CAUGHT IN THE VERY ACT



GRACE OLAYEMI

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the Almighty God, the only source of my inspiration and relevance.

This book is dedicated to believers who are persecuted, ostracized or tonguellashed due to their past sinful lives.

As long as you have returned to God and you have sincerely asked for mercy, you are now a Child of God. Receive freedom from guilt in Jesus' name. Amen.

Meditate on this verse Roman 8:34 "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

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My unreserved appreciation also goes to you, my wonderful readers. For always looking out for my novels, buying them, reading and sharing them. I pray that the Lord will continually bless you and keep you secured through eternity in Jesus name,

Amen.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

CHAPTER ONE

Pretty rolled out of bed after the alarm interrupted her sleep. She had had a great night once again, and she was grateful. She could not remember the last time she felt like a woman. It had been a long time she was last treated like a treasure the way the guy she was with the previous night treated her. She looked over at where he was sleeping, heard his quiet snors and smiled.

She had a great time with him, but now it was time for her to exit her world of fantasy and face reality. The thought of facing reality made her shiver. She shook her head as she brushed her teeth vigorously. She would have loved to keep her terrible reality out of her head, but it was like a shell - it followed her everywhere she went.

She was only 40, but her metabolic age would be 100 due to everything she had experienced. She wished she had made different choices in life; maybe then she would be truly happy. The only time she was truly happy was on Friday nights. That was the time she was free to be herself and express herself truly without feeling guilty or burdened.

She loved to be Pretty, and Fridays were the only days she felt pretty. Those were the only times she felt loved, appreciated, and wanted. She did not have to fake anything or try to meet any standards. She was just her young, happy self every Friday night.

Rag of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAFE ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

She rushed out of the shower to get dressed. It was Saturday morning, and she needed to return to her reality. She was no longer Pretty and had another name, identity, personality, and life. She wished she could stay as Pretty every day of the week, but that was impossible.

She brought out her make-up kit to give her face a little lift. She sighed as she opened it. If she was Pretty, she would have made her face the way she wanted to express how she truly felt. But at that point, she could not do anything funny to her face because she knew whom she was going home to.

“My life sucks!”

Pretty looked at herself in the mirror for the umpteenth time. She sighed, closed her make-up kit, and then rose to leave. She was about to walk out of the door when the man who had been lying on the bed spoke.

"When do I get to see you again, Angel?"

She hissed before walking out of the door. Where on earth did she even meet this novice? Didn't he know about 'eat and destroy'? She shook her head at her luck in men before jumping into her car. She needed to stop going for those young guys who thought they could have her whenever they wanted. She called the shots and would do whatever she liked whenever she liked it. This was the only part of

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND SOUL CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

her life she had control over, and she would only do it her way. She would choose to see any guy she wanted, and they wouldn't be the ones dictating to her. Her mantra was "eat and destroy." She had no time to keep up with commitments of loving a man or meeting them more than once. She had firsthand experience of how men could be, so she was not ready to allow another man to have her under his paws.

She drove out of the hotel and headed to her reality. She turned on the player to give herself some vibes, but her reality was scattered around the car. There was no music on the player that appealed to her whenever she was Pretty. She didn't bother to check her phone because she knew she wouldn't find any either.

She drove on in silence, which made her heart wander around various things. She wished she had a different life where she did not have to live with two identities. It was becoming hard to keep up with the gap between her different lives.

She got to her secret apartment and dashed in. She changed her outfit to fit her reality and dashed off. She must make it home before 6 am if she did not want hell to visit the earth on that day.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

CHAPTER TWO

Pastor Mrs. Theresa started praying in her usual way. It was few minutes to 6am on that Saturday morning. Her voice roared like thunder. It was certain that her neighbours were used to her being their alarm clock every morning.

Her children crawled out of their rooms, knowing it was time for the family devotion. They didn't want their mother to spank them before they found their way to the sitting room where the devotion would take place. They had lived like that for more than a decade, and it was already engraved in them. Even if their mother traveled out of town, they would still hear her voice in their subconscious.

Mrs. Theresa laid on the sitting room floor praying when her two children joined her. Her children held her in high esteem, and if they had the opportunity to come to the world again, they would choose her as their mother again. She was calm and easygoing. The only time her voice was the loudest in the room was during prayers. To her children, she was a praying machine. They wondered where she got the energy from despite her fragile look.

They took their positions on the floor and fired on into the spirit. If they were not baptized in the Holy Spirit, as old as they were, despite their fiery mother, then you could really call them bastards. They had both encountered Christ, and it was all thanks to their

Raj of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENT
TO SAVE ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

mother, who would not have any of her children go to hell. They were role models to other children in the church.

Although it was common for pastors' children to be wayward, they were the opposite of that. They had no chance to even consider the things of the world. Their mother did a thorough job of raising them in the way of the Lord.

They ended the prayer and praise session after which, Mrs. Theresa shared the word with them. It must be because she carried fire. The atmosphere changed as she started sharing the scriptures, and the children felt like they were in heaven. Their spirits opened up, and they did not miss any part of the rhema she dropped. Thanks to the daily morning devotion time, they developed a cordial relationship with God.

As they rounded up the devotion, they heard the honking of the car. Triumph, the first child, rushed outside to open the gate, while Tabitha went with her mother into the kitchen. It was Saturday morning, and they all knew what it meant - chores, visitors, and endless meetings. That was the perk of being the family of the General Overseer of one of the largest churches in Nigeria.

Their father was not always at home, but he made it home every Saturday for his various meetings and counseling sessions in the church, which was just behind their house. Tabitha started cleaning the house while Theresa took charge of the kitchen.

As big as their house was, they had no one living with them. Their father, Apostle Timothy, loved his privacy, and that was why he separated the church building from his residential house by a fence. He liked to keep his family affairs away from the public eye, and so he never entertained visitors in the house. But because it was Saturday, he does his counseling in the church, they had to prepare enough snacks and food to entertain the counselees.

“Welcome, Dad,” Triumph prostrated to greet his father before opening the back seat to get his suitcase.

He did not wait for an answer because he knew his father like the palm of his hands. He knew his father would be too preoccupied with his own affairs to respond to any greeting, but he was not always too busy to greet almost every church member with a smile and even engage in small talks with them. That had given Triumph concern when he was much younger, and he would hate God or anything related to spirituality. But through his mother’s influence, he had overcome that stage, and at 16, he was not bothered by whatever his father did. The only problem he had was…

"Theresa! Theresa! Theresa! How many times did I call you?" Timothy barked as he walked into the house.

"Welcome. You called me thrice!" Theresa responded without looking up at him. What was the point of looking at the face that had only brought her sorrow for the past 17 years?

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENT
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

"Didn't I tell you to trim the flowers outside the gate? Even the ones in the premises all look like an abandoned forest. You know that today is going to be a busy day and many of our church members and visitors would walked past the gate for various reasons. All you had to do was call the gardener to fix it. Is that too difficult for you?"

Triumph sighed and walked inside. His mother had told them to always walk away when their father started acting up. He wanted to stand in and defend his mother, but he did not want to disobey her, so he just grabbed his sister's hand and moved upstairs.

"Sometimes I wonder why I ended up marrying a dunce. You are too cold and sluggish for my liking. It's almost 7am and the house is still looking like this. You have just one responsibility - to look after the house. Yet, you have failed woefully. Look at the way you look like a used doll. You know that I can return with a friend or anyone from the church can visit the house, yet you will keep yourself looking unkempt. Isn't taking care of yourself the first thing you ought to do every morning?"

"I don't know what I did to God to end up with a woman like you. Yet, you hold women's program and tell the women to be Proverbs 31 women. Is this how the Proverbs 31 woman left her house looking like a piggery?"

Ray of Hope Stories
HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENT
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Timothy stormed into the house without waiting for any response from Theresa. She sighed and returned to the kitchen to continue her work. She was used to it already and no longer felt sad about it. The only concern she had was her children, who were growing up to see the cruelty of their father.

She did not want them to have a negative notion about marriage, so she always educated them on why her case was different with her husband. She always defended him so that they would not hate him. She hoped when they eventually settled down, they would not have a marriage like hers.

“Mummy, are you okay?” she heard Triumph ask, and smiled.

“Of course, I’m okay. Go and help your sister in the living room so that you'll get the place clean on time.”

Triumph left, leaving her with her thoughts. She knew Timothy was a hard man even before they got married, but she did not know he would be that bad. She had felt on top of the world when she got married to her General Overseer at 24. She felt like a queen. Many young sisters envied her, and some even left the church because they thought Timothy would marry them. Looking back now, she wished she could trade places with them. She wished she had prayed and sought God’s face before saying ‘yes’ to his proposal.

But how could she have said no? Timothy proposed to her right in the church during the Sunday service. After his sermon that day, he called her out and prophesied into her life. She was on her knees, saying amen to the prayers as he laid hands on her. Before she knew it, she heard laughter from the people around and the church band started playing softly. She opened her eyes to find Timothy kneeling before her with a box.

"Sis Theresa, would you do me the honour of ending my lonely single days? Will you be the queen in my palace and the treasure of my heart?" he said into the microphone, and the whole church roared.

