

“Are you sure?” Emeka interrupted her. “You might decide you don't want to see me,” he stated, holding her gaze.

Mosun scoffed with a tight smile, not sure how to respond; that annoying boldness again. But she had to admit, the guy had a point. The thought did cross her mind but now that he'd stated the possibility, she was forced to reassure him, and keep to her word.

“You don't have to worry about that, Mr Emeka. I will see you,” she stated. “I just cannot guarantee you'll win the contract as it will be awarded to the lowest bidder,” she threw in, unable to help herself. She needed to let him know she was still in charge; she could gradually sense she was losing the power she wielded over him.

He nodded in understanding as he replied, “Of course, I know. We can only hope we would be the lowest bidder and that your organization will be fair and objective”.

In between the words, Mosun sensed the underlying message. He was referring to the last time they'd won, and she'd given the contract to someone else. The guy was beginning to annoy her; his confidence would only land him in trouble. She didn't owe him any favors or explanations, but she couldn't say that. Instead, she walked up to him, and stretched out her hand to shake him, offering him a small tight smile.

“I'll see you at our next appointment.”

Emeka practically grabbed her slim hands in his two large ones, looked her straight in the eye and said, “Sure. And it was nice meeting you”. He dropped her hands and turned to leave the office, but before he turned the knob, he looked back at her. “It's not my

place but you should check the mirror before leaving for your meeting. I think your lipstick smeared your teeth when you fell." Before she could ask him what he was implying, he opened the door and left.

Mosun's eyes widened at the implication of what he had just said. She quickly dashed to her desk where she'd left her bag and poured the contents on the table in order to pick her mirror. This was her trend; she did everything haphazardly. Her reflection in the mirror was horrible, and though it wasn't as bad as she'd imagined, to her, she looked like a vampire with blood on her teeth. As if she was not embarrassed enough, this had to join the list. She wished she would never see Emeka again, and hoped they were not the lowest bidder so they could lose the account.

With a mixture of irritation and embarrassment, she pulled a wipe from a blue case on the table and cleaned her teeth. Satisfied she no longer looked like a vampire, she touched up her make-up then stuffed her bag with the content she had carelessly poured on the table earlier. Now, she was ready to see *thorn in the butts.*

What a beautiful way to start the week, she thought with sarcasm as she drained her coffee, and stared at Emeka's untouched one.

CHAPTER THREE

Charles and Emeka had been best friends for over twenty years, and for most part, had done everything together. From their choice of schools, course of study, sports, first cars, and even liking the same girl at some point, they had a rhythm. Then Charles got married and things became different. His wife became priority, and Emeka respected that. He was fine with being a part of their lives as often as they allowed it. However, he and Charles still attended events together mostly because Charles loved attending events and Emeka hated being at one alone. It was therefore a no-brainer to invite Charles to come with him to Sandra's father's party, and Charles had been eager. It was a chance to enjoy free drinks.

When Charles was ten, his family went on a trip to Calabar from Lagos for the marriage ceremony of his brother, James, and for a long time, that trip was the best thing that happened to him. He loved weddings and the sweet funfair that went with it, but that wasn't why this trip was memorable. It was memorable because it was the first time he slept in a hotel room. They had been in Calabar for three days, and he had been smitten with the room. Everything was white, from the bedspread to the long curtains and even the lights that were

tiny little things scattered on the ceiling like stars in the sky. Everything was pristine and to his child-like mind, the room was neat and “ironed.”

Charles was now a man and had slept in better rooms than that hotel room, but every time he entered Emeka's room, the memory rushed back. To say that Emeka's room was immaculate was putting it lightly. Not a single thing was out of place. In the early days of their friendship, he had often wondered how a fellow man could be this clean, detailed and organized. In school, Emeka's socks never got dirty, his uniforms were always neatly pressed and he always had a tissue and hand sanitizer. Meanwhile, guys like him didn't bother about hygiene. It was a miracle they had remained friends for so long. He doubted the friendship would have survived if they were women. He chuckled softly, knowing that if his wife could hear his thoughts right now, she would go into a defensive tirade about how men could sometimes stereotype women.

Pulling himself from thoughts of his wife, he became aware of the sound of the shower and shook his head at his friend, who was obviously still in the bathroom, listening to a sermon by T.D Jakes. He had parked his car outside the compound because he thought Emeka would already be dressed, but apparently, his friend was not in a hurry. Without removing his shoes, he plopped on the well-laid bed, knowing Emeka would scold him once he came out, but not caring as he began fiddling with his phone. He was used to the guy now.

True to form, as soon as Emeka stepped out of the bathroom and saw the familiar sight of Charles on his bed with his shoes on, he protested

“Oga, get out of my bed joor, or take your shoes off.” he said, throwing his hand towel at Charles, as he walked to his dressing table to cream his body and spray an antiperspirant. “I must talk every time!”

“Na you sabi! You should be used to me by now,” Charles replied as he sat up on the bed, and tossed the hand towel aside.

“Is this your 6 o'clock? I told you the party starts at 5, and you are just arriving.”

“See this one! Are you not the one just coming out of the bathroom? Or you expect me to come and wait for you while you get dressed.”

“You dey forbid?!”

“Abeg, abeg, abeg! If you need that kain company, you better get yourself a woman.”

“What has a woman got to do with this conversation now?” Emeka queried as he put on his undergarment.

“Everything!” Charles retorted. “This one you are even inviting me to follow you to this girl's father's party arouses its own suspicions, but I will reserve my comments.”

“What are you talking about? You better say your mind,” Emeka said as he grabbed the white towel he came into the room with and the hand towel he had tossed at Charles earlier, and headed back into the bathroom. “I'm only attending this out of courtesy. Sandra is my assistant, and girls take things like this seriously,” he stated from the bathroom.

“Okay o! I hear you,” Charles said as he got to his feet to check his reflection in the mirror, while Emeka emerged and reached for his clothes from the wardrobe. It was a royal blue traditional two-piece. “Whatever you say, man. I just want you to know that when it's time to go and prostrate or take kolanut to the girl's family, I am at your service.”

Emeka scoffed laughingly. “Get over yourself Charles. I'm not getting married yet. Even if I wanted to, I've not found the right girl.”

Charles looked away from the mirror to stare at his friend. “Guy, when you are truly ready ehn, you will find the right girl. As for me, bachelorhood was good while it lasted, but the joy of wedlock cannot be quantified, especially when you are married to the right woman.”

“Wetin I go do now? You married the last good woman that could have appealed to me.”

At his statement, Charles kicked Emeka in the leg and ran for cover “My friend, you better go and find your own woman o, let my wife not appeal to you, abeg.”

Emeka grinned widely as he adjusted his clothes, checking himself out briefly in the mirror before picking his hair brush from the dressing table. He looked at Charles from head to toe, taking in what he was wearing: black T.shirt, green jeans trouser and sneakers.

“Mr. Jealous Husband, I thought marriage would have cured your sick dress sense.”

Charles gave himself a look over. “What do you mean?”

“It's an old man's party, you can't dress like this,” Emeka gestured, waving his hand at his friend's apparel before proceeding to brush his hair. “Please, remove everything and pick something nice from my wardrobe, I can't let you follow me looking like my driver,” he said, dropping the hair brush to spray his perfume.

From habit, Charles picked the perfume as soon as Emeka dropped it and sprayed himself too. “Is this about creating a good first impression? You better tell me what you are up to.”

Emeka gave him a mocking smirk as he grabbed his perfume and arranged it neatly with his other body care products on the table. He refused to dignify his statement with a response and changed the topic.

“Speaking of good first impressions, I met Mosun today.”Charles, who had opened Emeka's wardrobe and was examining the pile of neatly ironed clothes arranged according to styles and colors tried to remember who Mosun was. “The woman in charge of the Freshee

Juice contract," Emeka explained when he realized his friend had no idea who he was talking about.

"Oh! Has she awarded you the contract?" Charles asked, trying to decide what to wear out of the options available to him.

"I wish!" Emeka chuckled. "Even the meeting was a miracle. The woman practically fell into my arms."

Charles' head shot out of the wardrobe to look at his friend, one eyebrow raised in curiousity. "That sounds romantic." he stated, "…and weird…" he added. "How did you get her to fall into your arms? Did you seduce her?"

"Really?" Emeka snorted, giving his friend a mildly incredulous look. "Must everything have a mushy undertone? Is this what marriage has turned you into?"

"Na you sabi! You better start talking so I can strategize on how to deliver you from another jealous husband."

Emeka laughed a little in amusement as he began to clean his shoes. "Don't worry, I don't need saving. She's not married. At least I didn't see her wearing a ring."

"That's interesting."

"Hmm…" he muttered. "What's more interesting is that she's very young. I doubt she's older than 27 years."

“And she's the Brand Manager,” Charles stated, his tone tinged with respect. “She must be very intelligent…. Or highly connected.”

“Assistant Brand Manager,” Emeka corrected, stepping into his shoes, his mind, filling with the vision of Mosun as it had several times after he'd left her office. He recalled the look of horror on her face when he'd mentioned the smear on her teeth and chuckled softly, but his amusement died quickly when he remembered she was purposely sabotaging his company from getting the contract. “I wish I didn't have to do business with her?”

“Why?” Charles queried as he put on the trouser of the wine, two-piece traditional wear he settled for. It was a bit too lengthy since Emeka was taller but he could survive.

“She just strikes me as a toxic person.”

“Hmmm… Mr. Critical, one meeting and you have reached a verdict.”

“It usually takes one meeting to make an impression,” Emeka said, giving his clothes a pointed look. “We are going to be late if you keep dressing like a woman, and you know you still have to check the shoes to see which one will fit.”

“For your mind, you want to turn me into your personal model abi? I'm sure everyone who knows you will know I'm wearing your clothes.”

“I doubt anyone is watching, and if they are, they should be used to it by now.”

Charles laughed in amusement. Wearing Emeka's clothes was a thing from when they were in school. It wasn't because he didn't have his, but for a chance to wear a neater one. “I have shoes in my car, my wife left a spare in case of emergencies like this.”

“That girl is a woman after my heart.”

“Which yeye heart?” Charles asked with a mock frown while Emeka laughed in amusement. “Mr. Man, I no dey follow you laugh, park well. There's only one heart she's after and it's mine.”

“Mr. Lover boy, calm down. You know she has eyes for only you.”

“Before nko?”

Emeka chuckled, shaking his head at his friend as he headed for the door. “Abeg, meet me downstairs, I'll get the car running.”

“Which car? Guy, abeg no fall my hand, we are taking my Mercedes. First impressions, remember?”

“And who are we trying to impress?”

“Sandra… Her dad…” Charles supplied, now fully clothed as he walked to the dressing table.

Emeka scoffed. “I've told you I'm not interested in the girl, but if you insist, I guess I could use a driver.”

Charles gave him a mocking look as he struggled with opening the lower drawer where Emeka kept his socks. “Who says I'm driving?

The effect would be lost if I drive you. My swag will dwarf you, and all the party girls will be all over me. My wife doesn't need the competition."

Emeka laughed in amusement. "You are incorrigible, you know, right? Ordinary this small Mercedes, you will not allow someone hear word. If na Benz box or something fancier nko?" Before Charles can respond, Emeka continued. "Mr. Man, don't spoil my drawer,"

"I no go wear socks?" Charles asked, finally successful with the drawer.

"I thought your wife had a mini wardrobe for you in your car."

"Na you sabi."

"Oga, hurry up and let's go joor," Emeka said and stepped out of the room while Charles proceeded to wear the socks.

Flowing in *agbada* left and right, men of class danced with their women on the dance floor, spraying the celebrant and the music band simultaneously. Emeka and Charles had been put on a table near Sandra's father's friend's table as soon as they arrived, and were treated to a plate of pounded yam and Oha soup. That was over two hours ago. Now, Charles was on his second plate of food; he could never pass off party *jollof rice* and *moi-moi* while Emeka was snacking on the bowl of small chops he had reluctantly accepted

when guests at their table were served. He was enjoying this party more than he had imagined. The M.C was a funny comedian that managed to crack jokes without being rude to the guest. He even succeeded in making the celebrant kiss his wife, while the audience counted from one to sixty.

He realized they were being given VIP treatment when he went out briefly to ease himself and overheard some of the guests around a table, where only two people had a plate of rice, were complaining that they were still waiting to be served. On another table, the guests had drinks but no food. In fact, one of the women on that table was already walking briskly to the area where the caterer's stand was. He imagined she must be on her way to complain to one of the close family members in charge of the refreshments. Sometimes, people felt so entitled to refreshment at these parties that they forget that their primary reason for being there was to celebrate with the celebrants.

Sandra must have anticipated that things may not go round because as soon as she saw him and Charles sitting at the back of the hall, she had come to them, snapping at the usher for not treating her guests as V.I.P, and had insisted without fail that they follow her to a space that was reserved for them.He was surprised that this was happening though. Sandra had been on the events planner's case the whole time, warning about this kind of food insufficiency. He soon realized the whole mix-up was not entirely the caterer's fault, because as some people were not getting food, others were feeding fat. On his way back, he saw a woman pouring food in nylon and swiftly throwing it

in her handbag. The woman would later sit down, straight-faced, and complain about not getting food with the others. Emeka was tempted to scold her, but resisted the urge and walked back to his seat to enjoy the band.

They would have been on their way out, but Charles hadn't finished his meal, and Sandra had insisted he greeted her mum before leaving. To make sure he didn't escape without her finding out, she had refused to accept the white envelope he'd slipped in her hands for her parents, saying it would be better if he presented it himself. Thirty minutes later, the dance floor was still hot. Right now, they were doing the family dance, and Sandra was there with her siblings, dancing with their parents. He glanced at his wristwatch. It was 9:15 pm, and he was going to work tomorrow. Charles's wife had also sent him a message. He wondered who fixed a party on a Monday evening anyway, but remembered that Sandra had told him the reason. A man of God had prophesied ten years ago that her father would not live to see his sixtieth birthday, and they had prayed to avert the prophecy, so as part of rejoicing about the falseness of the prophecy, they had decided to celebrate on the exact day.

Emeka excused himself from Charles and went to the dance floor. He danced a bit and moved towards Sandra, spraying her with one thousand naira notes since he didn't have lesser currencies. She danced happily, moving away from the circle of others just to dance for him. Emeka realized too late he had spent over a hundred thousand naira spraying her. He was about to leave the dance floor when Sandra's mum hugged him from behind and asked Sandra if he

was the one. She laughed out loud, scolding her mum gently without clarifying anything, and Emeka wondered why. He however smiled at the woman and raised his voice above the din of the music to congratulate her before pressing the white envelope of money into her hands. She hugged him immediately and prayed for him. She was about to start asking questions when a group of friends walked up to her and started spraying her. Emeka was grateful for the interruption and quickly left the dance floor with Sandra following him. He signaled to Charles, who immediately got to his feet and they left the hall.

As soon as they got to the parking lot, Emeka was relieved to be rid of all the noise. Sandra wanted to walk them to the car, but he refused since he was parked far away, and he didn't see the point. She didn't bother to refute him, giving him a bear hug, and saying thank you to Charles too for coming.As they walked to the car, Charles teased Emeka endlessly, claiming that he fit well with the family on the dance floor. Emeka scoffed, refusing to admit that it felt good to be treated as part of the family. He had also felt good at Sandra's hug but that was all he felt, “good,” and for him, “good” was not good enough.

When Charles got home, it was already past midnight. He slipped in with his key and put on the lights to find his wife, Chioma, dozing off on the couch, the style magazine she must have been reading, now on the floor. She was so pretty to look at, he wondered why he ever considered her plain. When he'd first met her, he'd thought that she was not enough; not enough breast, not enough hips, not the right

shape of lips, but thank God that had not stopped him from getting to know her. She was such an amazing person, and when God began to warm his heart towards her in love, his eyes opened to all that she had: pretty eyes, long hair, smooth skin, and amazing cooking skills. She was definitely his personal princess and he'd learnt that beauty was whatever you choose to call it, and wherever you choose to see it. He was about to steal a kiss when she surprised him with her soft hand flat on his face in a caress.

“So you are still awake,” he said and kissed her anyway.

She put her arms around him and smiled. “The bed was lonely without you.”

Charles returned her smile, and lifted her up. “In that case, we need to go and change that.”

As he carried her into the room, she chuckled, “Are you not tired? Remember you have a meeting by 7 am tomorrow.”

He chuckled too as he entered the room and dropped her on the bed “That's why I need all the strength I can get.”

As her husband pulled his shirt and made his way to her, Chioma asked “So, do you think Emeka and that lady may be on to something?”

Charles laughed briefly as he leaned in to kiss his wife “Now, that's the real reason you stayed awake,”

She smiled and tickled him. “Will you answer or what?”

“As a matter of fact, I think someone is up to something, I just don't think it's Emeka. He likes the girl but…” he shrugs, leaving the sentence unfinished.

“But what?”

“I don't know. He's stalling and I can't put my hand on why. The girl is perfect.”

“Hmmm,” Chioma muttered, her expression thoughtful. She however chuckled at the mischievous glint in Charles' eyes as he leaned close and started to plant tiny kisses on her thighs.

“What I can put my hands on tonight is you, so let's worry about Emeka tomorrow,” he said and claimed his wife's mouth in a kiss.

CHAPTER FOUR

A week ago, Sandra had been anxious about how her father's birthday was going to turn out. Thankfully, everything went well and she was back on the grind, having recovered from the stress of the party. She had never felt more alive and was excited about how the day was going to be. It was 6:45am as she stood in front of the mirror and studied her reflection, ready for work. For a twenty-nine-year old, she didn't look bad at all. In fact, in two months she was going to be thirty and if she didn't tell how old she was, one would assume she was in her early to mid-twenties. She smiled, pleased she was able to keep in shape and look good. Asides from the pressure of getting married because her biological clock was ticking, her life was going well. She had an amazing job that she absolutely loved, and her dream guy was more attentive than ever.

A wide smile appeared on her face as she checked her backside and adjusted the skirt she was wearing so it sat perfectly on her body. Emeka had not popped the big question yet, but she was hopeful and doing everything she could to show him she was a virtuous woman; a wife material. She had even become more religious so as to dissuade any thoughts he might have of them being unequally

yoked. She attended programs, planned on joining a department, and prayed more than ever even though the subject of her prayer was to have Emeka's love.

Her resolve to do something about how she felt for Emeka started at a youth annual conference in church the previous year when a pastor read a scripture that built her resolve, *"We make plans, but the final outcome is in God's hands."* Her interpretation was that if she prayed enough, her will would merge with God's will to bring her, her desired outcome. It didn't matter that she had heard over and over again that one must seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all other things would be added. Her reason for being a Christian was far from the kingdom of God; it was to get Emeka's love, and if God won't give him to her, then He might as well hold His kingdom.

Emeka too needed to catch the hint. The guy could just be clueless sometimes, she thought in frustration. How could a man not see a good thing when it was right under his nose? Sometimes she wondered if he had intentions of settling down at all. He wasn't young anymore; he was at least four years older than she was, and she knew he wasn't attached or interested in any woman even though he didn't lack female admirers. Her concern would have been that he was gay but for a man who had such strong Christian beliefs, she knew she didn't have to worry about that. As far as she could tell, Emeka was a nice guy, who struck a good balance between his social and spiritual life.

As was the norm since she became hung up on him, she painted an imaginary image of both of them poised together in a picture while he looked down at her in love, and her smile widened. She had imagined him in the bedroom, naked on the bed with her, in the bathroom, taking a cool shower, in a shopping mall, picking stuff with her, and in the car giving her a romantic kiss before dropping her off, and her body shuddered in anticipation at the pictures. She had even imagined a wedding, a honeymoon, a naming ceremony, and many other special moments as a couple. The guy was just simply sweet, and after waiting this long, considering the fact that her immediate younger sister married two years ago at twenty-four and now has a baby, she wasn't settling for any kind of man, she was going for the best.

Sandra looked in the mirror one last time, liked what she saw, picked her car keys from the dressing table, and wished herself good luck as she left the room.

Emeka drained his coffee, ate the last bite of bread, and hurried to the kitchen with his plates. He was running late for work, and although he could get away with it, he made it a duty to be an example to his team members. That way, it made it difficult for them to give him excuses. Out of habit, he started washing his plates even though he could have left it for the maid. As a teenager, he had created the rule that everyone cleaned up after themselves and he wasn't about to break it now, tempting as it was.This was what he was doing when his younger sister, Nkechi, waddled into the kitchen, her tummy extended before her.

Nkechi had met and fallen in love with Chinedu, an Engineer, while doing her National Youth Service in Abuja, and they'd tied the knot as soon as she was done. The inexperienced couple, who were still discovering each other, found out they were expecting a baby and unable to cope with the pressure of the first trimester, mood swings, cravings for strange foods, alongside different health complaints, Chinedu had brought his wife home to spend the rest of the month with their mother.

“Good morning,” Nkechi muttered as she headed for the fridge.

“Good morning,” Emeka returned as he watched her open the fridge and bring out a bowl of diced watermelon. She put two slices in her mouth, eyes on her brother, who was done washing his plates. He put them in the drainer, noting she hadn't used a fork. He picked one and handed it to her.

She made a face at him, but collected it as she spoke. “I thought you had gone. I didn't know you were still doing kitchen duties.”

“Washing my teacup and saucer is now kitchen duties?” he asked as he wiped his hands dry with a napkin.

He was happy to see her looking better. He had walked in on her yesterday while their mum was rubbing her feet and helping her try different sleeping positions. Nkechi was going through a lot with this pregnancy and the ideal thing would have been Chinedu, by her side, holding her hands through the journey, but on the flip side, he also knew that his sister could sometimes be an over pampered baby, so he could imagine why the guy decided to escape.

“Why do we have a maid in the house if you choose to do everything by yourself?”

Emeka smiled and responded as he walked out of the kitchen. “I guess to take care of a married baby.”

Just as he expected, she followed him. “At least, I'm married,” she countered, dipping her fork into the bowl to take another slice of watermelon.

The way people treated marriage as a status symbol never seized to amaze him. “Whatever”, he replied as he picked his car keys from the dining table and walked towards the entrance. He always enjoyed her teasing, and was glad to have her around, but he didn't have time for her drama this morning.

Like a troublesome wife, she followed him “is that what you will say? Well, I don't even think you need a wife, you are self-sufficient. What role will a woman play in your life?”

“Of course, there are some roles I cannot play by myself”, he said, turning to face her as they got out of the house, pointing towards her stomach.

She grinned widely and said, “So you also want to be a father?”

“Of course, I want to be a father,” Emeka retorted. “Besides, I am not a eunuch, I need a woman in my life, I've just not found the right one, and pressure from people like you is only making matters worse,” he said, pulling her nose the way he used to when she was younger. He

knew she would pretend to be annoyed and that would help him avoid the marriage pep talk she was about to start.

“I'm not a child anymore,” she protested mildly. “I may be five years younger than you, but you can't pull my nose like that anymore; I am somebody's wife now.”

Emeka grinned at her, caressing her cheeks softly, while she struggled to hide a smile “I know you are married now, but the way you act sometimes makes me forget,” he said, getting into his car. “But don't worry,” he continued, speaking to her through the opened car door. “I won't give you a sister-in-law who is like you so that you will be my only baby. God knows I can't afford to have two women like you in my life,” he stated and shut the door before she could reply.

She knocked on the window, indicating he should wind down, but he refused and instead, pulled out of the driveway. He caught her eyes in the rear-view mirror and saw her stick her tongue out to him. He laughed in amusement as he drove out of the compound. As he hit the road, he said a silent prayer, committing his day to the Lord.

“Ifelayo just called,” Sandra announced as soon as Emeka walked into their joint office.

“Good morning to you too,” he responded and she gave him an apologetic expression. “What did she say?”

“I'm sorry, good morning,” she said, her gaze on the documents she was working on. She wished she had thought of greeting him first, so

she decided to play the I-am-very-concerned-about-work card “It's just that we have worked so hard on this project, and this call is probably the answer to our prayers.”

Emeka settled into his chair and waved his hands to dismiss her apology. “When is the meeting?”

“Nine o'clock this morning,” she replied. “And they want us to bring a pilot copy of the advert,” she added, glancing at her system. She was copying data off it into a flash drive.

“How are we supposed to do that within thirty minutes and still not be late for the meeting?” Emeka asked in a mixture of alarm and incredulity.

“That's what I am trying to sort out,” Sandra replied, eyes still fixated on the system as she monitored the progress of the data she was copying.

Emeka stood up and started searching his desk for a document concerning the tender details. “The pilot copy is supposed to be created after approval, and not a prerequisite for getting the contract. That lady is a pain. I am sure this is her way of trying to discredit us.”

“You can say that again,” Sandra said as she disabled the flash drive from the system and yanked it out. “But she's in for a shock. Let's go.” She picked her handbag and walked over to grab Emeka.

“What magic do you intend to perform when we get there?” Emeka asked as they walked down the hallway? “This requirement would take at least a full working day to reach perfection.”

“I know that,” Sandra said with a triumphant look as they stepped out of the building and headed for the parking lot.

“So what do you intend to do?”

“Submit the pilot copy of course! Why else would we go there if we don't have it?”

Emeka stopped in his tracks, giving her a quizzical look. He wasn't aware that they had a pilot and wanted an explanation. He wasn't going to show up in Mosun's office and make a fool of himself. Sandra read the question in his eyes and decided it was time to come clean rather than act like Sherlock Holmes or James Bond.

“Well, I have been working on it for the past one week during my spare time, so this morning when I got the call, I just made a few adjustments.”

Emeka stared at her in pleasant shock, his face creasing into a smile. Instinctively, he lifted her and spun her a little in excitement, glad she had taken the initiative to do the pilot. “You are the best partner in the world.”

Sandra laughed heartily as he put her down. On cue, the official pool car stopped right in front of them. She had alerted the driver to bring the car just before Emeka arrived. In fact, she had decided she would go alone if he didn't show up in the office on time, which was unlike him. She was glad he walked in when he did. Stopping her musings, she stepped into the car as Emeka held open the door for her. They

greeted the driver together before Emeka faced a blushing Sandra again.

“Thank you, I am so proud of you.”

She shrugged and tried to sound casual even though her insides were buttering up. “I was just doing my job.”

Regardless of her feigned indifference, Emeka touched her hands briefly and said, “I know, but it takes responsibility to take initiative, and I appreciate such quality in my assistants. Thank you.”

Though his actions seemed completely innocent, Sandra could not help relishing these moments of proximity. It was a sign that she could hope for more, and though she wasn't a Mosun fan, she was silently grateful to her for this opportunity to prove herself to Emeka and hoped that everything will go well today.

Mosun stood by her window, thinking of the upcoming meeting with Mr. Overconfident. She'd tried not to give him too much thought after that first meeting in her office, but he somehow managed to creep into her thoughts unexpectedly. She'd decided to give them a chance but with a condition she knew would be impossible to meet. She wanted to see how he would handle that one. She smiled smugly and turned back to her desk. As much as she would just like to stand at her favorite place in the room and enjoy the view, she had work to do. She needed to prepare for her upcoming meeting and so opened the lower part of her cabinet where she stashed case files she left pending for weeks if nobody required or remembered them. The drawer was full and overflowing with some of the papers stuck in the

corners. Snorting at the task but not having a choice, Mosun knelt on the floor and forcefully pulled the drawer. It toppled in the process, and some of the files fell with the documents in them scattering on the floor.

Mosun hissed and sighed as she retrieved the papers, but when she saw her sketchpad, she squealed in delight and had to catch herself, a hand over her mouth. She had been looking for the sketchpad for the past two weeks. Drawing was her favorite pastime; in fact, it was the only area she was comfortable and confident in. Like her prowess in dancing, Mosun didn't see it as a real talent. It wasn't the kind of thing she wanted to be known for. She preferred being a boss lady heading a department in a big organization even if she didn't enjoy it.

Holding the sketchpad like one held an affectionate lover, Mosun sat down comfortably on the floor, and rested her back on the wall, as she flipped through the sketchpad. Drawing was therapeutic for her because it reduced her loneliness and helped her attain some level of peace when she was under pressure. It was also a means through which she could put her imagination and memories on paper. It was those memories that flooded her now as she flipped through each page.

She had been using the sketchpad since she was in SS 3, and it was special to her because she captured or illustrated only spectacular moments in it. She even had a name for it *Anike*, which in Yoruba meant a person or possession that you own to treasure. Ideally, she shouldn't still have any blank pages in *Anike* considering how long she'd had it, but because she sometimes drew on any paper she had

handy whenever she was inspired, *Anike* still had a few unused pages.

Anike was a gift from her maternal grandfather, Baba Onile, on her 16th birthday. It was the first and only time anyone in her family had given her a birthday gift. The man had come visiting a month to her birthday and had told her stories about her mum's childhood.That night, the room was dark, illuminated only by the silver lantern in between them. She had listened to him enthusiastically, building memories of the mother she never met. The moment was priceless and rare. The only person who could tell her about her mother was her father, and they rarely spoke about anything.

Baba Onile told her how her mother was one of the most beautiful girls in the neighborhood.

“Mosun, your mother had a good spirit,” he said. “We were blessed to have her as one of our children. She always sold *akaraand pap* for your grandmother every morning before going to school. Unlike other girls who were ashamed of their poor parents, she was proud of us.”In the middle of the conversation, she sensed that he was talking absentmindedly, for he said things she believed he wouldn't have told her. “But she went to the university, and I don't know how she changed. She got pregnant for that Akintunji boy, and died in the process. We didn't even know she was pregnant, her death was a shock.”

It was Mosun's soft sobs that interrupted his speech. He summoned her to sit on his laps and asked why she was crying.

“No wonder my father hates me” she had said.

He sighed deeply then said, “He doesn't hate you, he must have loved your mother so much, he couldn't bear to see you. And your promiscuity is not helping matters. But God knows if I had money, I would have taken you away from here. Don't worry my daughter, when he realizes how much you are like your mother, he would begin to show you love.”

“I am nothing like my mother,” she replied.

“Then how come you always remind me of her?” he asked rhetorically as he wiped her tears with the back of his hand, while leaving his own to flow.

She had woken up in the middle of the night and found herself on her bed, the lantern turned down low. The last thing she remembered was being in her grandfather's arm before she went off into slumber land. Awake and alert, she turned the lantern up and saw the old man sleeping on a chair by the window. Quietly, not wanting to wake him up, she tore a paper from her Mathematics notebook and drew the young lady Baba Onile had described her mother to be. The lady had *shuku* hairstyle, wore a school uniform, carried a bag pack, and had a hawking tray on her head.

When Baba Onile woke up and saw his granddaughter on the floor, he was scared, wondering why, but when he saw the drawing, he was amazed beyond words. She woke up as he lifted the paper.

“You are amazingly talented just like your mother,” he'd told her. “Don't ever think less of yourself because of any situation. You will

be great. When I get home, I will tell Shola to bring a sketchpad for you. It was given to your mother as a prize from one of the drawing competitions she won when she was your age. She kept it for special drawings, but misplaced it. I found it two years after her death."

The young man her grandpa sent to her brought the sketchpad a day to her birthday and she had claimed it as a birthday gift.Now, twelve years after, she couldn't think of any other thing that could replace the memory of that night. The words of Baba Onile came back to her: *"You are amazingly talented, you will be great."* How wrong he was. She was nothing like her mother. She flipped through the sketchpad while she fought back tears. She had a meeting coming up soon and couldn't afford to ruin her make-up. She glanced at the clock. It was 8:30. She had thirty minutes before her meeting with Mr. Overconfident of Apple Eye Advertising. Settling down on the tiled floor of her office, she leaned against the drapes and flipped through her sketchpad, losing herself in the memories she'd captured.

Thirty minutes later, Mosun was the picture of professionalism. Her make-up had been touched up, her office neatly arranged and her sketchpad tucked away like the treasure it was. She had no intention of misplacing it ever again. Now she was ready for work.

"Let them in," she said to Ifelayo over the intercom then checked out herself one more time after replacing the receiver.

Truthfully, she wouldn't have asked for a meeting, but her boss had been impressed by the tender they submitted. Although *thorn in the*

butts gave her the permission to choose the company that would handle the project, she knew better than to choose anyone else considering the fact that Apple Eye Advertising was the lowest bidder, but she wasn't going to make it easy for them. She found Mr. Overconfident irritating and annoying. She also sensed she wouldn't be getting any percentage on the job if they handled the project, but unfortunately, she was stuck between a rock and a hard place. She needed quality work to prove to her boss that she knew what she was doing and this Obiagu guy with his partner would be her trump card, but they didn't need to know that. In fact, she made a mental note to frustrate them some more.

The door made a calm creaking sound as they entered her office and her resolve became weak. She only needed to be in a room with this man and she stopped thinking rationally. She felt as if he could see through her and was capable of knowing her thoughts. It was the strangest thing ever. She found herself getting to her feet as they walked in when her boss-card move would be to sit down and watch them walk to her. She sighed inwardly as Emeka drew near and she shook him in that business-like way she had learned to do.

“Good morning, Mr. Obiagu,” she said as she looked him straight in the eye. She realized it was the wrong move.

Even though he returned her greeting with a warm smile, there was something about him that chilled her spine and took away her confidence. She was trying to figure out why she found him intimidating in a weird sort of way when the woman he came with, whom she assumed was his partner, stretched out her hand for a

shake and introduced herself as Miss Sandra Ezenwaka. The woman, like the man she was with, had a presence around her, and unlike her, was definitely one of those women who knew what they were doing in the business of branding and advertising. She motioned them to sit and made herself comfortable in her chair, reminding herself she was the chairman of this meeting regardless of their smartness. Their job depended on people like her to give their company contracts.

“I really would not want to waste any of our working hours so I would just go straight to the point,” Mosun said, and looked into their expectant eyes before bringing out their file.

Emeka tried to remain positive as he followed Mosun's fingers flipping through the pages of the file they had submitted earlier. He then stole a glance at Sandra who looked confident and returned his gaze to Mosun. What is it going to be? He wished he could answer that question, but he needn't bother for long.

“My team and I are impressed, but I can't say anything positive to you until I see the storyboard and the pilot version,” Mosun said as she lifted her head from perusing the file.

Emeka's heart skipped a beat as Sandra brought the flash drive from her bag and presented it to Mosun. Although he trusted her abilities and thought she did a brilliant job as he had said to her on their way when he checked it out on her laptop, he wished he'd contributed to the production with some of his own ideas to make it better, realistic, and achievable, especially because if they won, the company would

expect them to reproduce it, but he couldn't bother himself about that now.

Mosun stood up from her throne as she would like to think of her seat and position, and walked to the cabinet where the television was placed. She inserted the flash drive into it to enable them view it together on a big screen. Within a minute, it was over, successfully positioning Freshee juice as the leading fruit drink brand in Africa. Mosun was impressed, really impressed. The advert was captivating; the exact thing she needed to prove to her boss that she was more than just a figurehead. However, she was a master at concealing emotions so her expression remained the same.

While Mosun was impressed, Emeka was inspired. Checking out the pilot through Mosun's eyes gave him fresh perspectives about how the advert could be produced. Sandra had really stunned him. She was good; in fact, better than he had ever imagined. This was the first time she would handle a thing like this alone and unaided, and she did it well. He turned his attention back to Mosun, who looked indifferent and he didn't know what to think. It would really hurt if she turned them down, and not just because they needed the contract, but because Sandra had put so much effort into the project and he would hate to see her broken.

As soon as Mosun got back to her seat, she broke the tensed silence. “The advert needs to be improved on and I want something better than what you have on that storyboard.” Mosun noticed Emeka and his partner exchange a hopeful look. She almost rolled her eyes at

them but continued speaking. She needed to keep this as professional as possible. “Your cheque should be ready in two weeks, but you have to come around tomorrow. Our director would like to meet you,” she finished getting to her feet.

Emeka and Sandra were already smiling from ear to ear. If they were expected to pick up the cheque in two weeks, then that meant that they had the contract. Emeka felt surreal at the whole thing. He couldn't believe they finally had the contract. He wanted to scream in excitement but kept his cool.

“We'll review it and get back to you.”

Mosun nodded and Emeka extended his hand towards her. She glanced briefly at it and took his hand in hers as their eyes locked. Once again, she felt chills in her spine and quickly withdrew her hand, taking her seat.

“We'll see you tomorrow,” she stated and turned her gaze to her files. They've been dismissed.

Emeka nodded, still smiling, oblivious to Mosun's reaction as he led Sandra out of the office, while Mosun released the breath she didn't even know she had been holding as soon as the door shut behind them. She stared at the closed door for a while, hoping she wasn't going to regret giving him the job.

CHAPTER FIVE

Emeka whistled as he removed his office clothes and slipped into evening attire for his visit to SAN Williams" house. His day could not have gone better. His team had finally won the biggest contract of the year without him breaking his back like he had imagined. It wasn't like he didn't know that they could win, but he had been preparing to fight a battle first. He had expected series of interviews and probably a meeting from Mosun to split profits, but to his surprise, she had done none of those things. Instead, she had followed due process and had given them the contract on merit. Although, remembering the presentation Sandra had single-handedly put together, getting the contract was not just like that.

He was slightly shocked by Sandra's excellent delivery, and had told her so during the celebration lunch they'd had after the meeting with Mosun. The way she had evolved at their craft in such a short period marveled him. Even the devil would have been impressed if he was advertised the way Sandra had presented Freshee Juice. .He was proud of her and loved the way they worked together as a team. He could only hope she wouldn't miss him too much when he resigned to take over his father's company. He had definitely learnt enough on

the job, and it was time to use all he had learnt to raise the Obiagu name higher. That was why he was visiting SAN Williams, his father's closest friend and adviser. He needed fatherly advice and the best place to go to was the Williams'; at least he knew that was what his father would have expected him to do.

The maid, Aunty Agnes, who had worked with the Williams for over fifteen years and had become Emeka's ally, ushered him into the big house with a warm smile but quickly told him that the old man Williams was asleep and couldn't be disturbed. The way she took care of the family, one could easily assume that she was a blood relative or even the woman of the house.

“Of course,” Emeka replied, “You shouldn't disturb him, but I will wait. Is Glory at home?” he asked as Agnes placed a glass of chilled, fresh orange juice on the table beside him.

“Yes,” she replied. “She is in the sitting room upstairs with a friend.”

“Okay, thanks. I would probably go upstairs to see her later.”

As Aunty Agnes went into the kitchen, Emeka picked the remote control for the TV and changed the channel. After a few minutes of flipping through channels and finding nothing of interest, he left it on CNN where a repeat edition of African Voices was showing. The interview was with the wealthiest Nigerian lady under 30, who was also a full-time mum, and a part-time storyteller. He checked his wristwatch; it was just 6:30 pm.

Except for the sound of the TV, the house was quiet, and a smile tugged at his lips as memories flooded him. Who would have thought that this house would ever be this calm? Growing up, this had been his second home. He and his sister always came here from school every day with the Williams' kids, who were now all married except for Glory. They wouldn't go home until 6:00 pm when their mother would be back from work. He wondered how Aunty Agnes coped with dealing with five, very active and loquacious kids, who always had one reason or the other to quarrel and argue. With fondness, he remembered Aunty Agnes sometimes left them at the mercy of their lesson teacher when she got tired of their troubles.

Glory, the youngest of the lot, had always been wild. He remembered their short three months dating stint and he chuckled at the memory. He had just finished secondary school while she was in SS 1 and they had done every amorous thing in the book apart from actually having sex. It wasn't because he didn't want to, but for some reason, she hadn't let him, plus they had both been scared of getting caught. The relationship had fizzled out and they had put each other in the brother-sister zone. Emeka had grown up to know the Lord and have a personal relationship with him. He was no longer the kind of guy to engage in thoughtless pleasure-seeking activities, but Glory had turned out to be a social hub; a regular at Lagos clubs, moving from men to men for the fancy of it. Pulling himself from the past, he dropped the remote control, took a long drink from his glass of juice, and headed upstairs to see her.

She squealed with delight when she saw him fill the doorway. “I should have guessed it was you. No one walks like you do, but then again, I thought you have forgotten the address to our house.”

“That's no way to greet a big brother,” Emeka replied as he closed the distance between them and gave her a hug, “I have missed you”.

“Oh yeah? I guess you have. Your visit is a surprise. How did you know I would be home at this time of the day?” The look on his face explained the reason for his visit. Disappointed, she said, “I should have known. So you are here to see daddy.”

“Yes, I have a meeting with him, but I heard he is sleeping.”

“Yes, and he is not waking up until tomorrow morning. He used a pill to help him sleep.”

“Oh, okay, I guess I'll come and see him tomorrow then. He must have forgotten about our meeting. To be fair though, I didn't send him a reminder.” Emeka looked around the room, “I was told you have a friend here with you.”

“Yes. She is in the restroom touching up her make-up. We are going to watch a movie; taking a break from clubbing tonight because she has this big meeting to attend very early tomorrow.”

“Wow. It's good to know you have a friend who can take you out of the club,” Emeka remarked.

She squeezed her face at his comment. “Don't be deceived, she is not taking me out of anywhere. It was my idea that we don't go to the

club, which was a good idea now that you are going out with us. A cinema is decent enough for you," she said with a teasing smile.

"I didn't say I'll be going out with you because I am not," Emeka retorted.

"Oh you will, you don't have any excuse. The only thing that can bail you out is if she doesn't want you with us." Taking Emeka by surprise, she raised her voice and said, "Babe, do you mind if we have company?"

Emeka was completely taken aback when the girl shouted her reply. "If he's got something between his legs and smells like that, why would I?"

Emeka was embarrassed. Although the girl's boldness wasn't a surprise since most of Glory's friends were usually like that, he still felt objectified. How could she talk about someone she had never seen in that way, knowing he was hearing her?

Even Glory laughed out loud. "My friend is not as crude as she sounds, don't be scared," she said holding Emeka's arms. "But seriously Emeka, I would love to hang out with you again," she whined.

The way she stared at him pleadingly in that familiar baby-like manner of hers, Emeka couldn't bring himself to say no. "Alright, I will go with you, but not for more than two hours."

"You should be able to spend four hours with beautiful girls like us," Glory's friend said as she emerged from the bathroom.

Emeka looked from Glory to her and froze as soon as he saw her face. It couldn't be.

Mosun Olalere, Deputy Director of Freshee's Brand and Strategic Communications department was Glory's wild friend.Emeka wished he could take back the words he just told Glory as he stared at Mosun, who could also not hide her shock.

“He is not that handsome, why are you staring at him like that?” Glory said with a small, teasing frown. Still, Mosun couldn't bring herself to talk, she just dropped her gaze.

“Good evening, Mrs. Olalere.”

Glory burst into laughter at Mosun's embarrassment. “Who would have thought you would know each other. And why do you think she is married?”

“I just guessed,” he responded and corrected himself. “I'm sorry Ms. Olalere.” He didn't know what else to say, considering the fact that Mosun had not said a word.

Glory giggled again. “I cannot believe that you know each other.” She turned to Mosun who was now sitting on the couch. “Girl, cat caught your tongue?”

Mosun felt foolish. She also felt the stirring of anger. Who would have thought that this Obiagu guy would be Glory's childhood friend that she had heard so much about? And how was she going to gain her respect back? The guy obviously saw her for who she really

was. Rather than continue to keep quiet, she decided to put up a brave front.

“Mr. Obiagu, we meet again. It's good to know that you are Glory's friend.”

“I would like to think of myself as Glory's big brother,” Emeka said.

At Emeka's comment, Glory raised her hands to spank him behind his head like she did when they were younger, but Emeka caught her hand in a reflex action.

“Brother and sister huh?” Mosun scoffed. “Well, I don't know what to say Mr. Obiagu, I feel very embarrassed.”

With a wave of his hands, Emeka said, “Stop doing that. Call me Emeka. Meeting like this obviously removes every need for formality. I guess it's a small world.”

“Yeah it is, you don't have to go with us to the cinema if you don't want to, I was just joking,” she said, hoping he would say no. The situation was already awkward for her.

Glory looked surprised. She had never seen Mosun try to act respectable. “Of course, he wants to go with us, he doesn't even have a choice,” she said looking at Emeka for his final word.

Emeka sensed Mosun's discomfort and decided to decline. “Thanks for saving me from this bully. I guess I'll pass,”

Glory wasn't going to give up easily.And she won.

Emeka and Mosun kept their real feelings to themselves and pretended all was well.

The movie was interesting; Emeka couldn't help laughing with Glory, who kept littering the floor with her popcorn. It was a locally produced comedy movie by one of Nigeria's veteran producers, and the movie lived up to the hype that Nollywood was enjoying for their stories, art direction, sound, and picture quality. However, Mosun was quiet. She equally enjoyed the movie, but being around Emeka made it almost impossible for her to be herself. As the end credit began to scroll, signaling the end of the movie, they stood up and walked quietly out of the cinema with Emeka and Glory exchanging jokes and passing comments about the movie.

When they got to the parking lot, Mosun regretted leaving her car at home and coming to Glory's house in a cab. Her phone suddenly wasn't picking good network signals, which meant she didn't have good internet to order a taxi. It would have been easier for her to give an excuse and leave considering they were both aware of her meeting the following morning. Now, she had to go in Emeka's car to the next bus-stop to get a yellow cab to take her home, and it irked her to have to do that.

Even though Emeka had been nothing less than a perfect gentleman, he made her grossly uncomfortable. Every time she was around him, the hair on her neck stood. From her little interaction with him, she could decipher he was one of those principled Christian men in the

corporate world who felt they were better than everyone else. Throughout the drive down to the cinema, Emeka played slow Christian raps, singing along as he drove. His conversation with Glory, who sat beside him making a jest of his choice of music, revealed the depth of his love for Jesus.

That singular factor struck him out of her list of possible friends. He would definitely look at her as a sinner, and she didn't care. Why would she serve a God that had never been there for her? Night after night in her teenage years, she had cried for mercy, for her Dad's love, to be liked by her friends in class, to have a fairy godmother of some sort who would take the pain away, but did she ever get any answers? No!

As far as she was concerned, God was good, but He picked out those who would benefit from His grace. That explained why some people were very rich, and others were very poor in the same church, serving the same God. Mosun hated church things, Christianity itself was confusing. There were many times she had raised her right hand and put her left hand on her chest in church programs, surrendering to the Lord and asking him to come into her life, but did he ever come? No!

Mosun snapped out of her thoughts at the sound of Glory laughing. Glory had been laughing at almost everything Emeka said as they walked arm in arm behind her. It would be easy to assume they were lovers, but Mosun couldn't even imagine them together. A girl like Glory could never be with a guy like Emeka. They were just not in the same league. Emeka was probably engaged to a sweet girl

somewhere; one of those prim and proper ladies that she had never been able to make friends with. She could however imagine Emeka fitting perfectly into the girl's boring world.

Emeka wondered why Mosun was quiet as he pressed the central lock on his key, giving them access to enter the car. He knew she wouldn't be comfortable with his presence, but he wasn't expecting this level of coldness. Admittedly, he had enjoyed himself this evening, and realized he had been too busy to have fun lately. He made a mental note to address that area of his life, after all, all work and no play made Jack a dull boy.

“Drop me at the next bus-stop,” Glory and Mosun said at the same time, interrupting his train of thoughts. They all burst into laughter.

“Did you girls plan that?”

“No,” Glory replied. “I was hoping you would drop Mosun at home, while I take a cab into Lekki.”

“And why is that?” Mosun interjected sharply, dreading any personal time with Emeka, but it came out badly, almost as though she detested him and didn't want to spend any extra time with him.

Glory looked back in surprise from the passenger's seat. She didn't understand why Mosun had been acting cold all night, especially because a guy like Emeka was definitely her spec. “In that case, let's get down,” Glory said. “And I hope this is not a ploy to follow me to the club because you have a meeting tomorrow.”

Mosun's embarrassment deepened. Can the night be any worse? She thought.

“Glory, don't worry I will drop your friend. She is a very busy woman; I don't think she has time for frivolous things.”

As soon as he said the words, he almost bit his tongue. Of course, she had time. She was Glory's friend after all, and considering her comments from the bathroom when she didn't know that he was the one in the sitting room, she wasn't so busy. However a gentleman had to save a lady, and he was enjoying her embarrassment; it was written all over her.

“That's so sweet. You are such a knight in shining armour,” Glory teased. “See you when I see you,” she added as she hugged Emeka, who had just stopped under the bridge at Lekki Phase 1 bus-stop, and gave him a peck on the cheek, a little too close to his lips, before alighting from the car.

“If my girlfriend catch you, you will smell your yansh,” he said after her and smiled.

“Well, I guess I would bother myself about that when you actually have one,” Glory teased. In silent acceptance, Mosun opened the door to the back seat, alighted and was about to move to the passenger's seat beside Emeka when Glory pulled her aside and whispered, “You owe me big time.” Mosun frowned, wondering what Glory was talking about. Seeing her quizzical expression, Glory continued, clarifying her statement. “I know you like him. That's why you are all so jelly-fishy.”

Mosun scoffed at Glory's conclusion over her reaction towards Emeka. If only she knew how much she didn't like her over-confident, childhood friend. Rather than correct her though, Mosun let her carry on. She was in no mood to rid Glory of her thoughts. She would leave that for later.

“I will let you go with him,” Glory said, “but he is not your type. A car ride and a night out is all he has to offer girls like us, so use your brain and don't try anything foolish.” The comment irritated Mosun, but before she could reply Emeka horned, and Glory pushed her into the open door.“Call me when you get home,” she shouted, and Emeka drove away.

Mosun settled into the seat and tried to hide her irritation. Of all the guys in the world, how could she grow feelings for Emeka? Even if her heart dared go that way, her head would be fast to bring her back to reality. Guys like Emeka wanted marriage with love, submission, stability, and faithfulness. She on the other hand, couldn't afford to be stupid enough to open up herself emotionally to any man; not after what she'd suffered in the hands of her father and every man afterwards who claimed to love or care for her. She wasn't totally against the idea of marriage, but it would be a means to an end; like marrying a very rich old man who was about to die or being the second or third wife to a rich man with uneducated wives. That way, she could turn the man's company and attention to her, spoiling him with mindless sex, while her bank account would be his regular money dumping ground. She scoffed in derision. If Glory knew her well, she wouldn't say such rubbish.

After that what else?

This was the frequent question her heart always asked, and she was tired of it. Even if she wanted a good man and a decent way of life, it was still impossible. No one would know her past and want to share a future with her.

“Please give me the address,” Emeka said interrupting her thoughts.

Mosun glanced at him, not sure what he'd said. She tried to figure out his question, hoping he would repeat himself. Meanwhile, Emeka took his eyes off the road momentarily to look at her, wondering why she didn't respond. The look on her face told him she didn't hear what he'd said. He frowned at her in concern.

“Are you okay?”

“Of course, I'm okay,” she answered.

“So why have you been quiet all night?”

“I am a quiet person,” she lied, and Emeka laughed.“Why are you laughing? Do you think I am lying? Seriously I don't talk much, and I am very shy.”

Emeka laughed again. “Don't you think you have said so much in thirty seconds for someone who claims to be quiet and shy?”

“I was just trying to defend myself.”

“My point exactly! Quiet people don't try to defend themselves so strongly, and shy people don't even bother to do it at all,” Emeka said, now smiling.

His smile irritated her. He was obviously making jest of her, and she felt stupid. “I am not talking about this anymore. What were you saying earlier?”

Emeka just kept smiling. Mosun amused him. And to think she was the Deputy Director of Brand Strategy in a renowned firm even made him grin wider. She was such a girl; the way she talked, you would think she was eighteen. He remembered how they met, and for a second he shifted his attention from the road to glance at her.

“Shy and quiet people don't want to change topics, they avoid talking all together,” he said.

He knew he was annoying her, but it was fun. He just hoped it won't backfire. She held the key to a contract that was very important to him, and even that would be amusing if not that he was directly involved.

Mosun was frustrated. “Okay, I am neither shy nor quiet; I just don't have anything to say to you. I am a very busy person, my mind was working. I'm sure you can believe that.”

“Yeah, I can relate to that. What I can't relate to is how such a busy person with an ever working mind is a regular clubbie”

Mosun was annoyed. He was touching on stuff that didn't concern him. “Mind your business,” she replied trying to keep a straight face.

Emeka kept smiling at her as he parked his car in front of the house Mosun directed him to. “Speaking of business, I hope Apple Eye is still safe.”

“I am not the savior of Apple Eye. It is the quality of work that you do for our company that will determine your safety or not,” she said in a way that made her feel like the boss once again. His fate lied in her hands after all, and the earlier he got that, the better for him.

Emeka smiled again. He could sense that she was vulnerable and lacked confidence, but was trying to fake it. However, that wasn't his business. The only business he had with her was dropping her off tonight, and then sitting with her in a boardroom together with her boss and his assistant to discuss the tender they had just won tomorrow morning. Even that would soon stop being his business as his time with Apple Eye was about to end.

“Thank you for the ride,” she said arrogantly. He felt slightly irritated, but he didn't show it. He needed to make her feel like she was the Queen, even if he didn't think so.

“It was my pleasure, see you tomorrow,” he replied. As she opened the door to alight, Emeka asked, “Do you live here with your parents?”

“I live here alone,” she said quietly and quickly walked away, muttering goodnight before he could ask any further questions.

Emeka couldn't help wondering how and why she lived alone in such a big building as he drove away. He sighed deeply as he pressed

the accelerator to increase the speed of the car. For fourteen months, he'd thought she was an elderly woman, and then six weeks ago he had discovered she was a very young Senior Executive in a reputable firm. Tonight, she was a club girl who was Glory's friend, and finally, she lived in a mansion all by herself. What a girl, he thought! Only God knew the depth of atrocities she must have committed to be holding such a position. He made a mental note to keep away from her as much as possible. She was not worthy to be associated with him. The phrase "JUDGE NOT" shot into his mind immediately and he chided himself for being so judgmental. However, he was still going to stay away. She wasn't his type at all.

So who is your type?

The question jumped at him, and he thought deeply about it. What kind of woman was his type? She would probably be quiet, beautiful, decent, modest, innovative, hardworking, and of course, God-fearing. The thought of having such a perfect companion warmed his heart. He had waited so long to meet his forever girl, and even though he sometimes felt frustrated and wanted things to happen faster, he was willing to continue waiting to get it right, to have something better than the sweet relationship Charles and his wife shared. For the joy of finding his virtuous woman, the wait was definitely worth it, but the still-voice he clearly heard troubled him.

"*MY WAYS ARE NOT YOUR WAYS.*"

Emeka frowned, not sure what it meant. Did that mean he would not meet his virtuous woman? Would he remain single for life? With a

deep sigh, he turned off the C.D player and tuned the radio to listen to the evening news on Radio Nigeria. He had missed the 9: 00 pm news on NTA network, so he was relying on the federal radio network news to keep him current. As he tuned to the channel, he caught the signature of an advert that was about to end, saying a certain bank was always there, saying yes to the needs of its customers, and it reminded him of the scripture that says, *"The Lord will supply your needs according to his riches in glory."*

Emeka nodded his head to the reminder. God was definitely going to supply his needs. And his greatest need right now was a woman to call his own. His mother was good, and her meals were delicious, but he wanted more, and she couldn't give him that. He needed a wife to return home to on a night like this, someone to give a hug, and a kiss and maybe more; to do crazy things like give him a bath or feed him when it was just the two of them. He needed a woman whom he could draw strength from, who would support him throughout life; someone who shared his views, a person he could mentor, a woman who would give him children.

After his early morning devotion yesterday morning, he had sensed it more than ever before that she was closer than it seemed, and sometimes he wondered if it was Sandra. The decision to always separate business from pleasure had always kept every wandering feeling at bay, and there were times he was sure she wasn't the one. But times like now, he couldn't help but wonder. Since God was saying his ways are not His ways, maybe this was what he meant.

He had always thought that he would marry a lady that had been devoted to God all her life; a virtuous woman without compromise, but Sandra had just fully given her life to Christ a year ago. Maybe this was what the spirit was trying to tell him; that he should not raise his standards too high and that the Lord's plan for him was Sandra. Sandra wasn't a bad idea at all. She was a determined and hardworking young lady who always gave her all to everything she did. She had used that strength positively when she gave her life to Christ, and the level of her growth was overwhelming. On the physical side, Sandra was beautiful. She also knew how to combine outfits, and always looked good.

He knew she liked him, and he liked her too. He was sure she wasn't dating anyone presently, and he wondered if it would be okay to begin to date her while his feelings for her developed into deep love. He shook his head at the thought. To lead her on without any assurance from the Holy Spirit could be dangerous, and he couldn't afford to break a heart. The Lord was not an author of confusion. He would wait. He had waited this long, and it wouldn't hurt to wait some more. When you ran ahead of the Holy Spirit, you were bound to run into trouble. Yes, Sandra was appealing, but he wasn't going to rush into a relationship with her. She was probably the one, but he needed more confirmation from a source that had never failed him, and he trusted that that source would provide the strength he needed to wait some more.The radio news ended without him hearing a word, but he was glad about one thing; he'd heard God clearly.

As he horned to alert the gateman of his arrival, he couldn't help remembering the young lady he had just dropped, and wondered if

she was lonely in the mansion she lived in alone. Emeka shook his head, ridding himself of the thought. He strongly doubted it. Mosun wasn't just a Business Executive, she was a party girl. In his opinion, she could never be lonely.

He was wrong.

With a heavy heart, Mosun walked into her building without returning the gateman's welcome greeting. She felt stupid as she opened the door to her quiet house, and fell on the couch in the living room without even switching on the light. Emeka made her feel stupid. He seemed to look through her to see the trash she was made up of. He saw beyond the lie, and he didn't hide his disregard for her.

With him, she could never hide.

From the first day of the meeting when she'd literally fallen on him in her office till today when she'd embarrassed herself in Glory's house, she had continued to prove herself unworthy before him. Why was she bothered? She asked herself. It was his business if he thought low of her. But she wanted to be respected, and not getting it from a young man like Emeka infuriated her. Only older men adored her, and it was just for her body and her great skills in bed. Without even knowing when it began, she was getting tired of that kind of life. But she didn't have a choice; at least that was what she thought. No man would look at her with grace. If her father could not do that, why would she expect it from any other man? The only man who loved her was her grandfather, and she barely saw him. He would probably dislike her too if he knew her for what she really was.

The only sound in the house was the ticking clock, and Mosun felt a heavy weight of loneliness. For a second, she thought of switching the television on, but instead, walked to the fridge in the dark. She didn't want any lights on, it didn't suit her mood. She felt ashamed and wanted to hide.The beer she picked from the fridge was cold, and she opened it with her teeth. She drank the liquid from the bottle quickly and picked another, unable to stop herself.

Two hours later, she was asleep on the kitchen floor with six empty bottles as her companions.

CHAPTER SIX

The morning breeze was chilly, but Emeka was sweating heavily as he jogged round the neighborhood. He was tired, yet he didn't stop. He wasn't going to stop until he reached the tree beside the small local church at the junction of the street. He panted heavily, but moved on. It was his way of learning some key principles of life such as determination and endurance. He kept moving; until he got to the tree. As he sat at the foot of the tree, he picked his water bottle to take a long drink.And then he heard it. It was the sound of a sobbing woman sitting by the well in front of the church.

She was like an Indian bride. Her outward appearance was ornate. Her jewelry was gold from her neck to her ankles. She was breathtaking. He couldn't see her face. It was covered in a veil. And he wondered why she was crying. At that moment, his thirst was forgotten. He dropped the bottle and stood up, moving closer to her. As though she sensed he was coming, she turned her face away. When he got to her, she rose, and with her back turned to him, walked away. He followed, both of them moving in silence. Then all of a sudden, and without warning, she ran like a child who had something to hide and couldn't afford to be caught so he stopped,

annoyed. He didn't have any business with her. If she wanted to be alone, it was her headache, not his. But as he turned away, she fell and screamed in pain, and he knew that it didn't matter if she wanted his help or not, he was going to help her.

However, before he could reach her, he heard a loud sound; not just any sound, a song, his alarm song waking him. He opened his eyes, sweating profusely. It was a dream. He sighed heavily. The last thing he needed was this kind of dream. He didn't even see the lady's face. He had prayed that God would open his eyes to see what he needed to see, but this was definitely confusing. He walked lazily to the bathroom to brush his teeth and wash his face, before going to his reading table to start his personal morning devotion. By the time he finished reading the passage for the day, he felt better.

"Trust the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you what path to take" – PROVERBS *3:5-6(NLT)*

He wasn't going to do it by himself; he was going to depend on God. But still, he was scared. If the dream was about his future wife, then she needed help. And he hadn't even seen her face.

"God give me a sign," he said out loud, and almost immediately, his phone beeped. It was Sandra texting to remind him that there would be a meeting in Mosun's office later.

He removed his nightwear, picked his towel, and went into the bathroom. As the water poured on him from the shower, he wondered again.

Could it be Sandra? Who was the lady behind the veil?

Mosun's head throbbed seriously as she woke up. She wondered why her bed was so hard and cold as she sneezed repeatedly. Then she remembered how she had come in sad from her outing yesterday, and how she'd gone to the kitchen to take a drink.

“Oh my God!” she exclaimed when she saw the six bottles of beer beside her. She couldn't believe she had slept in her clothes and yesterday's make-up and was ashamed of herself. She used to be an alcoholic without any ability to control her drinking, but that was when she wasn't working with Freshee. It seemed that her loneliness was driving her back to her old habits. There was really no one she could share her true feelings with, and she was getting tired of pretending. She tried to get up but winced at the pain that shot through her head. The headache was blinding, but she had no choice. She had a meeting at 9 am.

Still feeling the pangs of the hangover, she walked to the sitting room where she received a great shock. The kitchen had been dark because of its low exposure to natural light, but the sitting room was different. There were windows on both sides of the room so it was almost fully bright. She shifted her gaze to the wall clock, and her mouth opened. It was 8:00 am already. How could she have slept for so long and still wake up with this kind of a headache? She knew how but dismissed the thought as she rushed to the couch and picked her phone to call one of her university friends to come help her get ready, but she dropped the thought and went upstairs instead. Most of them were envious of her and she usually liked the feeling of

superiority she had when she was in their midst, but this morning, what she needed was peace. Sadly, it eluded her. A trip to Baba Onile's place would have fixed that; at least momentarily, but she couldn't do that now. She was now accountable to someone at work.

Mosun slipped from the gown she wore the previous day, removed her underwear, and walked to the bathroom. Her head still throbbed, and every step she took heightened her pain. She took a quick shower, brushed her teeth, wiped her body, and slipped into another gown. But this one was a corporate office wear. Thanks to the laundry guy who came every Saturday, the navy blue gown, which was her favourite for meeting days like this, was properly washed and ironed. The gown was elegant, free, simple, and it matched the flat shoe she wore. She remembered the first time she met Emeka, and all the embarrassing moments of the day before, and sighed. She was going to see him again today, and she wasn't ready for his stare. There was no time for serious make-up, so she just applied powder and lipstick, sprayed her perfume, and pulled her hair into a tight bond.

As she picked her bag and left the room, she muttered, “God help me” and ran down the stairs without even knowing that she had said a prayer.And indeed, God helped her because the road was almost traffic free and her boss's car was not in the driveway when she got to work. But just like many people, she thought it was luck.

As she parked her car in her regular spot, she said, “I am so lucky,” but soon learnt that luck was never enough as her boss's car came in

after her. “So much for luck,” she said to herself sarcastically, her voice etched in frustration.

“I told you that we would get here before those people even if we came thirty minutes late,” Emeka said as he checked his wrist-watch again. They had been waiting for an hour, and there was no sign of either Mosun or her boss.

“Well, we are the ones who have business to do with them, so if they call us and come late a hundred times before the contract expires, it is not a problem, as long as they pay us accordingly,” Sandra replied.

As she spoke, Emeka gazed at her. He definitely liked her. She was hardworking, diligent, and did her part without complaining. He remembered his dream from earlier that morning and wondered if she was okay, if she was not like that lady, who despite her beautiful appearance seemed to be hiding something that needed prompt attention. If she needed help, he wanted to be there for her. As her hand glided through her notes, he observed her closely. Her mint green suit hung to her body like it was made with it, and her long curly hairstyle was perfect for her light-skinned face.

Emeka was distracted from his thoughts when Mosun entered the reception hall, her boss following closely behind. They greeted Emeka and Sandra, who stood up to return their greetings with a business handshake, before Mosun's boss left for his office, leaving Mosun to lead them to the conference room attached to his office where the meeting was going to take place. Rather than do that

though, Mosun excused herself, quickly dashing to her office to drop her bag and use some painkillers for her throbbing head.

Done with that, she called Ifelayo to usher them into *"thorn in the butts"* office in the next ten minutes, which would give her time to settle down before the meeting began, but it was no use. Throughout the meeting, her head ached. She forgot most of the things she practiced to say, so she left her boss to do most of the talking. The meeting ended earlier than expected. The Director was impressed by the pilot copy that was submitted, hence, Apple Eye Advertising Agency's tender was accepted, and so they won the contract to create advert copies for Freshee Juice for the next two years.

Emeka and Sandra were beaming as they walked out of the Freshee Complex. After six months of back and forth, the deal had been sealed. For Sandra, she had finally proven beyond doubt that she was capable and worthy of the promotion that qualified her has Emeka's assistant. For Emeka, it was a good time to leave Apple Eye Advertising Agency. He would be leaving when the ovation was loudest, and might even pave way for another promotion for Sandra. He wondered how she was going to take his resignation, but it was a decision he had to make.

As he was about to start the car, Sandra pulled a silver wristwatch from the car rug and asked who owned it. Immediately, Emeka knew it was for Mosun. He remembered seeing it on her wrist when they'd left Glory's home last night and figured it must have fallen off on the trip to her house. He didn't feel inclined to see her to return it, especially because she was obviously avoiding him. Mosun had

refused to linger for after-meeting pleasantries or thank him for dropping her at home yesterday. He also didn't want to have any reason to see her, but even as the thought formed, he knew it was a lie. He wanted to see her one more time.

She had intrigued him yesterday, and the way she had ignored him today caught his attention, so he excused himself from a bewildered looking Sandra, glad for the opportunity to see her again. When the intern standing in for Mosun's secretary asked if she could help him, he didn't send her to give Mosun the wristwatch. Instead, he told the lady he had something for her boss and she promptly let him in because Mosun had called to say that she was expecting a young man, who was supposed to be the pharmacist bringing her drugs.

Emeka opened the door and wished that he had knocked when he saw Mosun seated on the office rug with tears flowing down her face. He was shocked to see her like that and wondered what could have happened in fifteen minutes to cause her to cry this way. His first instinct was to turn back and excuse himself, but he couldn't bring himself to leave.

“What is wrong with you?” he asked, and closed the door behind him, moving closer to her.

“I am fine,” she replied, but he knew better than to believe her. For the first time since he met her, he felt drawn to her in a way he could not explain, or maybe it was just the gentleman in him in action. He walked to her and knelt by her side.

“You wouldn't be crying this way and sitting on the floor if everything is alright,” Emeka said and touched her shoulders.

Mosun was touched by his kindness, but brushed his hands away, “I believe our meeting is over, so why are you here? And why didn't you knock?”

“You have such a big mouth for a corporate executive sitting and crying on the floor,” he said lightly. “I came in because your secretary told me to,” he said, pulling her up and settling her on the couch. Mosun was too weak to protest. The headache was definitely more than just a hangover.“So will you tell me what the problem is?” he asked like someone who had all the time in the world and was not delaying another woman outside. “You are Glory's friend and we were together yesterday, I guess that takes me a little out of being just a 'business associate' to something close to 'almost a friend.'”

“I have a headache, and it's very bad,” Mosun said simply. “The intern probably let you in because I told her to let the pharmacist come in, but I guess she got it all mixed up.”

“So the reason you were sitting on the floor and crying like a baby is because of a headache?” Emeka asked with a teasing look.

Mosun smiled at her situation. She was in too much pain to be embarrassed. “I always sit on the floor whenever I am sad or in pain. It's a childhood habit that I'm trying to outgrow. I'm sorry you had to see me that way.”

Emeka smiled too, nodding in understanding, but Mosun's smile was soon replaced with a frown, and he wished there was something he could do besides just standing there and making small talk that

was of no help. The knock on the door bailed him out, it was the pharmacist. As she spoke to him, Emeka excused himself and wished her well, but before he could leave, she called him back with a weak voice and asked him why he came. Now it was his turn to be embarrassed. He had been so concerned about her that he had forgotten why he was there in the first place.

“I brought your wristwatch; you forgot it in my car last night.”

The way he said it made it look as though it was a norm for them to be together at night.

“Thank you very much,” she said, still sounding very weak. I didn't even know that I left it in your car.”

“You are welcome,” he replied and left.

Sandra was still surprised and angry when Emeka came back to the car and apologized for the delay. She didn't mind the delay, but she definitely wanted to know the reason for it. He had picked a female wristwatch and was gone for thirty minutes, only to return and start driving without any form of explanation.

“Where did you go?” she asked, unable to hold back when no explanation was forthcoming.

“I went to return the wristwatch,” Emeka replied without further explanation.

“I know that you went to return the wristwatch. What I don't know is the person you went to return it to,” she stated, refusing to let the matter go,

“Oh! I went to return it to Miss Olalere,” Emeka replied reluctantly. He didn't want to go into the details of how he met her the previous day, but Sandra wasn't going to give up so easily. She was shocked.

How on earth did the two of them meet without her knowledge? It infuriated her to think that he had been carrying out business with Mosun behind her back and yet pretended that she did most of the work.

“I can't believe that you will do such a thing to me,” she said, upset, and especially because Emeka remained unruffled.

“What can't you believe?” he asked as he avoided being hit by a car that was trying to overtake him.

“Emeka, I am your assistant. You can't just block me out and take care of things without letting me know about it.”

He smiled in his usual jest-like manner as he replied. “It was not a business meeting.”

“What do you mean it wasn't a business meeting?” she queried. She didn't want to panic, but what could he be doing with her outside business?

Emeka couldn't help laughing out loud. He wondered why she was working herself up over this. “Well, what does a handsome young

man do with a promising young lady on a cold night?" he said jokingly, but Sandra didn't find him funny at all, and as much as she tried to suppress her irritation, she failed. Her emotions got the best of her.

"I don't want to believe you would stoop so low. So you kept her warm to secure our contract?"

"Slow down," Emeka said. He wondered why she was taking everything seriously. "That was just a joke."

"Then what happened?"

"Of course, nothing happened"

"So why did you go to see her?" she asked again. He was beginning to frustrate her. She wanted to know why he saw Mosun and took her in his car, but Emeka remained taciturn. He didn't answer her question, and just kept driving, and she wondered why he was being so secretive about his meeting with this woman. "Why would you meet with her if it wasn't for business?" she rephrased, determined to get to the end of the matter.

Emeka took his eyes off the road and glanced at her. Her look was unpleasant, and it made him almost laugh. He wondered why she was bothered since he already told her it wasn't a business meeting, but since he had nothing to hide, he answered her question.

"I met her at one of my friend's place and they made me take them to the cinema. I guess she left the wristwatch when I went to drop her at home."

“Oh!” Sandra exclaimed, and sunk into the seat.

Emeka couldn't help thinking she was acting a little jealous, but didn't see why she would be. He had always known that she liked him, but he didn't think it passed the usual, initial fling between an unmarried man and woman who worked closely together. In a bid to make the atmosphere less awkward he added, “Can you imagine the coincidence?”

“Things happen,” Sandra replied, trying to conceal her feelings, but she was hurt. The way she saw it, Emeka had spent last night with a lady they had both complained about, and had tried to hide it from her. It even hurt more when she remembered that she was alone last night, getting information that helped today's meeting. She was a career woman who rarely had time for fun, but she would have spared the time if Emeka decided to take her on a date, but he won't. Instead, he kept their relationship strictly business-like, yet, he spent last night with a woman he just met.

“Just be careful, the lady is not as she seems,” she said spitefully.

“And what would you know about the lady?” Emeka asked.

“From what I hear, she is an opportunist who sleeps with big men to make money and climb up the social ladder. Haven't you asked yourself how she's made it to such a top level position?”

“Well, I didn't think it was my business to find out her business. How come you know so much about her?”

Sandra didn't even care that she could be considered a busy-body; she was determined to destroy any closeness between Emeka and Mosun before it grew.

“I had a private meeting with her secretary before the tender was won to ask about the things we need to do to win the contract. She was to provide inside information, but instead, told me that there wasn't much to know. She said that her boss is a novice whose language is money and that as long as we are ready to split the profit, Mosun would recommend us.”

Emeka was irritated, but he stifled his expression. “And how did you get a confidential secretary to spill all these confidential secrets?” he asked sarcastically, giving her a look of disapproval.

Sandra immediately wished that she had said nothing, but Emeka was no fool. She had to answer his question, so she became defensive. “It was politics for the sake of business”

“Huh?!” Emeka scoffed, shaking his head at her. “That is not the answer to the question.”

For a split second, Sandra considered lying because she knew Emeka would not approve of her method. However, lying to him was hopeless; he always saw right through her. “I gave her some money, but I guess it wasn't even necessary since she didn't even have any help to offer apart from this unwanted information.” When she saw that Emeka's ever-smiling face was expressionless, she tried to push the blame. “I wonder the kind of secretaries they have in that company.”

“I wonder the kind of assistant you are?”

“What do you mean by that?” She didn't think what she did was wrong, but by his standard, she knew he wouldn't approve, and it made her feel foolish. She had only succeeded in discrediting herself.

“I meant exactly what I said”, he replied without losing his calm. “You know the kind of person I am. If we win, then it's because we deserve it. Only God knows the kind of strings you pulled. No wonder we won on a platter of gold.”

“I didn't do anything, trust me,” Sandra said a little too loudly.

“How am I supposed to trust you when you would take such actions without my knowledge? And how come the acclaimed profit-splitter did not ask us for anything?” he retorted calmly.

“I don't know,” she said with a shrug. “Maybe it's because she was with someone last night,” she said trying to shift the blame again.

Emeka refused to fall for it. “Don't even try to exonerate yourself with that comment. What you did was unacceptable, and it must not repeat itself again.”

“I am sorry,” Sandra said almost quietly, and Emeka hid his disappointment with a smile, melting Sandra's heart. One of the things she loved most about the guy was his smile and cool demeanor. He could switch from stern to joyful in a second. He was mature and didn't waste time on grievances. He forgave easily too. It

would be beautiful to have a man like him forever, and nothing was going to stand in her way.

Mosun lay on her bed and waited for the drug she had just swallowed to take effect, but nothing changed. She had left the office immediately after the pharmacist dropped the drug, and had been sleeping for hours, but even after waking up, she was still not feeling better, and couldn't help but wonder why none of the drugs she took was working. Her house was quiet as usual with no companion to sympathize with her. At times like this, she couldn't help wishing that she had a sibling or a friend that checked on her regularly to know her whereabouts. Instead, she only had friends that wanted to party and have fun and would replace her if she wasn't available.

The quiet ringing of the phone from her purse gave some life to the room and she was grateful for it. It felt good to communicate with someone when she felt so lonely, even if it was one of her men-friends. She was shocked to hear the voice at the other end of the line. It was Emeka. She had stored his number the first time he called to prevent picking it another time, but right now she didn't mind. It was a relief to be called.

“Hello Miss Olalere,” he said, and she wondered why he was always doing that or why he was calling her at all.

“Hello, Mr. Obiagu,” she replied in the same tone. “To what do I owe this call? At least you have won the tender.”

“And who says that I called because of business?”

“What other reasons could you be calling for?” she said, trying to sound indifferent.

“Well, I called to know if you are better; the sight I saw this morning was scary.”

“What do you mean by scary?” she asked, trying to sound annoyed.

“I didn't mean it like that,” he said quickly, sensing that he was annoying her, and wondered why he was bothered about her feelings. As far as he was concerned, this was a courtesy call.

Mosun thought of lying that she was okay now, but she didn't feel up to it. She was really hurting and needed compassion, even if it was from this guy who she didn't want to have anything to do with.

“I don't feel better. I am probably even worse; I don't know what is wrong with me.”

“That doesn't sound good at all. If you are worse, then you are probably sitting on the floor and crying again.”

“I didn't ask you to make jest of me, I am in pains.”

He immediately regretted the joke and wished she was better. “Don't worry, you will be fine,” he said.

“Thank you,” she murmured quietly. She knew he would say goodbye soon, and wished he would just continue talking even if meant listening to him teasing and making jest of her. “I hope it gets better before tomorrow, I have a meeting with the other Directors in

the company, and I cannot afford to be the way I was at today's meeting."

She had said a lot in those words, and they both realized it. Emeka felt her vulnerability and didn't know when he said the first thing that comes to his mind when someone needed help. "Let me pray for you."

She was quiet; this was one of the reasons she was always uncomfortable with him. His religion scared her. She really didn't want any prayers because to her, God didn't answer prayers. The guy had the nerve to talk to her about prayers when they weren't even close. Something about him made her feel vulnerable and naked, as though she couldn't hide anything from him.

"Hello, I said let me pray with you," Emeka repeated, puncturing the silence.

"I don't want to pray."Her bluntness took him by surprise. He knew she was going to be reluctant but didn't think she would be so sure about her decision not to pray."I don't see the need to pretend to you. Besides, you will probably see through me," she said.

Her voice sounded very weak, and he knew that she was in pain."It's just a harmless exercise that would be of help," he said, trying to change her mind.

"Well, that is your own opinion, I don't believe in such things."

"Why?" he asked, suddenly curious to know the reason she was so

sure she didn't want anything to do with prayers.

“I really don't want to talk about this, thanks for calling,” she replied sounding even weaker.

Emeka was suddenly scared for her. She had rejected the only One who could help her, and had unconsciously opened the door for all kinds of evil, He couldn't force her though.

“Alright, take care of yourself, and call me if you need any help, I will be a phone call away. And you will be in my prayers,”

“I will keep that in mind,” she said breathing heavily before she hung up.

It took every ounce of self-discipline Emeka had not to pick up his car keys and drive to Mosun's house. The way she sounded made it apparent that she needed help. And he wanted to help her. He didn't know where all this sudden desire to help came from, but he knew that it was there. He had called only out of courtesy, but the way she sounded even when she claimed not to believe in prayers had touched him. She was like the lost sheep, who did not want to be found. And if she remained lost, she would definitely be eaten by a lion or a bear.

But he couldn't afford to go to her place; nothing he would say could change how she felt about praying or the Lord. He told himself she would be alright, that she couldn't possibly be alone when she felt that weak, she would definitely have a sister or a friend around to get help in case of emergency.

Even though he wasn't one to judge people based on gossip, his experiences with her hadn't been glamorous, but his spirit had not been at peace until he'd decided to call. And now, he was sure why he needed to call. God had an assignment for him. He remembered the dream he had earlier that morning, and he was sure that Mosun was the lady who needed help. The dream wasn't about marriage; it was an instruction to help a woman in distress. He was ashamed of himself; he was becoming too desperate to find a wife that he almost missed God's message.

He wondered how many people made mistakes in the choice of whom to marry because they were in a hurry, and turned God's words to suit their desires. He made up his mind to leave God to choose and not waste time on a situation that was his Father's business. Right now, he knew that he had an assignment to do, which was to win a soul.Immediately, he picked his bible and allowed the Holy Spirit to minister to him through the word, and then he prayed tirelessly into the night.

And all the Spirit helped him to pray about was the lady behind the veil.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Sandra had said goodnight to her sister on the phone two hours ago, yet she couldn't stop turning from one side of the bed to the other. Sleep eluded her. How could she sleep when her chest was heavy with a tingling aching sensation called worry? She sighed, still annoyed that she'd ended the call with her sister too quickly. She had a lot to say, but her sister didn't have her time because her baby was crying. Naturally, her younger sister was the only one she confided in, but she was no longer easily available now that she was married and had her own family and new responsibilities.

It had been a month since Apple Eye Advertising Agency won the Freshee Juice contract, yet nothing had changed between her and Emeka. In fact, her hopes of marrying him had dwindled. Her first shock had been with the discovery that Emeka related with Mosun outside of their work relationship, and it had hurt badly. She didn't know why it never occurred to her that he had other female friends. Sandra's assurance was based on the fact that Emeka was a decent young man who didn't have time for frivolous activities with women, but now, she wasn't sure anymore. Why would he be able to

stand the presence of that slut, let alone be comfortable enough to hang-out with her? When she remembered the circumstances of their meeting, which Emeka had told her, she had to force herself to admit that he had no choice, that he was only being a gentleman. Nevertheless, it didn't reduce the fear and tension. Why had he lingered for those extra unaccounted minutes when he had gone to return her wrist-watch?