She was shocked, confused, and scared. She felt different shades of emotions that day, aside from joy. She could remember clearly that she lost her peace right after saying 'yes'. Her friends said it was the enemy's trick to make her miss out on God's will, but was it truly the enemy's trick, or was it God's way of telling her he wasn't the one?

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

CHAPTER THREE

It was definitely God's way of telling her that Timothy was not the right man for her. Timothy was a gentleman and every woman's dream. He had a good sense of humour and was very romantic. He treated her like a queen and that was good enough until they got married and he became a different person.

She had known him to be very assertive and driven, but she did not know he would be a military husband. Timothy was a perfectionist to the core and a self-willed one at that. He did not listen to anyone and was always right. He hated to be challenged and would lash out at anyone who tried to correct him.

Theresa found out he got the trait from his father. Timothy went from being a sweet husband into a beast when Theresa got pregnant. She was too tired to be the perfect wife he wanted. He had a standard for her to dress, speak, relate, and do everything. He gave her rules for everything, and she was not allowed to do anything without his permission. He hated it when she talked while he was talking or tried to suggest anything. He was the lord of the house, and she had no right to say anything.

The house stopped being perfect because she had no strength to do most of the chores. She suggested they got a maid, and he refused blatantly. He had stopped her from working so she could focus on taking care of the home. He wanted to refine her from being a

Rod of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAFE ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

'village girl' to become poised enough to sit on the throne of Mummy G.O. He employed various coaches to teach her foreign languages, etiquette, poise, and everything he felt she lacked.

Theresa was tired and overwhelmed. There was nothing she did right before him, and he would complain until he got tired. Initially, she would show her emotions when he did something to her, but when she found out she was dealing with a rock that could not be moved, she gave up trying. She accepted her fate and tried to adjust.

"Why did you dress like a village woman?"

"Why did you carry yourself like that?"

"Why did you have to open the door like that?"

"Why did you have to speak like that?"

"You used a past tense when you were supposed to use a future tense."

"You pronounced that word wrongly."

"You placed the cup wrongly."

Theresa got used to being told that she was inadequate and could never meet up to her husband's standard that she gave up. What

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

was the point of trying when she could never satisfy him? She started doing things at her own pace and however she liked it. That was when Timothy resorted to using his fists.

The first time he did it, he apologized, and she thought that would be the end. But he continued to do it and eventually made it a second nature to hit her whenever he was angry, which was all the time.

Theresa finished making breakfast and had the table set. Timothy got to the table, and as always, the children watched the drama he would perform again.

"Doesn't he ever get tired?" Triumph had once asked his mother.

He could not understand why he was always angry when he was at home but would be the calmest human being at church. Surprisingly, he ate calmly, and everyone was relieved that the beast was calm on that day.

Rdg of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

CHAPTER FOUR

Pretty drove out of her secret apartment with complete ecstasy. She had rushed down there before her usual 8pm movement and had enough time to unwind and calm her nerves before going to the club to enjoy a swell time. The week had been an excessively long one for her, and she was grateful to have the time to relieve herself from all the stress. She didn't know why she felt uneasy that night as she continued to look over her shoulders as though someone was watching her.

She was used to feeling like that when she first started her escapades. She had been afraid someone might recognize her and ruin her fun. To avoid anyone knowing her, she traveled to a neighboring town every Friday to visit different clubs. She never went to the same club twice, and she made sure to change her disguise every Friday.

Still feeling anxious and overly self-aware, she drove into a new club in the town to enjoy the best time of her life. She didn't make any friends outside her reality, so she was used to being alone at the club until she found a guy she liked and wanted to end the night with. She did the selection and would not wait for anyone to hit on her before she chose who she wanted. She had the charm that won men's hearts, and none of them could say no to her.

Ray of Hope Stories
HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENT
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

She sat at a corner to observe the air. She loved the colored light and the loud music that drowned her sorrow. As she drank her alcohol, she scanned the room. Her eyes caught a young man who was sitting alone. She looked away from him but could not help looking back.

"Why was he sitting alone with his head in his palm? No matter the challenges a man has, once you enter the club, you should drop it and not wear your heart on your sleeves," she thought before looking away from him.

Something in her endeared her to the man, but she didn't want to spend the night with a killjoy. She was there to have fun and not console anyone. She had her own troubles, and if she could be doing a good job of dealing with it the way she was, the man should also deal with his problems.

She stood up and marched to the dance floor. It was time for her wild dance. That was one of the moments she enjoyed most every Friday night. She threw herself in the air and started twirling her waist. She didn't have to announce herself before she stole the spotlight; she was a very good dancer. The men thronged around her, some hailed, and the ladies also copied her dance steps.

She went on like that for almost one hour before she ran out of energy. She walked back to her seat to catch her breath before continuing her dance. It was past 11 pm at that time, and she

looked around again to see if any man would catch her fancy. She was surprised to still see that man sitting in the same position he was over an hour ago. She walked over to his side and started a conversation with him. She was not used to talking too much with the men she chose for the night, but that man was easy to talk to so she chatted away.

He did not disclose why he was sad or sat down without joining the fun, and she didn't push him. He surprised her when he mentioned he saw her dancing and was blown away; she blushed at the compliment, and they left the club to wrap up the night.

Pretty gave her best that night and even exerted herself. She found herself enjoying the man's company, which was very unusual. No matter how much alcohol she drank, she always felt guilty when it was time to actually sleep with the men. She would see her children's disappointed faces and have to drown herself in more alcohol. She would hear her husband's demeaning voice shouting down at her, and would feel even more humiliated.

However, that night was different. Guilt was replaced with ecstasy. She travelled to heaven many times and returned. She was blown away and strangely satisfied. When they were done, she looked over at the man sleeping by her side, and her heart yearned for him. That was a strange feeling that was against her escapade etiquette,

Ray of Hope Stories

but she allowed it. She cleaned herself up and slept soundly beside him.

Her alarm went off at 4am, and she had to rush off. She quickly showered, got ready, and was about to leave. She would definitely meet this man again. He had everything she had ever wanted, and she would not miss the chance of seeing him again. She tapped him gently, and he rolled to the other side. She had to tap him again before he partially opened his eyes.

"I'm very sorry to disturb your sleep. I'm about to leave, and I don't know if you would like us to meet again," Pretty said.

The man sat up and looked at her. That was the first time he would have a clear view of the woman who took him to heaven the previous night. He had been too preoccupied to see her face properly. She looked more gorgeous in the morning, and he could not help being mesmerized by her natural beauty, contrary to the makeup she had on the previous night.

"You are beautiful," he found himself saying.

"I know," Pretty blushed. She knew he shouldn't see her real face, but she could not help it. She was going to keep this man, and nothing would happen. It was time for her to drop her fears and enjoy life to the fullest. There was no big deal in what she was

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAFE ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

doing. It was not as if no one had ever done it before. She was not the first and would definitely not be the last person to do it.

"Why are you leaving so early? Shouldn't we have more fun this morning before you leave?"

"I have to leave now. We can have fun later. Give me your number. I'll call you."

Pretty collected his number and was about to leave when she did another unusual thing.

"What is your name?" she asked, breaking the ultimate rule in her code of conduct. "Never ask for their names!"

"Stephen," the man replied, smiling.

She bolted out of the door, reminiscing about the previous night.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

CHAPTER FIVE

"Let somebody shout Hallelujah!"

"Living souls in the house, shout a big Hallelujah!"

The whole church roared as everyone shouted at the top of their voices. It had been a wonderful service at Glorious Saints Assembly. It was the women's Sunday, and you could see the excitement on everyone's faces. The women all wore their best native attires and were seated towards the front, while the men sat at the rear. The women led every part of the service, and it was time for the icing on the cake.

It was time for Theresa to minister, and the women roared in excitement. Who would not want to sit under the powerful ministration of Theresa? She was a living wonder. She spewed fire from her mouth, and every word she said carried weight. The women always looked forward to their meetings, and on Sundays when she had to minister, the church was always unusually filled.

Many women admired her life because she carried so much grace and elegance. She was always beautifully dressed, and not like other regular G.O's wives who would dress shabbily. She was smart and still had heads turning when she passed by. Should we even mention her prophecies? They were always accurate and fiery. It was always like she lived in heaven and always had

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

meetings with God. You cannot sit under Theresa's ministration and remain ordinary.

Timothy was going to introduce her, and that was the part that got butterflies in people's bellies. As he showered praises on his wife, there were a lot of "huns," "hmms," "ohhhs," and various sounds coming from the congregation.

Many single ladies wished they would marry men who would love them the way Timothy loved Theresa. The married women wished their husbands would treat them how Timothy treated Theresa.

Theresa took the microphone, and the atmosphere changed. It was her style to sing, chant, and take everyone into the spirit before she would move into sharing the word. She raised a song, and the whole church joined in.

Stephen could not believe his eyes. He rubbed his fingers on his eyes and opened them widely again; he could still see Pretty. He had not gotten over her since the previous Friday and had been expecting her call. He should have been thrilled to see her in church that Sunday, but what he saw baffled him.

That Friday was his last night in town, and he could not stay in the same house with his wife. She had been nagging about the fact that he lost his job, and they had to relocate for him to take up a lesser-

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

paid job. She had threatened not to go with him, called him names, and lashed out at him.