In fact, for two weeks, she'd checked his phone occasionally to view his call logs and text messages just to see if he had been contacting the number she'd gotten from Mosun's personal secretary as Mosun's number, but she saw nothing suspicious. When she began to relax, convincing herself that Emeka's meeting with Mosun had only been by chance, he'd given her the second shock. Emeka had declared he was resigning from Apple Eye to take-over his family business, and develop some of his own business ideas. Now, he had two more weeks before he left, and she couldn't bear the pain of losing him. How was she going to help him fall in love with her if they no longer worked together?

She tried to console herself with the thought that it was a good thing he was leaving. She had always wanted a man who could take charge of his life, and it didn't even make sense to marry her immediate boss. She was his assistant, and he didn't want to mix business with pleasure. With him gone from the company, the excuse no longer held water. In fact, she began to see the benefits of him leaving. Not only would her potential spouse become a multi-millionaire since he was going to be running his father's already thriving series of

businesses, the chances were high that she would be promoted to take over his position. It really didn't look so bad anymore, but still, she was concerned. She needed an assurance that they would be together, and it sucked not to be able to just walk up to him and say her mind, It would make her look too forward or not womanly, and she couldn't afford to let that happen.

All of a sudden, an idea formed in her head. Emeka lived with his mother who was definitely expecting a bride from her son. Sandra smiled, and turned off the light, finally ready to sleep. Emeka was going to be hers. If she couldn't help him see her, maybe his mother would. She was an Igbo woman after all.

The sun had gone down, and the sky was fast changing colour, but even if the sun was at its peak, it wouldn't have touched them in the air-conditioned study room of the Williams old house. They sat facing each other, enjoying the goat-meat pepper soup that the maid, Aunty Agnes, had prepared for them with freshly squeezed, cold orange juice.

“I am impressed by your decision; that woman needs to rest,” SAN Williams said.

He had been seeing Emeka once every week in his office for the past four weeks, and they had been discussing the modalities of the business, and how to implement his new ideas and strengthen the old ones.

The Obiagu's company was a conglomerate which included a book publishing firm, an art gallery, a restaurant with many branches all over the country, a secondary school in Lagos, and now Emeka would be adding an advertising agency so that he could practice his profession alongside overseeing the other arms.

“The work has been too much for her to handle, and she complains to me all the time,” SAN Williams continued, “Your mother does not enjoy being CEO. All she wants is to take care of her grandchildren and also have time to become more active in church and go on mission fields to spread the gospel.”

“Well, I guess she can do that now,” Emeka said, agreeing with his older friend. It was time his mother stopped making sacrifices on his behalf.

They had finished their discussion about the business during their last meeting, but Williams had invited Emeka over to the house to find out the reason he hadn't headed the company immediately he finished school. He hadn't spoken to him about it then because he wanted to respect his wish and not influence him wrongly, but now that he had decided to come back to the family business, he wanted to know. Heading a conglomerate was something any youth would have wanted at the time.

Emeka who was holding the soup-bowl, put it down and relaxed on the chair. “I just wanted to experience some training and expertise in my desired career, and that wouldn't have happened if I had taken over the company immediately. In fact, I probably wouldn't be

capable of leading right. I would have just been a leader because I was lucky to be the son of my father, and not because I was qualified. That's why I stepped aside so that those who worked with dad could have the opportunity to take the position they deserved, while mum took the seat of the ceremonial head. Now that I have learnt a lot from my experience in a firm where I wasn't given preferential treatment, and bagged my M.B.A in business school, I guess I am ready."

"That is a very intelligent thing to say and do," SAN Williams said, nodding his head. He was impressed that Emeka, who was twenty-five years old at the time, could make such a decision. "You know, men like you are fast reducing in your generation. People like you are the ray of hope."

Emeka sipped his juice and nodded his head in respect. "Thank you sir, I couldn't have remained strong without your support and the help of the Holy Spirit."

"You see, that is my point. How many young men today remember to seek the counsel of their elders and attribute their life's success to the Holy Spirit? There is no doubt the heights that you will attain, just make sure you get a good woman to back you up."

Williams had always secretly hoped that Emeka would marry his daughter, Glory, and there was a time he'd thought it would happen, but Glory had become so wild, he doubted Emeka could tame her or even be interested in her that way. Emeka treated Glory like his sister, and he had accepted a long time ago that it wasn't his place to

match-make them. His joy would know no bounds if they did get together, but he wasn't holding his breath. He would be happy for them even if they chose other people.

“I am working on it sir,” Emeka simply replied to SAN William's statement.

“Oh, so there is a woman somewhere,” Williams prodded excitedly.

“Not exactly sir. I am still waiting for the Holy Spirit's guidance, and I must confess that I don't know what He wants from me right now.”

“Is there anyone in particular on your mind?”

“Not really, but there is this lady I work with in the office. She has all the qualities I want in a woman, and she is beautiful too.” Emeka took a short pause and searched for words to describe Sandra.

“Go on,” SAN Williams said, urging him to continue.

“This lady carries herself in a remarkable and impeccable way that feels so perfect.”

“Are you looking for a perfect woman?” Williams interjected.

“No, but at least she should be virtuous and responsible; someone I can live with,” Emeka responded candidly, and Williams relaxed into his seat.

“Chukwuemeka, all you have said is good, but you must always bear in mind that there is no perfect woman. Besides, what if this lady is

only pretending to get your attention? You have to listen to the voice of God on this issue so that having waited this long, you won't make a mistake."

"That is exactly why I have not formally asked her out, and truthfully, I am not sure I love her. I mean, I like her; a lot, but…" he shrugged, thinking about his feelings for Sandra, while the older man stared at him, waiting. "I don't think what I feel for her is at par to what I imagined I would feel for my wife and sometimes, I wonder if I'm not asking for too much, and have my head shrouded in fairy-tales," he said with a slight, self-mocking smile.

"You are not asking for too much," Williams stated, giving him an understanding smile. "The kind of love you are imagining exists. I am not saying this girl is wrong for you because I don't even know her, but the same thing happened to me with my wife, I married her because she was the most respected and virtuous woman in our fellowship. I didn't wait for God's counsel. I just thought that since she was so good, I couldn't have any problems with her, but you know the rest of the story. She was always busy with no time for family, and never around; here today and gone tomorrow. In choosing a life partner, you have to look beyond what you see to the unseen and let the Holy Spirit do the choosing, even if He chooses a stranger. In the end, you would be happy with her."

The light had gone off at some point in the course of their discussion but because the room was still cool, they had not felt it. Now, the room was completely dark, and they could hear the failed attempt of the gate man to power the generator.

“Thank you very much sir,” Emeka said. Those words were what he needed to hear at the moment.

Glory's entrance into the room truncated any additional comment. “Daddy, that generator is bad again. I think we should just get a new one.”

“That can be your contribution to this house,” her father replied with humour.

“Seriously daddy, how can we stay in a dark house? Anyway, I am going out, so it would just be you and Aunty Agnes.”

“Glory, you need to grow out of this your childishness,” he scolded, slightly upset with her. Running off just because there was no light and the generator was bad was a silly thing to do. Still, he heeded her wishes, albeit grudgingly. “I will speak to the company engineer to come and check it tomorrow and see if it can be repaired or buy us a new one if it can't. About going out, I want you to be with me instead.”

“Daddy!” she exclaimed in protest. She had no clue Emeka was the one seated beside her father since the room was dark. “You have a guest, let me go and be with my friends”

“I can leave immediately,” Emeka said, knowing she would recognize his voice.

“So it's you,” she screamed, and went to sit on his laps. “This is how you come into the house and leave quietly. God has caught you today because you are taking me out.”

“I thought Daddy just said you are going to keep him company.”

“He did, but if you're the one taking me out, he won't object.” She turned to her father and said in a way that sounded as though she was sure he wouldn't object, “Can he take me out?”

“No, he can't,” her father stated, shocking her. “Like I said earlier, I want to be with you tonight.”

If he was honest, seeing them together made his heart soar, but he also knew that Emeka was in a delicate time in his life as far as women were concerned. Going out with Glory would further mess his head if there were any remnant feelings from the time they'd dated as teenagers.

“Give me my daughter,” he stated in a teasing voice, stretching his hands towards Emeka. He knew Glory was upset.

Glory stood up immediately and made to leave the room. “If someone was watching from a distance, they would think I'm a baby. My mates are in their husbands' houses.”

“Well, when you are in yours, he can let you sit on different men's laps while he watches, but for now, it is daddy's voice alone you must obey,” SAN Williams said gently.

Not wanting to be caught between father and daughter, Emeka stood up to leave. “I should go sir.”

“Glory, you've succeeded in sending my companion away,” he said with feigned regret. “Goodnight, Emeka. Make sure you think about all we have spoken about.”

“I will sir, thank you very much,” he said, and exited the room.

“Can I at least see him off?” Glory asked petulantly and left the room without waiting for her father's response.

As soon as they were out of her father's earshot, Glory hissed and swore: “Sometimes that man forgets that I am not a baby anymore. How dare he tell me not to go out?”

“You need to take it easy and just grow up. That man cares for you and you know it. Besides, where are you going at this time of the day anyway?” Emeka asked gently.

“Please, don't start with your own o! I can do whatever I like and it's none of your business,” she stated, glaring softly at him. “It's good that you are here today sef,” she said, changing the topic. “My birthday is next week Sunday, I am having a party, and you have to come.”

“Nice! But what do you want me to come and do at your kind of party?”

“What do you mean?” she asked in feigned annoyance. “You are too holy to come, abi?”

“It's not like that and you know it. I will come and see you in the morning of that day, but I can't guarantee that I will come to the party.”

“Where's your phone?” she asked, her hand outstretched. Emeka gave her a wary hesitant look, but obliged at a prompting look from her. “Unlock it,” she demanded.

He obeyed but couldn't hold back his curiosity. “Am I allowed to ask what you want to do with my phone since you are being such a bully tonight?”

Glory gave him a mock glare but answered his question. “I'm setting a reminder on your phone for the party. You don't have a choice than to come,” she stated, handing his phone back.

Emeka shook his head at her, smiling fondly. She reminded him so much of his younger sister and how she sometimes manipulated him into doing the things he'd swore he wouldn't do. He pocketed his phone and didn't bother arguing with her. It was pointless. As they were about to leave the house, they heard SAN William's voice calling Glory to bring the lamp.

“You see the way that man treats me?” she complained with mock exaggeration,

“Well, I guess a daughter cannot grow too old for her father,” Emeka said and shoved her towards the direction of her father's study before heading back in the direction of the door.

Mosun did a double take when she saw the name of the person calling her. He had been unreachable for three years and all of a sudden he was calling? She just kept staring at the phone until it stopped ringing. It was a good thing the line disconnected because he had probably dialed her number mistakenly, and it would be irritating to hear him say it.

She dropped the phone and tried to take the caller out of her mind, but it wasn't working, so she went back to her drawing. She had been drawing a picture of Glory from a photograph she had taken from her album the last time they'd met. It was what she planned to give her as a birthday present, and the party was tomorrow. As she took the eraser to clean the edges, her phone rang again and it was still him.

Her father, who had lost touch with her, thwarting every effort she'd made to unite with him, was calling her and she didn't know how to feel about it. That was a lie. She knew how she felt about it, but the emotions were a lot, she couldn't put it into words. She stared at the phone for a few seconds then decided to take the call, partly berating herself for being too weak, and bracing herself to show him that she was no longer a little girl that needed him. The sound of his voice however made her freeze.

“Mosun,” he called softly. “Mosunmola,” he called again when he didn't get any response.

Her name on his lips, spoken with such softness and tenderness was strange. This was not the father she remembered. He had always been harsh and impatient, barely paying attention to her. He had always spoken nicer to their dog than he had to her while she was growing up with him. Who was this man on the other end of the line, calling her name ever so gently? It was her father's voice, she had no doubt about it, yet it couldn't be.

“My daughter, are you there?” the man asked, not sure if the line was still connected.

His words were Mosun's undoing. She burst into tears. For years she had longed to hear him call her his daughter, but it hadn't happen. Until now.

“Don't cry,” he said in a soothing voice.

Mosun finally snapped out of whatever spell held her bound and lashed out at him in anger. “I am not your daughter,” she screamed between sobs. She wished that she could stop the tears; she didn't want him to hear her cry, she didn't want him to know he still had this effect on her. She was highly emotional, and she hated it. Why would he call her a name he had starved her of for years? “I don't want to talk to you! I am okay without you,” she screamed into the phone, swiping at her tears in annoyance.

“I know you are okay without me. You have proven that already by the success you have attained in your career, and I am proud of you,” he continued softly.

His words were meant to be comforting but they just rubbed off wrong. “Okay, so the reason you are calling is because you heard that I am now a business executive, abi?” she demanded rudely. She knew this was no way to talk to her dad, but she didn't care. What was more aggravating for her was that he didn't sound affected by her insult.

“No, my daughter, that's not why I'm calling…”

Mosun interrupted him sharply, her voice raised. “Why the hell are you calling me then?”

“I need your forgiveness,” the man said simply.

The fight suddenly went out of Mosun, who crumbled to the floor, shocked and surprised at her father's statement. “Why do you suddenly think that you need my forgiveness?” she finally asked after what seemed like a long pause.

“I wonder why I did not realize it before now, but I wouldn't have survived your mother's death without you,” her father said, his voice, heavy with tears; it was hard to miss it.

Mosun pinched herself to be sure she wasn't dreaming. This was definitely what Christians called a miracle, and it was happening to her. But it was happening a little late because she didn't need a Daddy anymore, or at least that's how she felt right now, but she continued to listen, her heart shredding at the sound of every word.

“I guess I loved her too much and I couldn't bear to love anyone that much, and there was no way I could love you a little, so I ignored you, and now I regret it. Please, forgive me.”

“Why are you telling me this now?” she asked, still unable to believe that this was happening.

“I met the Lord Jesus Christ two months ago, and he has been teaching me a lot. In fact, I would have called you many times before now, but I always lost courage. I don't know where the boldness came from today, but it felt as if, if I didn't do it, I might not get a second chance.”

“What do you mean by you met the Lord?” Mosun asked in confusion.

“I will tell you all about it, but I want to be sure you have forgiven me.”

Mosun sighed and wiped her tears with the back of her hands. Nothing had ever confused her like this, and she was trying to waddle through a lot of emotions right now. “I don't know what to say,” she answered truthfully. “All this is coming as a shock. At least you had time to think about your apology, give me time to think about forgiving you or not. You have caused me indescribable pain, and I need time to process all the things you have just said.”

“No problem my daughter, I will give you time, but I doubt if we have enough time. We need to reconcile quickly and make the most of the time we have left.”

What did he mean they did not have time? She was going to take all the time she wanted and there was nothing he would do about it. He should suffer a bit for what he did to her, she thought, but his next statement threw her off balance. “I am coming to Lagos tomorrow”

“For what?” she asked, completely taken aback.

“I have a business meeting on Tuesday, but I will come on Sunday afternoon so that we can talk.”

“You really mean this thing?” she asked still doubting the sincerity of his pleas.

“Yes, my dear, I want to be a part of your life, I have missed so much already.”

“I guess I will reserve my comment till when I see you,” she said and not in good faith.

“No problem. The fact that you have agreed to see me is an honor. With all that is in me, I bless you and I pray that you shall be like a seed planted by the riverside bearing fruits every season. As you have honored me, the Lord will honor you, and give you rest.”

Reluctantly, she said amen. She didn't believe in prayers, but since it was coming from her father, she didn't reject it. It was her symbol of respect considering the humility he must have gathered to call her this night.

“I guess we would see tomorrow,” he said

“I will wait till I see you first before believing. For all I know, my ears are probably playing tricks on me.”

“Don't worry. You will believe that I am genuine once you see me. In the meantime, I want you to know that I love you and I always have.”

At the sound of those words, which she had longed to hear all her life from this man, the tears flowed again, and she wondered if she would ever stop crying or aching over the man nature had deemed fit to make her father. She took her old sketch pad from her table and drew him the way she remembered him. She had definitely forgiven him, and she couldn't wait for tomorrow to come so she could say it in person.

Emeka kept on praying in tongues. He had been on his knees interceding for Mosun for the past two hours, and he was gradually feeling better, as though his prayers were being answered. It had been about one month now since the Holy Spirit had led him to develop a routine of praying for her at least one hour a day. He had not called her since that day she'd told him that she wasn't a praying person, but his spirit had not stopped calling God on her behalf. Many times he would dream about her, and that would form a prayer point in his mind. The last dream he had of her, he'd seen her back turned to a certain man and the Holy Spirit had led him to pray that the picture he saw would be the opposite in reality. That was seven days ago and he'd been praying every day since then.

Today however, he'd felt the need to pray relentlessly that she would receive strength to face a certain situation. He sometimes wondered why such a young woman seemed to have so many problems that required all these prayers, so he started praying for the man Mosun would eventually marry, that he would be strong enough to support her in overcoming her challenges because he now knew that there were so many unpleasant situations in her life.

As soon as he finished praying, he called Charles to inform him about following him to Glory's birthday party, but he refused.

“Sunday evenings are exclusively for my wife, you know I am not a bachelor,” he said

“Thanks for reminding me of my plight,” Emeka said good-naturedly. “Anyway, I count myself lucky I am not restricted to one

woman, and still have the right to make a choice," he added for good measure. The truth was that he envied his friend, but he refused to let Charles know it. He won't hear the last of it if his friend found out how he felt.

"I am not interested in any other fish in the water, I love my wife," Charles replied unabashedly, and Emeka laughed.

"Okay, in that case, let her come with us," he said, trying to convince Charles again. He really didn't want to go to Glory's party alone. He felt like he would be a fish out of water in the midst of the crowd she ran with.

"I can't tell her because I won't risk her acceptance; I really want to be alone with her," Charles replied, and Emeka heard the smile in his voice.

"Alright Mr. Lover Man, I should have known better than to call you, I will soon stop considering you as my number one choice for a companion."

"I really don't mind at all," Charles said mockingly. "I prefer my wife's company to yours any day and she is my number one companion, so go and find yours."

"It's not your fault," Emeka said, pretending to be annoyed.

Charles played along, immediately apologetic. His tone was however mocking. "I am sorry," he said. "I guess we should finish

this conversation over a tennis game in your house tomorrow night after the party. I am sure I can squeeze a few minutes out for you."

"Go and play with your wife joor," Emeka said laughing and hung up while Charles laughed out loud.

They always played tennis every Sunday night and it was a tradition they upheld despite their busy schedules, and Charles' new centre of attention, Chioma. Charles, with his scattered way of life and lack of organization, had bagged the angelic Chioma, whom everyone wanted, and both of them loved each other more than life itself, and it was enviable. Emeka couldn't help but wonder how Charles had found a good woman before him, while he couldn't even boast of a girlfriend in the last three years.

For a few seconds, Emeka prayed that God would give him his own special and virtuous lady before going to his wardrobe to choose from the pile of carefully ironed clothes for tomorrow's Sunday service.

Sandra parked her car outside the Obiagu's residence to avoid alerting the whole house of her presence. The goal was to silently penetrate Emeka's family and prove to them that she was a homely, suitable lady for their son, and she was going to stop at nothing to get them on her side after all, the Bible in Matthew 11:12 says, *"The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force."* Even as she thought of the verse, she knew in her heart that it was a misuse of scripture. However, that was not going to stop her because all God wanted for her were good things. She remembered

another verse in the bible that says we should fix our minds on whatever things are good, and whatever things are lovely and of good report. All this readily described Emeka, and she needed to act quickly if she was going to get him.

Sandra was casually dressed, wearing a long sleeveless gown under a short-sleeved hand knitted jacket. Her natural hair was packed in four neat rolls, she smelled of raspberry, and her face was well powdered, giving it a smooth look. She'd avoided using any other makeup item except for a light pink lip gloss, making her simplicity endearing, and breathtaking.

Emeka couldn't take his eyes off her when he saw her on the couch in the living room. He'd heard his mum talking to her as he walked down the stairs in her usual friendly manner before leaving her with the maid who was now serving her a soda.

“This is indeed a pleasant surprise,” he said and gave her a side hug as she stood to acknowledge his presence. Her trademark was the beautiful way she always smelled, and Emeka couldn't help liking it. “So how is work without me on your tail?” he asked and Sandra smiled. “I have missed you,” he continued, and Sandra blushed. “I can only hope that work would be fun without you,” he said and relaxed on the chair.

“You could hire me if you need me that much,” Sandra said jokingly, enjoying the direction their conversation was going.

“Don't tempt me to take the next best thing that has happened to Apple Eye since I left,” he replied, but before she could respond to his flattery, his phone rang.

Sandra couldn't help listening to Emeka's conversation. The speaker was obviously female, and there was a familiar tone in which he spoke to her, but she relaxed a bit when she heard him say that he didn't even have a date. It was apparent the lady was inviting him to a party, and she was glad there was nothing serious between him and the girl since he was talking about not having a date.

Emeka sighed resignedly as he placed his phone on the cushion beside him, and made to continue the conversation from where he stopped before Glory called, but Sandra wasn't going to have any of it.

“I didn't know you attend parties,” she said

“Well, I do,” he replied and continued. “So what's the new campaign you are working on?”

Sandra tried not to frown. Emeka had a way of avoiding conversations he didn't want to delve into. Didn't he just say he had no date for the party? Should he not want to talk about the conversation as an excuse for asking her to be his date? Or did he have someone else in mind?

“I am not really working on anything new. You just left last week,” Sandra forced herself to answer.

“So there is no new challenge I can help you with?” Emeka asked, seeking an opportunity to support her.

“No, there is nothing I can't handle so far.”

“That's good. I was hoping you would say that. It means you learnt well from your former boss.” he said with a smile.

“Which boss?” she asked mockingly. “The one that left me without a second thought?”

“Are you saying you missed me too?”

“Why will I say that?” she said smiling softly. “But to be honest, you have added “during-the-week- boredom” to my usual weekend boredom.” This was her way of letting him know that she was free to go with him wherever he might want. Like that party, he needed a date for.

“Wow, that's even better than you saying you miss me,” Emeka said, beaming.

“We should hang-out more often. That way, we won't have to miss each other so much,” Sandra said and picked her purse from beside her in a bid to leave, hoping he would ask her to go with him. “It was really nice visiting you.”

Emeka was surprised at her sudden need to leave. “You just came now and you are already thinking of leaving? I thought you just said we should hang-out more.”

Sandra stood up and smiled. Emeka rose with her, and they both walked to the door. “Well at least I made a move, you too make yours. When should I be expecting to see you?”

“What about tomorrow?” he asked, almost sure that she would refuse.

“You will visit me tomorrow?” she asked unable to hide the excitement in her voice.

“I was kind of hoping you would be available to go somewhere with me”

She was almost going to scream yes, but managed to remain cool. “And where will that be?”

“My friend, Glory, is having her birthday party tomorrow, and has promised to hook me up with some girl. I wonder if you could rescue me.” The look on his face suggested that he doubted that she would agree.

“Well, since you are asking nicely, and you are somewhat helpless, I will go with you,” she said with a teasing smile.

Emeka returned the smile as he responded. “Wow! How magnanimous of you!” Sandra laughed and he continued. “I will pick you at 3:00; I hope I'm not messing up your Sunday routine though,” he added while Sandra opened her car door and entered.

“It's nothing,” she said with a reassuring smile. He had no idea how she wished he would mess up all her days. Didn't he just hear her say she was bored without him? How obvious did a girl need to be?

Emeka smiled, pleased. “Tomorrow then?”

“Tomorrow,” Sandra assured him and drove off, watching him from her side mirror as he waved at her.

The visit was a success, and hopefully being his date to this party would lead to more. It had to. She would not have it any other way.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Williams' garden was filled to capacity. Emeka had to hide his surprise at the turnout as he walked past the table where the cake sat in all its glory. He would never have believed that so many people could fit into the garden at the same time. It was a cocktail party and everyone was dressed in gowns and tux, holding a drink and chatting with a companion as Pharell William's "*Happy"* played. Emeka was glad he had brought Sandra, it was good to have company at an event like this, or you would either get bored or make new friends, and he wasn't in the mood to give cheap compliments in the name of starting a conversation. However, some people remembered him as their senior in Secondary school and so, he soon found himself gisting with former juniors while Sandra left him briefly to get a drink from the bar.

How Glory was able to pull this kind of party and get these people to come was beyond his imagination, and he was glad he did not miss it. The lightly decorated garden with the calm music was the opposite of what he had expected. In fact, he had been surprised when Glory called him the day before asking that he dress formally.

He had wondered what she was up to, and when he'd asked, she'd told him she wasn't a little girl anymore and wanted to have a serious party to bring everyone together, and probably draw the attention of a groom. Emeka had laughed in amusement but Glory had said she was serious. He'd obliged but had forgotten to tell Sandra what the dress code was. Still, she had risen to the occasion, and was beautifully dressed in a nice flowing Ankara gown.

Subconsciously, Emeka had been looking around, hoping to spot Mosun, but there was no sign of her anywhere. He wondered if something was wrong with her or if she didn't get an invitation, but he doubted the latter. As he made a mental note to ask Glory later in the day, he saw her coming from the main building with a glass of wine, wearing heavy make-up, and one of the shortest dresses he had ever seen. Emeka frowned in disapproval but quickly chided himself for being judgmental, but Mosun definitely made it difficult. Why couldn't she just obey the simple laws of propriety?

He was going to turn away and ignore her when Glory suddenly appeared behind Mosun and waved him to come over. As usual, she was loud.

“How can you come to my party with another girl who clings to you all day, and cannot even look for me to say happy birthday?”

Emeka had to look over his shoulder to see if Sandra wasn't near enough to hear the comment. She might have been a bit embarrassed and Glory wouldn't have been sorry. He gave Glory a quick hug as other people made their way to her to greet her as well. She returned their well wishes full of smiles, but still held on to Emeka's arm.

“Happy birthday dear!” Emeka said when he got a chance while curtsying to Mosun, who simply looked indifferent. “"You were nowhere to be found when I got here, and she is not my girlfriend.”

“I hear you,” Glory said and turned to Mosun. “What's up with you? You've been a bit withdrawn all day. Are you okay?”

“I'm expecting my father,” Mosun responded without preamble, taking a generous sip of her wine.

“Your father is coming to Lagos to see you?” Glory asked in surprise. She knew there was no love lost between Mosun and her dad.

“Yes,” Mosun replied. “He called me from Abuja yesterday to say he would come this afternoon, but it's 7:00 pm and there is still no news from him.”

“Wow, that's amazing! You should be excited,” Glory chimed, dropping Emeka's arm to pull Mosun into a hug. “Your dream has finally come true. No wonder you are not drinking booze. You want your head to be straight when you meet him.”

Mosun pulled out of the hug and sighed. “I don't want to believe him until I see him. I can't afford to expect too much. He should have called me to pick him at the airport by now; his flight should have landed this afternoon, and it's already seven.”

“Don't worry,” Glory said. “He will definitely call you. You know how men can be very unpredictable.”

Emeka cleared his throat and waved his hands. “Ladies, I am here.”

“Oh! I'm so sorry,” Glory said as she pulled Emeka's arm playfully. “It's just such good news, I forgot myself for a second. And did I lie when I said men are unpredictable?”

Emeka nodded and raised his hands in feigned acceptance. He really wasn't in the mood to play words with Glory. Still, he couldn't help wondering what the big deal was in a person's father coming around, but Mosun was a mystery woman, so he was sure there would be a story behind it.

From the buffet table where Sandra had just finished pouring juice and treating herself to a plate of salad, she spotted Emeka with two ladies: one was skimpily dressed in red while the other was all over him, pulling his arms, rearranging his tux, touching his cheeks and laughing at his comments; the very things she had always wanted to freely do with him. The other lady was familiar and on a closer look, she discovered it was Mosun Olalere. Sandra was alarmed. Could the celebrant be the lady Emeka said was Mosun's friend from that night? If not, she couldn't imagine how Mosun came to be in Emeka's family friend's party, and who the other girl might be. Determined to find out, she moved towards them with graceful strides and handed Emeka's drink to him.

“Thank you,” Emeka said as he collected the glass. “I am sorry I left you alone, but you seem to know your way around,” he said with a disarming smile. “This is Glory, my childhood friend and sister, and her friend Mosun. I am sure you know her from Freshee.”

Sandra, ever the brand communication expert, beamed with a large smile even though it turned her stomach to see that Emeka was on a first name basis with Mosun. “Of course, I do. It's good to see you again Miss Olalere,” she said and curtsied to Mosun while giving Glory a full hug. “Happy birthday Glory! Your party is quite warm, I am enjoying myself”.

“Thank you,” Glory replied as she gave Sandra another hug in her usual friendly manner. “I am so glad you came with Emeka. At least, now we know why he keeps turning down all offers in a skirt.”

Sandra and Glory grinned, but Emeka gave Glory a scolding look. “I said we are just friends Glory, why can't you just leave it at that?” he stated then turned to Sandra. “Sorry for the embarrassment, Glory is just such a blabbermouth.”

“I am not embarrassed, it's okay to play your girlfriend for one night,” Sandra said jokingly and they all laughed, except Mosun who looked tensed and avoided eye contact with her and Emeka.

“Now that the celebrant is here, I think this is the best time to play the birthday song,” Emeka said in a bid to change the topic. He was about to head in the direction of the DJ when Sandra exclaimed suddenly. Emeka paused mid-stride and turned worried eyes on her. “Is everything alright?”

Mosun and Glory were also looking at her in concern, while Sandra's gaze was fixated on her phone. She had checked her phone for missed calls and messages, but the news she just saw alarmed her.

“Yeah, I'm okay, but Lagos isn't” Sandra answered as she put the phone back into her purse. I just saw a news update that there was a plane crash in iju-ishaga; Abuja to Lagos.”

The glass cup Mosun was holding dropped to the ground and she looked bewildered all of a sudden, much to Sandra's amazement.

“You can't be sure he was on that flight,” Glory said solemnly, immediately knowing what her friend was thinking.

“I can't be sure, but he could be,” Mosun replied still looking scared. “I need to go and check.”

She started to walk away, but Glory pulled her into a side hug, her voice soothing and comforting. “You can't just assume dear. Besides, where will you check?”

“I can't just wait here, it would kill me,” she snapped. She could literally feel fear crawling all over her skin and tearing at her insides. Her eyes filled with tears at the feeling of hopelessness and helplessness that suddenly overwhelmed her. Her father couldn't be dead. She didn't want him to be dead. There were many things she wanted to say to him. “I need to go. I have to be on the move,” she stated, pulling out of the hug

“I will drive you,” Glory offered but Mosun shook her head rejecting the offer.

“You shouldn't leave your party; I can manage on my own.”

“I'll take her”; Emeka offered, addressing Glory “She is right, you shouldn't leave your party, and your guests.”

“I can't stay here without being worried to death about the situation. We can close the party.”

“You guys should all stay, let me go alone. It's probably not even a big deal and my dad could have been on an earlier or later flight. There is no need to fret,” Mosun said even though she did not believe it.

Emeka couldn't imagine leaving her side right now. She needed to be around someone strong and he didn't see anyone he could entrust her with, not even Glory. “You ladies are talking too much, let's leave at once.” He turned to Sandra. “Please, help me keep Glory from worrying too much until we find out what has actually happened.” He squeezed her arm and promised to give her a call later that night.

Glory gave Mosun a hug and assured her that everything will be alright. After about two minutes of necking and petting, Emeka had to stop the hugging session, and Glory thanked him for his help.

Sandra watched them go with mixed feelings. She was sad about the crash and hoped that Mosun's relative was not involved, but it also hurt her to see Emeka leave her behind to care for another woman. She sighed deeply as they both left the garden and she didn't miss the fact that Emeka had not turned back to look at her one more time before walking away into the night with Mosun.

Mosun could not stop the tears from flowing. Losing her father was something she could not afford. She needed him alive to answer questions, apologise some more, and take her in his arms. She needed to look him in the eye and see that he meant the words he'd said over the phone. Of course, it couldn't have been him on the plane that crashed, she told herself.

Over the radio, reports on what was going on at the crash site and the fatality rate was being discussed. It seemed as though no one survived even though the rescue team was still on ground, trying to account for everyone. Mosun tried not to let the news bother her, but couldn't help herself. She fretted and worried and Emeka must have sensed it. He turned off the radio and told her to calm down.

“Turn the radio back on; I need to keep tabs on what is going on,” she said, unable to bear the silence.

“It would only aggravate you unnecessarily. For all we know, your father was not on that plane. And didn't you say he was going to fly Arik?”

“Yes, but I can't be sure anymore. He was taking a flight from Abuja, and there has been a crash. I can't fold my arms and be calm.”

He took his left hand from the steering and placed it on hers. “You are doing something already, and I hope we get good news. Maybe you should try to call someone that stays with him in Abuja. That should help us ascertain the flight he was coming with.”

She burst into tears again, and Emeka became confused. If she cried without control even when she wasn't sure whether her father was involved in the accident or not, he wondered what she would do if their worst fears were confirmed.

Mosun couldn't bring herself to say anything. How was she going to explain to anyone that she didn't know anything about her father; where he stayed in Abuja, or who lived with him? She stared out the window, tears streaming down her face, frustrated at the fact that they were stuck in traffic. The car was at a standstill, which was a rare occurrence on a Sunday evening; no doubt, the plane crash was responsible. She looked at Emeka as he handed her his handkerchief and she tried to muster a smile but failed. The handkerchief smelled nice and masculine and it was a pity she had to ruin it. Her face was smudged with make-up, but she couldn't bother about aesthetics right now. All she wanted was an opportunity to speak of her forgiveness to her father, to hug him, and let him take the place in her life he had left void. The thought brought fresh waves of tears and she couldn't help but moan out loud. She turned her head to look at Emeka and waved her hand in apology for not being able to control herself. He nodded in understanding, but stared at her, at a loss on what to do.

The last time Emeka had consoled any woman was when his father died, and it hadn't been awkward for him because they were family and he'd shared their loss. But this was different. He didn't know this woman well, didn't even like her that much, and now she was crying in his car, looking helpless and vulnerable. He prayed silently that

the man was not on the crashed plane because the confirmation of their fears would spell doom and make it more difficult to convince Mosun about the love of a great God. He wondered why she had failed to call anyone in Abuja to confirm the time her father left, but kept mute. It seemed that the more he spoke about it, the more her tears flowed.

Mosun's phone rang and she frantically reached for it. He hoped it was a positive message; perhaps a call from her father or any other relative to allay their fears, but it was not to be.

“What?” she screamed and he knew the time for hopeful thoughts were over. He tried to put a hand on her shoulder while he moved the car with the other, but she waved it away like dirt. “He said he was going with Arik,” she shouted into the phone. He didn't know what the person told her. She just said, “Oh,” and the phone dropped from her hand.

“Are you okay? What did the person tell you?” Emeka asked, but he already knew the answer.

“Take me home,” she said simply.

“Why?” he asked, confused at her sudden change of plans. She was one spontaneous girl.

“Just take me home,” she repeated and let the tears fall. She didn't bother to clean or control them, neither did she wail out loud anymore.

“Alright, I will take you home.”

It was 8:30 pm already, and it was better to go home and get the details tomorrow. They could check the manifest to see if Mosun's father's name was among those who truly boarded the flight. That was the last thread of hope they could hold on to. He really couldn't tell her to stop crying. How could you tell a person who had just lost a parent to stop crying? The memory of the grief he felt when he lost his dad swarmed him and he heaved a heavy sigh.

As he turned the car away in silent obedience, Mosun wished he would say something to console or comfort her; a word of prayer, something that would bring a miracle, but she knew better than to hope for too much. No one ever thought that she hurt enough to be comforted, not even her own father who was probably now burnt to ashes. Emeka was only being a gentleman tonight, and would soon leave her to her dark world. The last door of opportunity and hope for a taste of true family love was shut forever. The words of the man who had called her rang in her ears. *“Your father was in the crashed Dana plane.”*

Emeka wished they could say a word of prayer together, but he knew she would not agree, so he said a quiet prayer within himself. He prayed that God would calm the storm and give comfort to the aching lady beside him. Also, he prayed that God would show him his role in everything that was happening.

The largeness of Mosun's house amazed him. He wondered why a young lady, however successful she may be, would choose to live

alone in a mansion. As they both opened the car to step out, he also wondered how no one but Glory had called, and why Mosun hadn't called anyone to share the news with.

“Thank you very much Emeka,” she said looking sad, her eyes brimming with fresh tears, her make-up, completely ruined. She looked totally pitiful and hopeless, he wanted to hold her in his arms to assure her, but he wasn't sure he should.

“I am glad I came along, and I don't want you to feel indebted or anything of the sort. We are friends,” he said, surprising even himself. He didn't know when he'd begun to consider her as such; perhaps because of her relationship with Glory.

Mosun held his gaze briefly, studying him. He was such a modest guy, she thought, but she couldn't bring herself to say anything. She just nodded, turned, and walked to her door. To her surprise, he followed her.

“You are not leaving yet?” she asked, wishing that he would.

“I just want to make sure that you'll be fine,” Emeka said, and she nodded indifferently then fiddled in her bag for the keys.

As she opened the door, Emeka wondered the sense behind going in with her. He should just go and come back tomorrow morning. But he couldn't bring himself to leave. She felt so fragile and at the edge of breaking, if anything was going to happen, he wanted to be there. He was surprised at himself; at how much he actually cared, but he

quickly concluded that it was the Christian thing to do considering the fact that he had been her prayer fireman for the past one month.

They entered the quiet building and she turned on the lights. Emeka observed his space as Mosun led him through the short hallway that led to the sitting room, and he was not prepared for the beauty of the house. From the furniture, to the fixtures, fittings, chandeliers, wall design, tiles, flower vases, everything was opulent and grandiose. Even the TV was massive. Yet, there was something cold and unwelcoming about the place. It lacked warmth and the atmosphere was heavy. Emeka wondered how she got a house like this but kept his thoughts to himself.

Mosun watched Emeka as he examined her living room and she wished she had insisted that he did not follow her. She knew he would definitely have questions, and she wasn't in the mood to give answers, so she was glad he didn't ask her anything. Right now, what she wanted was to drown her sorrows in cold bottles of beer, but she doubted very much that Emeka would approve. She decided to wait for him to leave, now that he was sure she was okay and safe in her house. To her dismay, Emeka sat comfortably on one of the couches and stared at her. She felt uncomfortable wondering what he expected of her. All of a sudden, it clicked; she was supposed to offer refreshments.

“What would you like to take?” she asked, still standing in the low-cut skimpy gown he had earlier detested her for. Now, all he felt for her was compassion and pity. She was like a blind child finding her way in the dark. There were so many scary shadows, and he soon

found himself wanting to be her light. He however cautioned himself to thread softly or else, he may lose his sight too, and they would both be in the dark.

He stood to pull her down to sit, and then sat by her, placing one arm on her shoulder. “Everything is going to be alright Mosun, you just have to believe it.”

Relishing his comforting arm on her shoulder and wishing that he would pull her into a hug, she said, “It would get me through tonight, but then what else? I will be forced to bury the bones of a man I have longed for all my life, and now, when I finally came this close to having him in my life, he is snatched away.”

He couldn't totally decipher what she meant, but he knew the story must be more messed up than he'd imagined. He fought the urge to pull her into his arms. If it was someone else, it might have been okay to comfort them that way, but with Mosun, it was definitely different. The arms she needed to be in right now were not his but that of a loving and caring father; not the one probably dead or dying, but the one who breathed life into her, the Almighty God himself. With much effort than he thought it would require, he stood up from beside her and moved to the other seat. He needed to keep the distance between them. It was late in the night, and they were alone in the building. For some reason, he felt a strong pull towards her that he would rather not test.

“I guess you should call a family or a friend who can stay with you for the night,” Emeka said, and her reaction surprised him. He didn't

know what was upsetting in the statement that should instigate strong emotions, but the tears just flowed. He had to move back to her side, reaching out to her by touching her shoulders, but she waved him off.

Mosun couldn't control herself anymore; she needed a drink and a cigarette. She stood from the couch and walked to the kitchen to take two bottles of beer. She stopped at the cabinet where she kept the cigarette and the lighter and put it on the tray. Emeka couldn't hide his expression; he was alarmed. How was she going to handle the situation like this? He had thought the second bottle was for him, so he'd planned what to say as he declined, but he was soon to discover that they were all for Mosun's belly, and wouldn't even be enough.

“Do you mind if I smoke?” she asked, and lighted the cigarette without waiting for an answer.

“I didn't know you smoke,” Emeka said.

“We are not close enough for you to know every little detail about me,” she replied as she inhaled the first bit of smoke and exhaled it. “I can't continue crying like a hopeless child? And this is the best way I know to soak my fears. The other is mindless sex, but I am sure you will object since you can't even manage to sit beside me for a minute.”

A lump built in Emeka's throat and he swallowed it immediately. He even found that his shirt was beginning to get soaked from perspiration. How does one handle a situation like this? The woman

was driving him crazy and he didn't know what to do about it. He felt obligated to remain with her until someone else came to her aid, but it seemed as though that was not going to happen.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” She snapped at him. When he didn't look away, she took a long smoke from her cigarette and leaned back on the couch. “You really don't have to babysit me, I am not the first person to lose a father,” she said looking indifferent.

Her tearful, weak frame had been easily replaced with an indifference that baffled him. Her eyes were dry already, but he knew she was far from okay. The bags under her eyes were clear evidence. It was 10:30 pm and he needed to make up his mind on what to do. His phone rang in his pocket and he hesitated to pick it, assuming it was Sandra. He really should have called her since they got home, but he had been too preoccupied with the woman before him to think of any other thing.

It was Glory. She wanted to know the situation, and as he explained to her, he felt awkward telling her he was still in Mosun's house at such a late hour. Still, he couldn't bear to leave her alone for fear that she could hurt herself. As he gave the phone to Mosun to speak with Glory, he made up his mind. He would have to take her to a place she could be monitored, at least for the night. He considered his own house, but it didn't sit well with him. How was he going to explain it to his mum? Although she was caring and understanding, Mosun could be unpredictable. She took another long smoke before giving him back the phone.

“Can you pack an overnight bag? I need to get you to a place where you can be monitored.”

She didn't even look at him. Instead, she took a long drink from the bottle before responding. “I am not going anywhere; I can take care of myself. You are the one that needs to be on your way.”

Emeka sighed in stifled frustration and ran his hand through his hair as he silently prayed that Charles would understand when they appeared at his doorstep. He thought of staying with her through the night, but his spirit disagreed with the idea. They were both leaving this house, even if he had to carry her out. He decided to first try persuasion, and for both their sakes, he hoped it worked.

“Mosun, I know it's not my place to make decisions for you, but I can't just leave you alone here. I need to be sure you'll be okay and won't do anything to hurt yourself.”

She wiped her face with the back of her hand as the tears started to fall again, and Emeka was a bit relieved. Letting out the pain was better than bottling it up. “You are right; it's not your place. You don't have to feel obligated because Glory put you to this, I will be fine,” she stated, draining what's left of the bottle in front of her.

“I am not doing this because Glory put me to it. You are my friend too, and you need us to help you at a time like this, I am just playing my part.”

“Till when?” she snapped at him. “My father is dead, and I am now forced to live without him.”

A wave of compassion swept over Emeka. He could understand her pain. He had been down that road before, but this was probably worse; a plane crash that probably left no trace of the man whose only reason for death was boarding a wrong plane.

“I feel your pain,” he said softly.

“Oh, you don't,” she stated heatedly, her eyes blazing with anger. “My father hated me! He thought I killed the only woman he ever loved by coming to the world at the wrong time. He despised me! He destroyed me, and starved me of parental love and affection! He sold me to the world,” she stated, her voice rising with each statement.

“It's sad,” Emeka muttered, touched by her pain.

“No, that's not sad,” Mosun retorted, her face once again streaked with tears. “I could survive all that, but this…,” she said, a fresh bout of tears lacing her eyes, “…this is what I cannot survive. He apologized to me on the phone yesterday, and I refused to listen to him until I see him today. I didn't tell him that I had forgiven him, and now it's over,” she said, breaking down. “My whole life has to be the saddest twist of fate,” she said, shaking now,

Emeka was by her side in an instant, pulling her into his arms. Without another word, he led her out of the house. She was really shaking and he didn't know how to help. Packing an overnight bag seemed inconsequential in the face of everything that was going on. She needed help and he needed to take her to a place where she could get that help. He was grateful she didn't object as he led her to the car.

She had however picked a bottle of cognac from the shelf as they walked out and he couldn't bring himself to take it from her. He just prayed that Charles would forgive his intrusion on his Sunday night love ritual, because his wife was the person Mosun needed at the moment.

CHAPTER NINE

Emeka was right. Charles had not liked the intrusion, but the text message from his friend signified that he didn't have any other place to go with this lady he was bent on helping, so he'd obliged. Chioma hadn't even thought twice about accepting the stranger. They had been cuddling on the couch when Emeka's message came in, and it would have annoyed any other lady, but she was different. He wasn't surprised at the way she had gone to the guest room to prepare it for their unknown guest as soon as he'd shown her Emeka's text message. Even now that the lady was settled in, she was making tea and checking out drugs that could help stop her fever.

They hadn't known anything about the crash until Emeka had come in with the lady, and had been shaken by the bad news. He would have switched on the TV immediately if not for the look from his wife. The sights on the screen might further aggravate the lady, so he had brought out his phone to get updates, and the news was splashed everywhere. It was a gory sight. The plane had collapsed into some buildings in Iju-Ishaga, and there were no survivors yet. His heart skipped a beat as he remembered that his wife was on that same plane from Abuja last week Sunday.

He looked at her from across the room and winked at her in gratitude to God. She smiled at him and it transformed her face. They shared an unspoken understanding of what could have been, before joining Emeka on the carpet where he sat.

“Gosh! Man, you need sleep,” Charles said, but Emeka just looked away. He had caught the look of affection shared by the couple, and though it always made him jealous, today, he was grateful to have them in his life.

“Sleep is the last thing on my mind right now,” he said with a sigh. “I don't know how I got myself into this, but I don't want to back out. I need to help her and I don't even know how.”

Charles nodded in agreement. The little Emeka had told them about the lady was sad. “Don't worry; just do the best you can, and we will support you.”

“Thanks guy, I'm glad I can count on you. I would have stayed here tonight in case anything comes up, but Mum is going to be worried. Besides, I need to freshen up for tomorrow and drop by Mosun's place to get a change of clothes,” he said as he stood to leave.

Charles rose with him. “Don't worry man, we'll take care of everything, just make sure you rest well. I know you feel like you are responsible for her, but you are not. It's good you are doing a Christian thing by standing by someone in need, but that's how far you should let it get.” Charles held Emeka by the shoulder and reinforced his last statement by looking him in the eye. “Don't get emotionally involved, it's easy to fall for a vulnerable lady.”

Emeka shrugged his hands off and walked towards the room Mosun was staying. “I know, but trust me I have been responsible for her on a spiritual level for a month now. I am on a mission, and my emotions have no role to play in this at all.”

“I hope so,” Charles said, raising his hands in surrender as he followed his friend, but Chioma's entrance into the room halted both of them.

“Thank you so much Chioma,” Emeka said as he pulled her into his arms for a brief hug.

“We are happy to be of help,” she said when Emeka released her.

“I was just going to check on her before going back home,” Emeka said as he glanced at his wristwatch.

Chioma waved her hands in disagreement. “You will just wake her up, she is asleep already. I guess the alcohol she took has taken a toll on her. She will wake up with a very bad headache though. Too bad you couldn't stop a crying lady from drinking so much,” she said and gave him a look of slight disapproval.

Emeka sighed tiredly, remembering how Mosun had drank more than half a bottle of Cognac as they drove to Charles' place and was too numb by the time they got here. “I don't know the first thing to do where consoling a woman is concerned,” he confessed.

Charles pulled his wife into the crook of his arm as he smiled. “Then I guess you should learn.”

Emeka ignored his attempt to get him jealous and walked to the door. “I will see you guys tomorrow morning, Goodnight”

“Goodnight,” they both said as they followed him to the door.

“Take care of yourself,” Chioma added before closing the door behind him. She turned to her husband as soon as Emeka left. “He is such a sweet guy.”

“Sweeter than me?” Charles asked with mock jealousy.

“Of course not,” she replied with a sweet look and gave him a quick kiss on the lips, but quickly pulled away before he deepened it.

Charles frowned, displeased. “Let's continue from where we stopped,” he said and made an attempt to kiss her again, but she wiggled away.

“That can wait,” she said. “We need to pray for this lady.”

“Can't it wait?” Charles asked, still in the mood for some action, but the look on his wife's face rid him of his sexual thoughts. As though he suddenly understood the urgency of the situation, he held her hands and together they prayed for the lady in their guest room, and the man bent on helping her, and that God would make them play their role as well in all of this.

Emeka dropped tiredly on his bed after taking a cold shower. The day had been a long one and he was grateful for the comfort of his bed. He arrived home at 12:05 am, and everyone had retired for the

night, except his pregnant sister who was eating fruits at the dining table. She teased him about becoming an Igbo-Yoruba demon, assuming that he had lingered with the girl he took on a date to the party. Little did she know that the party was now a blur, and he had not remembered that he had been there until she mentioned it.

He doubted she had heard about the plane crash since she hadn't passed any comment on it. She had probably been watching a movie on her laptop, while her phone was in God knows where, and he was grateful because he wasn't in the mood to talk about it. As he got to his room, it occurred to him that he needed to call Sandra and Glory, but it was really late, so he sent Sandra a text message, apologizing for leaving her at the party, but called Glory and told her that she would go with him to get change of clothes for Mosun at her house the next day.

Done, his eyes closed of their own volition, and the wind blew into the room through the-opened window; sometimes, he preferred the natural breeze to the air-conditioning. His sleep was however short-lived. He woke up thirty minutes later, feeling as though someone had poured cold water on him and he knew why; he had gone to bed without committing the situation to the most-High God. If he was going to give Mosun quality help, he needed to be on the same page with her Creator.

The next morning, Emeka quickly went to get a change of clothes for Mosun, with Glory's help and she was currently in Mosun's room packing a bag. He didn't want Mosun staying anywhere without

supervision until he was sure that she was alright, but he didn't think it was appropriate for him to make Charles and Chioma keep her with them for more than two days. They would need their privacy and he had to respect that, even though they weren't complaining. For a split second, Emeka wondered if it was his place to make all this decisions, but then again, he knew someone had to, and so far, he hadn't seen anyone like that. He made a mental note to ask Mosun later in the day if she had any family or close friends she could stay with till she got back on her feet emotionally.

Glory was the only friend of hers he knew, and he didn't like the idea of both of them staying together. He doubted Glory would know how to keep her in line and help her heal the right way. In fact, she would indulge Mosun's unhealthy habits, and he couldn't have that happening. Again, he prayed that God would show him the way.

As it was, the last thread of hope he harbored about finding Mosun's father had been dashed. He had confirmed that there were no survivors. The entire 153 people on the plane had been confirmed dead. The plane crashed three minutes before it could land at the Muritala Mohammed International Airport in Lagos. He had also checked the manifest that was published online and Mosun's father's name was included. There was so much to do and he didn't know where to start.

The sound of a scream from one of the rooms upstairs sent him flying up the stairs to see what had happened. He was shocked to see Glory on the floor of one of the bedrooms and stifled the need to say

a foul word as she continued yelling. She had slipped on a shampoo bottle and twisted her ankle. Apparently, the bottle hadn't been closed properly and was upturned so it had been dripping since like forever.

Emeka took this in, in one glance then quickly bent beside Glory and reached for her leg, trying to pacify her. She however brushed his hand away and attempted to stand up, but to no avail.

“Is it very painful?” he asked, giving her a worried look.

“Of course, it's very painful. Mosun is the dirtiest girl I know. Why would she leave the room like this?” Glory said in disgust as she tried to stand up again, but to no avail.

Emeka looked around the room and he wondered how a girl's room could look so disorganized. As beautiful as the room was, it was a presently undesirable. There were clothes everywhere; on the chair, on the dresser, and in the adjoining bathroom and toilet where Glory had fallen. The body cream was on the floor beside the bed, while the make-up bag and the contents that should be in it were scattered over the bed. The shoe rack stood beautifully by the wall but there were no shoes on it. All the shoes were in a heap beside the rack and they were a lot. Even the bathroom where he stood as he tried to lift Glory out of the room smelled terribly of strong urine, and there were also dirty panties and bras scattered everywhere. He was disgusted. For a normal random dude, this was bad to see, but for an unusually clean freak like Emeka, this was unacceptable and wrong. It was too much for him to take in so he quickly carried Glory out and straight to the living room downstairs.

“Do you want us to stop at the nearest hospital on our way so that they can check the leg for you?” he asked after settling her down on the couch.

“No, that won't be necessary. It's a minor accident, just take me home. I have some bandages I can use to hold it in place.”

“Alright, if you insist. I will go back upstairs and get the bag then drop you off at home before going back to see Mosun,” he said and left the room. A few seconds later, he returned with the packed bag and helped Glory to her feet.

“Why are you helping Mosun?” Glory asked, limping slightly as she leaned on Emeka, who bore her weight as he helped her to the door,

“Because she needs help,” he said lightly.

“Hmm…, Okay, I guess that is fair enough. Just don't start liking her. She is not that type of girl. Trust me; she is really bad; worse than me even.”

Emeka forced a laugh. He wasn't in the mood to talk about Mosun in a personal or intimate way, and he sensed that disagreeing with Glory or telling her he wasn't interested would lead to another barrage of questions or a conversation he was not interested in having,

“Yes ma,” he replied simply as he led her out of the house and closed the door behind them.

“Is that all you'll say?” she asked, not wanting to close the door of information on this particular issue. She was glad Mosun was

getting help from a guy like Emeka at a time like this, but it made her jealous to see the devotion with which he was handling the whole thing. She had fallen down deliberately and screamed to call his attention because she wanted him to see the inside of Mosun's room.

If he was suffering from any “pity me” effect of a prostitute, she wanted to end it before it grew. It was good that he showed concern, but taking her to a place where he could care for her closely was taking it too far. She felt a pang of quilt but ignored it. It wasn't as if Mosun was even close to her father. She could remember a time when Mosun had said she hated him and didn't want to have anything to do with him. They had never even lived together so why was she mourning him deeply like this? She concluded it was a ploy and she was not going to have any of it. If Emeka was going to be with a girl like her, then she might as well be his choice.

Even after they entered the car, Glory kept bickering and hissing. As though he could read her mind, Emeka said, “Why are you even thinking in that line? The girl just lost her father for God's sake!”

Glory gave Emeka a sulky look at his scolding tone and wondered why he was still defending Mosun after seeing her room. She put on her seat belt and refrained from responding. For now, she would hold her peace, knowing that the seed at least had been sown.

“Thanks so much for waiting,” Emeka said to Chioma as she took her bag and made to leave the house for her workplace. “It's an honour to have you guys help.”

Chioma's smile said all the words even before they touched her lips. “Emeka, you are family, and family sticks together all the time. Besides, each time I think of how it could have been me on that plane when it crashed, the least I can do is to help. She is very vulnerable right now, so be patient with her. Charles called a few minutes before you got here and confirmed that her father was definitely in the crash, and we want to help. I know you think it's inconvenient for us to have her, but it's not. We believe this is what Jesus will have us do, and we are glad for the opportunity, so don't take it from us.”

“Thanks,” Emeka murmured. It was all he could say as he closed the door of her house behind her, and sat on the couch with the bag that had Mosun's things. How did Charles get so lucky? Chioma was a complete and total woman, not like the type he'd just dropped off some minutes ago, nor the one in the guest room. She was a woman who lived and breathed Jesus, and that surely made all the difference. The way she had re-packaged Charles was another matter entirely, and he too wasn't going to settle for less than the best. The support of his own God-fearing woman at a time like this would have been refreshing.

As he made to stand up, the name *Mary Magdalene,* was whispered to him clearly, and he looked around to see if he was still alone in the room, but the voice continued.

“*Mary Magdalene lived and breathed Jesus”*.

By now he knew that it was the Holy Spirit talking to him, but still, he was confused. “And what does this have to do with me?”

“Everything”

Still, in confusion, he stood up and went inside.

As Mosun heard the sound of the knock on the door, she turned to face it. She had heard the footsteps and she knew it would be Emeka, she just didn't know how to face him. Her actions and outburst the previous day was shameful, but deeper than that was the deep wound that her father's death had created. Right now, her life was messed up, and if she didn't have this guy as a pillar of support, she would have totally crumbled.

He was such a good person and was surrounded by other good people. Even amidst her sorrow, she felt peace in this room. She overheard the couple praying for her yesterday night and it made her feel important in a real way for the first time in her life. The way the Chioma lady acted and talked made her feel like she belonged, as though she was better than she really was. She wished that she could be like them, that somehow she could also blend with them and think like them, believing in their God and all that, but it was all wishful thinking. Any chance to have that kind of life had been blown away since God gave her parents who were not ready for the commitment of children.

“Come in,” she replied to the knock on the door and Emeka walked in, looking as handsome as ever, but that didn't matter at the moment. She was overwhelmed with sorrow.

“How are you today?” he asked as he sat on the edge of the bed,

holding her Burberry bag with the change of clothing items and cosmetics.

“I am as fine as a girl whose father just burnt without a trace,” she said and tears streamed down both sides of her cheeks.

Emeka fought the urge to pull her into his arms and comfort her. It was as though waves of affection for her were sneaking up on him and he realized that he felt it more strongly when someone or a situation tried to paint her in bad light; like the day Sandra had told him about her wayward lifestyle and how she came about her position, like how Glory had insinuated she wasn't worth his affection, mixed with his disgust at seeing her dirty room. Still, it didn't change the fact that he wanted her in his arms and safe, and it had nothing to do with her father's death.

He rose from the bed and sat on the chair beside the wardrobe, giving himself a mental shake to stop dwelling on an impossible, foolish idea. She was definitely the kind of lady he didn't want to have anything to do with. He told himself what he felt was pity, and ran his hand through his hair at a loss on what to do with them.

“Mosunmola stop crying, it's not going to make a difference. The good thing is that he has the Lord, and I think you should have him too,” Emeka said

“Stop!” Mosun screamed as though she had seen a ghost, and for a moment he thought she had. “Don't tell me it's a good thing he has the Lord because whoever the Lord is, He is a selfish person who can't find it in His heart to see me happy.”

“Mosun, stop blaspheming; don't incur God's wrath.”

“Oh, you mean there is something worse than this?” She asked amidst sobs, and his heart sought ways to comfort her, but he physically remained glued to the chair.

“I am sorry you've had to go through all these things, but the truth is that God cares for you. The way He does His things is His business, but we must still believe that no matter how His plans for us may look to us, He has the best in mind for us, and if we stick with Him till the end, we will be shocked by the depth of His love.”

Mosun shook her head in disapproval. “Don't talk about me and the depth of God's love in the same sentence. I am not saying there is no God, and I am not saying He is bad, I just know that He doesn't like me.”

“Stop saying that,” Emeka said standing up from the chair to sit by her side on the bed. She was shaking already, and he didn't know how to calm her down. The only thing he could think of was to end the conversation, but the Holy Spirit kept egging him on and putting the words in his mouth. “God loves you.”

“No,” she screamed again, and it broke his heart. He could relate with her point of view, but he knew that it was wrong.

“God does not owe you anything, yet He has loved you enough to create you and sustain you in life. He has made you a testimony, because despite your many sins, He has still preserved you for His purpose.”

“What purpose?” she asked with a shaky voice as she shivered. He wondered why she was responding this way and willed himself to stop talking and hold her, but his mouth was moving of their volition.

“Your parents are dead, and it's sad, but it's their story. I still have questions about why my bible believing Christian father would just die through a sickness we all prayed about, but each time, the Holy Spirit reminds me that this earth is a temporary place, and we are all puppets in the hands of God to do and live as He will allow us. You are alive and strong, and your life can be even better if you embrace Jesus as your personal Lord and saviour because that is the only thing that can give your life meaning, now and beyond.”

He paused to see if his words were taking shape in her heart, but he wasn't sure. She was still shaking and crying, but he could tell she was listening, so he continued.

“We are all going to die someday. How we die is not what matters most, but where we go when we die, and how we have lived here before God calls us to be with Him. Trust me, the end is near. The signs of the end time are obvious and I beg you to surrender yourself to Jesus and let him make all the difference. I am not saying you will have a trouble free life, but you will be happy. We are in this world where the devil is roaring about, but Jesus says that in our trials and tribulations, He will be with us, and that is what makes us overcomers and more powerful than the devil.”

He moved a bit closer to her, hoping to get through the blank stare she gave him amidst her tears. “If your dad, whose behaviour

during his lifetime took the will to know God from you, believed in Jesus before he died, he will be with Him already. Don't let his death take away the opportunity for you to know this same Jesus, who is the father to the fatherless." Mosunmola breathed in everything Emeka just said and broke down in tears again. Emeka took her two slim hands in his own bigger ones and shook her till she looked him in the eye. "Mosun! What is it? What is holding you back?"

Mosun's expression became defiant, and she struggled to remove her hand, but he held her firmly. "You don't know anything about my life! That is why you think your Jesus can make all the difference. I am a product of sin, and everything I have ever achieved was built from sin."

Emeka stifled a smile of triumph as he saw her wall of resistance melting. "Jesus doesn't care about your past; He wants to give you a future. There was a woman in the bible, her name was Mary Magdalene. He delivered her from seven demons and the spirit of prostitution and she became one of the most popular women that were Jesus's best friend."

Mosun's sobs had reduced now. Her eyes shone brightly as she looked at him and his heart melted. Emeka caught himself. He had no right to have amoral feelings towards her. As far as he was concerned, she was his disciple.

"You don't understand. If I give myself to Jesus, I will lose everything, I don't even have any skill to work, and no good man will want me for a wife. I will end up having nothing."

For someone who was well exposed to the sins of the world, she suddenly looked innocent and scared; like a child who had just swallowed a seed and was told a tree would grow in her stomach.

“Don't worry; Jesus will make all the difference,” Emeka said

“You can't be so sure of that. You've always been good.”

“Mosun, every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future. We are all of the seed of Adam and therefore born into sin. It is only a conscious decision to let Jesus be the Lord of my life that separates me from you. Once you give Him the reins of your life, He gives you a clean slate, and we become united in His love as brother and sister in Christ.”

Mosun looked away from him and rubbed her shoulders with her palm to alleviate the cold air from the air conditioning system that chilled her from his words. He was getting to her. “I am confused, I don't even know what is best for me, and I just lost my father. Can I think about it?”

“Of course you can, but be fast about your decision because the next second might be too late.”

She squeezed her face at his comment. “Oh, you mean I could fall down from this bed, die and go to hell?”

He released her hands reluctantly and patted her shoulder. “You won't die now, just don't take this conversation for granted. I want you to really think about it.” Turning to the side table, he said, “You

should use this bible at your bedside; it would help you answer many questions that may come to your mind"

"Alright thanks," she said with a feeling of deep gratitude. "When do I leave this place?"

"Don't you like it?" he asked, concern etched all over his face.

"Oh, I love it here. They are lovely people, but I don't want to overstay my welcome."

A smile tugged at Emeka's lips as he picked the bag with her change of clothes from the floor and gave it to her. "Make yourself comfortable for the next couple of days until I am sure you are okay, or I know what to do with you."

"I will probably leave for the village tomorrow," she said.

"Who are you going to see in the village?" he asked with a slight frown.

"My grandfather is in Kogi state," she replied looking down at her palms as she said it. "He is the only family I have." Emeka felt a certain pain in his heart looking at her. He couldn't imagine what it felt like to be without family. "Thank you so much, I don't know what I would have done without you. You make me feel as though I am not alone."

He knelt by the bed and held her hand, his eyes misting at her statement. "You are not alone; I am here for you all the way."

The way he said it struck something in her heart that she couldn't understand, and she felt lucky that a guy like him would look at her. At a loss for what to say, she looked at the bag he brought and asked how he got it. He told her the whole thing including Glory's accident, but he carefully skipped the part about him seeing the dirty room. Mosun however knew he'd seen her messy room because she looked away from him in shame, and for some reason he couldn't decipher, it endeared her more to him.

“Don't worry about anything,” he said trying to allay her concerns. “In fact, I am going to make you a special kind of pepper soup that would make you relax, but that is if you promise to finish your bread.”

He sounded like a big Uncle talking to his young niece and it made them both smile. Even when he left the room, she continued to smile. Despite her pain, it seemed that she had found something really valuable. Emeka was more than just a man you want in your bed, he was a man you would want in your life either has a friend or more. He had shown her that it took more than a mutual interest in sex and business to build a quality relationship with a man, and she secretly wished he would be there forever, but she wasn't going to push her luck. She was already too lucky to have him in her life as a friend at her time of need.

CHAPTER TEN

Emeka paused as he stepped out of the room, heaving a sigh. He had said a lot, much more than he would have said even if it was a planned speech. He put his right hand to his chest and wondered why it was beating so fast. This lady was doing things to his system he couldn't understand. She wasn't even in the category of ladies he could have feelings for, let alone marry, yet he couldn't bring himself to stop thinking about her and wanting to help her.

He knew monitoring her at her time of deep mourning was not just because no family of hers surfaced; it was because he couldn't bear to let her go. When she'd hinted about leaving to be with her grandfather, who was her only family, he had felt the strong urge to hold her in his arms and tell her he was all she needed.

“What am I going to do about this?” he asked himself aloud as he strode away from the door. It was probably best to let her go and see the man as soon as possible before his emotions overrode his good sense of judgment.

As he opened the door of the house to exit, a mild breeze blew his way and the words came clearly.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding.”

Mrs. Obiagu's expression changed from sad to worry as she awaited Emeka's entrance. She had heard the sound of his car from her room where she was watching the news about the crash of the airplane and had rushed out immediately to receive him. He had come in very late the previous night and had gone out very early in the morning without even saying a word to her. It was unlike him; he always came to her room at the slightest opportunity and now, she hadn't seen him in almost two days.

“Good afternoon mum,” he said as he dropped on the couch, trying to sound normal, but she caught the hint of stress in his voice.

“Chukwuemeka, what is wrong with you?” she asked, concern etched on her face as she sat down beside him.

“I am fine. It's just that my friend lost her father in the crash that took place yesterday and I had to take care of her.”

“Oh my God!” she exclaimed as he knew she would. “I am so sorry; I can imagine how hurt she would be. Which of your friend is this?” she asked, already trying to figure out who it was.

“You don't know her.”

“I don't know her?” she echoed, looking surprised. “I thought I knew all your friends, at least those close enough to get your undivided attention in emergencies.”

“Well, this one is a new friend,” he said, standing up from the couch. He knew the interview would never end if he didn't leave the room.

But it was too late because his actions made her all the more curious. “Who is this lady that you're giving so much support and I don't know?”

“Mum, how can you possibly know all my friends, I have a lot of them,” he said and continued to walk away, but she followed.

“Okay,” she said with a sigh, and continued. “The situation is really painful. I even heard the plane crash could have been avoided. I don't understand our country again, wasting people's lives like that.” “What would you like to eat?” she asked as she turned towards the kitchen while he made a beeline for the staircase.

“Don't worry about me, I am not hungry?” he said but immediately regretted his decision. He should have taken whatever she wanted to offer him. Now, she would raise eyebrows.

“You don't want to eat? Is it because of your friend? Please, my son, don't let it affect you that badly; you need strength to be of any help to her.”

“I know,” he said stopping mid-stride and walking to his mother. He put his arms around her to allay her concerns. “I am going to cook for her so I'll eat out of it.”

“You are going to cook for her?” she asked, surprise written all over her face. The fact that he had a female friend close enough to get his

undivided attention regardless of the circumstance was enough to surprise her, but his choosing to cook for her by himself was a complete shock. She gave him a knowing smile. “Who is this girl to you?”

He returned her question with a smile of his own as he made to leave her again. “I have told you already, she is just a friend.”

“Emeka, do you like this girl?”

“Of course, I like her. She is my friend.”

“I know. I mean do you have feelings for her?”

He frowned shyly. “Mum, you are putting me on the spot”

“Answer the question”

“Maybe, I don't know”

“I take that as a yes,” she said, grinning from ear to ear. She was excited about this but had to curb her excitement as she remembered that the girl just lost her father.

“You should let me meet this girl, at least to offer my condolences and comfort her as well.”

“No way,” Emeka said rather too loudly. He couldn't believe that his mother was already being like this about the whole thing. He wasn't even sure about his emotions, and Mosun wasn't appropriate.

“Okay,” she said, sighing in resignation before asking, “What's her name?”

Even as he answered, Emeka knew that even if his feelings for Mosun were genuine, his mother would never approve. “Her name is Mosunmola Olalere.”

“She is Yoruba,” his mum said, stating the obvious.

“Yes,” he replied calmly, wondering why he let himself say this much. He could see the storm brewing on his mother's face.

“Emeka, after all this years of making me wait, you are falling in love with a Yoruba lady. Really?” she said, giving him an angry stare.

“Mum, I am not in love with her; I just said I might have feelings for her. We shouldn't conclude yet.”

“Of course, I can conclude you are in love with her, it's all over you, and I have noticed your attitude for a while.”She looked him in the eye, her expression stern, and her voice reeking of disapproval “Chukwuemeka, you will not marry a Yoruba woman, it's a taboo in our clan,” she said and strode away. She stopped midway and turned to him. “And don't you dare enter my kitchen to cook any rubbish!”

“Really mum?” Emeka stated, affronted by his mum's attitude. Rather than continue up the stairs, he turned towards the main door, annoyed at the way she was addressing him as if he was a kid.

“And where are you going?” his mother queried.

He didn't bother to answer; he needed time away from home to think.

Emeka drove with no particular destination in mind, hitting the steering aggressively. He liked Mosun. He had never felt so deeply about anyone, and he couldn't help but wonder how everything had changed in one night, He had been disgusted by her, angry with her, and cheated by her, He had seen her dirty room, heard bad things about her and he had even thought she wasn't very smart. She had cried in his arms, and he had prayed for her, preached to her, dreamt about her, and was in his thoughts more times than he would admit to himself.

She was not his ideal girl. Her past was disgusting, her history terrifying, and her life, a lie. She lacked professionalism and she wouldn't fit in with his friends. Yet, he couldn't remove her face from his head. Her smile, her tears, her ignorance, even her promiscuity were all racing in his head and his heart soared. If he was going to be truthful, he had been nursing his feelings low-key for two months now, trying to make it go away, but willing it away was not enough to make it disappear. Telling himself again and again how inappropriate she was, was not entering his head or his heart. He was falling for her.

Emeka was overwhelmed with the truth he had just admitted to himself. Everything he had ever known was conflicting with the raging emotions he felt. He had always convinced himself that he

was waiting for a special lady, a virtuous and untainted lady. Mosun wasn't any of that. In fact, putting it harshly, she was a damn prostitute. She didn't qualify to be his bride. He had kept himself, trained himself, and equipped himself. He was a Christian, a tongue-speaking, Holy Spirit-filled brother. How could he let such a lady be the support in his life? They were unmatched and unsuited. He couldn't even talk to his pastor about her. No one in his life would approve. And to make matters worse, she was a Yoruba woman. His family would reject her even before they knew her story.

“What am I going to do?” He asked himself and unknowingly ran the red traffic light.

Three LASTMA officers appeared by his car as soon as he parked on the other side of the road.

“Can I have your driver's license?” The first one asked. Emeka removed it and gave it to him without bothering to argue.

“You will pay a fine of twenty-five thousand Naira to the Lagos State Traffic Management Authority account,” another one said.

“Okay, give me the ticket,” he said quietly, and the three officers looked at each other, surprised at his willingness.

The third one spoke. “You are a good Nigerian, I am sure it was a mistake. Settle us and go; don't bother stressing yourself to pay the fine.”

He was disgusted. “I don't have any money with me right now; give me the ticket and let me go to the bank.”

“Abeg make him go,” one of them said.

“Make him give us something first,” chipped another.

Emeka was now impatient, and he turned to the third one who was holding his driver's license while the other two went to a corner to argue. “What do you want me to do now?”

The man looked at him undecidedly before giving him back his license. “Don't do that again.”

“Thank you sir,” he said and drove away before the man could change his mind. He couldn't believe he got that lucky.

He looked back through his rear-view mirror and saw the three men arguing, probably over him.

It was time to go home and get on his knees. It was okay to be confused, but his Creator was not an author of confusion It was time to talk to his heavenly father.

Chioma entered the room and found Mosun sleeping with a Bible on her chest. She was surprised but glad. If the girl was turning to the Lord for answers, it was a good sign, but as she looked down beside the bed, she saw that her breakfast was still untouched. She looked up at the clock in the room. It was 3:30 pm. Mosun had not eaten all day. She glanced at her slender frame and wondered how she was going to help this hurting lady. Mosun's eyes had bags under them from endless tears, and her face looked sad and worn even in sleep. Chioma was still examining Mosun when Emeka and Charles

entered to join her, and it broke Emeka's heart to see Mosun on the bed, looking helpless and vulnerable. He had convinced her to eat before leaving earlier that morning, but apparently she hadn't. He doubted if she had left the bed except to take the side-table bible which was almost falling from her laps.

“We have to wake her up,” Charles said, breaking the silence in the room.

“How are we going to make her eat?” Emeka asked no one in particular.

Chioma moved to Emeka and touched his arms; she had sensed his growing feelings for the girl since he brought her in the night before, and she knew how hard this must be for him, not knowing the depth of his feelings and how he should behave towards her. It was a different thing if it was your girlfriend that was in pain, but when it's someone you haven't told or you're not sure you should tell, it was different. It could drive you crazy.

“I cooked Semo with vegetable soup; we will make her eat it, even if we have to feed her.”

“Alright, thank you,” Emeka said as Chioma pushed her husband gently out of the room, leaving him alone.

As the door closed behind his friends, Emeka stared at Mosun, his emotions raging. Looking at her lying helplessly on the bed, facing the ceiling, with bags under her closed eyes, and her lips tightly

pressed together tugged at his heart. It was the first day he was seeing her without any kind of makeup, and he liked it. She looked totally innocent, and it took all his will-power to stand and not pull her into his arms to comfort her.

“You are back,” she said sleepily as she roused slowly.

Emeka was breathless. He cleared his throat slightly, not trusting himself to speak at first. When he eventually kept his emotions in check and found his voice, he spoke. “Mosun, you've not eaten all day. Why?”

“I just don't have an appetite,” she replied as she sat up on the bed while he remained standing. She noticed that he was still wearing the polo he had on in the morning, and wondered if he went away at all.

“You need to eat some food for strength,” he said as he sat beside her on the bed and held her hands. They felt thin and cold.

“I know, but I can't bring my stomach to cooperate with me.”

“You need to try,” he insisted and squeezed her hands. “Please. You need to try some more,” he repeated and paused as he caught her eyes. “Do it for me.”

“For you?” She asked surprised at the intensity of his plea.

“Yes,” he replied, still looking at her in a way that gave her butterflies in her stomach.

“Okay, bring the tea,” she said and removed her hands from his.

“It's cold. Let me make another one for you”

“Thanks,” she murmured. “You are too kind. What would I have done without you?”

The words were his undoing. Every will-power he had to stay away from her immediately disappeared, He pulled her into his arms, and she sighed. The sound emboldened him and he held her closer, feeling her body against his. He knew he should pull away the moment his body started reacting, obviously having a mind of its own, but she felt perfect in his arms. The sound of footsteps finally brought him back to his senses. He pulled away reluctantly.

“Let me get the tea,” he said, not looking at her face

“Thank you,” she said and leaned back on the bed.

He got out expecting to see Charles or Chioma, but there was no one there. He immediately knew it was the Holy Spirit. He sighed, releasing the doorknob. He needed to sort this whole thing out fast, or he wasn't going to be able to help her the right way.

He met Chioma on his way to the kitchen. She held a tray of food and freshly made juice. “She said she wants tea,” he said gently.

“Maybe later in the night. For now, I want her to take this juice. I put some herbs that will help calm her and make her sleep better.”

“I guess you know what's best for her, thank you.”

Chioma nodded her head as though to say he didn't need to thank her. She went to Mosun's room while Emeka went to join Charles in the sitting room.

Charles looked away from the television to stare at his friend. “Man, you are messed up”

“Yeah, it's sad. It's never easy to lose a father,” Emeka said and sat on the couch.

“Of course, you are right, but you look messed up. What's up with you?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, you don't look okay to me”, Charles said, and Emeka raised his brows wondering what his friend meant. Charles sat up to ask a more direct question. “Are you falling for the girl?”

Emeka was slightly irritated. He had just admitted his feelings to himself and wasn't ready to share it with anyone. He hadn't even come to terms with how he felt for her yet, and Charles had already picked up on it. He instantly became defensive

“What rubbish are you saying? Is it a bad thing to want to help a mourning young lady? I guess I have to take her away from your place before you annoy me more than this.”

Charles just laughed. “You will take her to your mother's house? See man, I am your friend, it's apparent you like the girl. I know you well enough to see that, so stop trying to hide your naked body from the doctor that will sign your death certificate.”

Emeka sighed and scratched his head. It was hard to be angry or stay angry at Charles. “Am I that transparent?”

“It's written all over you. Even Chioma noticed”.

“What am I going to do? Emeka asked resignedly.

“If it's the real thing, there is really nothing you can do about it,” Charles stated candidly..

“I don't know if it's the real thing, but it's driving me crazy. I am confused, Charles,” he stated, getting to his feet and walking the length and breadth of the room, restless. “And these two days have made me more aware of my feelings for her. Before now, I could control myself and tell myself I don't have feelings for her, but all this tears and pains have been driving me insane. I want to be there for her at all times. She has no one. I want to be her pillar of support. I want to file her past and re-write her future. I want her in my arms and on my arm. Yet I am not sure it's right to feel this way,” he stated, pausing to look at his friends. In a resigned tone, he submitted, “I can't even believe I am falling for someone like her. She's not even my type of girl.”

“That's something,” Charles said after a few minutes of silence, overwhelmed by his friend's outpour. Emeka sighed and resumed

his seat beside him. “I am sure talking about it makes you feel better.”

“Yeah, it does,” Emeka replied, “but I don't want to feel better, I want to be sure. I need to know if it's right to feel this way about her. I want to know if she is the one for me. I don't want to pity her. I don't want my flesh to deceive me into taking upon myself something that I will later grossly regret. Love is supposed to be a beautiful thing and...” he paused, different thoughts going through his head. “How is one ever sure who the right person is?”

“Hey, slow down man. You are not helping yourself. You would just drive yourself nuts with worry. We are Christians, children of the Most High God. We will commit this to His hands and let Him tell us what He wants.”

“I am not sure this is what God will want, and that's my fear,” Emeka confessed. “I know He won't mind her past because He forgives totally and without keeping records, but I think all He wants me to do is to mentor her and lead her to Him. That's the sign He's been giving me for the past three months” Emeka heaved a sigh. “I am becoming inappropriate for the task now that I am having feelings for her.”

Charles considered Emeka's points for a second then quipped, “All things work together for good, for those who love God and live according to His will. Relax, and let God lead you.”

“I get your point, and the truth is that I know all this things in my head. I have counseled many people on these issues, but I guess

when it's your turn, it's really hard to counsel yourself." He heaved another sigh then got to his feet. "Let me check on her before leaving. I feel really better having shared this with you. Thanks."

"You know I am always here for you. And you've been in our prayers".

Emeka smiled. "That's what I am talking about; I need someone to pray with."

"And you will find. That door is looking at you now, and it's about to open."

"What's about to open?" Chioma asked as she entered the room, and the guys laughed.

"Once it opens you will be the first to know," Emeka said with a smile.

"I hope you'll finish that food," Emeka said as he re-entered the room with a smile. He was feeling more in control of himself now.

"I am trying; at least I have eaten half. That your friend's wife is something else."

Emeka laughed, not wanting to imagine what Chioma did to get her to eat as much as she had.

"I am glad you are trying; it would help your body to be stronger and your mind too. I will be leaving now. What do you want me to get for you tomorrow?"

“Nothing. I will be leaving tomorrow. I am going to the village. I appreciate your care and concern, but I have taken too much of your time and that of this family.”

“Mosun, I have told you that you don't bother us at all. We are glad to be of help at your time of need.”

“I know, but I must leave. My grandfather is scared sick about me. I called him this afternoon, and he said he would come and stay with me here in Lagos. I told him not to bother, that I will come to the village. I am sure that staying with him there would help me heal better.”

“I can't possibly object to that. I will inform my friends that you will be leaving tomorrow. Do you have a plan on how to get there?”

“Not yet, but I guess I will go through public transport or hire someone to drive me there in my car”.

“In that case, I will take you there,” Emeka said without giving it any thought.

“You don't even know how far it is,” she said, surprised at the offer.