He got fed up and decided to go to the club. He could not get his wife's nagging out of his head, even with the loud music that blared in the clubhouse. He saw how everyone was happy and wished he could be happy like them. He had never tasted alcohol in his life, but he did for the first time that night. He was determined to do anything to get his confidence back as a man.

When he met Pretty, she treated him like a king. She made him feel loved, and he could not express how grateful he was. Even as a Christian, he knew adultery was bad, but he could not help it. He was determined to continue seeing Pretty for as long as he lived. He blamed his choice on his wife's nagging and would always exonerate himself whenever his conscience pricked him.

They found the Glorious Saints Assembly immediately they got into the new town, and his wife insisted that was the church they would start attending. He didn't have much of a say, and since he had not found any other church, he tagged along. It must have been God's way of bringing him closer to Pretty because there she was standing on the altar, ministering powerfully.

CHAPTER SIX

Stephen sat with his wife and children at the first-timers' corner. They had been entertained and were waiting for the G.O. to personally minister to each of them before they would be allowed to leave.

“This church feels like home. I love the way the welfare people are taking care of us. It is not like our church, where they would not even know that a new person came, let alone treat them specially,” Vera, Stephen’s wife, said to break his train of thought.

He nodded at what she said, even though he didn't catch most of the words. His mind was fixed on Pretty. Maybe the person just looked like her. He felt it was impossible for the person he saw in church that Sunday to be the same Pretty who gave him such bliss the previous Friday.

“They must be doppelgangers,” he concluded and brought his mind back to what his wife was saying.

“I’m sure no one from that church would even call to ask about us, even if we don’t go back there again. Hospitality and welfarism are important in building the membership of the church,” Vera kept going on and on about what her previous church could have done, which they did not do. Their young children got tired of sitting down and started playing around the church premises.

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Timothy and Theresa walked over to where Stephen sat with Vera. It was their turn to be ministered to. They exchanged pleasantries, and immediately he shook Theresa's hand, he confirmed his fears.

"This is Pretty!"

His conclusions were not adding up though. The voice, hand, face, and everything seemed like Pretty, but could she be Pretty?

"Please, ma'am, do you have a twin sister?" he asked after trying the math in his head.

"No, I don't," Theresa answered, and Stephen's body shook. This was the same voice that soothed his soul on that Friday night. He needed to confirm his suspicion.

If it was the same person, then that means she had traveled all the way down to another city that night to have fun. But why would she do that? She seemed happy in her marriage with her husband. He saw all the displays of love they did during the service, and it was obvious she had a great marriage. Why would she be cheating on such a powerful apostle? Even if she was cheating, how would she still be able to minister with such power? Nothing was making sense to Stephen anymore.

He listened as Timothy spoke, and then he asked another question.

"Sorry, ma'am, were you at Crescent City on Friday?"

"No!" Theresa replied without blinking an eyelid. She was getting irritated by his questions, but she knew better than to lose her cool. She kept smiling as she answered Stephen's ridiculous questions. Why would he be asking her all those questions?

"Have you seen me somewhere before?" Theresa asked, looking him in the eyes.

Stephen was surprised. Even if she was Pretty, shouldn't she be at the point where she was afraid that someone had recognized her? She exuded a great level of confidence that made him conclude that he must have been mistaken.

"Not exactly. You look like someone I know from Crescent City. Like my wife said earlier, we just moved into this town yesterday and still settling in."

"We would like to make this church our permanent church," Vera said, smiling.

Timothy was happy to hear that. It was his joy that the ministry was expanding, and that is what he had always wanted. He prayed for the family, assigned a welfare worker to take them home in one of the church's cars when he found out they had no personal car. They expressed their gratitude for his show of kindness and turned to leave.

Raj of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Stephen turned back to have a final glance at Theresa, and what he saw made his heart stop.



CHAPTER SEVEN

Stephen turned back to have a final glance at Theresa, and what he saw made his heart stop. Theresa winked at him before turning around to follow her husband. He thought his eyes were playing tricks on him and stood there for a while before he heard his wife's voice calling out to him.

So he was right? She was Pretty! The G.O's wife was the same Pretty he met at the club.

"How is this even possible? How can a respectable woman like that be involved in such a mess? Why would she do such a thing?" he kept questioning as they walked towards the car.

Theresa hated herself for winking at Stephen. She had done a great job concealing her shock, fear, and every other emotion she felt the moment she saw him. She felt her world crashing and her long-held secret about to become an open scandal.

Her mind started calculating the many things that could happen if the whole world found out she had been living a double life. The women in the church who looked up to her would be disappointed. The ones she mentored in society would be shattered. She couldn't even picture how disappointed her children would be. How would she convince them it wasn't her fault she chose that life? How

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

would she make them understand that she was a victim in everything?

Theresa immediately composed herself as they greeted Stephen and his family. She knew she had succeeded in making him believe he was mistaken. Just as they turned to leave, Pretty winked at him, and that was the end of her disguise. Once Pretty took over her, she was always fearless and daunting. She went for whatever she wanted, and she knew Pretty still wanted Stephen.

When she got home from the church, she went about her usual duties, attended every meeting they had, and then it was time to retire for the night. Timothy was around to take charge of the evening devotion. They finished the devotion, and the children went into their rooms. Theresa and Timothy also entered their room.

"Are you sure you don't know that brother?" Timothy asked immediately they entered the room.

Theresa was not ready for such conversations that evening. She knew Timothy hardly talked to her, and she was used to the silence. Whenever he did talk, he would insult her and make her feel less than herself. She chose silence, but that did not sit well with Timothy.

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENT
SAVE ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

"Are you not the one I'm talking to? Have you suddenly gone deaf, or have you reverted to your animalistic behavior again?" he exclaimed.

Theresa stood up from the bed and walked into the bathroom. She wouldn't allow Timothy's words to get to her.

She stayed in the bathroom for a while before stepping out again. "I don't know him," she replied, and Timothy turned away from his Bible to face her.

"Why was he asking you all those questions, then?"

"You should have asked him that while you were in the church. Please leave me alone tonight. I need to sleep."

"What was I expecting from a useless, rude woman like you? It would be better to communicate with a mad person than with you," he muttered, turned back to his Bible and continued studying.

Theresa laid on the bed, covered her head with the duvet, and unsolicited tears started flowing from her eyes. She didn't deserve what she was getting. What kind of beast did she marry? She sobbed uncontrollably, feeling helpless and powerless. Was there anything she had control over?

After sobbing her heart out, Timothy crawled onto the bed beside her, and soon she could hear his quiet snores. Thoughts she had

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

battled with for years began to resurface. She reached her hand under the bedside drawer and retrieved the small jack knife she had kept there.

She had bought it on the day she had felt like killing Timothy. She rubbed the blunt edge of the knife and brought it closer to Timothy's neck. She had watched videos on the best place to slit the knife that would end Timothy's life in seconds.

She had suffered enough, and no one would blame her if she ended her misery right then and there. Hadn't she tried hard enough? She had endured his malicious behavior for far too long and could finally retaliate for all the pain he had caused her. She was sure he would go straight to hell for treating her so badly.

Rag of Hope Stories
A HOPE OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

CHAPTER EIGHT

Theresa washed her hands in a hurry. She could not wait to treat Timothy to a sumptuous meal. She knew he had been pushing her hard since they got married and had not looked at her with affection the way he used to while they were courting. He wanted her to be more sophisticated, although she had tried to keep up, she had not satisfied his expectations.

He wanted his wife to be incredible. He would love to show her off and bask in the glory of having such a remarkable wife. Theresa was trying to get on the pedestal but kept falling short, which put him off. At some point, she stopped trying, and that made him fed up with the relationship.

He nagged about everything she did, which made Theresa disappointed. But she was on the verge of impressing him once again. She watched a lot of videos, listened to podcasts, and read books on how to please one's husband. She was willing to practice everything to regain Timothy's love.

Although heavily pregnant, she made his favorite meal and kept the house spotless as he wanted. She practiced French and Spanish as if her life depended on it. She read all her books on eloquence, and she could speak as if she had hot yam in her mouth.

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAFE ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Timothy was away on a ministerial assignment for about a month. He would return on that day, and she wanted to impress him with her achievements. She wore one of the clothes he bought for her, styled her hair the way he always wanted, and sat in the living room.

She did not have to wait for too long before Timothy returned from his trip. He did not look as tired as she had expected, but she was happy to see him. He wasn't all that thrilled to see her, but he was happy to see the house in order. He praised her for doing a great job of making the house spotless.

His compliments took Theresa from Earth to the third heaven. She felt like she had just won the award for the best wife in the world. She could not remember the last time he said something nice about her. She drank in the euphoria of the moment and wished he would remain like that.

He kept praising her as he ate the food. After eating, he joined her in the kitchen to wash the dishes. At that point, Theresa was convinced she was dreaming. Maybe God was just showing her how her family ought to be. She feared she would soon wake up from that blissful dream to another reality.

But it wasn't a dream. Timothy joined her in the living room. They watched a movie before he politely requested they watch the news. Still on cloud nine, Theresa obliged with utmost delight.