“Even if it's the end of the world, I will take you there”. Emeka said with a smile

“Don't say things like that.” Mosun said softly, leaning back, and away from him.

“Why?” Emeka asked.

“They will get into my head and make me feel special when they don't mean anything to you.”

“You are special,” He said, holding her gaze.

“Oh my God! Stop. There is nothing special about me. I know it's a Christian habit to say good things to people, but I don't want you to be deceived, I am not special!” Mosun insisted.

“Let me be the judge of that,” he said and shoved his hands into his pockets. “I will leave now, but I will be back tomorrow to take you to your place so you can pack your things. Have you informed them at work?”

“Yes, I called H.R already, I took two months mourning leave.”

“Two months? You want to keep brooding for two months?”

“Not exactly, I just want to think and plan my life”.

“I can't object to that. But I am surprised they gave you two whole months off just by making a phone call.”

She smiled, “I am a director, and anything is possible when you are the boss.”

“Yeah, that is true. I totally forgot. Alright then, see you tomorrow,” Emeka said, touching her shoulder lightly before leaving the room.

“Goodnight,” she said as the memory of the hug they shared earlier flooded her mind. He was indeed her knight in shining armour. She turned to pick the Bible beside her and held it to her heart. She wanted to know more about this God that made all these people truly beautiful inside and out.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The water rushing from the shower head was at its peak, and Emeka stood under it with an arm raised, touching the wall. He had finished washing his body for a while, but the water was refreshing, it eased the tension he was feeling at the moment. His heart was heavy.

His mother had apologized for her behaviour in the morning and he had forgiven her. However inappropriate her outburst had been, he knew it was from a heart that truly cared, and he really couldn't hold anything against her. What troubled him was that even as she had apologized, she had begged him not to have any emotional entanglement with a Yoruba woman. He had been quiet and it had scared her. She had been expecting a promise, not his silence.

He knew there was no reason for her to fret yet because there was nothing but mere attraction for the helpless girl. Yet, he feared there was more, and he was going to find out. If anything was going to stop him, it wasn't his mother's fear of inter-tribal relations or even his own. He sighed deeply as he turned down the shower. It was now, more than ever, that he needed his mother's guidance and counsel, but that wasn't going to happen because her judgment was already clouded with prejudice.

He tied his spotless white towel around his waist and sat before the mirror, leaving his body to dry. He looked at his reflection in the mirror, and smiled in self-mockery. Who would have thought that a day would come when he would be like this? He couldn't even get the hug out of his head. He sighed.

“Lord I am confused. I don't know what to do about the way I feel. I don't understand what I feel for Mosunmola but you do. Please, give me clarity on this issue, sweet Jesus; I have never felt this way about anybody before. Make the feelings go away, Lord, so that I can concentrate on winning her soul for you,” he prayed, and was there for the next two hours before sleep eventually found him.

Mosun could not sleep that night, tossing and turning on the bed in confusion. Even though she was still hurting from her dad's demise and was trying to come to terms with it, the feeling was taking a middle seat in her mind now. She had earlier berated herself for reading too much into Emeka's Christian effort to help her heal from the hurt she was experiencing, knowing that if she began to depend too much on him, it would break her finally when he stopped.

She mulled over stopping him from following her to the village as she sat up on the bed, giving up on the idea of sleep. It was pointless when her head was filled with thoughts of Emeka. His kindness had gone a long way in soothing her pain, but she didn't want to get used to it. And in truth, it would be easy to do so, but it would be to her detriment because he wouldn't be like this forever, and the emptiness would return.

She felt nauseated and went to the bathroom to vomit but couldn't. It was at that moment she caught her reflection in the mirror and almost began to weep for what she saw. She had become a shadow of herself. She met her eyes in the mirror and remembered her childhood days, when people always said, *"E ro ju e bi ti baba e,"* meaning *"See her eyes like that of her father's,"* as a kind of mild insult, and Mosun burst into another round of uncontrollable tears.

Even though he wasn't a good father, he was her family, and it hurt that he was gone. She had blamed him all her life for her failures and reckless living, but now, she was alone.Exhausted from crying, she took a leak, flushed the toilet, and stepped into the room. As she climbed the bed, the Bible fell open to the ground. She picked it without closing it, and her eyes fell on a part which the real owner of the bible had underlined. *Come on to me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

This Jesus was so confident, always promising His people all this amazing things, but she wasn't interested. He couldn't give her the kind of peace she wanted. Or so she thought. And so, for a minute, she wondered what would happen if she gave him a chance? Chioma had said this Jesus could redeem her and give her a clean slate, but still, she didn't get the point. How could one man's pain and death on a cross thousands of years ago be responsible for the salvation of uncountable numbers of men? This was just man's way of helping himself live a guilt-free life, she concluded. She dropped the Bible, refusing to take Jesus's offer as she settled into bed.

This time, she eventually found sleep even though they were filled with troubled dreams.

"What do you mean she left?" Emeka shouted at Charles who just entered his room. He had overslept, waking up at 8:30 am and was rushing to go over to Charles' place and meet up with Mosun when Charles had walked in, stating that Mosun was no longer at his house. "Oh my God!" he exhaled, using his fingers to comb back his afro hair, while he paced the room.

"Emeka, you need to calm down. The girl did what she felt was right and it's her business," Charles answered him calmly as he sat down on the bed.

"Damn her business," Emeka said stomping his feet on the ground. "She doesn't even know what is right for her."

"And you do?" Charles queried gently as he studied his friend.

Emeka took calming breaths, realizing he might be over-reacting. He sat down beside Charles who adjusted to accommodate him: "Where did she go?"

"She didn't say. Glory came to take her away. She thanked us for our kindness, and begged us not to tell you."

"Glory told you not to tell me?"

"No, Mosun. She begged us not to tell you immediately."

Emeka rose to his feet and hissed, obviously angry. “She's not serious. If this is how she treats her friends, it's no wonder she doesn't have many.”

“Take it easy on the girl. She probably feels indebted to you and doesn't want to owe you more,” Charles said in defense of Mosun. “Think of it this way, she is probably trying to protect herself,” he reasoned.

“Protect herself from what?” Emeka demanded. “From me?” he asked rather too loudly. Realizing he's shouting again, he raked a hand over his head and spoke in a gentler tone. “All I am trying to do is stand by her.”

Charles rose and held his friend by the shoulder. “And that is what you should do. Stand by her and show her what's different about you. Let her see the light of Jesus in your heart.”

Emeka gave him a confused look. “I don't even know where she has gone.”

“I overheard her tell Glory to take her home. I believe she's still going to the village today. I guess you can quickly check her at home before she leaves.” Charles advised but Emeka shook his head in refusal.

“She made her decision, and I have made mine. I won't go to her house.”

With a defiant expression, he turned and walked into the bathroom, leaving Charles to wonder about his behaviour.

Sandra combed her hair in front of the oval shaped mirror in her room, but her mind was far away. Even the crying baby on the bed was not enough to lure her from her thoughts. Her friend, Bimpe, and her sister, Florence, had come to spend the public holiday with her and though she appreciated their presence, deeper issues bogged her mind. It had been a week since the air-crash, and Sandra felt like one of the victims, her heart crashed inside her. The reason Emeka had exclusively supported Mosun was far beyond her understanding. She had called him every single day since Sunday, and he was either with her or doing something for her. Why would a guy go out of his way for a girl if he didn't have ulterior motives? The worry lines on her face deepened at the question because she didn't like the answers that came to mind.

“Thank God today is a public holiday,” her sister Florence said, as she walked into the room, but quickly dashed to the bed at the sound of her crying baby. “Sister, why didn't you carry him to see why he is crying?” she queried as she dropped the food and picked him up, trying to pacify him.

Sandra turned to mother and child and saw that the baby was already quiet, now in his mother's arms. “I'm sorry,” she said quietly. “My mind was not here at all.”

“Where was your mind?” her friend Bimpe interjected as she entered the room from the adjoining bathroom, taking the words from Florence's mouth.

They were looking at her so intently that Sandra had to turn her back to the mirror to avoid their eyes, and continued with the mindless combing.

Bimpe, who has always been the action-packed lady, moved to her and collected the comb forcefully. “I won't wait till you pull all that hair from your scalp before rescuing you.”

“The hair is tangled; I am only trying to straighten it,” Sandra said, not putting up a fight.

“Why not let's straighten you out?” Florence said, holding the baby in her arms and feeding him from the bottle. The sight alone almost brought tears to Sandra's eyes. She was heavy with jealousy. Why couldn't she just have it all; the good job, the Emekaish kind of husband, and her own baby?

“It's that guy abi?” Bimpe blurted out as she leaned her butt on the dressing table and faced Sandra. “You've still not gotten him to see what he would be missing without you in his life.”

“Well, it's not easy, I am only a woman,” she replied with a sigh. “The only thing left for me to do is to practically shove myself down his throat, and yet he isn't responding.”

“And why would you do that?” Florence demanded. “You need to give this guy space and let him see you for who you are,” she continued. “That is the only way he can love you genuinely, and that is even if he is meant for you.”

“Of course he his meant for her, he just doesn't know it yet,” Bimpe snapped.

“Then she should wait for him to know it, or pray that her own man knows it and finds her soon enough.” Florence retorted.

“It's easy for you to say that,” Sandra said as she stood up, angry. “I would probably say the same thing if everything fell from the sky for me.”

“Why would you even say that?” Florence said, obviously offended. Her baby was fully sated and sleeping now, so she couldn't match her sister's voice. “All I want for you is the best.”

Bimpe, seeing what the situation could become, jumped in to arrest it. “Florence is right. We all want the best for you, and that's what you will have.”

Sandra sighed and sat down again. “The situation is more hopeless than you think.”

“What do you mean?” Bimpe asked concern etched all over her face.

“I think there is another girl in the picture,” she stated. “And I honestly don't know what he's doing with a girl like that,” she said, her voice tinged with anger, frustration and irritation. “I swear, I'm not exaggerating if I say the girl is a prostitute.”

“Is he dating the girl?” Florence asked.

“I doubt it. We met the annoying girl through business, and then later at a party where we got news that the girl lost her dad in the recent plane crash. Since then, he has been glued to her side, and it makes me wonder if he would do the same if I were in the same situation.”

“Haba, Sister!” Florence exclaimed.

“What?” Sandra asked defiantly, turning her face away. She knew her sister's interpretation would include the fact that she should take pity on the girl, and she would have if not that at the moment, she felt like she was losing Emeka to her and it made her angry and frustrated.

“I think you made a mistake,” Bimpe said thoughtfully, her index finger on her cheeks.

“What kind of mistake?” Sandra asked.

“You should not have left your guy alone to care for the grieving lady. It's at a time like this that you would have shown yourself as a caring and virtuous lady. That way, you would have been able to closely monitor him, and your presence would have broken any form of affection that might exist.”

“Why didn't I think of this? You are right, my friend” Sandra said, shaking her head in self-pity.

“It's not too late. Call him to say you made a special kind of pepper-soup for the girl, and offer to meet them wherever they are,” Bimpe counseled with a wide smile.

“Really? Do you think it's a good idea?” Sandra asked weighing the suggestion

“Of course! He will see the goodness in you. That's how those Christian boys know who is right for them. Do you think God jumps from heaven to place a flower on the girl's head so that the guy would know for sure?”

Sandra and Florence laughed at the statement, but Sandra looked like she was giving the suggestion a thought.

“I have said my own,” Bimpe continued. “Desperate times call for desperate measures. In fact, go to his house as often as you can, and familiarize yourself with his mother. Once the woman likes you, the rest is a small matter.”

Florence put her baby on the bed and moved closer to the other ladies. She was obviously not comfortable with Bimpe's advice. “Sister, I know that you are getting desperate, but it's wrong for you to push yourself on this guy. If he is truly yours, nothing can take him away from you. All you need to do is to keep praying to God so that he can lead you right instead of making your own plans, and hoping he will sanction it.”

“I have told you already, you don't know how it feels,” Sandra retorted, and stood to leave the room. “I will do everything in my power to get this guy for myself, and nothing will stand in my way.”

Standing by the big caramel teddy in the dining hall, Mosun dialed her grandfather's phone for the umpteenth time, but Baba was still

not picking. He should be really worried that she had not arrived at the village yet, so why was he not with his phone?

She was supposed to be in the village about a week ago, but had moved her journey because of the fuel scarcity. There were long queues everywhere and she hadn't been able to fill up her tank. So today, not able to contain the frustration anymore, she had decided to go through the public transport system but unfortunately, had missed the only bus that conveyed passengers straight to the village. She had left the place five hours ago, sad that she would spend yet another night alone in this house that was suddenly both haunting and sickening. This was what happened when you read a strange book for too long and listened to all these perfect people. Yet, she felt this longing to be one of them; to live a guilt-free life and believe that a God somewhere was responsible for her.

She unbuttoned her blouse and began to remove it, thinking of getting a cold bottle of beer, but decided against it. She wouldn't be able to stop at a bottle, and her head would suffer for it the next morning, and she wasn't in the mood for that. She just wanted to go to Baba Onile. And she was glad she wouldn't miss the bus tomorrow. Glory had promised to go back to the park and book a seat for her.She jumped as her phone rang on her laps, and almost fell under the table. She however picked it in time.

“Hello Mosun, are you not coming again?” said the loud voice of Baba Onile without a greeting. He was obviously trying to manage his airtime.

Nonetheless, Mosun heaved a sigh of relief. “Baba, good evening,” she said lazily.

“Se o wa mo ni?” he asked in Yoruba, meaning, “Are you not coming again?”

“I will come tomorrow, Baba. The bus was full by the time I got to the park. I called you several times, but you weren't taking your calls”

“Oh! Sorry. I was charging my phone at my neighbor's. You know we don't have power supply here, and the generator has spoilt. Hope you are not crying again sha?”

“I am better now Baba, I have resigned to fate. When I see you tomorrow evening, we will talk some more.”

“Alright my daughter, but are you staying there alone? Or is the boy with you?”

“I am alone.” Mosun sighed, and wondered why Baba forgot things so quickly. “I have left the boy and his people; I don't fit in with them. When I see you, I will be better”.

“Mosun, those people are just trying to help. You shouldn't shut them out, especially the boy.”

“I know, Baba, but I just don't know…” she trails off, sounding confused even to her own ears, and felt the tears building again.

Baba, sensing her raging emotions, tried to calm her. “No problem, just don't worry yourself. When you come home tomorrow, I will take care of you myself.”

“Thank you Baba,” she said, trying to hide the tears from her voice, and quickly disconnected before he barely said goodbye.

The fact that Emeka hadn't called her since she left his friend's place had added to her grief. He had only sent text messages to check on her and the two times she had been with Glory since then, he had called her friend to ask about her. In the first days of her loss, his presence had made everything so easy to bear.

But you decided to shut him out.

Mosun sighed. She'd made the decision as a way to protect herself, but it seemed it was now biting her in the foot. She had been lucky to have him as a friend in her time of need, but because of her foolishness, now she had this gaping hole of sorrow in her chest. She had been tempted to call his number and apologise, but stopped herself. What was the use in having a guy like him in her life? He was a good man, and his goodness made her feel dirty and unworthy. It didn't matter that when he held her in his arms, she had felt like she was in paradise. She couldn't be with him and then spend the rest of her life wishing she was a better kind of girl; the type that he truly deserved. Things were better this way.

“Emeka, I am not feeling you actively in this house anymore. In fact, since your sister left, it's as though I am all alone by myself in this big

house," Mrs. Obiagu said, as she stared at him eating his food absent-mindedly.

He had been doing that a lot recently, and it wasn't going well with her. It had to be the fault of that Yoruba girl, she thought, but even as she did, she knew that the girl couldn't be blamed since she was still mourning the loss of her father. It was her son that needed to snap out of this unusual mood.

However, Emeka just sighed and continued to eat his food. The delicious ofensala soup with eba always suited his stomach, and he was sure that was why his mother made it. But unfortunately, this afternoon, he almost couldn't taste it. He was only eating it so as not to hurt her feelings.

"Won't you say anything?" she asked almost angrily, demanding a response that he wasn't in the mood for.

Luckily, he was saved by the sound of a knock on the door. They both didn't hear the sound of a car driving in, and wondered who it could be, both of them not in the mood for a guest.They didn't have to wonder for long as the maid ushered in the uninvited guest. Even before he saw her, he knew she was the one. The cool fragrance of her perfume, and her soft voice as she greeted the maid gave her away. Emeka stood up immediately to drop his plate in the kitchen, and by habit was about to wash the plate when the maid appeared.

"You have a visitor," she announced.

“Thank you,” Emeka replied, washing his hands and listening to his mother exchange pleasantries with Sandra in Igbo. He didn't even know Sandra spoke Igbo, and it all the more surprised him when he entered the parlour to see her dressed in George, the Igbo traditional attire for women, and greeted him too in Igbo. He however answered in English, leaning close to give her a side hug.

His mother gave him a look that he interpreted as “Why didn't you reply in Igbo,” but he ignored her. He just didn't feel like being traditional at the moment, especially because he knew it pleased his mother and planted funny ideas in her head.However, he commended Sandra's outfit.

“I am just coming from a wedding around this neighbourhood,” she said, to explain her elegant look. “The couple decided to do their traditional wedding ceremony today since it's a public holiday.”

“The style is beautifully made,” Mrs. Obiagu stated in admiration. “And I don't mind meeting your designer.”

“I made it myself,” Sandra declared happily and took a sip from the cup of water she had chosen over the refreshments she was offered.

“Really? You are a fashion designer as well as a creative director?” Mrs. Obiagu inquired, obviously impressed.

“No ma,” she replied, enjoying the obvious effect she was having on the woman. “I learnt it in secondary school, and I use the skill for the benefit of myself and family”.

“Wonderful!” Mrs. Obiagu exclaimed. “I like that a lot. This is the kind of talent the younger generation should be equipped with,” she said, looking at Emeka for approval.

He nodded his head in agreement. “Sandra is a very skilled lady,” he stated.

“I will leave the two of you now,” Mrs. Obiagu stated, standing up reluctantly. She didn't want to be a third wheel, but she was beginning to like the girl, and hoped that her son's eyes would be opened soon enough.

“Thank you for your hospitality ma,” Sandra said again in Igbo, standing up at the same time with Mrs. Obiagu and nodding respectfully. The woman's response and smile told her that winning her heart would be done without much effort, but as she sat down to face Emeka, she wished she could say the same for him.

His afro hair was looking nicer than usual. Only God knew what he did to it. It was a black contrast to his fair skin, and it took all the will-power in her not to walk to his seat and run her hand through it.

“Thanks for coming,” he said, resting his hands on the shoulder of the couch. “I am sorry I haven't called you since I left you abruptly at the party. Each time I receive your call, I feel guilty. It's just been overwhelming having to deal with a lady in mourning.”

“And you've been doing it full time,” she said with a smile, hiding the scorn she felt at his statement. “I didn't even know that you and Mosun were that close.”

It was on the tip of his tongue to say they weren't, which would be the truth, but somehow it didn't feel right to say so despite the way Mosun had disappeared on him.

“Well, I didn't know that I would be compelled to stay glued to her, but it hasn't just been about her, I resumed work on Monday as well.”

“Stay glued to her?” Sandra asked leaning up from her chair, trying very hard to conceal her emotions.

“Yeah. I mean she needs to be surrounded by trusted friends in her time of grief, and I now realize it's not a bad idea to be one of them. If someone important is taken from one's life, others should help fill that gap.”

“Really?” Sandra said, her tone heavy with sarcasm as she drank the remaining water in the cup then poured some more. Her face was changing, but Emeka didn't seem to notice.

“She's vulnerable and doesn't even know what she is doing,” he said, more to himself than to her.

“Do you know what you are doing?” she asked before she could take it back, and quickly formed an explanation before he could answer. “I mean, you are spending too much time with her. I am not saying it's wrong, but be careful. I called Glory and she said you've been single-handedly caring for her. It's a good Christian thing to do, but you could use help from someone like me and Glory. We don't mind stepping in to do our part.”

“When did you and Glory become so close?” Emeka asked looking surprised.

“Well, you practically dumped her into my arms at her party, and I had a lot of calming and checking on her to do.”

“Speaking of Glory, I should call her. She has a degree in spreading half information. I helped in caring for Mosun during the first two days after the crash, but right now, I don't know what's up with her anymore. She has probably gone to her village to be with her grandfather.”

“Oh! That's good. She should be with family,” Sandra responded excitedly, and Emeka's phone rang almost immediately, interrupting the conversation.

The caller was Glory. She was tired from a busy day and wanted to know if he could carry out a secret mission.

“I guess I deserve to know what the mission is,” Emeka asked, hoping it was something connected to Mosun. For all his anger, he was itching to be around her again.

“You better answer,” Glory said light-heartedly, “because once I tell you, you can't refuse me again.”

“Okay, what is it?”

“I need to get a bus ticket for Mosun to her village, but I am tired. I don't want to go.”

“How do I help?” he asked, feigning lack of interest, “I thought she would be in the village by now. Didn't you take her out of my care without a word?”

Sandra shifted uncomfortably in her chair. What was this she was hearing about needing help, and Mosun's aborted trip?

“She wanted you out of her business,” Glory said carelessly, hoping it sank into Emeka. Like Sandra, she detested the building closeness between him and Mosun. “I know you meant to help,” she said for effect, “but the truth is Mosun can't cope with the presence of someone like you no matter your intentions.”

“Did she say that?” Emeka wanted to know. He was irritated by Glory's revelation.

“Forget what she said,” Glory said smiling, glad that her words were having the desired effect. In fact, if she could help it, she wouldn't be calling him for help right now. But there was no other person she could call, and she didn't want Mosun to miss the trip again. The quicker she was away, the better for everyone.

“I want you to help me to do it, but that's if you promise not to let her know. She really doesn't want you involved anymore.”

“I get,” Emeka said, almost angrily, and Sandra was amazed at his show of emotions. He rarely gave his feelings away. He was always in control, or rather, as he claimed, the Holy Spirit controlled his temperament.“If she wants me out, then I would rather remain out,” he continued, sounding calm now.

“So you won't go?” Glory asked with mixed feelings. She was happy he was angry but sad that she had to run the errand herself because she knew Emeka would never go now. But his next reply shocked her.

“I'll go and book the ticket,” he said quietly, but Glory heard, and was going to insist that he should forget it when he added, “But you must not tell her that I had anything to do with this”

“Of course I won't tell her,” she beamed in excitement. What more could she ask for?

She gave him the description of the park and hung up after thanking him. If Emeka wouldn't look at her with affection, she couldn't make him, but what she wouldn't see him do was fall for a girl that was more harlot than anyone in her group of friends.

“I can't believe I agreed to go,” Emeka said almost to himself, as he raked his finger through his hair.

“Then why did you agree?” Sandra asked, hiding her frustration.

“I don't know,” he replied, rising to his feet. “I just couldn't help it.”

Something was happening within him, and he was beginning to understand it. Where Mosun was concerned, it didn't matter what she did or said, he had to help her. Admittedly, she was controlled by her flesh, but he was controlled by the Spirit, and that should make a difference.He was on a mission and had to complete the task. He could only hope that his heart would come out complete.

He sat down right back and smiled as he asked Sandra about her new promotion.Sandra sighed, and leaned back before responding, but the promotion she spoke about wasn't the one on her mind. She needed to transit from being single to being married.

CHAPTER TWELVE

One of the drivers from the office came home to take Mosun to the park. She had planned to go by taxi earlier, but the continuous Lagos rain had made her change her mind. It wasn't as heavy anymore as it was at midnight, but it was still drizzling, and she was weak. She hadn't slept a wink all through the night, and even though she detested the noise coming from the generator house, she had to leave it on all night long because she couldn't bear the darkness.

Mosun caught her face in the rearview mirror and wondered what others thought of her if her reflection was this bad even to herself. No wonder, the driver had advised her to take things easy about three times since the journey started. Her eyes had big bags under them, and she was feeling a deep pain in her stomach. The constant starving was finally telling on her, but she couldn't bring herself to eat anything. She had even tried to take a cup of chocolate shake that morning after having her bath, but she had vomited it. She also tried to use a little make-up but as she held the lipstick to apply it, it had fallen from her hands. She thought she might be coming down with a fever and hoped the grief she felt wouldn't be her death as she looked out the car window.

There were little children selling things on the street and Mosun couldn't help but wonder if she would have been like this if her father had not accepted her and given her basic social amenities. As the traffic thickened, a blind hunch-backed man begging for money on the street stretched his hands towards her, and she rolled down the glass to squeeze a thousand naira note into his palms. He didn't see it, but the girl guiding his alms collection did and thanked her greatly, and Mosun's tears began to flow again.

She was crying now because she realized last night as the raindrops fell on her window blinds that she couldn't blame anyone for her misfortunes or actions anymore. Each individual was accountable for his or her own decisions. She needed to live a better life and leave her past behind, and this journey to the village was the retreat that would help map her continual journey in life.

The journey was about to begin and yet there was no sign of Mosun. The bus conductor was about to sell the last seat to someone else, but Emeka had insisted and paid the complete bus fare for himself and Mosun. He couldn't get a seat for her beside him, but he was lucky to get one directly in front of him. He even collected her share of the refreshment that was distributed by the chubby woman who everyone in the garage mockingly referred to as the hostess.

It was a twenty-four seat luxury bus designed for the comfort of the passengers undergoing the long journey that took off at 9:00 am once every day. The jollof rice and chicken with a bottle of soft drink that was shared a few minutes at the start of the journey was a marketing strategy that led to a higher transport fare. He had

misgivings about taking the food at first, but the aroma he perceived from the woman with a baby, sitting close to him was enticing, so he threw caution to the wind and did not hesitate to pick one for himself and Mosun when the 'hostess' came to serve him.

All the passengers were already seated. Behind him were two Fulani men who were taking the trip for business purposes. Another person, a Yoruba man, was sitting directly in front of the woman with the baby, leaving the empty seat directly in front of him for Mosunmola.Now, the bus was about to move and there was still no sign of her. He would have to come down as there was no way he could go without her. It was her journey after all; he was only taking the journey as an unwanted chaperone. Having been there for about two hours, without any sign of her, he was beginning to feel restless. He wondered if she'd seen him and left, and the thought twisted his heart. In fact, he was going to stand up and leave but something glued him down.

“A Muslim and a Christian in this bus should pray for us,” the driver said as he took his seat, and Emeka became uneasy.

The fact that the driver spoke correct English was a surprise but he couldn't even dwell on that. The guy probably went to school. He fiddled with his phone, debating whether to call Mosun or not when he saw her enter the bus, and the conductor directed her to where she should sit down.

Mosun wasn't a fat or fleshy girl, so the weight she had lost in the short period of time he hadn't seen her was glaring. He caught a brief

glimpse of her face before she sat down, and noticed the dark circles and freshly dried tears around her eyes. If Mosun saw him, she gave no indication of it. She completely ignored him and didn't cast him a glance as she sat where she was directed. Emeka wasn't sure how to react or respond to her denial of his presence. He was however at ease that she was making the journey after all.They were here together and that was what mattered. Whether she liked it or not, he was taking her home. He absentmindedly said amen to the recited prayers as the driver drove off and when the general prayer was done, still said his own short prayer. Done, he loosened the first button of his shirt and relaxed in his chair. He was going to enjoy this journey regardless of the circumstances. It had been a long time he took a road trip that was more than two hours long; it was easier and more comfortable to fly, and he was glad the park was at the outskirt of Lagos, which meant they had left all the city traffic behind.

His plan was to take a nap, but the babbles of the baby beside him were endearing, plus she kept leaning away from her mother's arms to pull his collar, so he took her from the mother and asked for her name, which the mother happily supplied. They soon got into a lengthy conversation, starting first with the baby's age, then little achievements, and finally children in general. Emeka deliberately raised his voice as a way of catching Mosun's attention, but it didn't make a difference. Instead, she leaned forward and rested her head on the seat before her, leaning away from their chatter.

While Emeka was getting frustrated, Mosun was feeling foolish.

“What is wrong with me? Why am I imagining that I saw him, or that I can hear his voice? Isn't it wrong for me to torment myself like this?”

She sighed and brought out a sweater from her bag to shield herself against the chill of the AC. Her head throbbed heavily as she threw the cardigan behind to put her arms in it. Unfortunately, it fell behind, and directly on Emeka's laps. Finally, he'd found his opportunity. She turned back immediately to retrieve it and he gave it to her.

“Emeka?” She asked as though she was sure it couldn't be him. The fact that he had a baby in his arms even made it look more unbelievable, but she was sure that he was the one.

“Mosun,” he said, almost like an answer to the question she asked by the calling of his name, and gave the baby back to her mother.

“Why are you here?” she asked unbelievably.

“To take you home,” he said with a smile, and she tried to no avail to hold back the tears, drawing attention from the other passengers.

“Aunty, ki lo shele?” asked the woman with the baby. She wanted to know what was wrong, and some other passengers looked at her expecting an answer too, but she couldn't talk. She just turned away from Emeka without even collecting the cardigan.

The woman on the other row by her side looked at her closely and said, “Olorun o ma ni je ka ri ogun ekun o” meaning “God won't give

us any reason to cry" as Emeka leaned forward, trying to touch her shoulders.

"Do you know her?" the man sitting beside Mosun asked.

When Emeka replied in the affirmative, he graciously offered to exchange seats with him so that he could communicate with Mosun better. Emeka was grateful and said as much. He tried to ignore the people who were already making snide comments about the situation, but felt a bit embarrassed at the situation he had put Mosun in. Sitting by her side, he helped to adjust the falling hand of her flowing spaghetti gown, and she jumped, almost as though she didn't know he was there in the first place.

"Why are you doing this to yourself, Mosun?" he asked, trying to hide his frustration but failing. "I want to help you, and that is why I am here. I don't even understand why you want to shut me out, but I am here because you need me. Let me help you."

Mosun was in a vulnerable state so naturally, almost anything would trigger her tear ducts, but this was too much. The plea in his voice was too much for her, so the tears flowed again. This guy's kindness was too different to understand. He left everything behind in Lagos just to see that she got home safe and was in good hands.

"Give me your hands," Emeka said quietly, fully aware that other passengers were focusing on them now. He took the hand before she lifted it, and the level of her frailty became more pronounced to him. "You need to be strong," he said.

“I don't know how,” she answered amidst her tears. “My father is dead, and now I am alone with no one to blame.”

“You don't need someone to blame,” he replied. “You need someone to lean on, and I am here for you all the way.”

“Why are you being nice to me?” Mosun asked, already shivering all over. Emeka quickly gave her the cardigan to wear, her hands shaking as she collected it.

“It's mysterious even to me, but I can't bring myself to stop,” he answered honestly, and his response touched her.

“You've missed so much work because of me,” Mosun pointed out and Emeka smiled.

“No, I haven't,” he assured her. “I resigned, so I work for me now. But I really don't want you to bother yourself about me, let's worry about you first,” he said softly, and Mosun decided to ask the real question on her mind.

“How did you know about my journey arrangements?”

He smiled and squeezed her hands. “Considering the fact that I made the arrangements, it wasn't too difficult.”

“Why am I not surprised that Glory gave me away?” Mosun said and smiled weakly, her hands still folded in Emeka's own.

“Don't hold it against her, the situation wasn't hers to decide,” he said, conscious of how cold her hands were. For some reason, he

couldn't just bring himself to let go. “You should stop crying. Look at your eyes,” he said, using his other hand to clean the dried lines of tears on her face.“I can bet you haven't had anything to eat today?” he surmised

“And you'll be wrong,” Mosun responded with a weak smile. “I had coffee.”

Emeka returned the smile, happy she smiled. “Coffee huh?” he teased. “You could have done better, but I guess it's okay since we have some food here.”

He brought out the plate of rice he had collected earlier, and though Mosun didn't have the appetite, she couldn't bring herself to refuse anything coming from this guy whose thoughtfulness and selflessness made her heart melt and her worries dissolve.

Mosun was now sleeping on his shoulders, and he was glad. She'd told him how she hadn't slept well the night before and he had asked the spirit of God to help her rest. Watching her as she snored softly, he was grateful and thankful, his lips curving into a smile. She had been sleeping for an hour, and in that time, the driver had navigated them from the highway to the untarred roads characteristic of villages. The driver had made the call when they had come across an unending line of trailers parked on the road, causing unnecessary traffic. Like the other cars on the road, he'd followed a path they had all assumed would lead them back to the express, thereby leaving the traffic behind.

However, twenty minutes after they veered off the highway unto this path, the driver had gone off in a different direction, leading two

other cars behind them astray as well. Everyone had assumed that because he was a commercial driver, he knew how to navigate the roads, but it was soon clear he had no idea where they were. People started complaining, but the driver remained stubbornly undisturbed by their comments. It wasn't until they got to a dead-end before he finally stopped. There was uproar in the bus. Many people were scared, and they were right to be. There was no network service, neither were there people that they could ask questions. One of the two cars behind them had already turned back.

“This driver is a stupid man,” the quiet man dressed in a coat, reading a newspaper at the back seat said, and it opened the tap of abuses from other passengers.

It was already 4:30 pm and people were getting scared. The baby, as though sensing the seriousness of the situation, started crying. The Fulani men were hissing and shouting in a language others didn't understand, yet Mosunmola was still sleeping, and Emeka regretted that he had to wake her up.

He nudged her gently, rocking her in the process as she struggled between waking up and leaving her eyes closed. Already, there was chaos. Some passengers had alighted from the bus, following the driver who had gone to check his front tyre. Apparently something had punctured it while they were navigating the rough, untarred road and now it was leaking. That discovery caused the murmuring to intensify since there was no way to get a vulcanizer to pump the tyre anywhere around and they were so far from the main road. Any thought of using a spare tyre was quickly squelched by the Youth

Corper who sat in the front seat with the driver. According to him, the driver had no extra-tyre. The women began to express deep fear and worry, while the men cursed loudly. Yet, the driver was defiant.

The only people left in the bus were Emeka, Mosun, and the woman with the baby, who was raining abuses on the driver, making Emeka wonder how true her claim of being a deacon in her church was. He however dismissed the thought from his mind, focusing on the issue at hand. The potency of the woman's salvation was the least of his worries right now.

“Where are we?” Mosun asked, fully awake now. She looked around scarily.

Emeka quickly filled her in and Mosun flinched in fear. “Are you afraid of a little adventure?” he asked teasingly, trying to calm her down as he combed her hair with his hands.

She liked the feel of his hand on her hair but raised her eyebrow to indicate that she wasn't in the mood for that kind of adventure. “I have always imagined how nice it would be to be a part of the Gulder Ultimate search, but trust me, this ain't gonna be a treasure hunt. We would be lucky to leave here unscathed.”

Emeka looked at her in wonder. He was glad that she was being normal about everything, and he thanked God for the opportunity to be here with her at this moment. He said a quiet prayer to God, asking him to take charge of the situation and take care of them. Another thirty minutes had gone, yet there was no sign of

development. He held Mosun's hands re-assuredly and led her out of the bus to join the other passengers.

“We cannot continue to stay here, doing nothing. We need to find a solution to this problem,” someone said as they alighted from the bus. Finally, someone mirrored Emeka's thoughts.

“If he attempts to drive the bus, the tyre might give way on the road,” another person said, causing more murmuring and complaints.

Their Moses was the driver of the private car who had followed them on this wrong path. “Let us slowly drive back to the small village over there. They should be able to give us guidelines and lead us to a vulcanizer for your bus,” he suggested meaningfully and everyone agreed.

Just then, a little girl approached the man and tugged at his shirt. “Daddy, are we lost?”

“No, my princess, we are not lost. But even if we are, you can trust that your daddy would know what to do.” The little girl nodded her head and smiled, as her father took her hand and led her back to their car, where his heavily pregnant wife was sitting in the passenger's seat.

“You will know what to do because God will tell you,” Emeka heard the woman say to her husband with a smile as he opened the door and guided their daughter into the car.

He glanced at Mosun and realized she'd heard the conversation too. Her eyes were fixed on the family and he could only hope and pray that she too would let the lord supply her with answers.

By the time they got to the village, the tyre was already making sounds. It was totally low, and the weight of the passengers didn't help matters. They had to stop the bus before they got to the village square.

Most of the villagers they saw were quite nice and ready to help, but they didn't know how. They were majorly old people and invalids; the other villagers were celebrating the New Yam Festival, and to make matters worse, they were told that there were few cars in the village, and the only vulcanizer was an important figure who could not be distracted from the ceremony.

“That man could have left with his family,” Mosun said, as she came down from the bus with Emeka, referring to the man in the private car.

“Well, he is a good man,” Emeka replied, wiping the sweats that were coming down his brow. The situation was frustrating.

“I think I should find my way back to the main road with the driver so that he can come back with a vulcanizer.”

“What if you don't find one?” one of the women pointed out.

“We will definitely find one,” the bus driver quickly responded

“Are we going to stay here in this bush till you come back?” another woman said.

“Well, we don't have much of a choice,” Emeka replied. Doing something meaningful was better than doing nothing.

“Don't worry; my husband will bring him back. I will wait here with you all,” the wife of the man with the private car said.

“Are you sure you want us to do this?” her husband asked so quietly that only Emeka heard them, and saw the concern etched on his face as he looked down at her heavy stomach, but the wife insisted. Everyone was touched by their selflessness. They didn't need to go through all this stress. Missing the way was enough frustration, but this family was ready to risk their neck for people they didn't even know.

Emeka also volunteered to go with them. He had been reluctant to leave Mosun behind, but he suddenly felt a strong pull to. He'd struggled with the decision, convincing himself that she needed him by her side, but when he strongly heard the voice of the Holy Spirit telling him to move aside, and leave him to finish the work, he yielded. She had smiled in approval when he volunteered and had left with the others while he continued to pray in the spirit.

As they left, some passengers were singing the praises of the family that was helping them, while others complained heavily. It was getting dark, and everyone was agitated. They still had at least three more hours of the journey to go, and they didn't even know when the bus would be repaired.

Mosun was going back to sit on the bus when the little girl came to meet her. “My mummy wants to know if you will come and sit with us under that tree.”

Without waiting for an answer, she pulled Mosun towards the tree. It was a stone throw from the bus, and very visible so Mosun didn't mind. She was endeared by the little girl's boldness.

“I hope God will bring them back soon,” the little girl said as they walked together.

“Don't be afraid,” Mosun heard herself say, playing the role of comforter when she needed it very much herself.

“I'm not afraid,” the little girl said, surprising her. “The bible says fear not,” she added and went to sit on the worn-out wooden bench with her mother, shifting to make space for Mosun.

“Are your parents Christians?” Mosun asked in a slightly hushed tone so as not to interrupt the sleeping mother.

“Yes ma, we are all Christians,” the girl said boldly.

“Hmm… No wonder your parents are very nice,” Mosun said, surprising herself.

The girl smiled at the comment and Mosun sensed that she was a girl wise beyond her years. “The bible says we must be our brother's keeper, it's an instruction from God that must be obeyed.”

“How come you know all these things? You are so young. How old are you?”

“I am not so young,” the girl replied and folded her arms across her chest, giving Mosun a mock scowl that quickly dissolved into a smile as she declared, “I will be eight years old next month.”

“Wow, you are a very big girl,” Mosun said and smiled as the girl's smile widened.

It was funny how, when you were young, you couldn't wait to be old, and when you become old, you crave to go back to your youth. She sighed inwardly and eyed the sleeping woman jealously. How could she sleep so peacefully in the middle of all this? The woman and her family didn't feel the least bit agitated, and all this goodness brought her to a state of hopelessness, making tears well up in her eyes. She didn't even know they were there until the little girl tapped her mother's laps.

“Mum, aunty is crying,” she stated, watching Mosun with concern.

Mosun wished she hadn't woken up her mother, who immediately became alert as if she hadn't been sleeping soundly a few seconds ago. The concern on their faces made her feel ashamed and she quickly sent the tears back, wiping the stubborn ones that had flowed uncontrollably with the back of her hands.

“Go and sit on the stone over there,” she heard the mother say to the child. The girl struggled to remain with them, but obeyed her

mother. With the girl within eyesight, but out of earshot, she asked, “What is the problem?”

“I'm alright,” Mosun managed to say.

“No, you are not okay. You are trying hard not to cry. I can see that very clearly.”

“I am just going through a phase,” she said. ”I can't seem to control my emotions any time they are triggered.”

“Do you mind sharing your pain?” The pregnant woman asked already holding her hands and stroking the back of her palms.