Her joy was soon short-lived when Timothy's phone rang. He walked into the room to answer the call. She waited for him for a while, and when he didn't return, she went after him. She already missed him and could not wait to lie in his arms again.

"I love you too, baby," she heard Timothy say just as she reached the front of their bedroom door. She knew she had heard it wrongly. She stood there to confirm what she heard.

"I love you a million times. You are the dearest to me in the whole world," she heard again, and that confirmed her fears.

Who could Timothy be saying that to? Was he cheating on her? Never! That can't be possible. He was a Christian, not just a Christian, but a minister of God, not just a minister but the founder of a church, a General Overseer. Something must be wrong somewhere.

Theresa did not know how she got back into the living room. She could not shed tears because her heart was frozen. After all she had done to be the perfect wife for Timothy, she could not believe her ears. A part of her kept telling her she was wrong, but she knew what she heard. She might be stupidly in love with Timothy, but that did not mean she was deaf as well.

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Timothy returned to the living room, and like a character in a comedy series, she grinned at him as though nothing had happened.



CHAPTER NINE

Nothing remained the same for Theresa after that encounter. She gave up her quest to please Timothy and employed a maid to help her around the house, despite knowing that Timothy would not like it. She became hostile and unruly. At first, he didn't seem to be bothered by it, but he became irritated when she denied him his conjugal rights.

"I know you are pregnant, and I understand whatever hormonal imbalance you're going through right now, but you cannot continue to do this to me. Remember what the Bible says..." Timothy was saying, but Theresa cut him short.

"May thunder strike you like that for calling the Bible! You! The Bible! You know what the Bible said, yet you have the guts to cheat!" Theresa blurted out without thinking.

She had confirmed her suspicions. Timothy was cheating. Most of his ministerial appointments were lies. He was always going off to be with the other woman. Sometimes, he met with her during his actual ministerial trips.

She knew men are scum, but she never knew Christian men and even ministers were also scum. She had learned this and would not allow herself to be played again in the name of religion.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Raj of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

"How dare you talk to me like that?" Timothy was enraged.

He would not play it cool with her anymore. He moved closer and wanted to force her, but Theresa was already prepared. She brought out her jackknife without hesitation. He was taken aback by that move and took a while before regaining his composure. Theresa had become wild, and he didn't know why.

"I'm sorry, Esa. Let's talk about this!" he pleaded while moving towards the door.

"Talk about what? Talk about how I gave my all to you in this marriage. How I lost myself to satisfy you. How I worked myself to death just to see a smile on your face. How I take your ministry as if it's mine. How I take care of your rude family members and endure all the insults. What exactly do you want to talk about?"

Timothy remained quiet.

“Do you think talking can take away the pain I've been going through for the past one year? I've only been married to you for a year, and I can't remember the last time I experienced joy. You have turned me into a slave. You knew how I was before we got married, so if you didn't love me, why did you marry me? You've been trying to change me. Do I enjoy it? No! But I've been doing my best. Yet, nothing seems to satisfy you.”

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

“If you had stopped there, Timothy, I could have lived with it. I would have continued to endure and hoped that one day I would meet your standards. But no, despite everything, you had the audacity to cheat on me.”

“You deserve to die today!”

Theresa rushed at him as he quickly bolted out through the door. She missed her steps while running down the stairs and fell face forward. The pain she felt could not be described. She passed out at that very moment.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

CHAPTER TEN

Theresa was unconscious for more than five days. The baby had been taken out of her and placed in an incubator. She was also on life support. It was only through the mercies of God that she survived and returned alive.

She thought she was gone for good. When she opened her eyes, she could not believe she had to face the terrible world again. She saw her mother and Timothy's mother by her side and sighed.

As she tried to sit up, Timothy entered with the baby, and the two women rushed towards him. They were lost in their admiration of the baby to even notice she had opened her eyes. It was when Timothy moved closer to her bed that he knew she was already awake.

The doctor checked on her condition, asked her some questions before giving Timothy some instructions. He followed the doctor out. She was boiling with fury at the sight of Timothy, and it was such a relief to her that he was gone. She refused to talk to her mother or Timothy's mother. She pushed the baby away when her mother placed him on her chest.

One look at the baby, and she could see Timothy. The hurt of everything she had gone through in his hands came to her again. She could not even look at the baby again.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Timothy returned and sat by her side. She looked away from him, but he held her hand. She yanked his hand away, but he brought it back again.

"Don't touch me with that filthy hand of yours!" she screamed. Their mothers were confused.

"Don't do that here. Our mothers are watching."

"Oh! So you have a sense of shame? Why didn't you think of your mother before going around town like a dog?"

"Mind your language, Theresa."

"Or what? Or you will beat me like you used to? I can tolerate anything from a man but infidelity. You use me like a slave, battered me, and made me lose my self-esteem. If you had stopped at that, I would have endured it. But you have the guts to cheat! You are a bastard! I'm getting a divorce after this. I don't want to have anything to do with a dog like you."

Timothy became afraid. He had prayed that Theresa would keep the matter between them. He didn't want his case to make the headlines. He knew that as a popular and prominent figure in society, the media would not hesitate to chew on anything that had to do with him. He had done a good job of staying away from scandal, and he would not allow Theresa to ruin that.

Timothy's mother was confused. She thought her son was the perfect husband. Theresa had been a good daughter-in-law to her. It was shocking for her to find out that her son had been mistreating her. On top of that, he still cheated. She felt ashamed to call him her son.

Theresa's mother stood up from where she was sitting, quietly placed the baby in his cot, moved to where Timothy was, and landed a slap on his face. Everyone was shocked because no one expected such a move from her.

"How dare you maltreat my daughter? Who do you think you are? Did I give her to you for you to turn her into a punching bag? And you have the audacity to cheat and pretend to be a good person. Pastor indeed! Is this what your Bible taught you?" she exclaimed.

She turned to Theresa.

"Do you remember what I told you when you brought this fool to my house? I knew those who call themselves pastors are good for nothing. They are the worst set of people on earth. At least we, who are not deceiving ourselves, would never do terrible things like these deceivers."

"Why didn't you tell me you were suffering? I asked you!" she continued, breaking down in tears.

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENT
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Theresa also cried. Her hurt came fresh to her, and she cried her eyes out. She could not tell her mother because she knew her mother was a no-nonsense woman. Her mother would not have tolerated Timothy's behavior, and she would have encouraged her to divorce him. That was why she kept suffering in silence. But that was ending already! She was ready to get a divorce.

"I want to divorce him!" she said to her mother amidst sobs.

“Yes, dear! You will divorce him, but he will pay for what he has done. I'll make him know that no one can hurt my daughter and get away with it. Divorcing him is the least we will do to him. I will destroy him in this town. I will make sure I ruin his reputation and ensure he cannot start another church in this town or any other town in this nation again.”

Timothy was on the floor, begging Theresa's mother to have mercy on him.

"You should have thought about mercy before doing those nasty things to my daughter," she replied.

* * * * * *

Everything started happening very fast. Timothy was arrested for domestic violence and placed behind bars. The church board was informed of the situation, and they held numerous meetings.

Triumph, Theresa's son, was also growing rapidly. Theresa loved Timothy and could not bear to see him go through such humiliation any longer. The church elders were always preaching forgiveness to her. She had forgiven him, but her mother was the problem.

Theresa's mother would not hear anything. She was hell-bent on destroying Timothy. Everyone begged her, but she did not budge. Theresa was already living with her, and she wouldn't listen to anyone.

"I didn't give my daughter to him because I couldn't take care of her. I am capable of caring for my daughter. She was doing fine here with me before she married that fool. She's the only one I have in the world. I don't want to wake up one day and read the news that Mrs. Theresa, the wife of the General Overseer of Glorious Saints Assembly, died in her sleep. I don't want that beast to kill my daughter."

Theresa begged her mother to release Timothy from prison. After months of pleading, she finally agreed and set him free.

To say that Timothy was battered would be an understatement. He was a mere shadow of his former self. The few months he spent behind bars had taken a toll on him. He looked like a skeleton, and he had lost his dignity and self-worth.

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENT
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

He didn't know the extent to which his case had escalated until he was out of prison. The media was on his case, and he wished for nothing but death. He hated Theresa for causing him to lose everything he had ever worked for.

The church elders told him he would not be allowed to preach for a while until he settled with God and his wife. He was left to figure out his path, not even knowing where to start. He spoke to the church elders to help persuade Theresa, and they agreed.

Theresa had already developed a soft spot for Timothy. Seeing Triumph every day had made her forgive Timothy. Triumph was his exact replica, and she didn't want her son to grow up without a father.

However, her mother was not persuaded, no matter how hard Timothy and the elders begged. Timothy was not allowed to see Triumph. He felt a deep ache and wished he had been more cautious. Every day, he resented Theresa more for causing him so much pain. He begged her so he could resume his position in the church, not because he loved her or wanted her back.

"What would he do with an unsophisticated woman like that?" he wondered.

Ray of Hope Stories
HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENT
SAFE ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

However, he didn't give up his pursuit. Finally, Theresa's mother gave in on the condition that she would kill him if her daughter ever shed a tear in his house.

Timothy remembered his time in prison and behaved himself. He treated Theresa like a queen, doing a good job of hiding his disgust. He apologized and cut ties with the lady he was seeing.