The woman's kindness brought a tearful smile from Mosun. “My story is sad and complicated, and right now, I don't know how to go on living.”

“Does your husband know about this?” she asked referring to Emeka.

“He is not my husband,” she answered with a sad face.

“Oh! I'm sorry, I assumed he was,” she said unable to hide her surprise. She had observed them together and assumed that she saw a spark in the little talk they'd had before he left. The man had looked back at her when he was leaving in a reluctant loving way, just like her husband had done.

“He is my friend; the kind I don't deserve, but I have survived this long because of him. He is a Christian, just like you”

“Are you not a Christian?”

“Well, I am a Christian only on paper,” Mosun said in self-mockery, “Until recently, I didn't want to have anything to do with Christ. Besides, I am not like all of you. I don't have what you have.”

“Yes, you are not like us for now, but you can be.”

Mosun's tears were coming back, and her voice shook as she spoke. “I cannot be like you, my past is too dirty. Your husband and daughter have goodness in their heart, and so does Emeka, but not me.”

The woman wanted to say something, but Mosun shook her head, the tears flowing now. She knew what she was and she wasn't going to pretend with this woman. With Emeka, her ego was on the line considering the circumstances of their meeting, but with this woman, there was nothing at stake.

“I want to be like you,” Mosun confessed, “but I can't,” she stated with such finality, the woman chuckled softly. A part of her was touched by the woman's compassionate look, but another was upset. She didn't deserve this woman's understanding or compassion and Mosun felt the need to state how filthy she was.

“My father is dead because he chose to come back to me. I don't think that God has any plans for me to enjoy this world, and I don't blame Him,” she stated, scoffing slightly. “I don't wish people well. I am selfish and greedy, and lustful. I have done so many wrong things

with my body, I don't know if I can stop wanting to do the things I do despite the fact that I know they are bad," she stated passionately, pouring her heart and feelings out to this stranger. "What can wipe away my sins?" she asked with such despair, the woman hugged her, equally teary-eyed.

"Sweetheart, can't you see? It is finished. Surrender and stop struggling, you have confessed your sins. All you need to do now is let Jesus in your heart by asking Him for forgiveness. Stop putting this pain on your tiny shoulders. Jesus has put the pain on himself when he died on the cross over two thousand years ago. You need to relieve this weight from your shoulders and say no to the torment of the devil. He wants to continue to be your slave-driver, but you have the power to cut him out, and live the kind of peaceful life that we all have."

Mosun broke from the hug and looked her in the eye. "Emeka tells me the same things, but how do I move from being here to being there? How can things turn around, just because I made a decision? How can I stop sinning because I trust a man I cannot see?"

"He is not just a man. You must believe in faith, and let the Holy Spirit do the rest. Man is too lacking in knowledge and wisdom to understand the ways of God. Do your part and let Him do the rest. Surrender to Him and give Him your love," she said, observing Mosun and when she saw she wasn't getting through to her, heaved a sigh and stared at her daughter who was talking to some of the other passengers. Their laughter floated to her and a smile curved her lips amidst the tears she'd shed for Mosun. It was dark now and she could

see the moon clearly lighting the sky. She thought of it as a pillar of cloud to direct her husband and the men who had gone to search for a solution to their current predicament. Her smile widened as she mentally thanked Jesus then turned back to Mosun.

“My husband was born in a ghetto in Lagos to an absent father and a prostitute mother. He survived the harsh life by pushing drugs even before he was fifteen. He was in a club of boys who concerned themselves with teaching painful lessons to girls who claimed to be decent or virgins. By seventeen, he was a trainee armed robber for a notorious gang. He met Jesus two months after his initiation into the robbery cult and three weeks after, they were caught while attacking a family.

He was sent to a Remand Home, a kind of prison for those who are under eighteen. While he was there, a prison evangelism team from United Missionary Church of Africa (UMCA) came to preach, and his life took a turn that night. He was able to finish his secondary education in that prison, while Jesus molded his life as he constantly read the Gideon's bible that was distributed to them.

Today, all that is history. He owns a non-governmental organisation that reaches out to children in the ghetto, and is also a legal practitioner. Nothing makes your situation worse than his. Jesus gave him life, and He can do the same for you too, if only you'll surrender whole-heartedly.”

Even before she finished, Mosun was already nodding, and kneeling, weeping profusely and drawing attention of onlookers.

But all that didn't matter, she had found the answer, and she wasn't going to waste an extra second.

The woman didn't have to do anything more, Jesus had taken over. She just walked away to her daughter as Mosun spoke to her Creator.

As soon as they got back, Emeka went to sit by Mosun on the bench and noticed her heavy eyes.

“Did you cry when I was away?”

“Yes, I did. But it was a good cry,” she said with a smile.

“What do you mean by it was a good cry?”

“I have found Jesus” she simply said, waiting to see the expression on his face.

“You have?” he asked in open surprise.

And she told him all that happened while he was away.

Emeka looked at her and smiled, before pulling her into his arms. It was his turn to cry, but they were tears of joy, adoration, wonder, and homage to the wisdom of a great God, who had made everyone lost in the bush so as to find His daughter.

Mosun too was shedding tears again, but they were different now as Emeka held her tighter and waved at the kind family as their car departed.

She didn't even know their names.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

It was midnight when they got to the village, but Baba Onile was at the park waiting for Mosun, and the young man she'd hinted him was coming along with her. He had been anxious to meet the person who had shown Mosun such kindness and support in her most critical moment. Now that his wish had come true, what he saw was far from his expectations. He had expected an older man, still young, but maybe a widowed missionary, but instead, it was a handsome young man in the prime of his life.

This was the man who had endlessly showed the love of Christ to his grand-daughter, who'd achieved what he had not been able to even try for over a decade. As he led them to the village, oo*hing*, and *ahhhing* over Mosun, the young man remained respectfully quiet, carrying Mosun's suitcase and his small over-night bag. He couldn't wait to have a private time with him, extremely impressed by this Igbo boy who was definitely God-sent.

By the time they got home, ate their food and bathed, Baba thought better than to involve Emeka in any conversation even though he was desperate. Mosun slept immediately she entered the room he

had told his grand-niece, Adeshewa, to prepare for her. Emeka was also dozing on the worn-out couch in the living room. There were only two rooms in the house, so the only option was for them to share the other room, and the bed in it together.

Emeka didn't seem to mind the sleeping conditions for he was fast asleep as soon as his body touched the bed. And for that, Baba was most grateful. The boy looked like he was used to more luxurious quarters, but if he felt irritated by Baba's room; it didn't show in his countenance.

Even before he opened his eyes, he was disgusted. The smell of many things that he couldn't describe mixed together to create a foul stench. He sat up from the bed, and almost jumped when he saw the old man that was sleeping on the other side of the small bed.

How was he able to fall asleep here, he asked himself, taking in the room. Although it was neatly arranged to suit the owner, it still looked untidy. The unpainted cemented wall had several cracks and broken sides. The roof obviously leaked when it rained as there were traces of dried water on the upper parts of the walls, and the white ceiling was already sandy brown around its edges. He suspected that was partly responsible for the smell.

Emeka must have been really tired last night, and he was grateful for that. He quietly stood from the bed in order to avoid waking the old man, but the spring that the bed was made of, gave a creaking sound. The man turned, but didn't wake up, and Emeka was thankful for that. He needed some 'alone' time before everyone got up from the

bed. It was 5:30 am, and the house would soon be up and running. He walked into the sitting room and saw two young men there; one on the couch, and the other on a mat. He would later find out that they were the sons of Baba-Onile's brother who died two years ago. They had resorted to farming in their rural community and squatting with their uncle since getting a job in the city had been a herculean task.

Emeka literarily walked over their heads in a bid to leave the house for a breath of fresh air. He was however careful not to wake them. A part of him was already thinking about his trip back. If it wasn't for the recent air crash, he would have traveled to Ilorin to take a flight back to Lagos, but he knew it would be pepper on Mosun's fresh wounds. He disregarded thoughts of leaving and focused on the present, choosing to see things to be thankful for.

The cool village breeze was pure, something that was rare in Lagos, and Emeka savored it, letting the quietness wash over him. This place was devoid of the hustle and bustle of Lagos. There were no industries to cause air pollution and he'd seen just few vehicles when they'd arrived the previous night, thus ridding the place of the nuisance and incessant noise tricycles and bikes characteristic of Lagos roads caused.

“My son, you are up so early,” the old man said.

Emeka turned to see him standing by the door and greeted him, bowing to his middle the way he had seen Yoruba's greet their elder ones. “E karo sir,” he managed to say in much accented Yoruba.

“Ha! So you can speak our language?” Baba Onile said, pleasantly surprised. He offered Emeka a smile. “Ka ro omo mi.”

Emeka scratched his head, smiled and stifled a yawn as he responded, 'I have lived in Lagos all my life, I should at least be able to greet correctly.”

“Was the bed so bad you couldn't spend an extra hour?” Baba asked as he sat on a bench and summoned Emeka to do the same.

The old man was right, but agreeing to that would be a great insult. “You have been very kind in your welcome. I really appreciate you, sir,” he said instead, avoiding the question.

“It is I who appreciates you. Nothing I do would be enough to show gratitude for how you supported my Mosun. I will be forever grateful,” Baba insisted.

“Ha Baba, She is my friend. It was only right that I supported her that way. Besides, it's not me, but God that deserves the thanks.”

Baba nodded his head in respect for Emeka. The boy would never know the relief his presence in Mosun's life had caused him. He had always hoped that Mosun would come to meet the Lord and some responsible young man one day, but he hadn't counted on both happening at the same time. The young man probably didn't know yet, but he could sense it greatly. The emotional heat that oozed from him was enough.

At the end, all things work together for good for those who love God and live according to His purpose. The only unfortunate part was the death of Mosun's father, whom he had continued to pray would come back to his senses, and embrace his daughter. How was it that it was at the time when the prayers were finally answered that such calamity struck? Who could know the ways of the Lord? Baba sighed looking upwards even as he began to chew his stick judiciously.

The journey back had been smoother and shorter, and for that, Emeka was glad. He had not been in the mood for another road drama, but was grateful to have made the journey, especially because it had birthed Mosun's salvation.Baba Onile had been excited at the news. They had spoken for about fifty minutes that morning before the others started coming out one after the other to do their chores. The man had reluctantly let him go to have his bath after insisting Emeka regale him with details of the event.

As he opened his laptop and turned on the wireless internet service when he got home, several emails on pressing business issues that needed urgent attention started dropping. The experience of the last two days suddenly felt like a lifetime away. He hadn't expected that the responsibilities of taking over the family business would flood in so soon, but apparently, those handling things before he came into the picture were not ready to share his responsibility.And he knew his mother had a lot to do with it if the way she had met him at the door when he arrived was any indication. She had not been ready to listen to any explanation he had, and he couldn't blame her.

“How can you travel such a far distance without telling anyone about it?” she vented.

“Mum, I am sorry. It was an emergency.”

“You should have called. I was worried about you,” she retorted, and Emeka tried to hide his frustration.

“But I sent an SMS to let you know that I am fine.”

“An SMS is never enough. I am your mother,” she shouted, and the look in her eyes told him she had been worried about him.

“I am sorry, mum,” he said again and she had just nodded and left for her room.

His shoulders sagged as he watched her go, but he didn't follow her to beg her like he would have normally done. There came a time in a man's life when he identified the two most important women in his life, and that time had come for him. It had sneaked up on him, but now he couldn't do a thing about it. He was in love with Mosun, and though his mother didn't seem to like it, there was nothing he could do about it.Emeka sat on the sitting room couch and said the words out as if to give it credibility.

“I am in love with Mosun.”

He had done business with her, nursed her to strength in mourning, travelled with her, met her family, had a hand in the salvation of her soul, marveled at her person, and all this was in the preparation of his

mind for the acceptance of this truth. He was in love with Mosun and it had nothing to do with her seductive ways and dressings. That hadn't moved him a bit or aroused lust in him. Instead, it emphasized the fact that he couldn't marry a girl like her, but when she became stripped to vulnerability, and the weakness and emptiness of her soul were about to swallow her, he had discovered that God had chosen him to be the Hosea to this woman.

At a later time when he would talk to Charles about his feelings for Mosun, he would admit that he didn't know when he moved from being her intercessor to her soul-mate, but one thing was clear; the Holy Spirit was the one who could have made it happen, and it was Him alone who will show him how to navigate things.

“I don't even know where he his anymore. He has not been picking his calls. He just replies me with text messages, saying that he will call me later. It's very annoying that a slutty girl has his whole time now. I really can't take it anymore,” Sandra said to her friend Bimpe over lunch.

They had decided to meet across the street from the office during lunch break because Sandra had not been able to concentrate at work.

“Why don't you calm down first? This is no way of handling such an issue. I think you should tell him you like him,” Bimpe said in between spoonfuls of rice, and continued. “If he can't bring himself to see a good girl over a slutty one, then I think you've got to jump in and save the future for both of you.”

Sandra sighed, still unable to touch her food. “You know I have been trying. You don't expect me to go and ask him to marry me,” she replied with some irritation and transferred aggression. “That would be selling me too cheaply. This is Africa, and I am the lady. We are not allowed to do such things.”

Bimpe dropped her cutlery and charged at Sandra “There you go again. We are in the twenty-first century for God's sake. You can do whatever you want. If you can't say it with words, then do it the age-long way of getting a man's attention.”

“Are you by any means suggesting seduction?” Sandra asked, bewildered, but Bimpe's rolling eyes told her that was exactly what she meant, and she screamed at the realization “What? I can't possibly do that. I am desperate, but I can't take it that far. That will be compromising my standards.”

Bimpe rolled her eyes again. “Oh God, have mercy! I am a Christian too, you know; even before you became one.” She scoffed knowingly then continued. “How do you think I got Junior's father?” Sandra stared at her friend in shock, while Bimpe clucked her tongue, unrepentant. “That's right! I needed to get into the game to get him to look at me, and five years down the line, he is still looking at me, girl.”

Sandra scoffed mockingly and with a hint of disdain. “Well, I can't say I admire the way he looks at you? She uttered without thinking. “I'm sorry, but your family is not my role model. I want a man who would love me naturally, not the one I forced to do it.”

Bimpe hissed in annoyance as she picked up her bag,. “At least I have a man to call my own, and two children who call me mother. The choice is yours.”

Seeing that her friend was angry, Sandra apologized. “Bimpe, don't be angry with me. Please don't leave me here, I didn't mean it that way.”

“Well it sounded that way,” Bimpe said still angry, but she dropped her bag on the table.

“I am sorry, I don't know what is wrong with me, and I have no right to say that to you. Besides you might have a point.”

“Of course I have a point. And I am only interested in your happiness and fulfillment as a woman. I am sure you know that a woman without a man is not respected in our society, and the success in your career will only continue to send eligible men away.”

“How do I go about something like this?” Sandra asked crestfallen, Bimpe's words dampening her mood.

“Well, I don't know how to teach you that, but the ball is in your court. Play it to your advantage. The most important thing to remember is that he is a man.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Emeka was super excited. Mosun was coming back to Lagos after spending three weeks in the village with her grandfather, and he couldn't wait to see her again. He smiled as images of her filled his mind until his thoughts were interrupted by Charles.

“How is life treating the latest chief executive?”

They were seated by the pool of Bowad Hotels, sipping chapman. It was a friend's bachelor's eve party, and it was exciting to be part of all the fun. It was a break for Emeka who had been working tirelessly since he assumed his new role.

“I don't even know how to answer the question,” he said, relaxing his back and enjoying the softness of his seat.

“Really? It's that serious?” Charles asked in a mock tease. “You are controlling all those millions and you are complaining. Better park well.”

“Oh! You think the millions just fall from the sky? The hard work that needs to be done to keep the millions flowing and increasing is the big deal. And trust me; leading men old enough to be your father

and people who are probably more intelligent than you is serious work."

"Please, stop complaining; it's irritating my ears," Charles said jokingly as he rose from his seat, his eyes fixed on the pool. "If you feel that way about your duties, we can trade places. It wouldn't be a bother for me to call the shots in a big conglomerate."

"Be careful what you wish for," Emeka said. "I might just agree to your request."

"Be my guest, I don't mind at all," Charles returned as he pulled his t-shirt and jumped into the pool.

Emeka looked around, combing his hand through his hair in his usual practice. All around him, guys were doing different things; playing tennis, snooker, swimming, and chatting away, celebrating the last moments of their friend's bachelorhood, and he smiled at the thought of his own.

"Mr, CEO, your phone dey ring," one of his friends, Badmus, shouted from the snooker board. His friends had teased him with the title in secondary school when they'd learnt about his father's wealth and status. Now that the tease was becoming a reality, they had resumed again.

"Who be the caller?" Emeka asked as Badmus brought the phone to him. Badmus' phone battery was out and he'd needed to do a quick research. Emeka had volunteered his phone.

“Na one Mosun I see for there.”

On hearing the caller, Emeka practically jumped from his chair to collect the phone, making everyone who was observing him laugh, particularly Charles who had witnessed everything from the pool.

“Oga, calm down, wetin happen?” Badmus teased, but Emeka ignored his friends' mocking laughter as he took the call, but it was too late. “You didn't tell us that your bachelor's party will be the next,” he continued, and Emeka just smiled as he dialed Mosun's number.

As the phone began to ring on her end, Emeka walked away, barely hearing his friends' teasing comments as he disappeared into the hallway.

“Hello,” Mosun said as she picked and Emeka relished the sound of her sweet voice at the other end of the line.

“Hey,” he said, smiling a little as he paused in his stride. “Sorry I missed your call.”

“It's okay.”

“How are you doing?” Emeka asked, leaning on the wall, while using his foot to prop himself.

“I am fine,” Mosun answered, feeling like a new bride. Emeka had called her at least three times since she left the village to know how she was faring, and it felt good to know there was someone out there who cared.

“So where are you now?”

“We are somewhere around Mowe. We would be in Lagos shortly,” she said, wondering why she'd called him when she wasn't close to reaching her destination. The truth was that she was bored. It had been great having his company on the trip to the village. Coming back alone just wasn't the same, so she'd called him because she wanted to hear his voice. She was getting addicted to this guy and she wasn't sure if that was a good thing.

“That's good,” she heard Emeka say, snapping out of her reverie. “I should go and wait at Oshodi right?”

“No, don't bother. I will find my way,” she said, blushing. She was still trying to get used to the fact that a guy like Emeka was giving her so much attention.

“It's no bother at all. I have missed you, I want to see you,” he replied. He'd fought, analyzed and finally accepted his feelings for Mosun and he wasn't one to play around. Plus, he meant it. They had spoken often while she was away, and he enjoyed it. Speaking to her was refreshing to him. It was always an awesome break from the hustle and bustle around him, but he had missed her and couldn't wait to see her.

“Why do you keep saying all these sweet things?' Mosun asked softly, smiling.

Emeka smiled too. “If you don't like them, why do you smile each time I say them?”

“I don't smile,” Mosun chuckled. “How do you know I smile?”

“I hear it in your voice. You miss me too; just say it so that I can have that kind of smile too.”

“I am not going to say anything,” Mosun replied playfully, smiling widely now. It was amazing how talking to him made her forget all her worries. Just seeing his call gave her this adrenaline rush that made her feel she could take on the world. It was such a beautiful experience having a guy like him in her life as a friend.

“I will be waiting for you at the park in Oshodi. Just call me when you enter Lagos.”

“Okay,” she said as the line disconnected. She put the phone to her chest, which was beating relatively fast, still smiling dreamily. She however snapped out of her fantasy of Emeka, reminding herself she shouldn't fall for him. A part of her knew it was too late, but she refused to dwell on it as she dropped her gaze to the New Bible Believers' book that Baba Onile had given her.

She smiled again when she remembered how she had complained about how boring the book was when she first started. But Emeka had encouraged her, answering all her questions, and ensuring that she read at least a chapter a day by asking her questions about the things she had claimed to learn. In between trying to impress Emeka with her answers and his explanations, she had fallen in love with the Jesus the book portrayed. She didn't know how it happened because when she gave her life to Christ it was out of fear and awe of the great

and mighty God who could save, but in the last three weeks of her stay in the village, she had gradually understood the grace and mercy of the Lord, and his unfailing love. She had become so captivated by the enormity of his sacrifice that her heart had begun to warm up to him. Today, she saw Him as more than just her Lord and King; He was her Father, Friend, and Lover. It was so sweet to be part of something so big and refreshing.

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“I am going to Oshodi,” Emeka told Charles as soon as he came back to the poolside from the room, fully dressed. He glanced at his wristwatch and saw that he still had some minutes to spare so he sat a while and suffered Charles's curious glance. “Why are you staring at me like that?”

“I am waiting for you to tell me what we are going to do in Oshodi.”

“We?” Emeka said with raised eyebrows.

“Hmm… So this is personal.”

“Of course, it's personal,” he said and tried to evade the conversation.

“It has something to do with Mosun's call right?”

“Yes, it does,” he replied, waiting to see what Charles's reaction would be.

“Wow, this is serious. When did Mosun move into being a personal issue?” Charles asked, not willing to let the matter go.

“When I decided I was going to marry her,” he responded, surprising himself. It wasn't a possibility he had dwelled on before now.

“Marry her?” Charles asked, his mouth opened in bewilderment.

“I think you should close your mouth,” he said with a smile as he downed the glass of wine before him.

“You have truly made me speechless,” Charles returned as he leaned back in his chair and grinned.

“Is that a good thing?” Emeka asked, needing validation.

“I think so,” he said nodding his head approvingly. “But you must take your time until you are sure it's right to make the move.”

The road was almost traffic free, and it didn't surprise Emeka. Saturdays were good days to drive around town in Lagos because the roads were less busy since people didn't have to go to work. And for that he was grateful.

He hadn't felt this anxious since his first crush. He was in such a hurry to get to the park that he almost hit the black SUV that was parked in front of him, and though the man insulted him, he only smiled back. He was excited he was going to see Mosun soon.

She saw him first.

His back was turned to her, and it was obvious he was looking for her under the rim of his sunglasses. His tall frame as he stood in-between the body of his car and the door made her heart do a double take, and she was glad to have him in her life. A big part of taking this big step of change was having well-meaning minds as friends.

“There you are!” Emeka exclaimed as he spontaneously turned back and caught her eyes on him already.

Mosun gave him a big smile as she closed the distance between them. She practically ran to him the moment she spotted him, pushing her way through the throng of people at the park. Thank God she had maintained a healthy pace when she was close enough, if not, he would have caught her hurrying towards him.

'It's good to be back,” she said as Emeka collected her luggage from her, smiling at her as if she was the only woman in the world.

Mosun gave him a shy smile and made to open the passenger's door, but to her surprise Emeka pulled her into a tight hug.

“I've missed you,” he said then let her go and opened the door for her.

Mosun got into the car, still dazed at his display. It was different when he told her on the phone, but hearing him say it to her face, and then hugging her like that did all sorts of things to her. She hadn't even thought to hug him because she'd felt it would be too forward and unchristian, but here he was, being so nice and really informal.

“Why do you have that dazed look on your face?” he asked has he got into the car after putting her luggage in the trunk.

“Nothing,” she said and tried to keep a straight face but failed. “I'm just surprised by you, that's all.”

“How do you mean?” he asked as he maneuvered his way out of the garage to the express and faced the Island. “We are going to make a stop somewhere.”

“Where?” she asked, wondering where he was taking her to.

“Are you too tired for a little adventure?” he asked and she shook her head, hinting that she was game.

“Okay then, answer my question. Why are you surprised by me?” he asked, taking her back to the subject she was avoiding.

Mosun sighed and smiled. “Nothing. It's just that you are not acting the way I assumed you would be acting and it's a bit confusing.”

“Confusing how?” he asked and placed his left hands on hers while his right hand remained on the steering.

Mosun stared at their locked hands then at his face. “This is exactly what I mean,” she said when Emeka glanced at her, wondering why she was quiet and not responding to his question. “I am not used to this kind of friendship, and I don't know what to feel or think.”

“What do you want to think?” he asked, dividing his attention between her and the road. Again, he was grateful the roads were free. They were going to get to their destination soon.

“Well, I can easily think that you are leading me on.”

He chuckled, not responding, as they continued the rest of their trip in silence until he finally turned into one of the private beaches in Lagos Island. He however didn't take his hand off hers except when he wanted to pay for tickets at the gate. When he parked his car in the compound, Mosun didn't wait for him to get the door for her. She came down on her own and headed for the waterfront. The ambience of the atmosphere was calming but Mosun was far from calm, Emeka just smiled to himself and locked the car then walked towards her. He stood by her side and they both stared at the waves for a few seconds before he broke the silence.

“What if I am leading you on?” he asked, glancing at her while she held his gaze.

“Leading me on to what?” she asked a bit tersely. She knew she didn't deserve a man like him, and he had no right to make her hope. “I really don't need this now Emeka. I'm concentrating on my new found relationship with Christ. Please, don't start all this confusion within me.”

“I am not trying to confuse you.” he said with an easy smile, putting his arm around her neck. “I like you.”

“I like you too, maybe too much. I would be lucky to have you in my life, but I am not ready for that kind of commitment.”

“I have not asked you for any kind of commitment,” he said with a mixture of humour in his voice. He removed his hands from her neck

and took off his shoes. He bent to help her, while she gave him a puzzled expression. Emeka chuckled. “I want us to take a walk.”

Mosun obliged him, putting her hand on his shoulder while he helped her take off her shoes. Done, he picked both shoes, took her hand in his, and led her along the river bank. They remained quiet for several minutes, just enjoying the view until Emeka broke the silence.

“The water… The sand… The freshness and vitality… The abundance… Everything has a soothing effect on me.” He glanced at her as he continued. “That's why I brought you here.”

Mosun smiled, nodding her head. “I can feel it too,” she said and Emeka smiled back at her. They both fell silent again.

“I want to build a friendship with you,” he said, stopping. “Let's get to know each other deeply. I want you in my life.”

“As just friends?” she asked, as though she wanted him to say more.

“Yes dear, as just friends,” he said and Mosun felt her heart sinking. “But we must be committed to this; to make each other better, and just maybe it could lead to more or somehow prepare us for what God has in store,”

“More?” she asked, hopeful, and it came out as almost a whisper.

“Yes. But we need to forget that right now. You need to concentrate on learning how to live the godly life, and I will help you by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Mosun held his gaze for a moment then smiled. “Thank you”, she said.

Emeka wasn't listening anymore. The water had his attention now, and he was running to receive its full embrace. She couldn't do that. She just sat down and watched him.

That night, Mosun had come back home excited, and had prayed in thanksgiving to God. Though the prayer was short, she felt she was making progress. The wave of peace she felt was an indication that God was with her. The only thing that would have spoilt the day was if Emeka had entered to see her house looking like a pigsty. She had to stop him when he made a move to help her in with the luggage and though she sensed that he was slightly hurt, she had to cover up by saying that he shouldn't be seeing a single lady alone in a big house with many rooms.

He took the joke well, and laughed heartily before leaving. He however hinted that he was coming for a surprise visit soon, and he would be sure to bring his friends as chaperone. She laughed too, glad that she was able to save the day.

Mosun took a look at her bed with clothes scattered across it, dust all over various surfaces, and felt the urge to clean it, but it wasn't her style. She didn't even feel up to it, considering she just got back from a long journey. Tomorrow, she was going to call Mama Seki to do an overall sanitation of the house particularly because Emeka could pop in anytime soon, and it would be a shame for him to find her place like this.

She shifted the clothes to one side and lay on the bed, pulling out from her bag the bible-study manual. She had yet to conclude today's reading about the beatitudes, so though she was tired to the bones and the shower she just had lured her to sleep, she refused to let her laziness creep into this beautiful routine.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Monday mornings were busy for Emeka, and this one was no exception. He had spent about an hour thirty minutes in traffic when he had a deadline to meet and it was annoying. He might just have to employ a driver as his mother suggested, he thought to himself as he flipped through the reports that had been submitted by the various heads of department for last week.He had also forgotten to write a query to the director of finance for the imbalance in the account reports the previous month, making it the second time in the year.

There was so much to do, and those who thought that Managing Directors and CEO's just enjoy money had no idea of the work involved. He was fast losing his usual calm, and he knew that he needed an assistant quickly; someone who would help him maintain some balance, and keep him updated about things. He missed Sandra, she was simply the best. She always kept him on his toes and made him do all he had to do to ensure success. For a split second, he was tempted to give her a call and offer her the job.

However, instead of picking his phone, he turned on his computer, and within five minutes, the e-mails began to come in, in torrents.

His secretary already informed him of about fifteen people booked to see him, and it was just 9:00 am. He had a meeting with the board by 12:00 noon and the outline for the discussion wasn't even ready. He really couldn't be taking the weekend off anymore. He wondered how his mum handled the pressure but remembered that she had various assistants handling different things, and here he was without even a single P.A. Immediately, he put a call to the head of Human Resource to place an advert for a personal assistant for him urgently, and the woman assured him that she would work on it immediately. Just as he was putting the intercom down, a call came through on his phone. It was Mosun.

A smile curved his lips at the sight of her name displayed on his phone screen. He immediately took the call, pulling down his tie a bit as he relaxed in his chair and made himself more comfortable.

“Hey!”

“Good morning,” she muttered softly.

“Good morning and how are you?”

“I am fine, thanks for yesterday.”

“You really should stop thanking me for making myself happy.”

“You are blowing my mind,” Mosun said, and Emeka smiled.

“That's good. It means I am making progress. If your mind blows, we can share mine.”

“Emeka, stop it,” she smiled. “We are supposed to take things slow.”

“Do I look like I am on the fast lane? I am just telling you how I feel. You should award my honesty with quality respect.” Emeka interjected, and Mosun laughed

“Seriously Emeka, you are a typical Igbo boy. You people are too full of yourselves.”

Emeka laughed and decided to change the topic. “How is work?”The question made Mosun sigh, and Emeka became concerned. Today was her first day at work after her father's death, and the long break she took to recover from it. “Is everything all right?” he asked.

“Yes, but everyone has been acting strange, as though something happened when I wasn't around,” Mosun said, trying but failing to hide the anxiety in her voice.

Emeka caught it and tried to assure her. “It is well with you. Don't worry too much though. Calm down and talk to a trusted friend around who can update you on what happened in your absence,” he said and Mosun sighed.

“I don't have any trusted friend at work,” she said sadly. “To be honest, I don't even know what I am doing here,” she continued frustratingly. “There is a deliverable on my desk that I don't know how to handle and there is no one here that I can run to.”

“Okay dear, calm down,” Emeka said, glad that she was free enough to be honest with him about her ignorance. “Is it advertising related?”

“No, it is public relations.”

“I should be able to help you. Do you want me to drop in and check what it's all about?” he asked, but Mosun refused.

“No. I am sure you have a lot to do at your place too.”

“Yes, I do, but I can always spare time to ensure that you are alright,” he said and meant it, but Mosun wasn't going to have it.

“That is touching and thoughtful, but don't bother. I will figure it out.”

“You don't have to figure it out alone, I am here to help. Send me an e-mail with the challenge and I will get back to you shortly,” Emeka insisted and his thoughtfulness warmed Mosun's heart.

“Thank you so much,” she said quietly. “You are always saving me.”

“With all pleasure, dear,” Emeka said, excited that he had lifted a weight from her shoulders. “My mum is organizing a small family and friends welcome party to commemorate my new office. Can you be at our place tomorrow evening by 6 pm?'

“Are you inviting me?” she asked, teasing him.

“Of course, I am,” Emeka replied with a smile

“Send the address, I will try and fix it into my schedule,” she said with a hint of humour.

“You had better do that, or you will pay a fine.”

“And what will that be?”

“You will be forced to see me every morning before you go to work for one month,” Emeka said, sounding outrageous even in his own ears.

Mosun laughed. “You've got to be kidding me. Do you need attention that much?”

“No. Just yours,” he replied gently, and Mosun's heart stopped for a split second.

“Emeka, stop it, have a nice day,” she said when she recovered from his last statement.

“So you are sending me away, abi?” he tried to sound hurt.

“Go back to work jor,” she said playfully and ended the call, leaving Emeka smiling.

As soon as he dropped the call, the intercom rang. He picked and his secretary's voice floated to him. “When should the guests start coming in?”

“In five minutes,” he replied, still smiling.He had never had so many deadlines and assignments, yet Mosun was somehow becoming a

priority, and he wasn't even dating her yet. “God help me,” he said and downed his cup of coffee while browsing through his system for details of his upcoming appointment.

By the time Emeka drove into the house later that night, he was fagged out. He had left the office at 7:30 pm and had rushed to the dentist for his appointment. One of his right molar teeth was giving him problems but he had been managing it. Sandra had been on his neck to go see the dentist, but he had ignored her. The pain had resurfaced that afternoon and coincidentally she had called him to say she was coming to see him later in the evening. In a bid to avoid her, he had said he needed to find a doctor for his painful tooth later that evening, and to his surprise, like a dutiful assistant, she had promised to help him fix an appointment with her doctor.

The call had ended with him thinking he had dismissed her, but an hour later, she had sent the contact of her doctor whom she said she'd informed that her boss would be coming by 8:00 pm. She had however insisted that she was going to drop by and greet his mum, and maybe wait for him.He had been impressed by her efficiency and had been tempted to offer her the job of being his assistant again. If she was working with him, he wouldn't need to work as hard as he did now, but he'd refrained himself. As much as he felt he needed her and even missed her, he had conflicting thoughts where she was concerned, and he needed to have a straight-thinking mind right now. Besides, his mum was beginning to like Sandra, and he wasn't sure it was a good thing.

He pulled his car into the garage and heaved a sigh of relief knowing that in less than an hour, he would kiss his bed, but on entering the house, he met a shocker. The living room was decorated with beautiful ribbons, but before he could take in the atmosphere, his heavily pregnant sister, who had opened the door, was already in his arms, her stomach pushing him back as she congratulated him. When she let go, Emeka finally focused on the familiar faces in the room; his sister's husband, his father's sister from Abuja, and Sandra. They were all sipping from glasses of what he assumed was a mocktail as they approached one after the other, greeting him in excitement and teasing him about his new job. His mother had told him the party was happening the next day but apparently that had been a ruse to plan this surprise. He smiled at the thought, glad to have his family around even though he was bone tired.

The grandfather clock rang. It was 10:00 pm and Sandra picked her keys and bade everyone goodbye. As Emeka excused himself to see her out, he realized that everyone greeted her in a familiar way. His sister hugged her, thanking her for her help and his mother called out to her saying that she shouldn't forget to come early the next day since she would be coordinating the serving. Emeka frowned, wondering what they were talking about and how they came up with such an arrangement. He'd assumed tomorrow's party wasn't happening any longer and was already thinking of how to inform Mosun that plans had changed, but his concern was quickly put to rest. Tonight was for family; tomorrow was for others.

“You really don't have to bother about coming to do anything tomorrow,” Emeka said as he saw Sandra to her car. “It's a small party, and my mother is just blowing it out of proportion.”

“I don't mind at all,” she said. “In fact, I will be glad to help”.

Emeka sighed inwardly but smiled at Sandra “Okay, thanks a lot, I appreciate it.”

“How did the doctor's appointment go?” she asked, ignoring his compliment.

“It was great,” he replied, “There is a hole in it, so we fixed another appointment for the filling.”

“Don't you have to remove it?” she asked worriedly. “Can I see it?”

“It's too dark here, maybe tomorrow,” he said quickly, hoping he didn't sound dismissive.

“Alright, take care of yourself. Good night,” she said and touched his face.

“Yeah, good night,” he returned as she entered her car.

He waited for her to drive out of the compound before going back to the house, where everyone was still waiting for him. He chatted with them a bit and asked about their lives while they watched him eat his food, and teased him about the beautiful girl who just left. His aunt specifically asked if that was 'our wife', but before he could answer,

his mother responded, asking teasingly if Sandra didn't already look like one of them. Everyone laughed, including Emeka, but he hadn't been happy about his mother's remark.

By the time he finally got time to be alone, it was already 1:00 am. As nice as it was to have family around, he was going to have to pay dearly for their visit. He needed to be at the office by 7:00 am if he wanted to finish the day's work before retiring home early to prepare for the party. The sight of his well-laid bed was so appealing that he knew that if he sat on it, he wasn't going to get up until the next day, so he hit the shower, and was there for about an hour, worshiping the Lord with hymns and reciting psalms.

When he finished, he felt refreshed both physically and spiritually. He slipped on fresh shorts from his neatly arranged closet and practically jumped on his bed to sleep. As he turned on his pillow, he felt a strong urge to call Mosun but seeing the time, he sent her a chat on WhatsApp instead. When she didn't reply, he sent her a text message asking if she was able to do the work the way he'd explained and reminded her about the party. Somewhere between clicking the send button, and wondering why he liked her that much, he slept off.

Sandra woke up very early, happy and excited that the day was going to be awesome. She was going to enjoy being a part of Emeka's celebration. From her interactions with his family the previous evening, it was obvious they liked her. His mum was already taken by her, and she believed it wasn't going to be too difficult to get Emeka to look at her with affection.

“I deserve to be happy too,” she said as she put on her robe and walked to the bathroom.

Her sister had continued to challenge her efforts at getting Emeka for herself, and it was annoying.Yesterday when Florence had called, Sandra had told her about Emeka's party and how she was going to work hard towards ensuring that his family liked her. This had brought a worried sigh from her, and when she'd asked why, Florence had said that she really shouldn't force this thing anymore.She'd ended the call saying in annoyance.

Ideally, she didn't have time for this kind of midweek party, not to talk of being active in its preparation if not that she was trying to create a good impression. Focused on the goal, she stepped out of the bathroom and knelt down by her bed to pray, thanking God for the night and requesting that all her actions today be noticed by Emeka.

“What strategies do I need to perform, Lord?” she asked as she clasped her hands in prayer.

You don't need strategies, you need me

Sandra paused, frowning slightly before she continued. “God, please help me to keep my eyes on the goal. I need you more than any other thing in the world, and having Emeka would make me better for you because he is your son, and guys like him are rare to find. He is complete in you, and adding him to my life would have saved a soul for you forever.”

Only Jesus can save

“I know only Jesus can save, and that is why I am praying for a man who has Jesus,” Sandra reasoned. “God help me to have Emeka so that together we can work out our salvation. I need this man, just him; he is so perfect,” she said stressing the word 'perfect.'

Feeling satisfied that she'd made her request known to God, she stood up even though she felt no peace, and headed for the kitchen. She planned to make a strawberry cake for the party before leaving for the office, and had organized everything she needed the night before so it wouldn't delay her this morning from getting to work early. As she walked into the kitchen, Sandra thought to herself that with all her management skills, it was wrong for her to be living alone. She needed someone who could benefit from all the many talents she had and made up her mind not to give up on Emeka, no matter how hard or challenging it was going to be to get him to see the light.

Even Jesus said that there would be tribulations, but we should take solace in the fact that victory is sure. She smiled at the thought of the scripture as she got to work.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The sight and aroma of good food combined with slow music added to the glamour of the hall. Looking around him, Emeka felt the weight of his responsibilities more. Old time business associates of his father and some members of the company's board of trustees were around, shaking him and pulling him aside for pep talks. His mother swelled with pride as she introduced him to various associates who voiced their opinions about him, and everyone seemed to have faith that he would do a good job of filling his parents' shoes. They were big shoes to fill, but Emeka resolved to fulfill their expectations of him as best as he could with God on his side.

He was standing with some of the board members, but his mind was far from their discussion, his gaze at the door, wondering for the umpteenth time why Mosun hadn't shown up. It would seem that everyone invited was there already except her. He had called her earlier to find out if she was still coming, and she had answered in the affirmative. He just hoped she was okay and would have gone out to give her a call, but he couldn't excuse himself since everyone

was waiting for their moment with him. He was the celebrant after all. As he stared at the door, eager to have Mosun arrive, his gaze fell on Sandra.

Sandra was another matter entirely; one would have easily mistaken her for a member of the family. She took full charge of the food, co-coordinating the event planner his mother had hired, and relieving his sister of the duty. He saw how his mother was using her in an 'it's-only-you-I-can-trust-to-handle-this' way, and it bothered him. But in all honesty, she was doing a really good job, and he was glad for her help. Her outfit was perfect for the day, and as usual, wondered where she got her awesome dress sense from.

Moving away from businessmen, he went to his friends, who couldn't help complimenting his outfit.

“This shirt is unique. I saw the price on one of this online shopping site, but I had to remove my face and move on,” Badmus said and everyone laughed.

“What do you expect from our Mr. CEO? He has all the money to throw around now,” another friend added

“You guys and all these money talks, I wish it was all about money,” Emeka replied. “I have to work my butts off day and night and still fast and pray that the accounts will balance.”

“I feel your pain, I will definitely opt out of being an entrepreneur in my next life,” Chioma said. “It's not always ice-creams and burgers.”

“Don't even give us that, Chioma,” Badmus interjected, downing his wine before continuing his statement. “You can't tell me that with all those beautiful designers in your Chachi's Couture, you don't have enough time to lick the ice-cream off Charles back as often as you want.”

“I think I need some more wine,” Chioma said trying but failing to conceal her laughter as she left the group, while everyone burst into laughter causing a few other guests to look in their direction.

Charles quickly rose to his wife's aid. “She will do whatever she wants with my back, and it won't be your business,” he stated, increasing the tempo of laughter from the group.

In their hearts, they were all secretly jealous of the relationship Charles shared with his wife. She had fit perfectly into their group of friends, and there wasn't any of them that did not owe her one debt that was impossible to pay.

Emeka was surprised to see Chioma come back with Mosun who was looking quite shy. “Look who I found on my way back.”

The way Charles greeted her and the sudden change in Emeka's expression and disposition told the others that this had to be the 'Mosun', but she wasn't what they'd expected. Her beauty was indisputable, but there was something about her looks.It was the disco party make-up and tightly fitting dress that made her stand-out wrongly. Every other person was in corporate wear: shirts, suits, skirts, tux, ties or business casual, but Mosun had on a gown that was way above her knee, her hair was a combination of loud colours, and

Emeka wondered when she'd made it. She couldn't wear that extravagant look to work, so he figured it had to be a wig.

He wanted to take her away and protect her from the looks directed her way, but the thought was immediately nipped in the bud when his mother came to alert him of the arrival of Tobi, one of the youngest executives in their group of companies. He excused himself and left her to his friends, which he didn't like at all. As he walked away with his mum, it bothered him that she was inappropriately dressed. He imagined that she would have attended a lot of business cocktails and dinners and so would know the appropriate style of fashion for these kinds of parties. But there was no time to worry about Mosun's appearance or even pray that she won't make a fool of herself before his friends.

Tobi was the manager in charge of their art gallery. He had just returned from the States on a study leave and Emeka respected the guy. He had met Tobi once, before he'd travelled and hadn't expected to see him tonight. Tobi stated that his flight had landed earlier that evening as the men hugged like brothers, saying he couldn't miss the party for the world. They exchanged pleasantries and spoke briefly about the experience and knowledge he'd acquired overseas.

“I have placed an advert for an assistant who will help with some of my duties at the gallery. There is so much work to be done especially with the things I learnt overseas, and having an extra professional hand would make the work easier,” Tobi said, and wished he hadn't started a work-related conversation at a party, but Emeka was such a good sport.

“I totally feel you on that point. Even I need an assistant. The HR department is working on it though, and I think you should go through them too,” Emeka said.

“I really don't want to. I'm not looking for someone who has a degree in visual or fine-arts, I want a natural talent; someone I can train, and whose desire to work will go beyond the paycheck. I am sure you know what I mean,” Tobi defended his choice, hoping that Emeka will back him up.

Emeka nodded in agreement, “I do. It's fine, just do your thing. But don't compromise authenticity for shadows; we need to be the best. You guys will be working with the creative department of the advertising agency on a campaign we just secured yesterday.”

“Wow, that's great! I can't wait for us to get started,” Tobi said, always excited about a challenge.

“After the party,” Emeka whispered conspiratorially and Tobi smiled in understanding. “For now, let's have some fun,” he added, smiling as he shook the man's hand. “I will see you around,” he stated and walked away.

He was going back to his friends and Mosun when he heard the sound of cutlery against glass calling everyone's attention. It was Sandra, and all eyes were now trained on her, waiting for what she had to say.She cleared her throat and raised her voice even as the music went down

“Good evening ladies and gentlemen.”

“Good evening,” everyone replied.

“We are glad that you have all made yourselves available today to celebrate with our guest of honour,” she stated, looking at Emeka. “It is now time to make a toast, but before we raise our glasses, I want a few people to say something about the celebrant in two sentences.”

In a split second, so many hands were up, but Sandra picked only five people.

Glory was the first to go. “This is not really a compliment; it's more like a confession. Emeka was my first boyfriend, and I broke his heart.” Emeka rolled his eyes as he listened. Was this necessary? “But it's me who has not recovered,” Glory grinned widely, covering her face in self-mockery while people laughed.

He graciously walked up to her and gave her a bear hug. “You will always be my sister,” he said loud enough for everyone to hear, and people clapped.

“It's not his bachelor's eve, you might still have a shot,” Charles chimed from the corner he was and people laughed.

“You have wasted your first sentence,” Sandra rejoined, addressing Charles. “So choose your next statement well,” she said with humour.

“Hmm… Okay,” Charles said as he held his wife's hand, “I will try and make my one sentence as long as possible so that I can still include everything I want to say.” Everyone laughed again and when they piped down, he continued. “I like myself a lot, but if I have to choose who I will come as in my next life, it will definitely be Emeka. His personality defies human comprehension, his physical and spiritual cleanliness never ceases to intrigue me and if there is anyone who can do a better job at taking this group of companies to the next level, it's him.”

Everyone nodded approvingly and clapped heartily while Emeka went to hug both Charles and his wife.

“I guess at this point I have to interrupt and add mine,” Sandra said and all eyes went back to her. “I must confess that I couldn't help but shed a sad tear or two when I was promoted to Emeka's position after he resigned from our company. As much as I believed in myself and have my own plans for my career, the pleasures of working as Emeka's assistant can't be traded for any other working experience, and I will do it again if I ever have the opportunity.”

“That sounds like a good cover letter for your next job, if you are willing to work with us,” the head of human resources department said, and everyone clapped and laughed again while Emeka went forward to pull Sandra into what she would later describe to her sister as an intimate hug.

Two other people spoke and it was finally his mother's turn and the jovial, laughing mood in the room turned into a solemn one at her words. In fact, their Big Aunty shed a tear

“Emeka is the son of my heart,” his mother began. “The way he has been with me all these years has lessened the pain of missing my husband to only the times when I turn for a hug in my sleep and remember he is not there. Emeka is just starting his life, yet the wisdom he possesses shuts me up most times, and I thank God for the privilege of having him as my only son, even though he is worth more than ten sons. I believe like Charles said that he will take our company to the promise land.”

It was the cutting of the strawberry cake that Sandra brought, and the toast to Emeka's success that brought sound back to the hall.The night was a success; and after a while, guests began to slip out one by one.

Mosun too did the same.

Mosun had never felt so small all her life. She just did not fit in, and it was as obvious as oil in water. She couldn't even hold small talk with Emeka's friends; they all seemed to know each other well, and she was the odd one out.

Her dressing must have also made her stand out. No other word described it better than 'different'. They all looked corporate and business-like, but she looked like she was going to the club. She realized that Glory had misled her when she'd asked for advice on the appropriate look to dazzle Emeka on his special night.It wasn't until she heard Glory's confession that she realized that Glory was deliberately trying to sabotage her.

When she had called Glory from work, asking if she could go in her work clothes, she had invited her for a make-over. Due to her own vanity, she had admired herself in the mirror, thinking to herself that she would totally steal the show. She had refused to see that Glory wasn't dressed the way she had asked her to dress. To make matters worse, she had to go home in a taxi tonight because she had deliberately told the driver to take her car home, nursing the secret desire that Emeka would be so dazzled by her, and he would opt to take her home.She was waiting for a cab when she heard a voice call out to her.

"Hello dear. Are you waiting for someone to pick you up here?"

"Not exactly, I'm waiting for a cab."

"Where are you going?"

"Chevron"

"What a coincidence! I am headed towards that direction too," he said, already opening the door of his car. "It's why I decided to leave the party early. The traffic would be really thick now, I could use some company"

"I don't know you; I am sorry, I can't ride with you."

"I believe you are a friend of Emeka, I am too. I am from his party, so you are safe. Or do you want me to call him?"

"No," she said dreading to be in Emeka's presence at the moment.

She entered the car, and the guy zoomed off, asking questions that Mosun wasn't in the mood to answer. She however did to avoid coming across as rude. He was offering her a ride after all and if she wasn't in a sour mood over the events of the night, she realized the guy wasn't bad to talk to. He kept making funny comments about everything; from the radio programs to the things happening on the street, and it did take her mind away momentarily from the ache in her heart.It was when he was about to drop her at home that she realized that she did not even know his name.

“You didn't ask, and I didn't want to bother telling you and suffering the pain of knowing you'll forget immediately.”

Mosun smiled. “You are a very funny guy.”

He chuckled as he pulled up in front of Mosun's house and gave her his card. “Tobi Akinleye, Director of Evergreen Art Gallery.”

“Really? Wow! So you're an artist?” Mosun asked looking up from the card to stare at him.

“Yeah. I like to draw and paint.”

“Wow! That's cool. Nice actually,” she said giving him a small smile.

Tobi observed her momentarily then stated intuitively. “You sound intrigued about this. Do you draw?”

“Yes, but not professionally.”

“You don't have to be called a professional to be good at it. Art is a thing of the heart,” he said, placing his hands on his chest and catching Mosun's eye.

She was so taken away by his speech that she did not know when she blurted, “I have a sketch-pad.' She expected him to laugh at her, but instead his comment surprised her.

“Can I come and see it now?”

“No,” she said, shaking her head repeatedly for effect. She was building new values and she had to be disciplined at it. She wasn't going to allow any strange guy enter her house even if he wanted to appreciate one of the only things she believed she could do. Besides, she had worked hard at cleaning the house because she was expecting Emeka; no other guy deserved to see it first, but with the way she had messed up this evening, she wondered if Emeka would want to come into her house. If he did though, it would mean a lot to her.

“Alright,” he said raising his two hands up in surrender, “But at least give me your card.”

Instead of the card, she gave him her number. She no longer took pride in announcing to the world a profession she did not deserve. She now wanted to be respected based on her values and was working hard at it, except for times like tonight when she messed things up.

“I'll call you,” he said as she opened the door and left his car.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The night had been better than good, yet Emeka didn't feel good, and as usual, the shower was his succour. He had been under the flowing water for over fifteen minutes and wasn't ready to leave anytime soon. His mind was in chaos.

He had complained jokingly about needing a personal assistant to Sandra when they were cleaning up after the party, and had not expected that she would offer to give him one week out of her annual leave, starting from next week. The offer had been too good for him to pass up, but he had not liked the fact that his mother overheard and even went ahead to offer Sandra the position full time, which he was glad she rejected.Her acceptance would have muddled up things for him. He was beginning to like her more than he'd expected. The way she handled the party was heart-warming; not that her capability surprised him, but he'd been awed at her selflessness. She had handled the toast perfectly too, and turned the event into a memorable one for him. His sister kept *oohing* and *aahhing* over the strawberry cake she'd made, bonding sweetly with her as they chatted like sisters.

There was no doubt that Sandra was perfect. She was what the Bible referred to as a virtuous woman, yet, it was Mosun that his heart skipped a beat for. He had gone out to call her when he noticed she had left without notifying him, and she had sounded cold. He had thanked her for coming, and apologized for his distance, and she had said she understood. He suspected she'd felt like a fish out of water especially with how she'd dressed. It wouldn't have bothered him, but he'd been surrounded by friends and family who had certain expectations of him, As much as he wanted her in his arms, he didn't like how he imagined she would look on it.

S*he needs help*

“I know she needs help, and I have been trying my best, but she is so deep in the ways of this world that even Jesus in her life has not reflected in her ways.”

F*or all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory*

“Yes, but God transforms His saints with the renewing of their minds.”

It's a gradual process, be patient. Feed my lamb.

“Now, I am confused,” Emeka muttered in frustration. “Am I just to disciple her? If that's it then let me stop feeling this way about her. Let her voice stop melting me. Let me stop seeing her even when she is not there.”

He waited for the Holy Spirit to respond. He didn't. Emeka sighed.

“Holy Spirit, help me stop this feeling and let me concentrate on your work in her life so that I can also have a pure mind in choosing the woman you have for me; a woman who can serve you with me, a woman who will love you, and by extension, love me too, and receive wisdom to fulfill her role in my life perfectly.”

Mary Magdalene loved more than most. Tend to my lamb.

“What is this thing about Mary Magdalene? Lord, I am confused.”

The Lord is not an author of confusion

Emeka sighed and left the bathroom, wiping the water off his body with his clean white towel.

“Lord, lead me”, he said as he lay on his bed and worshiped God.

M*y grace is sufficient for you.*

When Mosun got to work that morning, she sensed that something was wrong, but dismissed it for the usual coldness she had received since she'd resumed back from her leave of absence.

Everything had to be alright, she thought as she sat on her chair. Her boss had been impressed by the corrections and additions she'd made to the news release that would be sent to media organizations. She had been surprised when he'd requested that she personally do it, unaided. He said he wanted it to be professional, and he did that in front of every member of the team, making it impossible for her to delegate. If it wasn't for Emeka's timely help, she would have been

disgraced. It was as though he was testing her. The man knew she didn't get the job on merit, and had been trying every means to get her out.

At a loss for what to do, she combed her hair with her hands. Chief, who had been her back bone, was no longer aiding her. In fact, he had threatened to get her fired when she'd refused to honor his sexual appointment.

“Lord, how do I survive?” she'd said amidst tears. “The only way I know is to use my body, and now that it's your temple, I don't have anything anymore”.

The word for the day in the New Believer's devotional guide she was reading was Colossians 2:15, which says, *“You are complete in Christ,”* but she didn't feel complete.

She stood from her chair, walking around the room, and finally knelt by her table, sobbing. “Lord help me to be truly complete in you. Make my life beautiful. Teach me the steps I need to take to have a good and fulfilling life.”

She was so deep in her communication with the Lord that she did not hear the knock or the sound of the door when the person entered.It was the touch on her shoulder that brought her back to the room, and she was surprised to see the secretary to the Human Resource Manager. She quickly stood up to clean her eyes and motioned the lady to sit. Usually, she would have sparked at such invasion of privacy, but right now, she wasn't in the mood to scold anyone.

“Don't let it break you down like this. I was shocked when I saw it myself,” the lady said in a sympathetic voice and Mosun wondered what she was referring to.

“I don't understand what you mean.”

“Oh! Have you not been given the letter?” The lady asked scratching the back of her head.

“What letter?” Mosun asked, perplexed and worried. What could be in the letter that should make her break down?

The lady stood to leave the room, “I am sorry, it's nothing.”

Mosun rose with her and quickly walked to the door to stop her from leaving.“What letter am I supposed to receive?”

“It's not my place to say. Please, let me leave. I thought you had collected the letter and was instructed to come and help you pack.”

“Pack?” Mosun asked in shock and held the nearest furniture to avoid falling as the implication of the word sank.

“Yes ma. A letter was issued yesterday to terminate your appointment.”

Mosun went rigid and silent. She had assumed it may be a query or even a suspension for an offense she couldn't remember, but termination of appointment? It was beyond her imagination. The lady made a move to touch her, but Mosun moved away, motioning her to leave.

The tears had not come, and she wished that they would. Maybe it would make her feel better or dissolve the pain in her heart. Was her relationship with the Lord not supposed to make things better? Didn't He promise a land flowing with milk and honey?

“There is no milk,” she said out loud and laughed mockingly at herself. “Why have I been deceiving myself? Nothing works for me; not even Jesus. Lord I feel alone,” she screamed at the apartment and got no reply.“You don't even speak to me. Or maybe I don't know how to listen to you. God, teach me. I want to follow you but it's getting hard,” she cried out in prayers.

I am with you

Her phone rang from her bag, but she refused to pick it. She went to the fridge to pick a beer, but suddenly realized she had discarded them. She had told herself that she didn't need any temptation to take her back to her addiction and mini-god. She was glad she did because she wouldn't have been able to stop herself just now until she was dead drunk.She went back to the living room, sat on the couch and prayed for a while. She didn't feel good right now, but she didn't want to lose her relationship with God, which was the only thing standing in her life right now. Her bible reading yesterday had said, *“Work hard to work out your salvation,”* and she wasn't going to give up. Emeka had sent her a text message this morning before she went to work inviting her for the yearly musical worship experience held at Tafewa Balewa Square, and she had consented. Now, she wasn't in the mood to go anymore but she couldn't hide and

shut herself out of the world, she needed to go out, especially to gatherings that would help build her spirit.

She reached for her bag on the table and brought out her phone to text him that she would be coming, but to her surprise, she saw ten missed calls, and it was from Tobi Akinleye, the guy she'd met yesterday at Emeka's party. She wasn't surprised that he had called her; she however marveled at his tenacity. Before she could attempt to call him back, his call came in again, and she picked on the second ring, after dropping a message for Emeka

“I was beginning to think you were not going to pick my call,” Tobi said.

“I'm sorry, I wasn't in the mood to talk to anyone, and the phone was in my bag. I didn't know you were the one,” Mosun responded.

“Hmmm… So you mean it would have made a difference if you knew it was me?” Tobi asked in a teasing voice.

“I don't know jare,” she said. “At least I sha picked the call as soon as I saw it was you.”

“That sounds good to my ears. Are you at home, or still at work?” Tobi asked.

“I am at home,” she said downcast, remembering her situation.

“Wow! You close really early. Anyway you are the boss, so it's understandable.”

Mosun wondered if he knew what he was saying at all. “You don't know where I work, so stop assuming things,” she said.

“Are you for real? This is the 21st century; of course, I checked your Linkedln profile.”

“Oh! Too bad I am on that thing,” Mosun commented, wondering where she was getting the strength to hold a normal conversation when she felt this way.

“It's good. Now I know I'm connected to a high profile personality.” Tobi said, and Mosun laughed at the irony.

“See who is talking? Anyway, not anymore.”

“What do you mean, not anymore?”

“I was told to quit today,” she said and felt relieved to have told someone.

“Really?” Tobi stated, surprised. “I am so sorry. But you sound okay to me.”

“I don't know where I am getting the strength from,” she said to him, as much as to herself, but instantly knew it was God who was upholding her

“Hope you are not brooding? Are you alone?” he asked, concern etched in his voice.

She was comforted by Tobi so much that she didn't know when she accepted his request to come to her place.To her surprise, before she could change her mind, she heard a knock on her door and it was him.

“I have always known it was a bad idea to let a stranger drop you at home,” she said with an amiable smile. Apparently, he had been at her gate all the time he was calling.

“I am hurt,” he said in a mock, sad tone and Mosun smiled. Unlike when Emeka came, she had different soft drinks and juice she was able to serve him. She was changing into a different person and she loved her new life. Depression could not even weigh her down because the Holy Spirit was bearing her up in his arms.

Tobi did not sit down in one place, moving up and down the living room and marveling about how wealthy she must be to own a place like this when she told him she lived alone.She couldn't explain in details why she had been sacked, yet he was compassionate and encouraged her, saying it was the organization's loss for letting her go, and that she would find something better.

“I think they are better off without me,” she blurted honestly. “I don't know half of what they do there. I was just a figurehead.”

“What are you good at?” Tobi asked, suddenly calming down to have a serious conversation.

“I don't know. I never took anything serious growing up,” Mosun confessed and Tobi waved it off.

“Everyone is good at something; there must be one thing,” he insisted and Mosun sighed.

“Aside from the fact that I like to draw and paint, I can't really think of any other thing. Oh, except that you would break a bone and still not win if you choose to dance with me,” she said, and smiled, expecting him to give up on her for sure, but he didn't.

“That is something; more than something. How can you belittle my profession just like that?” he asked, feigning anger and she smiled. He was such a likable character, and she couldn't help but wonder what he'd found in her to make him come back for a visit.

“Let me see your work,” Tobi demanded and she snapped out of her thoughts.

“I really don't have any works,” she said.

“What about that sketch pad you mentioned yesterday?”

“Oh! It's just a childish book I……”

“Just bring it,” he said interrupting her, not in the mood to hear her berate herself one more time.

“Yes sir,” she said, quickly getting to her feet, leaving him laughing.She came back with the pad and a dusty frame some minutes later. “I don't know if I should show you this,” she said, holding back the frame, and he didn't try to convince her otherwise. He just stood up and slipped it out of her fingers.

Mosun watched as he held the frame, his eyes widening in shocked surprise. “This is awesome,” he exclaimed in excitement. “I can't believe you've been keeping this art to yourself. This thing is speaking to me, it's full of emotions. Why is it under your bed, covered in dust?” he asked accusingly “It's almost an offense to starve this thing of attention. It belongs on shelves and walls to be admired and appreciated.”

It was a painting of a nearly naked young girl walking away but looking back sadly. Mosun had painted it in her final year when she looked back at how empty her past had been. She had never really shown anyone, except those who had seen her when she had been painting it and they had marveled at her work, even though she hadn't thought much of it. The compliments from Tobi were stirring a sense of pride in her. She didn't know she could do something that would be this appreciated, and she loved it.

After checking out all the drawings in her sketch pad, Tobi looked up and asked, “Will you work with me?”

Mosun burst into laughter. She assumed he was joking, but before any of them could say anything, her phone rang and she picked it.It was Emeka. He was on his way to pick her up for the program, and for some reason, Mosun didn't want him to meet Tobi at her place. As soon as the call ended, she rose to her feet and told Tobi that she had an appointment so he had to leave.

“Hope there is no problem?” he asked, surprised that she did not answer his question before sending him off.

“No,” Mosun replied. “I have a program to attend and I don't want to be late.”

“What program?” he asked curiously rising to his feet even though it wasn't his place to pry.

“It's a worship program,” she answered, wishing he would leave immediately. Emeka could be there any minute.

“Oh, that's good! We can go together.”

“No! No!” she said quickly and was ashamed at her rudeness. “I am sorry.”

“It's okay,” he said in understanding. “We just met yesterday; I can't just suddenly crash into your plans. Besides, I was joking, I need to get back to work, I forgot some materials there.”

“Okay, thanks for understanding,” she said as she walked him to the door.

Before she could close the door behind him, he turned back to her. “Think about the offer, I could arrange an interview quickly,” he said.

“I don't think I'm that good or that qualified,” she said quietly and Tobi held her hands.

“What you can do is enough for me to build on. I don't need qualification. I need talent and results. Call me when you decide,” he said and walked to the parking lot.

As Mosun closed the door, she leaned her back against it and closed her eyes. “Thank you, Jesus,” she muttered.

Before Tobi arrived, she'd been wondering how she would survive now that she was jobless. God had brought a job to her without her having to stress about what her next move would be or where to send her CV to. Still, she had her doubts. She wasn't sure she should consider the offer, considering she'd failed at everything else. Who says this one will be different?

She couldn't think about that now, Emeka was coming and she had to be ready.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

It was going to be an awesome day, Emeka could feel it already. He had left work at 3:00 pm to get his mum's SUV so as to be able to pick Charles, Chioma, Sandra, and Mosun. It was fast becoming a ritual to go for the yearly worship experience with friends, and it had always been a blessing. In the past, he had gone with with Charles, Chioma, and Badmus, but this year, Sandra and Mosun were coming along.

He had picked Charles and Chioma first then Sandra who had advised against going to Chevron to pick Mosun because of traffic. If she came to join them at Lekki Phase 1 with a cab, it would be easier since she would be against traffic, and everyone had agreed with her. It was the logical thing to do, but Emeka hadn't like it. He wished he had arranged earlier to get her, but there was no arguing against reasoning. He'd called to tell her, but she'd told them to go along, that she would drive and come on her own, and Emeka had begged her to come with them instead. If they went separately, it may be hard to get a seat together, and he wanted to share the experience with her, to see her feel the Holy Spirit.

He was afraid that she might change her mind, and it wasn't until he saw her that he heaved a sigh of relief. Now, they were all on their way to Tafawa Balewa Square and thanks to Sandra's thoughtfulness, everyone was sipping and munching something as they moved in traffic.But it was Mosun's presence that left his toes itching in his shoes as he drove. She took the back seat, while Sandra and Chioma took the middle seat, and Charles was with him in front.

Even before the experience, the car was already heated as they sang different worship songs. Emeka sang tenor, Charles, bass, Chioma, soprano, and Sandra tried alto although she claimed she was naturally a soprano singer. Only Mosun wasn't singing, and he assumed that she didn't know the song, but she was making efforts by clapping and dancing.

The truth however was that she wasn't in the mood. She didn't feel like singing with them. They were all perfect in their world, and she felt like the intruder. They all felt so comfortable and knew what to do. Chioma had brought ground-nut and banana and was constantly feeding her husband plantain chips even from the back where she was seated. They were such a lovely couple, and she couldn't even imagine having something as special as they did. But maybe God could help, she thought.

Sandra however had brought a shop; different kinds of juice, a bucket of ice, bread, and a bowl of grilled chicken with home-made potato chips and ketchup. One would have thought they were going camping instead of on a worship vigil. For some reason she couldn't

place her hands on, the girl threatened her. Both Chioma and Sandra were nice to her, but the emotions she felt coming from Sandra were different from that of Chioma.

In the driver's seat, Emeka was advocating that Chioma ministered the chips in his mouth too. Everyone laughed in jest of him when she made an attempt to do so, and Charles snatched it.

“Go and marry, and stop asking my wife to minister anything to you,” Charles retorted jokingly.

“Your biggest problem is that you are too jealous,” Emeka replied.

“Thank you very much,” he returned. “When you have your wife, turn her to a public minister to men,” he said and everyone laughed again.

However, amidst Emeka's laughter was the knowledge that one of the ladies in this car could be the one. One was perfectly realistic to tie the knot with, even though he didn't feel deeply for her, while the other was unrealistically the only woman he had ever been able to explain his feelings for, yet she was not adequate.

For ye are complete in Christ

Emeka caught Mosun's eyes through his rearview mirror and winked at her. She smiled and his breath caught in his throat. Just one smile and he felt like a teenager on his first crush.

“God have mercy on me,” Emeka muttered under his breath.

My spirit bears witness with your spirit; you know the truth, let it set you free from confusion.

The words brought such clarity and he had been grateful, but when the program progressed, and the presence of God's spirit became very thick, he had fallen on his knees in awe, Sandra had begun to cry, Charles had held his wife's left hand in his and they'd both lifted their hands in worship, singing from the heart, but Mosun had been looking around, probably wondering at their behavior. The sight of her looking clueless when he'd opened his eyes briefly bothered him.

“Lord, how am I going to follow your lead? I need someone who can feel you with me, someone who has Jesus.”

She has Jesus, feed my lamb

Emeka praised the Lord. He knew the Holy Spirit was present, and whatever he was hearing was undiluted. He stood up, held Mosun's two hands and told her to sing.

“I don't know the songs,” she said, distraught.

“Do you want to feel the spirit of God?” he asked, looking into her eyes.

“Yes,” she said.

“Close your eyes and just worship Him. Say sweet things to him; honour him, adore him, and love him.”

Mosun obeyed, praying and worshipping God with words while he still held her hands, singing. Seconds turned into minutes, and she was still worshipping. He was speaking in tongues, and at some point pulled her to a seat. Still, he continued, and at some point, she began to cry, but he didn't stop her. He just held her hands tight. Suddenly, the atmosphere changed and he felt cold. She started moaning and groaning, and was soon speaking another language; something he couldn't understand, and was shouting it unrestrainedly. As Michael. W. Smith sang *'I am desperate for you…'* she let go of his hands, and knelt on the ground. Emeka couldn't help but open his eyes as he stared in awe at the scene before him. God was definitely here. He closed his eyes and continued to worship

Sandra was hurt. No two words explained the way she felt better. All her efforts were like pouring water into a basket. When it seemed she had walked a mile with Emeka, he took two miles backward and then she had to go get him again.

They had been really close after the party, and she had been getting ready for the one week position as his assistant to finish her mission, even if she had to take Bimpe's advice of getting his attention the age-long way.But this girl kept showing up to complicate matters. She hadn't even expected her to come for the worship experience since her secretary had said she was a professional whore, but it seemed as though the girl was also bent on getting Emeka for keeps. She'd seen how Emeka was attentive to her, how he'd held her hands during the worship, how he'd looked at her when she'd been pretending to be in the spirit, and it infuriated her.

She removed the pin from her hair in annoyance and sat on the bed, upset and worried. Emeka could have dropped Mosun first, but instead, he'd dropped every other person then taken her home alone. She wondered what they would be doing and saying and the pictures she conjured only made her boil more with anger and jealousy. She pulled her shoe and threw it at the shoe rack in anger.

“I am the one working hard to get him. I deserve him more than anybody,” she lamented in frustration, tears misting her eyes.

It's not by works, look unto God

Sandra wasn't listening. She'd fought for this long and hard, and refused to give up or be discouraged. She still had another chance next week to complete her walk into his heart, and she needed to deploy every strategy in the book.

Finally, the period he had been waiting for had come and he was excited. He had not been alone with her since the day she'd come back from the village, and as much as he was conflicted in his thoughts, he always wanted to see her.

“Did you enjoy my party?” Emeka asked as he made a turn into her estate. They had been talking about many other things since the others left, except what he really wanted to talk about. He had been wondering why she'd left his party early, and felt bad about not saying anything.

“It was a fine party. You should be proud of yourself,” Mosun responded softly

“I was humbled,” he said, reflecting on the party.

“It's because you are a good person,” she chipped. “If I was the one, my head would be times five its original size.”

Emeka laughed. “Don't worry; maybe I will organize one for you so that I can see how you would look with five heads.”

Mosun laughed. ”You would be disappointed. Nobody will say the kind of things they said about you; at least they won't mean it.”

He sighed as he made a turn into Mosun's street. “Why do you think so low of yourself? I hold you high,” he stated, and held her left hand.

“Do you really?” she asked, looking at him in doubt, but before he could answer, she removed her hand from his. “I saw the way you looked at me at your party. You were disappointed at my outfit, and I am sorry, I didn't know how you would want me to look and Glory recommended that…” Mosun couldn't go on, she stopped mid-sentence and looked out the window.

Emeka felt small. She had seen the judgment in his eyes that night, and it was a shame. At that moment, she had been better than him. She'd left everything she knew to embrace his world, yet he'd blamed her for not being enough. She was improving herself, yet he wasn't giving her credit. And he knew she was trying. She had looked very decent and beautiful today in her beige gown, and nude shoes.

“I am sorry Mosun,” he said and held her hand again, but she shook her head as though to shut out his apology.

“I'm the one who is sorry. I am trying, but it's not showing,” she said dejectedly.

“Don't give up. Just continue, God sees your effort,” he returned and caressed her hands softly, trying to comfort her, but she pulled out again, slightly uncomfortable with his touch.

“He does?” she asked, needing validation badly.

“Yeah, and I do too,” he said and held her hand again. This time she looked at him and they both smiled.

“You don't give up,” she stated, looking at their joint hands, and he laughed.

“Did your boss like the story I wrote for you?” Emeka asked, changing the topic.

“Yeah, he did,” she said with a sigh, “but it didn't seem to make a difference.”

“What do you mean?”

“I got the letter yesterday.”

“What letter?” he asked as they got to Mosun's gate.

“Termination of appointment,” she said as Emeka parked.

“What? Why?”

“I fell short of the expected standards.”

“They can't just say that; they need to have evidence. You should sue them or something. Are you okay?” he asked worriedly, his hand on the head-rest of her seat.

“I can't sue them. They were right to sack me. I can no longer afford the fuel that kept me going there, so I had to go out. It's that simple.”

“I am so sorry. Hope it's not weighing you down?” Emeka asked, impressed by the way she was handling things.

“No, Jesus is strengthening me,” she replied, and Emeka was happy she was leaning on Christ.

“Do you have any plans?” he asked.

“Nothing really, but someone said something yesterday that might be worth considering,” she said and wished she hadn't. She was in no mood to explain about Tobi, especially because Emeka knew him.

“Really? Already? How come you are just telling me?” he asked, suppressing his hurt.

“It just happened, Emeka.”

“Hmm… Someone already knows enough to want to help, and you will be claiming that you have no one.”

“It's a miracle,” she insisted, and Emeka laughed.

“You are experiencing miracles already? I like the sound of that, but who is this person anyway?”

“Just someone I met earlier this week,” she responded dismissively, and Emeka knew she didn't want to say more, so he didn't press, but as he watched her go in through the gate after a short prayer with her, his heart fell.

Was this someone else another guy? Had he been ignoring God's counsel and now He had decided to replace him?

The questions plagued his thoughts and stayed with him all through the drive home.

The worship experience was an unforgettable one for Mosun. When she got home that morning, she couldn't sleep for hours. She was trying the new tongues of the Holy Spirit and reading all that the bible said about it. She was shocked that she could have experienced such a transformation in these earliest times of her faith. Chioma had told her as they sat together in the back after they'd dropped Sandra that it was not about how long, but how well, and encouraged her to continue to yield to God. It was then she asked Chioma if she could teach her how to cook. She had expected to see judgment in her eyes but Chioma was excited to be asked. She'd told her to come to her place the following day, but subsequently, the cooking classes would be held every Saturday between 9 to 12 when her husband would leave for the gym.

Excited about the class, Mosun had arrived an hour earlier than the agreed time. Even though she could learn to cook on YouTube, she got the feeling that learning with Chioma will be an amazing experience. She'd called Chioma to inform her, only to learn they had gone to church and would be back soon. Mosun waited in her car and soon enough, Chioma and Charles pulled into the compound. A short while later, they were in the house and Chioma excused herself to go change, but wanted to boil rice first. Immediately, Mosun offered to do it. Chioma gave her a skeptical look, but Mosun assured her boiling pasta and rice wasn't her problem, It was how to make stew, soup, and any meal that required mixing of condiments and ingredients.

Chioma agreed, leaving her to boil the rice while she went to change. A short while later, she returned with a small book, wearing an orange bum short and a black spaghetti top that revealed some of her cleavage. Mosun's eyes widened in surprise at her outfit and Chioma caught her look. She smiled knowingly.

“I am home alone with my husband, I can't be boring.”

“Wow, and I thought I should dispose all my slutty clothes,” Mosun said quietly.

“Well, you can keep them till you have a husband to seduce,” Chioma said with a smile, but Mosun didn't return her smile. “What's wrong?” she asked in concern.

Mosun sighed “You talk about your husband with so much joy, and as much as I am happy for you, I am sad for myself. I can't expect to have a life like yours.”

“Mosun, do you know who is in you?”

“Yes.”

Chioma shook her head. “I doubt it. If you know how Jesus can wipe a person's slate and make him totally new, you won't speak like this. You will find your own man and he will love you deeply. Just fix your eyes on God, and continue to develop yourself.”

“Do you have quarrels with your husband at all?” Mosun asked.

“Of course, we do. But we know that we are the most important people in each other's lives, so we've learnt to always forgive.”

“That's really good. I will pray for that.” she said, and Chioma smiled.

“Yeah, do that, but pray for more. Once you have God's choice for you, the rest is history. Now, let's get you started.” she said and gave Mosun the book in her hand. It was a recipe book.'This book contains a recipe for the different kind of meals and fruit juice that I am going to teach you. You can take it with you.”

“Thank you so much,” Mosun said, taking a look at the book while Chioma studied her.

“I marvel at your desire to truly be a new person,” she stated after a few seconds of silence, making Mosun look up from the book. “You are really working on changing, and I am very impressed. I pray that God will reward you duly,” she said, smiling.

“Amen,” Mosun returned, equally smiling as they got on with the lessons.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The past four days were the best days Emeka had enjoyed since he took over his late father's business. By the time he got to work by 8:30 am on Monday, Sandra was already there. The secretary, who usually resumed at 6:30 am, said that they got in at the same time, and again, Emeka marveled at how hardworking Sandra was. Before he arrived, she'd taken charge of his itinerary and he was glad he had told the secretary she was coming so as to give her unlimited access to his office. She had profiled his appointments into categories and arranged the files he needed to treat in their order of importance. Since she was leaving at the end of the week, they'd shared his office together at her suggestion - just like old times.

On Wednesday, he'd needed to meet one of the consultants working with them on the island, and as usual, she had done most of his duties. She'd gotten the briefing for the letters he needed to write by Tuesday and before he arrived from his meeting, had written everything. She had even stood in for him for some of his meetings and based on the reports and feedback, there was little he would have done differently. Missing lunch had become a regular thing, but with

Sandra at the helm of his affairs, it became a thing of the past. Before 1:30 pm every day, she would have ordered for lunch, and they both had it in his office to avoid wasting time to go to a restaurant. There was no doubt Sandra was the kind of assistant he needed. She was good at her Job.

“I have gotten used to this,” he said as they closed for the week.

“I like that very much,” she replied, closing the last file she was treating.

“Go jare! You didn't even spend one full week and you are leaving me already. This public holiday should have chosen another Friday so that I would have been able to keep you for one more day, or will you stay with me full time?” Emeka asked jokingly.

She caught his eye. “I can stay with you forever, just say the word.”

The atmosphere in the room changed and Emeka realized what she must be implying. His mistake, however, was to ask, “What do you mean?”

“You know what I mean. Don't make me say it,” Sandra said, hoping he would take the hint.

“I really don't know what you mean, but let's change the topic.”

“No, we won't”’ she said tired of playing hide and seek as she rose from her seat.

Emeka continued speaking as if he didn't hear her. “I signed your cheque yesterday. Make sure you get it from the Accountant before you leave.”

Sandra didn't immediately respond, sitting on the desk and making Emeka nervous. He wondered what she was up to.“The accountant sent the cheque this morning. You paid me more than I worked for,” she said as she stared at him, wishing it didn't have to come to this.

“It's more than you deserve for your ingenuity,” he said and leaned back in his seat. She was too close for comfort.

“Emeka,” Sandra breathed, closing the distance between them. “I want you to take whatever decision you need to take. You don't need to be afraid; you would be surprised that your request would be granted gladly.”

She had decided to tell him this last night when Bimpe had mentioned that Emeka might just be scared of being turned down. Even though she didn't want to be forward, she felt she needed to clear that doubt.

“Thanks for the advice,” Emeka said, wondering what she meant, but refusing to analyze it. Right now, he needed to put some distance between them. He felt an urge to tell her to stand up from his table but he knew it could come out rude and he didn't want to hurt her feelings, so he stood up instead, picking a file and making a beeline for the door. “I need to have this file treated and…”

“I have treated the file and every other thing that needs to be done for this week,” Sandra stated, her voice tinged with slight frustration as she snatched the file from him and threw it on the table. “Except this…” she stated, pulling a startled Emeka into her arms as she snuggled close to kiss him. He however stops her, wondering what had come over her.

“What are you doing?” he asked, perplexed but trying to sound polite.

Sandra caught herself and let him go, sighing softly. She wanted him, but she also didn't want to come across as desperate. She was getting tired of waiting as well.

“My longtime expectations are making my heart sick, why do you keep me waiting?” she asked with such despair, Emeka pitied her.

He would be lying if he pretended he didn't know that Sandra liked him and he liked her, but that was it. He felt nothing more; at least not the way he felt around Mosun. She searched his gaze, waiting for him to say something and when he didn't, she turned and headed for the door, but he pulled her back into his arms.

“You are a wonderful lady, and you will always be special to me,” he said and for a moment, was happy he could put the smile back on her face. When he however let her go, he knew he shouldn't have pulled her back. From the way she smiled, he suspected she read more meaning into his statement than he meant, and he was right.

Sandra was happy. It seemed that she had finally achieved her goal of getting Emeka to admit his feelings for her.

Long after Sandra left the office, Emeka kept replaying the scene in his head. He'd been unable to eat when he arrived at home, going straight to his room. He had not showered either, lying on the bed as he kept thinking about his relationship with Sandra. After hours of tossing and turning, he decided to go down for an ice-cold chocolate drink, but the moment he got down the stairs, he wished he had called the maid to bring it to his door.

He had been lucky to enter without anyone to bother him with small talk, but now he wasn't going to get away so easily. His mother was at the dining table, helping herself to a bowl of *abacha*. It was an awkward meal to be eating late in the night, but she had bad eating habits so he was not surprised.

“You came back really late,” she said and motioned him to sit down.

“I need to rest, there has been so much to do,” he said, hoping it would help him get away quickly, even though he obeyed her and sat down. He enjoyed his mother's company and he wouldn't trade it for many things, but right now, he just wanted to be alone.

“Are you here?” His mother asked and he literarily jumped.

“I am sorry,” he said, standing to get the ice cubes for his chocolate drink.