Two years passed slowly, and Theresa enjoyed bliss in her marriage. She was somehow grateful for the incident that made Timothy become a loving and supportive husband. He listened to her, played with her, and helped around the house.

Then she gave birth to Tabitha. Her joy knew no bounds as she finally had the family she had always dreamed of. She felt everything in her life was falling into place, until another tragedy struck.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Raj of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Theresa felt everything in her life was falling into place, until another tragedy struck. She received the news that her mother had died in an accident. She felt her world crashing. Her mother had singlehandedly raised her, because her father died before she was born. She hadn't even had the chance to repay her mother for her lifelong labor.

Her sorrow would have been minimal if that was the only thing she was sad about. However, her mother had not accepted Jesus before she passed away. Although her mother was a good person, Theresa knew that good works alone could not save anyone.

She cried her eyes out, unable to imagine the torment her mother was going through at that moment. It felt as though she had been stabbed in the stomach. Her mother used to love God, but the church hurt her deeply, causing her to lose her faith. Her encounter with Timothy had further worsened her condition, leading her to believe God was not worth it.

Theresa wished she had prayed more for her mother and lived a more exemplary Christian life that could have healed her mother's pain. Regret overwhelmed her. Her mother was quietly laid to rest, and Theresa was left with everything she had. However, Theresa couldn't bring herself to take over any of the properties, so she

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Raj of Hope Stories
SAFE ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

decided to donate everything to charity and only kept her mother's personal belongings.

When Timothy discovered what she had done, he became enraged. "Why didn't you tell me?" he raged.

"Tell you what? They were my mother's properties, and I can do whatever I like with them," Theresa responded.

"I am your husband. I have the right to know everything you're doing. You need to get my approval before you make any decisions," Timothy argued.

Theresa was not in the mood for such discussions. She was still mourning her mother and didn't want to argue about her properties.

"We have more than enough. Clearly, we don't need my mother's properties," she stated.

"Who are you to say that? Even if we don't need them, you should have consulted me before making the donations. So, you want to receive praise for being the one who donated it? Shouldn't you donate on behalf of the family?" Timothy countered.

Theresa was exhausted from the ongoing back-and-forth with Timothy.

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

"What exactly are you angry about? Is it because of the donation I made, or because I didn't tell you, or because I didn't give you credit for the donation?"

"Everything!"

"I'm sorry!"

Timothy stormed away. That was the beginning of his outburst. He suddenly became like a loose beast. It was as though he had been tied up before and was suddenly set free. He became worse than he had ever been to Theresa and even the children.

At first, Theresa thought it was because of the donations, but soon she found out it was beyond the donations. Timothy was out to get her. He unleashed on her and would beat her to a pulp at the slightest provocation.

"Run to your mother!" he would taunt her and mock her for being a mama's girl.

Theresa missed her mother even more. She wished her mother was alive to defend her. There was no one she could talk to. The whole world saw Timothy as a perfect Apostle. His public show of affection towards her and the children was enough for everyone to believe that she had everything together and that she was the problem in the union.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Theresa ached from within as she remembered everything Timothy had done to her. The thoughts kept rushing back to her as she still had the knife in her hands. She couldn't wish for anything more than to stab Timothy.

She eventually buried the thought, put the knife back in its place, and lay on the bed. She knew it was going to be a long battle before she could sleep naturally. She wasn't ready for the struggle, so she took her sleeping pills and lay down, waiting for sleep to take her away to a land free from sorrow.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND SOCIAL CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

CHAPTER TWELVE

Theresa carefully descended the stairs, unsure of her destination. From the top, she could see her treasure just a few steps away. Instead of moving towards it, however, she found herself walking in the opposite direction. She wanted to stop, turn around, and head towards her treasure, but her body seemed to have a will of its own, carrying her farther away with each step.

She knew the treasure was meant for her, something she had yearned for a long time. But then, she felt a loss of control over her own movements. Her legs continued to propel her downward until she reached the lowest point of the stairs. With one final step, she found herself on the ground, and the stairs vanished as if from a movie scene.

Helplessly standing on the floor, Theresa gazed at her treasure, now tantalizingly out of reach. She had been so close before, with the stairs providing a path upward. But now, she had nothing to aid her. Frustration welled up inside her, and tears streamed down her face.

How would she ever reach her treasure without the stairs to climb? She desperately searched for assistance, but no one offered to help. She attempted various methods to bridge the gap and reach her treasure, but her efforts proved fruitless. Exhausted and defeated, she sank to the floor, consumed by pain.

Bag of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENT
SAFE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Suddenly, a soothing voice broke through her anguish. "Did you call for help?" it asked from behind her.

Tears still flowing, Theresa replied, "I have called for help, but received none. I have tried everything to get my treasure, but all was in vain. At this point, I no longer care. If I obtain the treasure, fine. If not, that's also fine. Look at the bruises I've acquired in my pursuit. I've been battered and wounded, and now the treasure holds little significance to me."

The man smiled. "Come unto me all she that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light," he said.

"That sounds familiar. I have heard it before," she replied.

"But do you believe it? Do you trust me enough to give your burden to me?" he asked.

"I have been battered beyond repair. I have gone far away from my treasure. Look at the huge distance between my treasure and me. If I give the last thing I'm holding on to you, what guarantee do I have to get what I want?" she questioned.

"Just trust me with your troubles. You have tried to do things in your own way, and look at where it has landed you. You have shut me out of your life, and I could only watch from afar. You were

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENT
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

wise in your own eyes. You thought you could lay hold of the treasure without me. But you have forgotten that I am the treasure you seek," he reassured.

Theresa's heart opened up. She saw her folly. She had been engrossed in achieving a perfect marriage and having a blissful home that she forgot who she was. She was a child of God, but she had lost her identity in the process. She allowed everything that was going on to take her far away from God. She had lost her salvation and kept walking farther away from God.

"I have been foolish. Please forgive me, Lord," she cried out and woke up.

It was a dream, but it felt so real. She was perspiring, and even the pillow she laid on was wet. She must have screamed because Timothy also woke up. He didn't give her much thought as he went back to sleep.

She knelt beside her bed. She did not need anyone to give her a sermon. She knew she had sinned. She had committed adultery, lied, and engaged in many other vices. She had harbored hatred, unforgiveness, bitterness, and every other vice you could name. She had paraded herself as the perfect G.O.'s wife, but she was far from perfect.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

She had fallen from grace, and instead of getting up, she kept sinking deeper. It all started with bitterness towards Timothy, and it had escalated to the evil acts she had committed. Her wicked life flashed before her eyes.

"Have mercy on me, Lord!" she screamed, tears flowing from her eyes.

She was done pretending and tired of faking it. She longed to return to the way things were between her and God. She had backslid, and if not for mercy, if she had died like that, she would have perished.

With sincerity of heart, she confessed all her sins. She desired a fresh start with God, and she received it. God showed mercy and forgave her, granting her another chance. For the first time in a long while, Theresa felt joy emanating from her spirit. She couldn't recall the last time she had felt like that.

"Oh Lord, I have missed you," she found herself saying as she immersed herself in the presence of God.

No longer pretending like she used to do in church, her restoration had brought her back into fellowship with God. She made a commitment to love God forever and rededicated her entire being to Him.

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAFE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Her spirit nudged her toward all the things she had to do. She knew it wouldn't be an easy journey, but she was prepared to go to any lengths to maintain a close relationship with God.

"You are the love of my life.

You are the hope that I cling to.

You mean more than this world to me.

I won't trade you for silver or gold.

I won't trade you for riches untold.

You are my everything!"

She sang the song from the depths of her soul. She had known the lyrics all along, but that time, the song poured out from her spirit, and she sang her heart directly to God. That was how she felt at that moment, and she prayed that she would continue to feel that way. She knew it wouldn't be easy to regain her footing, but she was ready to give it her all and live a Godly life.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Stephen couldn't sleep that night; he only managed to eat lunch and dinner. He couldn't get Pretty out of his head, or should he call her Theresa? Her name clung to his heart and lips. Throughout the day, he called his daughter Pretty many times as he reminisced about the wonderful time he had with Pretty.

He remembered her wink which made his lips break out in a smile.

"Why are you smiling to yourself?" his wife said, jolting him out of his world of fantasy.

"Nothing! I'm just remembering some wonderful moments."

"Really? What are those wonderful moments? Do you want to share so I can also smile?"

"No! I want to sleep now."

"You want to sleep? Yet you've been rolling around on the bed and mumbling to yourself. You think I haven't been observing you. You're cheating on me, is that it? You're here beside me and thinking about another woman!"

His wife pushed him off the bed and rose to continue her nagging. He wasn't in the mood for such. He wouldn't allow her to ruin his night. He walked out of the room and went to the sitting room to

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
TO SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

continue his fantasizing. It felt as though he had fallen in love with Pretty. Thinking about her alone made his soul relax.

Stephen waited for Pretty's call, but she didn't reach out to him. After three days of waiting, he got fed up and decided to contact her himself. His wife had gone to a women's meeting, and he knew Pretty would be there too. He went to the church where the meeting was taking place and stayed close by. He was able to see Pretty from where he stood.