“Emeka, you are not alright. You know I know you well” she said and took another spoon of food.

“Mummy, I am fine. I am just tired, and trying to sort out some stuff.”

“What stuff? Is it work related? You know you can always share with me,” she said in her usual motherly tone.

“Just keep praying for me,” he said and put the mug on a tray. He was going to take the drink in his room, but she stopped him.

“Son, talk to me, I am really getting worried about you. This has been going on for a while now, and I am not enjoying it anymore,” she said, her concern, obvious.

“Every man goes through this cycle at some point in their lives, I guess this is mine,” Emeka said.

“So it's woman problem after all. When are you finally going to stop arguing with yourself, and choose what is right for you?” she asked.

Emeka sighed, “I have stopped; I just don't know how to come to terms with it.”

Mrs. Okafor rose up and placed her hand on her son's shoulders. “If you have made your choice, why is it difficult for you to come to terms with it? Love is a very serious emotion, and marriage is a spiritual union. You have to choose the person that comforts you the most, once you feel the leading of the Holy Spirit.”

Emeka nodded his head; she was really making a lot of sense.“I just realized I love her so much, yet I am letting the cares of this world distract me.”

“I know you have been distracted, but you have to face the truth now.”

“This talk is what I needed.” Emeka said and went to hug her.

She smiled, looking pleased. “Sandra is a wonderful lady, and will make an amazing daughter-in-law.”

Emeka stared at his mother, shocked. So his mother had a face in mind when she was counseling him. “Mum, you can't assume who my wife is. Sandra is not the lady I am talking about.”

“She is not?” his mother asked, shocked.

“No, there is someone else.”

“Don't tell me it's that Yoruba girl.”

“What if she is the one? Shouldn't you be ready to accept my partner whoever it may be?”

“No, I can't accept that girl,” she said as she rose from her chair and faced Emeka for emphasis “Not after all I have heard about her.”

“Heard about her?” It was Emeka's turn to stand up. “You have been finding out about her.”

“You can't blame me, I need to know about the woman my son is soft on.”

“Well, I am soft on her, so start to come to terms with it.”

“Emeka, are you saying this to me?”

“Mum,” Emeka said softly, moving to her side to calm her,“I am soft on her and Jesus has solved all her problems. Join me in praying about her, and for her; don't be a stumbling block. I love you so much.”

She couldn't say a word, she just hugged him. And as he rested in his mother's arms, he prayed that God would touch her heart. He'd been battling the decision too, but as soon as he told Sandra she was special and wonderful, he knew he needed more than that.

And Mosun was the more. She wasn't perfect yet, but she was work in progress, and he knew without a shadow of doubt that the Holy Spirit would work His magic

CHAPTER TWENTY

Mosun walked into the art gallery, feeling chilly all over. It had been a tough decision to make, but she had made it nonetheless. Tobi had been persistent, insisting that she come take the job, but she had put her foot on the ground, saying that the only reason she would, no matter how stranded she was, was if he agreed to interview other people from whom he was going to choose the best. He'd agreed and had been interviewing one person a day since the beginning of the week. Now, it was her turn and she'd had no choice than to show up. Since it was a public holiday, she had thought that he would wait till Monday, but he had been adamant. There was no going back on the issue, particularly because he had other people who would be involved in the assessment, and they weren't going to be available on Monday.

Mosun had never been to an art gallery before so she didn't know what to except. She had imagined how the place would look, but everything she imagined fell short of what she saw as she walked the length of the gallery. The paintings in the room where she was waiting to be interviewed by the board spoke to her; it was a reflection of beauty in its very raw form. She felt at home here in the

midst of the paintings and thought of how beautiful it would be to have her works on the walls.

She realized she was perspiring all over. It was the first time she was sitting for this kind of thing, and it scared the guts out of her. She had even come fasting, and had worshipped God and prayed for more than four hours between 10 pm last night and 2 am this morning. She had felt peace, and confidence from the Holy Spirit, but now fear wanted to creep in. She shuddered as she remembered that she'd almost spilled stew on the sample projects she'd worked on all week that morning. She had brought them into the kitchen, bothered about the art not being good enough to be presented for the interview, but had been excited about making the stew even though she couldn't taste it because she was fasting. Chioma had told her to come later that evening for practice since it was a holiday, and she was excited about it, but the excitement was not enough to keep the fear away.

The young lady who ushered her in interrupted her thoughts. “Your attention is needed in hall three upstairs, I will take you there”.

As they got to the hallway of the second floor, she saw Emeka entering the hall she would be interviewed in, and she shuddered in fear. She almost turned back if not for the lady ushering her on.How was she ever going to face him again if she made a fool of herself before him today? She should have known better than consider an offer that came from one of the directors of his group of companies. She said a quick prayer as she entered the hall.

Emeka was shocked to see her. He was planning on inviting her for the interview on Monday and wondered how she'd found out when

he saw Tobi's face light up with excitement as she entered. He felt crushed. Without a doubt, he knew Tobi was the person she'd spoken about last weekend, and concluded they must have met at his party, where he'd completely ignored her. The guy had known about her entrenchment before him and had comforted her before he could. The thought made him sad, upset and jealous at the same time and it was a feeling that was alien to him. He however maintained an unreadable expression. This was an interview, and he needed to be professional. He'd come to see how the interview was being conducted with the intention of telling Mosun how to prepare, but he had been too slow. Someone was already watching out for her.

There were three consultants in the room who had been invited from other art galleries to help conduct the interview, so it was up to Mosun to perform excellently. Even though it was apparent that she will get the vote of two people, their votes alone wouldn't be adequate.

She was nervous, and it was obvious in the way she placed the materials on the table. This must be her first interview to get a job legitimately, he thought. As she sat down, Tobi winked at her encouragingly when he thought no one was watching, and it annoyed Emeka greatly. He asked for a few minutes to use the bathroom when Mosun smiled back at Tobi weakly; the kind she gave him when he had encouraged her to be strong in the earliest days of her father's death.

When he got back, she had just finished introducing herself and was talking about her background in visual arts. The female consultants

asked her for any academic qualifications in the field but she could not provide any.Another person asked if she offered the course in secondary school, and she responded in the negative.

“Why do you think we should employ you as the assistant director of this gallery when you have no qualifications in the field to prove your worth?”

She began to say something, but stuttered, not sure how to continue,

“Miss Olalere,” Tobi called out to her, “relax and tell us why we should employ you?” he asked calmly, his voice, soothing.

“Art is a natural part of me. I could draw well before I could write full sentences. It's a natural gift that I believe through extra training, as I begin to experience living and breathing art here, would become better.”

“Miss Olalere, this is not a training centre. We are here to employ an expert with experience to work with our team of creative artists,” one of the consultants said.

“We are not looking for a figurehead; we want someone who can do the job. Can you?” Another quickly added,

Mosun dropped her head, all her bravado gone. She really shouldn't have come or even applied for such a high position. She waited for them to tell her to leave when Tobi intervened again.

“I believe you came with some of your works, let's see them.”

Quickly, trying not to let her hands shake, she brought out the works she did that week and they passed it round nodding their heads in appreciation.

“You don't have a degree in art, yet you are this good. How did that happen?” One of the interviewers asked

“I really don't know, it just happened that way. I had a sad childhood, and the only way to vent my anger or express myself was through drawing.”

“She is also an experienced brand manager, so I don't think leading people should be an issue for her.” Another interviewer said.

Tobi brought out a plain sheet and pencil, gave it to her, and told her to draw anything she felt that they would appreciate, and submit it to the secretary. Mosun nodded in gratitude and left the room, sighing in relief as she got out. The worst part of the day was over, and she didn't care if they picked her or not. However, she went to the reception, drew something anyway, giving it her best shot.

Whatever happened, she would know she tried her best to get something legitimately.

“I don't think we should waste time on that one,” the lady consultant said. “She doesn't have the experience and leadership qualities expected of that position.”

“We should wait for that drawing, and make our final decision from it,” said the other one.

“We are not looking for just a good artist; we are employing a leader, a curator. She doesn't seem to understand even her own arts,” the woman argued.

“I think I like her,” said Tobi, and all eyes turned to him.

“You like her for the job?” Emeka was quick to ask.

“It goes beyond the job; I like her personality and believe that it would help her learn better on the job.”

“This is not a training centre,” Emeka said a little too loudly.

“I know,” Tobi continued undeterred by the fact that he was the only one who was going to vote for Mosun. “With all due respect, I must say that I will be the one working with her if we employ her, and I have seen what I want.”

“What exactly do you want?” the lady asked, taking the words from Emeka's mouth, and he was grateful.

He didn't want his emotions to get a better judgment of him, but if he sensed or smelt a whiff that Tobi had feelings for Mosun, he would have no choice but to vote against her employment and his vote would count even if he was the only one who voted against her.

“I want someone I can teach the new things I have just learnt, someone with a virgin mind, who will fully fly with our mission and vision.”

And that ended the discussion.

“Let's wait and see how well she draws under pressure”, the lady said, and they all nodded in agreement.

The shower wasn't going to solve his problem today. The day had unfolded in a very funny way, and Emeka didn't like it. As he drove to the house, he tried very hard not to harbor any negative emotions towards Tobi, but it was difficult. He couldn't bear the thought of another guy with Mosun, and Tobi was a great guy. He was nice, friendly, objective and a good Christian too, the choirmaster of his church somewhere here in Lagos. He would be good for her.

“Was this the plan?” Maybe he was just her *shepherd* after all. Maybe the best was yet to come for him. But his heart had come to settle here, to be with her.

He got to the house quite early. He was supposed to go straight to Charles' place to pick him for table tennis but he needed some time alone first. It was becoming a ritual to meet his mum in the sitting room, and these days he wasn't in the mood for small talk, especially because they didn't meet eyeball to eyeball on the issue that mattered most to him.

But when he saw her, he knew he had to put aside his own worries. She looked distraught, and his heart fell. Irrespective of his feelings for Mosun, she was still officially the number one woman in his life. He was about to approach her when he saw that she was not alone. Her friend, Aunty Rose, was sitting adjacent to her, and they were so deep in their conversation, they didn't sense his presence. Against his better judgment, he stood by the door and listened to them.

“You said he already told you that he loves the girl, so leave it alone. You can't choose for him.” Aunty Rose said.

“How can I just give up without a fight?” his mother replied.

“You seem to forget that it is not your fight. He his old enough to make his own decisions, we can only pray for him and support him. Remember, you won't live with him; it's his life.”

“He is my boy,” his mother said amidst sobs and his heart fell. “How can I just leave him to marry a Yoruba girl? Those people are very selfish and pretentious.”

“Haba Christy!!” Aunty Rose was the only one who still called his mother by her first name. “Why would you judge a whole tribe like that? The most important thing is not where a person comes from, but who the person belongs to.”

“That is another thing I worry about. I don't think the girl is even a true Christian. All the things I have heard about her are quite discouraging.”

“On that one, I can't agree with you. I know your son, he won't settle for less than the will of God for his life, and God won't give him someone that is of unequal yoke.”

Emeka was grateful for the vote of confidence. Why couldn't his mother have the same attitude?

“He said she is now a Christian, and has repented of her ways, but her past is so dirty, I can't imagine such a soiled person with my son.”

“Don't we all have a past or some dirty secret that we need the blood of Jesus to cleanse us of from time to time?”

“I know, I am not judging. It's just really difficult, to have watched your son grow into a perfect gentleman, and then end up with someone from another tribe whose moral rectitude you cannot even vouch for.”

“Christy, at the end of the day, isn't it what God thinks and what Emeka feel that should matter? Don't mislead that boy; you have trusted him with a whole conglomerate, why can't you trust him to make the best decision for himself.”

“I think you have a point; I need to give the issue to God and let His will be done.”

“Now you are talking, and make sure that you ask him for forgiveness too. You have judged that girl too much, and if they eventually come together, you won't be able to forgive yourself when you realize what blessing and richness a cross-cultural heritage can be.”

“You are very right, I think what has helped me the most in this conversation is that now, I will focus my mind on who she belongs to, and not where she is from or has been.”

Their conversation was winding down, and he couldn't bear to see either of them just now so he quickly left the house, the sound of their prayers bidding him good-bye.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Two months passed and Emeka did not see Mosun. He called her every week to check up on her, but she kept things formal. He was busy at work and did not have the time to go and visit her at home, but her coldness was getting to him. He would turn on his bed at night and imagine how her day was, yet did nothing about seeing her.

She had resumed at the art studio and was working directly with Tobi. Even though he was jealous Tobi got to see her every day, he was happy and excited for her. He constantly got a progress report, and was very proud of her. He was however a little surprised about the hard work and tenacity with which the reports said she'd taken the job. He realized that nobody was inadequate or lacked the ability to excel, we just must find our area of strength and purpose, and success would be inevitable. He'd found his, pouring all his energy into the company, and it was paying off.

Still, his heart was heavy. He felt this ache he couldn't explain as he went through the motions; not even Sandra's presence could ease the pain. She'd tried to come on to him again after that day in his office

and he'd had to tell her explicitly that he wasn't interested in anything more than a platonic relationship with her. She'd been heartbroken, but it had been necessary. She'd stopped calling and coming around to his house and he'd thought it was for the best. She'd finally reached out the previous day through email.

It read:

'I am coming to terms with your decision, and I've learnt that we cannot move God's hands for him. I pray that we both find the one that would make us happy.

I have applied for a study leave at work, I hope they give me.It would be a breath of fresh air to leave this country for a while. It would also help me figure out God's plan for me.

I wish you all the best, and you will always be dear to me.

That email had brought a lot of mixed feelings, but he was glad that she was moving on. He was tempted to give her a call, but he replied her mail instead and wished her well.

“Lord, I have been waiting on you; please show me the next move to make.”

He was still praying when he dozed off.

He woke up ten minutes later and grabbed his keys. He couldn't just sit and brood, he needed to go and see Mosun. Even if he wasn't going to say anything to her, he needed to see her. That way, he would feel better.

He got to the gallery around 3:30 pm and stopped outside a while to admire the new paintings he saw. They were beautiful. One of the curators, on seeing him, had come to say hello with the heavily-coated respect people gave to people with higher authority. He asked the guy to tell him about the painting, and he did, also adding that the new Madam painted the one he said he wanted to buy.He was impressed. Mosun was good and had been working hard.

“Where is your boss?” he asked.

“He is in the studio.”

“Alright, thank you. Go back to your office, I will go and see him there.”

When Emeka got to the studio, he froze.

Tobi was shirtless, perspiration all over his face. He was standing in a corner of the room, striking a pose while Mosun drew him. They were both intent on the activity that they didn't notice him come in until he cleared his throat loudly. They both turned to him and as soon as Mosun saw him, her pencil fell. She was shocked, as though caught doing something bad.

“Good Afternoon sir,” Tobi said, and went over to shake Emeka, smiling as he glanced briefly at Mosun, then back at Emeka, whose gaze was riveted on her. “She has been doing her best, I have been impressed”.

“Good afternoon, sir,” Mosun said too, looking at him briefly then going back to her work. There had been this certain coldness

between them since after the program, and she just couldn't hold his gaze. Although drawing Tobi was an innocent exercise, Emeka knew her past and could easily judge her.

With his eyes still trained on Mosun who picked her pencil and returned to the diagram to shade it, Emeka said, “I can imagine she has been giving it her best.” He then finally looked at Tobi. “So what kind of work are you doing here?”

“I was training her on how to make impromptu body sketches in emergencies.”

“Is she good at it?”

“Yes,” Tobi said, bursting with pride. “She's a fast learner,” he stated, glancing in Mosun's direction, before looking back at his boss. “She can do it in less than ten minutes.”

“Great, I would like to see for myself first hand. In the meantime, I want you to prepare a quick report on your activities this week,” he said and dismissed him, eyes already glued to Mosun.

Tobi looked at him suspiciously. The report wasn't due, but he didn't dare contradict him. He'd suspected there might be something going on from the interview when Emeka had queried him about wanting Mosun as his assistant. He hadn't given much away, but he was a guy and could tell his interest had an undertone of something more; he just wasn't sure what it was. He hadn't bothered to ask Mosun either. He didn't see the need as she gave no indication that there was something going on between her and the boss. In fact, if he hadn't

met her at Emeka's party, there really wasn't anything that connected them, and just being at someone's party wasn't enough to conclude that they had a relationship. His presence in the studio and the way he was looking at her seemed to confirm his initial suspicion.

“Yes sir,” he said and winked at Mosun before leaving the room. “Make sure you represent well.”

“Why is he always winking at you?” Emeka asked as soon as Tobi left the room. He was heavy with jealousy.

“I don't know, maybe you should ask him,” Mosun replied defiantly.

Emeka ignored her.“Alright let's get down to business; he says you are good with impromptu sketches, how many sketches of him did you draw to become perfect?”

Mosun looked into his eyes and saw the judgment in it.“What do you take me for?”

“What are you?” he replied calmly.

She disregarded his question, upset. “If you want me to draw you, stand there or sit here,” she stated, pointing at the places she wanted.

Emeka stood at the side and began to tug at his buttons. “Do I need to remove my shirt too, so that you can get the angles correctly?”

“What is wrong with you? I was only learning how to do a better job.”

“And you can't do it more discreetly?” he asked in a slightly raised voice, giving her a furious glare.

“I will do my job whichever way I want, and it would not be your business,” she retorted, angry at him. He had no right to judge her or tell her what to do. She didn't even know why he was upset.

“Of course, it is my business, I own this place.”

“Oh, I'm sorry sir,” she returned sarcastically. “I forgot you are the CEO.”

“It's not about that,” Emeka interjected in frustration

“Then what is it about?”

“I don't want you working here…”

“Well, you can't make me quit,” Mosun retorted, hurt that he didn't want her in his gallery. “I am good at this and I want to be here, so if you want to get rid of me, you will have to fire me. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'd rather be in my office.”

As she made to walk out, he blocked her path and pulled her into his arms, then planted a kiss on her lips, and for a split second, she responded to his kiss only to come back to her senses. She pushed him away, and he attempted to pull her back to him, but she circumvented him just as Tobi walked in. It was his entry that stopped Emeka from stomping out after her.

“Is everything okay?” Tobi asked and Emeka had no choice than to turn to the man who was responsible for his fight with Mosun.

He didn't get to Charles place until 6:30 pm, and even then he wondered what he was doing there. It wasn't as though he was in the mood for socializing, but he went into the house anyway. He remembered he hadn't eaten all day, and the aroma from the kitchen was enticing.

Charles was sitting on the rug, watching the play-offs between Chelsea and Man-City. He had totally forgotten about the match thanks to his fixation on Mosun and what could possibly be going on between her and Tobi. There was of course the fight that had happened between them and the kiss, but Emeka refused to dwell on it. He joined Charles on the couch, rolled up the sleeves of his shirt and unbuttoned his first three buttons.

“What's up, man?” Charles asked after the usual pleasantries. “You don't look good to me.”

“I am good,” Emeka said grumpily, not in the mood to talk.

“What is wrong with you? Charles asked again, turning to Emeka fully now. “There's something wrong and it's written all over you. Talk to me.”

Emeka sighed. “I'm just trying to sort things out in my life right now, and it seems as though the more I try to reach for it, the more it moves away.”

Now sure what his friend was talking about, Charles asked, “Are you sure you are not the one pushing it away?”

“I don't know,” he said, hands in the air in frustration. “And I am not in the mood to talk about anything, so can we leave it and enjoy this match?”

“Food is ready. Both of you should find your way to the dining,” Chioma called from the kitchen. She had not come out to greet Emeka but was aware of his presence.

“I can marry you just for the aroma of that food,” Emeka shouted in the same tempo as Chioma, trying to sound excited. If Chioma caught on his mood, she was definitely going to make him spill on the issue and he didn't want to.

“You should marry Mosun then, if she will have you, since she did the cooking,” Chioma stated as she emerged from the kitchen, Mosun in tow. If she was white, she would have turned a crimson red. She did look peaked though.

“What are you doing here?” Emeka asked as he stared at her in shock.

“I am with my friend,” she replied calmly, shooting daggers at him. It was apparent she was still upset as she dropped the dishes in her hand and went back to the kitchen.

“What was that about?” Chioma asked, looking from Mosun's retreating back to Emeka's shocked face.

“I was just surprised, that's all,” Emeka said innocently, still wondering what she was doing at his friends' house.

Chioma shook her head at him, “You just keep messing things up,” she said and left for the kitchen as well.

Emeka turned to Charles, hands spread in confusion. “What's wrong with my question?”

“It's not the question; it's the way you asked,” Charles responded, giving his friend a curious, quizzical look.

“Please spare me,” he said, feeling the stirring of his anger as he thought of their disagreement at the studio. “What is she doing here cooking in your kitchen anyway?”

“She has been taking cooking lessons from Chioma for sometime now. This is her third time here this month, and Chioma has been following up on her with plenty daily practical assignments. I guess today is supposed to be a mini-test; you know the way Chioma can take things like this seriously. I met them in the kitchen when I came back from Ikeja, and they've been there ever since, killing me with that aroma, and making me do the tasting.”

Emeka scowled. “I could have used that information”.

Charles chuckled at his expression. “I'm sorry,” he said and meant it. He understood what his friend was going through.

Emeka picked his car keys and stood up. “I think I should leave, the situation is already awkward as it is.”

Charles snatched the keys from his hands. “What do you mean, and what happened between both of you?” he demanded, staring at his friend, who wasn't ready to tell him what transpired at the studio. Instead, he plopped down on the couch, looking dejected. “Is this about Tobi?” Charles asked intuitively.

“Isn't it enough?”

“So you are in love with her after all.”

“I haven't hidden my feelings from you, but let's not even go there. Just let me go. I am not proud of myself.”

“You are not going anywhere. Don't mess the situation up.”

“Okay,” he said resignedly and let Charles pull him up, and they both walked to the dining area.

Charles did a double take when he walked to the dining table, while Emeka was over-whelmed by the number of dishes on it, but managed to keep a straight face as he pulled a chair. He wondered which of the delicacies Mosun had prepared as he enjoyed the meal despite himself, but Chioma soon satisfied his curiousity.

“Wow, Mosun! This is really good. It tastes different and better than I expected.”

“Yeah, it's really good,” Charles intoned as he chewed on his meat with relish.

“I can't take all the credit,” Mosun replied humbly. “Chioma did a big part of the work too.”

“No, I was only a supervisor, but I must confess I ended up taking lessons myself. You are very creative. You didn't follow the rules but you still did a splendid job”.

“I didn't know I would enjoy cooking like this. It is fun, really fun,” she said, “I have enjoyed it tremendously. You need to see my freezer,” she laughed, bursting with confidence now that she knows they appreciate her cooking.

“Wow,” Charles said, “I think you should host us to dinner often then since Chioma won't be able to cook as much as before.”

“Why?” Emeka lifted his head from his food. He had been quiet, but Charles' statement caught his attention.

Charles held his wife's hands and looked into her eyes and both Emeka and Mosun knew the answer even before he said it: “The reason I am sure Mosun cooked the entire food unaided is because Chioma wouldn't eat it if she lifted a finger to assist the cook.”

“You're pregnant,” Emeka stated, excited for the couple. They both nodded in response, beaming. “Wow,” he said, and stood to walk around his chair, giving Chioma a bear hug, and then Charles.

Mosun watched the three of them as they hugged one another and her eyes misted with tears. There was love here, and she would have given anything to be part of their past. They added her to their circle, and she muttered her congratulations with a hug to Chioma.

The rest of the dinner was quite lively. They joked about how Chioma would look in the next three months when the pregnancy would be six months, and kept laughing and chatting until Mosun and Chioma packed the plates to the kitchen to do the dishes. As they were about to start, Emeka walked in.

“You must be tired; you should go and rest with your husband in the sitting room,” he said, sending Chioma off.

“I'm not that tired,” Chioma smiled. “Mosun did most of the work, let me help her.”

“I'll help her,” Emeka offered, winking at Chioma to cooperate, but before she could further argue with him, Charles came into the kitchen and waltzed her away.

“I can do it alone,” Mosun said as soon as they were alone.

“You must be tired too,” he muttered as he came to stand beside her.

“I am not,” she stated, refusing to look at him.

“I want to help you anyway,” he said rolling his sleeves up.

She glanced at him for a moment then adjusted to accommodate him by the sink. As she washed the plates, he rinsed and arranged them in the cabinet, both of them working silently but rhythmically until they finished.

“You mentioned you didn't enjoy house chores,” Emeka said as he arranged the last plate and she rinsed the sink.

She paused and stared up at him, giving him a look he was becoming familiar with. It was a look that showed she was upset about something and Emeka wondered what he'd said wrong again.

“I am different now,” she stated then resumed her task

“I see,” he said, and fell silent, not sure of what to say. His intention wasn't to upset her, but it seemed every time he said something, she took it the wrong way. Done, she dropped the napkin and started to head out of the room when Emeka pulled her back. “Why are you acting cold towards me? The last time I checked, we were friends.”

Mosun scoffed. This guy had a nerve! He'd come into the studio, insinuated there was something going on between her and Tobi and now he was claiming they were friends.

“My new friends believe in me, they don't judge me, and please what was that weird kiss about?” she said giving him an angry stare.

Emeka sighed. He knew she was talking about his reaction towards her at the party and at the studio earlier. He'd apologized for his behavior at the party when they'd gone for the worship program, but at the studio, he'd been livid and green with jealousy, he wasn't thinking.

“Look Mosun, you are special to me,” he started to say, but she shrugged him off.

“Stop it, Emeka. Please.”

She wasn't going to let him lead her on and make her hope when he was going to dash her expectations. She'd accepted that guys like him didn't date girls like her. She'd always known this but when she'd confronted Glory about misleading her concerning what to wear for the party, she'd said the same thing to her. She had been angry at Glory, but she knew she was right.

Glory had been sure that Mosun was wasting her time pretending she could be anything to Emeka, and had said as much. Their friendship had taken a hit. What was the point being friends with someone who was out to embarrass you and wished you the worst? This friendship with Emeka had to end too. It was playing with her emotions too much, and may not be heading anywhere.

“Just leave me alone, Emeka. You don't need a girl like me. Go and find your spec.”

“You are hurting me,” he said, his expression full of despair.

“I am going home, it's getting late,” she stated, refusing to look at him as she exited the kitchen, leaving him alone.

When she got to the sitting room, Chioma was lying in her husband's arms, dozing off while he watched the television. She stared at them momentarily and her heart filled with longing. She wanted what they had; a love that was beyond words. She heaved a sigh, snapping out of her thoughts to bid the couple good night, barely giving them a chance to reply her or ask about Emeka.

As the door closed behind her, Emeka walked into the living room, looking sad and dejected. One look at him and Charles knew whatever he hoped to achieve with helping Mosun had gone awry.

“What happened?” he asked

Emeka rolled his eyes, not saying anything.Chioma just went to hold him in her arms, and he embraced her too, releasing all his frustration. “I don't know what to do? I am scared about this.”

“I read on a friend's status once that just because it's not what you expected, doesn't mean it's not everything you have been waiting for, and you will be foolish to lose it,” Chioma replied.

“You are right,” Emeka muttered, nodding in agreement.

“Don't just stand there and thank her, your destiny is about to drive away, go and grab it,” Charles stated.

Before Charles finished his sentence, Emeka dropped the kitchen towel and practically flew out of the door, running down the stairs.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Emeka practically flew down the building, chasing after Mosun, who was already in her car, and reversing out of the parking lot. Thankfully, she was looking at her rearview mirror, otherwise she would have hit him. She quickly stepped on the break and came down from the car as Emeka rushed to her side.

"What is wrong with you?" Mosun screamed, trying to get over the shock of almost running him down.

"Thank God you are a very good driver," Emeka said, trying to lighten the situation with humour, but Mosun was not in the mood. She needed to be far away from him.

"What do you want from me Emeka?"

"I think you know the answer to that already," he said, and held her hands, but she snatched them away from him.

Emeka sighed, exasperated. "You are hurting my feelings."

"What feelings? Feelings that even you are not sure of?"

“I am sure about how I feel about you. Isn't it obvious?”

Mosun poked his chest. “You are playing me Emeka, and right now, I am not the girl for that. You say you want to build friendship, that you have feelings for me, and you want to get to know me, yet you disappear for two months, just dropping random messages here and there: *Hey!, I miss you, How was your day?,* and then the few times we saw, you couldn't wait to leave. Tell me, is that how you plan to build friendship with a woman you claim to want something more with?”

“I am new at this. I don't…” he started to say, but everything sounded like an excuse. “I am sorry!”

“No Emeka, I am sorry. If I wanted too much, or gave you any indication that I wanted you to get physical with me, I am sorry, but I am not that girl anymore. That kiss earlier...”

“I am sorry about the kiss,” he interjected, giving her an apologetic look. “It's not you, it's nothing about anything you did; it's about me, and how badly I have been suppressing wanting you.”

Emeka held her hands again, and this time she didn't resist him. He took it as a sign to move closer and held her by her waist.

“Mosun, why do you think I stayed away?”

Mosun scoffed slightly before responding, her eyes filled with pain and misting with tears. “Because you don't want me!” she stated, her hands resting on his chest. She was very much aware of this man and

the way her body molded to his and the sensations he was igniting in her by his touch, but she tried to focus on their ongoing conversation. “You came to your senses, and realised that I am not worthy of you.”

“Not worthy?” Emeka breathed trying to avoid holding her closer, but the soft feel of her hand on his chest pulled at him. He had never been physically attracted to a woman as he was to Mosun.

“If anyone is not worthy right now, it's me. That kiss earlier today… It was pent up desire. I am charmed by you. I am so attracted to you, controlling myself has been a struggle, so I stayed away, hoping it will simmer down enough for me to build friendship and get to know you better.”

Mosun half-scoffed half-smiled. “You think you're the only one fighting the attraction?”

Emeka's face creased into a smile as he continued to look into her eyes, holding her. “I want to kiss you. Can I?”

“You kissed me earlier today,” she said shyly.

That was madness; pent up desire mixed with jealousy.”

“You are jealous of Tobi?” she asked, sounding like it was the weirdest thing ever.

“Yes I am.” he confessed candidly.

“Why?”

“Have you seen the way he looks at you? The access he has to you?”

Mosun smiled. “He's my boss, and luckily for me, we have a good relationship. He respects my talent.”

Emeka didn't let her finish. “He likes the lady with the talent too. I know these things, I am a man. Yet, I shouldn't have been affected by him. I need to focus on what I want to build with you.”

Mosun nodded in agreement. “So, are we back to building friendship?”

Emeka cradled her face gently with his palms, staring into her eyes, his lips close to hers. “May I?” he asked, and she nodded shyly. It was all the encouragement he needed as he touched his lips to hers in the sweetest kiss Mosun had ever had. Knowing how emotions can quickly spiral out of control, he kept it brief, and let her go, backing a few steps away from her. “I think we've passed the friendship stage,” he announced. “It's time for stage two.”

“What is stage two?” Mosun asked, curious and amused.

“I want to start a relationship with you. I want us to know each other better, and I want us to eventually getting married.”

Mosun smiled. “You make everything sound so serious.”

“But this is serious, Mosun,” he stated, unconsciously closing the distance between, his look earnest. “I want you in my life. God chose you for me, and I can't wait to explore what He has in store for us.”

“In that case, let's get started.” Mosun said, smiling into his eyes as she looped her arms around him.

It took all Emeka's will power not to kiss her again. Instead, he smiled back, took her by the hand and walked back into Charles and Chioma's house to break the exciting news to them.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Mosun was getting late for the event because of the usual Ikorodu traffic, and it was annoying. She was already planning to sell the house in Ajah and rent a small apartment somewhere in Yaba, but Emeka had convinced her to stay there a while longer. They were dating now, and he was a big part of her decision making, but for the first time in the last seven months since that night in Charles and Chioma's place that he had asked her to be a part of his life, she wished she had put her foot down on this.

This was the second event she was managing since she finished the three-month events planning course with Chachi's management school, and she couldn't afford to mess up. It was a small event at Clara Hall; the birthday party of a young lady from Emeka's office who was turning thirty. It had coincidentally fallen on her birthday and Emeka had almost insisted that she did not take the job so that it wouldn't affect his treat for her. But she had pleaded with him that she needed to promote her brand, and he had agreed. She felt really good doing something for herself.

She had promised him yesterday when he dropped her at the salon that she would let him take her to a Chinese restaurant after the lady's celebration. She smiled to herself when she remembered the drama he'd performed there and the comment the lady beside him gave when he left

“I would kill to be married to a man like that. How did you get him?”

“He's just my boyfriend o,” she replied smiling.

“Better hold him well, make sure you get the ring,” the lady said and she had smiled.

She wasn't desperate for a ring. She knew God had great plans for her life, but assurance of marriage to a guy like Emeka would deserve a lifetime thanksgiving session every day. He was a really great guy. Although, now she knew he wasn't perfect, that he had his flaws too, but the way he always leaned on God to make him a truly good person was heart-warming.

As she drove, she made calls to the M.C and D.J ensuring that they were there already. The M.C couldn't pick because the program had started, but the D.J picked and told her that all was going well.She should have been there she chided herself, but she had to go back home to get a change of clothes for her date with Emeka. He had called, saying he would like to see her in the pink gown he bought for her on Valentine's Day,

As she approached the venue, she called Emeka, expecting him to be waiting for her outside but he was not. She hid her disappointment

with a smile and went to check the caterer, whose boys were already serving small chops, Asun and Chapman. Satisfied everything was in order, she walked into the hall.As soon as she entered, the M.C announced that the celebrant had finally arrived, and immediately, everyone stood up and began to sing *"Happy birthday to you"*

Mosun was mesmerized, looking around to identify the about fifty guests who were there. They were all familiar; her new friends from work and church, Chioma who was now very pregnant, holding her husband's hands for support as they stood, and many others. When she saw Emeka's mother and her grandfather, the tears actually dropped from her eyes. She had never felt so loved, honoured and important all her life.

It was like a dream. And it was even sweeter to know that she was part of creating the banquet that had been meant for her right from start. She knew the cost of the event after all she planned it, and was mesmerized. Emeka had paid her so much for the event that she had wondered how rich the girl must be to be able to afford such a party.

The comedians made her laugh, the soloist touched her deeply, but there was no Emeka. Just like on Emeka's party, people were called out to comment about her and she just continued to blush, wondering if they truly meant the things they said.

"I have never thought it was possible to have a considerate and humble boss, but Miss Olalere is that and more," a staff from work said.

Mosun giggled deeply at the comment. If anyone from her former place of work was here, they would think this was a scene from a movie.

“She has a very teachable spirit. She is very dependable, committed and hardworking. She cleans the chairs in church on Saturday evenings like she makes a living from it,” the youth leader said

The comment made her smile. She had joined the sanctuary unit in church because she wanted to learn how to clean after herself and, so the more she made the church clean, the more it inspired her desire to keep her own space clean too.

“Mosun has become one of my best friends, and she will definitely be the godmother of my unborn child,” Chioma said and that touched her deeply. Being Chioma's child god-mother was an honor she didn't take lightly.

Tobi also had sweet words to say too. He had now gotten over the brief heartbreak he felt when he realised that Emeka and Mosun were an item. “You are a Queen, and working with you has been a privilege. Thanks for bringing sunshine to our place of work. We will be unmotivated without you.”

His words almost brought her to tears, and she mouthed an affectionate thank you, but soon got distracted when Emeka walked in, full of smiles. It took all of her willpower not to get up from her seat and jump into his arms. He looked so good-looking and confident, his eyes fixated on her as if she was the only one in the room.

As Emeka took centre stage, the M.C came to connect a microphone to her dress and she wondered why, but she didn't ask questions. She just listened to Emeka as he spoke.

“Some time ago, I promised to hold a party for you where people would talk about the goodness in you, so that I will see how you look with five heads,” he started and Mosun smiled lovingly, remembering the conversation. It was a private joke, but people laughed anyway. “Today, you can see that the goodness in you is beyond my observation alone. You are my Nkem, a very special lady, and your presence has brought sunshine into my life. I laugh all the time these days when I think about you and your ways. You are the sweetest person in the world, and my world won't be complete until I have all of you exclusively for myself.”

Emeka dropped on one knee, and everyone stood up, some quickly bringing out their devices to record, while others watched with mushy faces, as he removed the ring from his pocket. “Mosunmola Rebecca Olalere, will you marry me?”

It was too much.

He was too much, but he was hers, and she would treasure him for life.

A tear dropped as she watched him on his knees. This wonderful man wanted to marry her. Truly, what God cannot do, does not exist. It took the audience shouting “*Say yes”* to move her lips. Even before he heard the words, Emeka was on his feet, slipping the ring

into her finger, and she smiled despite the tears flowing down her face.

“Yes Emeka, I will marry you; no one else, just you.”

Emeka couldn't help himself. He pulled her gently to him, and held her in his arms, whispering into her ears. “How long does it take to plan a wedding?”

“Why?” she asked.

“Because now that I have found you, I need to have you.”

“You have me,” Mosun said, smiling, knowing his meaning but choosing to tease him.

Emeka smiled too. “I am glad I found you behind the veil.”

“Me too,” Mosun said and smiled into his eyes, excited about what the future held for them.

AUTHORS NOTE

I was 19 years old when I began to write this book and it took me five years to finish it. I abandoned it for almost three years after writing because I considered it “not good enough”. My boyfriend, now husband found it on my laptop, read it and insisted that it was good enough, so I first published it on our wedding day in 2018. Unfortunately, I couldn't sell over 1000 copies that we printed because it had plenty errors, and I wasn't proud to have it in circulation.

It has taken me another three years to finally have it ready again, and I hope that it was worth all the back and forth. My goal for this book is to have it bless my readers, and to show them that Christ is the number one lover, and he can turn our lives around if we hand him the reigns by giving our lives to him.

My second goal was to write a christian love story that people could enjoy, and I hope that the two goals were achieved.

I like love and the concept of happily ever after. I write about it, I teach about it, and I believe in it. Love may be hard to find, or hard to nurture after you found it, but determination, resilience, sacrifice and friendship can help you surmount all odds.

I have other amazing novels that you may want to check out.

The Family Affair:

In this novel, a woman's world changes when a billionaire fell in love with her, and she considered giving him a chance.

He is an Afro-beats artiste. She is a christian girl with a career in pharmacy that is expressed through catering.

Can they build a family? Will the media, friends, fans, and family allow them to have a chance to fall in love? Or will love win against all odds, and help heal wounded hearts?

Find these and much more, in my book “The Family Affair”

Her Chef, His Crush, A Chance:

Should a man fall in love with a richer woman, who may be older? Can he love her simply for who she is, or is he after her wealth? Find out in this page-turner, how Kayode will stop at nothing to secure Funmi's affections.

The question though is: will she look past his status and take a chance on him?

This story was inspired by the necessary lockdown that most governments of the world imposed due to COVID-19.

Kayode and Funmi, both busy people in their own rights, now have time to fall in love.

Will they choose each other? Can the relationship work?

To order any of the books above, please send a Whatsapp message to +2347052419520 or an email to bonfamilytribe@gmail.com.

You can also follow me on Instagram @bolanleolosunde, and bonfamilytribe on YouTube and Instagram.

Have a great life, and don't stop loving. We all deserve to find and keep romantic love at least once in our life time. It's not impossible. Believe it, and you will attract it.

With Love,

Bolanle Olosunde-Jenrola.

This novel unveils the story of Mosunmola, a Lagos big girl by all standards. She masks her childhood pains and estranged relationship with her father by having a generous sexual experience with other men to get everything good life could offer.

Till she met Emeka Obiagu!

Emeka is the perfect man, or at least better than most men. He has grown in his career and is finally ready to take over his late father's business and settle down to marry the perfect woman.

Till he met Mosunmola!



About the Author

Bolanle Olosunde-Jenrola is a storyteller and a mental health counsellor with a Masters degree in Media and Communications from the prestigious Pan Atlantic University, a BSc in Mass Communication from Ajayi Crowther University, and a Diploma in Relationship, Couples and Family Therapy from the Institute of Counseling Nigeria.

She believes that stories have powerful capacities to entertain, educate, and inspire, so she writes novels, screenplays, and makes commercials to pass across messages that have a lasting impact on her audience.

She currently runs a storytelling agency that makes commercials and video campaigns for notable brands. This agency is also dedicated to creating series, courses, novels and films that helps young married couples, or those in a relationship have a better understanding of the phrase "Happily Ever After."

She is married to her best friend, Olatunbosun Jenrola, and together they have a lovely daughter, Morayoolaolowa.