After waiting for a while, he saw the women dispersing. He went closer to where they had the meeting and saw Pretty walking out with his wife. He dodged aside.

"Why are they together?" he questioned in his heart.

He waited for the coast to be clear before stepping out of his hiding place. Theresa was returning from seeing off some of the women when Stephen accosted her.

"Hello, Pretty," he said, jolting her in the process. She almost fell from the shock, and he had to hold her.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to startle you."

“You really did.”

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

“I'm sorry, once again. I waited for your call, and since I didn't receive any, I had to come see you.”

“Sorry, but you've got the wrong person. Didn't I tell you on Sunday that I don't have a twin sister?”

“Please, stop pretending. I know it's you, and I'm willing to cover everything as long as you allow us to have one more night together.”

Theresa didn't like the direction the conversation was taking. She felt uneasy thinking about the number of men she had slept with since she started her Friday evening escapades. She knew Timothy had frustrated her into it, but that wasn't enough to justify her actions.

Her conscience had been urging her to confess to her husband, but she didn't know how to start or what to say. She had already apologized to Timothy for being an unruly wife. Although he was shocked, it didn't lead to any positive change. He remained irritable as usual.

Theresa started walking away, but Stephen stopped her.

“You can't walk out on me like this. Do you know what would happen if I told your husband and the whole world about what happened between us that day?”

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

“I don't know who you are or what you did with that person you call "Pretty." But if you've done anything wrong against God and humanity, you need to repent and make things right with God before His wrath catches up with you.”

Stephen laughed.

“Look who's preaching. You, of all people, a professional sinner, preaching to a novice like me. You're such a clown. Do you think you can deceive me the way you're deceiving everyone else?”

Theresa walked away as fast as she could. Her past was catching up with her faster than she had imagined. Even if she confessed to Timothy, what would she do about Stephen? She thought he was a gentle man, but now she realized that every man was a selfish beast after all.

She entered the church, gathered her things, and walked away. Her mind was conflicted about what to do. Should she continue pretending that she didn't know Stephen, or should she go with him for just one night? Her conscience rebuked her.

“I know this is wrong. Everything is wrong. What exactly does God want me to do in this situation?”

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray Of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Theresa returned home with a conflicted heart. She couldn't focus that evening due to her distractions. Meanwhile, Tabitha took charge of the cooking while Theresa lay on her bed. She had made up her mind to tell Timothy everything about her alter ego, Pretty.

She knew that he wouldn't forgive her, and their marriage could be at risk. However, she was prepared to face the consequences of her decision. Kneeling beside the bed, she prayed for strength and grace, realizing that she couldn't handle it on her own. Though afraid, she was determined to do the right thing.

As Theresa heard Timothy's car drove into the compound, she hurriedly finished her prayers and went downstairs to greet him. To her surprise, she noticed Timothy walking in with Stephen. Her heart skipped a beat. What had Stephen done? Observing Timothy's demeanor, she saw that he was unusually calm. If Stephen had revealed anything, Timothy wouldn't be this composed.

It was out of character for Timothy to bring someone home without prior notice. He was concerned about his public image and wouldn't do anything to tarnish it. So why had he brought Stephen home?

Raj of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

"Welcome, honey," Theresa said, trying to conceal her apprehension upon seeing Stephen.

Timothy thanked Stephen as he dropped his bag on the table. Everyone looked at Timothy, waiting for an explanation. He didn't keep them in suspense for long and quickly satisfied their curiosity.

"Meet Bro Stephen. He will be my personal assistant from now on," Timothy announced.

"P.A.!" they all exclaimed simultaneously.

"Yes, a personal assistant. You can leave now," Timothy said dismissively to Stephen, who promptly exited.

Theresa couldn't comprehend Timothy's sudden decision to hire a personal assistant. He had never had one before, and she wondered why he needed one now. Moreover, she couldn't understand why he had chosen Stephen of all people.

"I don't understand. Why would you hire a personal assistant now? You've never had one before. What do you need a personal assistant for, and why him?" Theresa asked, voicing her concerns.

"Are you questioning my decision?" Timothy's voice rose.

"No, I'm not. I'm just trying to reason with you. You've always been cautious about people getting too close to our family. You rarely

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

bring anyone home to avoid gossip. Yet, you brought him here on his very first day as your personal assistant. You're letting him into our private space, and we barely know anything about him," Theresa explained, appealing for his reconsideration. "He was a newcomer at church last Sunday. You don't even know where he stands spiritually. I think this decision is hasty, and you need to think it through."

Timothy remained resolute. "There's nothing to think about. God laid it on his heart to serve as my personal assistant. Who am I to refuse God?"

Theresa felt frustrated. How did Stephen manage to gain her husband's trust so quickly? Timothy was not someone who easily trusted others. He even kept his own family at a distance. His parents and siblings seldom visited because he would lash out at them if they did without his permission. He cherished his personal space and didn't allow anyone to intrude upon it.

Why was he making an exception for Stephen? How had Stephen convinced him? If Timothy trusted Stephen to this extent, then he would believe anything Stephen told him.

Theresa's heart started racing. How could she undo the mess she had created for herself?

Ray of Hope Stories
HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENT
ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Stephen was not making life bearable for Theresa. He started calling her and sending messages claiming that he loved her. Theresa still did not know how he got her number. She presumed he must have gotten it from Timothy, but why would Timothy give his personal assistant her number? Theresa couldn't find an answer to her question, but that was the least of her worries.

Theresa received another message from Stephen: *"Give me a chance to prove to you that I love you. Allow me to bring out the little girl in you once more. I can't get over your touch, the sound of your voice, your soothing words. Pretty, please give me a chance."*

Theresa hissed, deleted the message, and blocked his number. "I should have done this a long time ago," she said, wanting to continue what she was doing when her phone rang again.

"Hello, good afternoon," she said immediately after answering the call.

"Hahahha! Stephen chuckled. So, you can be this calm on the phone?"

"Who am I speaking with?" Theresa asked.

"You're speaking to your lover," he replied.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Raj of Hope Stories
SAFE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Theresa was irritated. "I'm a very busy person and I don't have time for this. If it's a prank, stop it. If not, get something else to do."

"Now, you're talking. That is the Pretty I know."

Her heart skipped a beat.

"Why are you suddenly quiet? This is Stephen. You blocked my other number, and I'm calling you with another number. You cannot run away from me. We are destined to be together."

"Let this be the last time you will ever call me again. I'm definitely telling my husband about this."

Stephen laughed. "Go ahead! I dare you. I've been cool with you about this because I love you. If you push me, you will regret it. You are the one with the dirty secret and still being arrogant. Let's see who will regret this."

Stephen ended the call, leaving Theresa dazed.

"What kind of rubbish is this? God, please help me! I don't know what to do anymore. I want to get out of this bondage. Stephen is frustrating my life."

She had made up her mind to report Stephen to Timothy to at least get him off her back. Timothy returned, and Theresa did not even

allow him to rest before she went on about how Stephen had been disturbing her with calls.

"Why did you give him my number?"

"Me! Give who your number?"

"Your P.A, of course! He has been disturbing me with calls, and I don't like it."

"I did not give Stephen your number. Besides, why has he been disturbing you with calls? What did he say he want from you?"

Theresa became calm. She had deleted all the messages and even cleared out the call record. She can't even dare to tell Timothy all Stephen had said to her.

"You can't talk again. You are here shouting just because he caught you red-handed, right? You think I don't know. Is it because I've been keeping quiet?"

Theresa was shocked. Had Stephen told Timothy already? Why was he quiet about it all this while?

"I know you will not say anything. But, I was not ready to discuss it with you as well. He told me you will say nasty things about him out of fear, and here you are doing just that. Is that how to be Christlike? Is this what Jesus taught you?"

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Everything was confusing to Theresa. Her heart was filled with something else, but Timothy was speaking about something different. What exactly was it that Stephen told him?

"What did Stephen tell you?"

"He told me everything you told his wife. His wife came to you for counseling, and instead of counseling her, you went ahead to say something else. What have I done to you? Do you want to destroy my ministry? Are you the devil sent to wreck my ministry?"

Theresa was lost, but the hurt from Timothy's words was shattering her heart. What was she even expecting before? How had she thought that he would be understanding? She didn't know where the tears came from. At that point, she cared less about what Stephen had told him.

To her, Timothy was not a good man, and that was certain. She wished she had found another alternative before she got stuck with him. At that point, she had done a lot of terrible things. She knew no one would see her as a victim anymore. Everyone would point fingers at her as a terrible person.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Theresa did not talk to Timothy again after that encounter. They continued to ignore each other while Theresa focused her energy on her children. Triumph was preparing for his school leaving examination, and she didn't want anything to distract him. She knew it would be a blow for him to find out that his parents had broken apart because his mother committed adultery.

The news would devastate him, and it might affect his exam. She decided to hold on until he finished his WASSCE before she would tell Timothy and then move to her secret apartment.

She started teaching Tabitha about loving God deeply and living for God to prepare her for what was ahead.

"Who is your standard?" Theresa asked.

"God!" Tabitha replied.

"Who is your role model?"

"Jesus and you," Tabitha chuckled.

"No!" Theresa sighed. "I am human, and I'm not perfect. I can try, but I might make mistakes. I might have done some terrible things. That is why you should not make any man your standard. Your focus should be on Jesus. The Bible says, 'looking unto Jesus, the

Bag of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

author and finisher of your faith.' Tabitha, Jesus is our perfect example. He is the only one who is faultless and sinless, so you should make Him your role model always. You should always look to Him and use Him as your standard."

"Even if someone you hold in high esteem falls into sin, you will not follow their path. You will not allow anger, bitterness, and hatred to find a space in your heart. Always examine your heart to make sure you have not set any man as a standard. No man died for you. Only Jesus did, and He is the one you should model your life after. Let your life always be like Jesus and make Him proud."

Tabitha smiled. "I know, Mom. But I still want you to know that you are my role model. You are everything to me, and I love you so much."

"Don't look up to me, please. I'm not perfect," she thought.

Theresa couldn't stop the tears. Why hadn't she considered her children before making that decision? Why had she allowed frustration to push her into such a thing?

"I could have endured. I could have continued to stay calm for my children. Now they will be ashamed of me. Now they will see me as worthless," she thought, as tears streamed down her face while she hugged her daughter.

Ray of Hope Stories
HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENT
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Gradually, she started packing her things. She didn't hold onto any hope that Timothy would allow her to stay after she confessed. She was ready to start life afresh in another country, relocating immediately to avoid any shame that might come from her confession.

Her plans were falling into place until Stephen called her again. He hadn't called in a while, and she felt both worried and relieved. She panicked when he called and when he didn't call. She had lost her peace, joy, and everything. But confessing was something that scarred her as well.

"Confessing your sins to God is easier than confessing to a man. God, who has the right to judge a man, wouldn't even judge you when you confess to Him. A man, full of sin, and even one forgiven by mercy, would judge, crucify, and lash you with their tongues when they discover your flaws."

She should be afraid of God, not of a man. A person who wants to please God must not seek to please any man. You cannot please God and man at the same time.

"I choose to please God."

That was Theresa's devotion for the day, and there she was, receiving a call from Stephen again.

She answered the call, and it was the same old story from him. How would she be free from this? She couldn't allow him to spill the beans just yet. She knew the aftermath would be detrimental to her children, and it might affect Triumph's exam. She also wanted to be the one to tell Timothy herself.

So, she finally gave in to Stephen's demands. She knew once wouldn't satisfy him, but at least she would be able to postpone the day of reckoning.

"Just one more night!"

"Just one more night!"

"Just one more night!"

Theresa convinced herself that she would meet with Stephen for the last time, and that would be the end of her escapade. The guilt was eating her up. What else could she have done? What other options did she have?

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
AIM: ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Stephen was on cloud nine since Theresa agreed to meet with him again. A part of him wanted to do something that would make her continue to see him. He knew that if he could obtain her nude pictures and videos, he would be able to manipulate her into seeing him whenever he wanted.

He was not willing to let her go and would do anything to keep her. She was too sweet to pass by. He thought she was still engaging in her Friday escapades. He wanted to ensure she stopped involving herself with other men and that he would be the only one she would see.

"I'm not greedy. I just want her for myself and the apostle," he said, trying to convince himself that what he wanted to do was not something terrible.

He finished scheduling Timothy's appointments and went into the office. He overheard them talking about a conference out of town. He knew that would be his chance to be with Theresa. If Timothy was away on a trip, Theresa would be available to him.

* * * * * *

After the meeting with the elders, Timothy went home feeling down. He disliked it when ministers' conferences included wives.

Rays of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

How could he bring Theresa along? How could he make her fit into the standard of being his wife? He had always enjoyed it when he didn't have to travel with his wife because he didn't have to worry about anyone embarrassing him. He loved his image and was always willing to do anything to maintain it, ensuring that he was revered and admired by everyone around.

"Welcome, Dad," Tabitha greeted him, taking his bag into the room while Timothy slumped into the chair. "Where's your Mother?"

"She's inside," Triumph answered.

"Get her for me."

Theresa arrived and sat down. The mere sight of Timothy terrified her. Speaking to her children made her sad. Seeing the women in church and her friends made her sad.

How would they react when they found out what she had done?

She wanted to confide in one of her friends, but something held her back. She felt her friend might not be able to keep it to herself. The secret was tormenting her. She wanted to release it so she could be free. She felt like she had hot food in her mouth, unable to swallow it but unable to spit it out. She was truly in a bind and wanted a way out as soon as possible.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

“I had a meeting with the elders today. The upcoming conference for this year is going to be in another dimension. They have agreed to make it a couple's ministerial renewal, so every minister is mandated to come with his wife. Those who have lost their wives or husbands will have a special conference after this. The focus of this year's conference is marriage.”

“This means that you'll be going with me to Abuja in the next two weeks. I don't even know how to think about this, but I want you to put your best effort into it. You have truly improved and better than you were when we just got married, but there are still a few things you need to work on.”

“You've been slacking on your diet, and that's why you look out of shape. You'll have to start going to the gym again. Then your skin, I don't know why it's not shining. You'll go to the spa for facials and a full-body treatment. You'll see a dermatologist so they can recommend the best product that will suit your skin better than the one you're using now. Your hair is another issue that needs to be addressed. So, I'll look for the best hairstyle I want you to have. We'll go shopping next week after you've lost some weight so you can get outfits that suit you well.”

“I'm sure you still have the links to all the videos I sent you. Watch them again and see how those ministers' wives carry themselves with grace. Practice etiquette again and polish your spoken English.

You know I stand for excellence, so don't do anything to drag me into mediocrity. Everyone will be looking at you because of me, so you must give your best effort."

Timothy stood up after speaking and went upstairs. Theresa sighed. She was used to it already. Even the children were used to it. They knew the number of classes they attended just to meet their father's standard of excellence. As young as they were, they spoke more than seven different languages, played various musical instruments, and learned various skills every three months. They were the best students in their classes, excelling in sports, arts, science and everything else.

It would have been wonderful to have a father like Timothy who went to any length to ensure that his children were excellent. They went on vacation to different countries every year and had been exposed to a lot of things other children could only dream of.

But they lacked one thing that almost every other child and teenager had. They lacked the love of their father. He didn't play with them or sit to talk with them unless he was scolding them for not meeting his standards. He was more like a slave master, driving them to become like him.

If it weren't for their mother's love, they might not have known what the word "love" meant. Theresa filled the void perfectly. She

did her best to give them enough love to compensate for the lack of love they received from Timothy.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Stephen was disappointed when he found out that Theresa had to go with Timothy for the ministers' conference. He started scheming ways to go on the trip as well. He planned to meet Theresa during the program and run off to somewhere where they wouldn't be recognized to enjoy themselves.

He longed for her. Everything in him wanted her already, and he couldn't wait anymore. He kept calling Theresa, and whenever she failed to pick up his call, he would send a threatening text.

She agreed to all his terms, and soon it was time for the ministers' conference. The two weeks went by quickly for Theresa. She was constantly on the move, going from the gym to the spa, the dermatologist, and the hair salon. She had a lot to do and wished she had married a normal man.

What kind of man expects perfection from his wife?

Timothy was not perfect himself, though he believed he was. He set high standards for himself and wanted to bring everyone around him up to that level. He didn't care if he was hurting them in the process.

Stephen didn't give up on his desires. He was able to talk his way into attending the ministers' conference. He convinced Timothy

Raj of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

that it was important for him to attend the conference with him, so he would have someone he knew to run errands for him.

Throughout the flight to Abuja, Theresa prayed in tongues. Her spirit had been against her decision to spend one more night with Stephen to buy his silence, but she felt she had no other option than to comply. Refusing to do it one more time wouldn't cancel the name everyone would call her. She would still be called an adulteress even if she refused Stephen's demands.

They were all lodged in a hotel which also housed the hall that would be used for the conference. The program was power-packed, aiming to address the family problems in the church. They had sessions to spice up their marriages and pray for their spouses and children.

It would have been a wonderful time for Theresa and Timothy to rekindle the fire in their marriage, but Theresa was irritated and worked up. Stephen was pestering her to come to his room so they could be together, while Timothy was using their home as an example for the other ministers. Whenever he ministered, he would cite examples that made Theresa wonder if he had another family elsewhere.

"You married a great man."

"Wow! You're such a lucky woman."

"Apostle Timothy is the best husband and father in the universe."

Those were some of the comments the other ministers' wives made about Timothy. It wasn't the first time she had heard such comments, but she was exceptionally angry this time. She wished she could grab the microphone to tell everyone who Timothy really was, but what right did she have to do that? She was no saint herself. If anyone was to weigh it, she was a worse sinner compared to Timothy. At least Timothy hadn't killed anyone.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Her mind did not leave her at that thought alone. It was hell-bent on roasting her to death that day. She felt as if she was already standing at the judgment seat. She condemned herself to death by hanging as she remembered the terrible thing she had done. She hadn't been able to forgive herself. She perspired and shivered lightly as the memory rushed back to her.

"Congratulations, ma'am, you're six weeks pregnant," the doctor said to her, smiling. He began giving her tips on how to take care of herself for a smooth pregnancy.

She couldn't hear a word after the doctor told her she was pregnant. What had she gotten herself into? What kind of mess was she in? She had been careful. She couldn't remember casually meeting with any man. Why, then, would she be pregnant?

She stood up from the chair and walked out. She couldn't feel her legs, arms, or any other part of her body. She was completely numb.

How would she tell everyone that she was pregnant with another man's child besides her husband? She couldn't even remember the faces of the men she had met that month alone, let alone the ones she had met six weeks before.

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAFE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

She felt doom running towards her. Who could she run to for help at that point? Her mother was dead, and the whole world thought Timothy was a saint. Even if he was a saint, which man would happily embrace his wife who was carrying another man's child?

Timothy had been on a fast for more than forty days, and they had not met her since then. There was no way she could pin the pregnancy on him.

After weighing all her options, Theresa felt that the best thing to do was to get rid of the baby. No one had to know about it. She had gotten herself into the mess, and she would get herself out of it.

The pain Theresa felt after the abortion was more terrible than any pain she had ever felt before in her life. Every part of her body ached as if she was being passed through a grinding machine. She winced in pain and made up her mind to stop her escapades if she recovered.

She bled for days. Thank God for Timothy's thoughtlessness; he didn't even notice anything was going on with her. She stuffed herself, and with the pain, made sure she maintained the total package. She kept taking care of her children as she nursed her wound.

The pain in her heart competed with the one in her body. She started seeing babies in her dreams, crying out to her. She would

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Raj of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

wake up terrified, perspiring, and panting. What would she do to overcome her trauma?

She tried everything she could to get over the pain. She would sing, cry, and even tried praying. She was too ashamed to go to God in prayer because she knew she was the one who messed up. She knew she was filthy, and she believed that God hated filth.

She could not stay away even though she tried. God was the only one who could hear her cries. She cried out to God for mercy. She promised God she would turn a new leaf if he forgave her.

A few months after that, she was back on the street again. It was as if something had possessed her. She longed for other men who would make her feel like a woman and not treat her the way Timothy did. Again, she was at the crossroad of going back to her vomit.

Can God really forgive her for wanting to spend one more night with Stephen again?

She knelt beside the bed and prayed for mercy. She knew she would need a great deal of mercy to push through what she had to do that night. That was the last night of the conference, and Stephen had given her an ultimatum. If she refused to go to his room that night, he would spill the beans, and she would have nothing to live for anymore.

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

It was the impartation night, and everyone would be at the conference hall for the entire night. Stephen planned that they should have the night together, then they could go back to the conference hall before anyone would notice they were gone. Although afraid and skeptical, Theresa didn't have much of a choice, and she had to agree with that.

She finished her prayer, rose from where she knelt, took her bag, and headed for the conference hall where the impartation service would take place. Timothy had left before her because he was one of the ministers who would minister for the night. She dropped her bag on a chair at the left corner of the massive auditorium and joined in the prayers. She had not prayed for long when her phone beeped. She received the message and went out.

Stephen stood on the other side, and as soon as he saw her, he started walking. She followed his lead while looking around to make sure no one saw her. They had planned it so well that no one would notice anything was going on.

Stephen entered his room and left the door open. His room was a less expensive one and wasn't on the same floor as the other ministers' rooms. Most of the ministers who came with their assistants lodged them on that floor. That was why Stephen had to be extra cautious.

Theresa found the room and walked in. Her heart was racing, and she knew nothing could make it stop beating fast unless she did what she had to do and returned quickly.

"Lock the door and let's get down to business," she said hurriedly as soon as she entered the room.

"Haba, baby, calm down. We're here to have fun. No rushing, please. We have the whole night."

"We don't have the whole night. I need to go back to the auditorium before anyone notices I'm gone."

"No one will notice you're gone. Tonight is for everyone, so many people will be in attendance. Look at how the place is already full of people. So, my dear, no one will notice you're gone."

That did not calm Theresa. She sat on the chair, removed her shoes, wristwatch, and everything she had on.

"I'm only spending thirty minutes here. Once it's time, I'll leave. Please, never call me again after this."

Stephen smiled. If only she knew the plan he had for her, she would know that she would never be able to get out of his grip. She would be his pawn after that night. She would be at his beck and call. She would never be able to resist him after he was done with her that night.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Theresa entered the bathroom to calm herself. She was still afraid and needed to be composed if she was going to do anything.

"I'm sorry, God," she said under her breath. "I'll never do this again. After this, I'll dedicate my life to you completely."

Tears flowed from her eyes as her heart ached.

Stephen brought out what he relied on to help him achieve his deceitful plot. He wanted to make Theresa sleep so he could take some nude pictures of her to use as a weapon later. He smiled to himself while pouring the mixture into her drink.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

CHAPTER TWENTY

Theresa came out of the bathroom feeling worse than she felt before entering. The shower could not calm her aching soul. She sat on the chair, watching Stephen undress, whistling and smiling. He was happy that he would fulfill his aim again and was even happier because of what he intended to do. He could not wait to see Theresa's face when he sent the pictures to her. She would be at the back of his palm until he grew tired of her.

He would not only have his way with her, but he would also be able to make a lot of money from blackmailing her. He could not wait to start demanding millions to keep her dirty secret.

He walked into the bathroom, leaving Theresa baffled as to why he was exceptionally happy. Theresa noticed the drinks on the table and walked towards it. She needed something to make her bold enough for the action she was about to take.

She missed the two bottles of wine together in the glasses and poured a part of the mixture back into each of the two bottles. She wanted a mix of the alcoholic drink and the nonalcoholic one. She didn't bother using a glass; she drank directly from the bottle.

She started feeling the effects of the drink shortly after taking a few gulps. She couldn't explain how she felt. Her stomach tightened,

Ray of Hope Stories
HOME OF INSPIRING AND BODY CONTENTS
SAFE ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

and she had to lie on the bed. She rolled in pain and then started feeling drowsy.

She must have drunk too much. Her eyes were closing gradually before they eventually led her to escape from the realm of her sorrows.

Stephen walked out of the bathroom feeling refreshed. He was ready to get down to business. He wanted to have the night of his life, an unforgettable night for himself and Theresa.

He saw her lying on the bed, moved closer to her, shook her but got no response. Had she already taken the drink? He went over to the table and saw that she had consumed the spiked drink.

“Oh, shoot. I should have kept this away from her. I thought she would want to have the alcoholic drink first,” That was why he spiked the nonalcoholic one.

He had anticipated that she would need the soft drink later to cool off. However, he didn't expect her to take the soft drink first. He wanted her to do what she came there to do before he would give her the soft drink, hoping it would make her fall asleep so that he could take some pictures of her.

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Frustrated, he poured himself a glass of alcoholic wine and gulped it down. He poured another one and soon emptied the bottle. Little did he know that Theresa had mixed the drinks together.

As if he was under a spell, he walked over to the bed and crashed beside Theresa.

* * * * * *

The impartation service went well. Timothy and the other ministers did their job of equipping people for life and ministry. Young and old ministers were all empowered to make a difference in the world. Some of them were so touched and impacted that they could not stop praying. Some even had open visions and didn't want to leave the meeting. The program was indeed successful.

That was what Timothy enjoyed. He did not like to be part of anything shabby or unproductive. He was happy to see people fall under the anointing, manifest various spiritual gifts, and pray continuously in the spirit.

He got to the room and was surprised that Theresa wasn't there. When he didn't see her in the auditorium, he thought she must have left for the room. He went about everything he needed to do before lying on the bed to get some sleep. Their return flight was in few hours, and he didn't want to oversleep.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

He tried calling Theresa to find out where she was, but received no response. He set an alarm for 7am to ensure he would be on time for their 10am flight.



CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

"Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! What is this?" Raphael kept shouting as he entered Stephen's room.

Raphael was Apostle Justice's P.A. His room was next to Stephen's, and they had formed an acquaintance over the course of the program. He did not see Stephen at the impartation service and assumed it was due to the crowd. Another part of him told him Stephen was not there, and he wanted to confirm. He felt it necessary to check on Stephen before they left.

Their flight was at 8 am, and he wanted to say goodbye to his new friend before they left for Warri. Raphael knew he might never get to see Stephen again and felt a connection with him. Among all the other P.A.s at the conference, he was closest to Stephen.

He enjoyed sharing scriptures with Stephen, while Stephen taught him about marriage. Raphael was about to get married at that time and valued the practical lessons he learned from Stephen. He was determined to keep in touch with Stephen even after the conference, but he knew it might be impossible for them to meet in person again since Stephen was going to another part of the country.

That's why he went to Stephen's room that morning. He knocked on the door but received no response, so he let himself in. What he

Raj Of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

saw sent his heart racing. He couldn't believe his eyes. He never expected to witness something like that in his lifetime. He had heard of people cheating on their spouses and being caught in hotels, but he never thought he would walk in on a cheating couple.

Stephen was in bed with another woman. Raphael couldn't process what he had just seen. Perhaps that was due to his innocence, his heart started pounding. He stood confused and transfixed on the spot for a while. Then he ran out of the room, entered again, shouted, and ran out. He opened the door more gently, rubbed his eyes, and hoped what he had seen was not true. He shook Stephen, but the latter did not wake up. At that point, he didn't know what to do. He ran out of the room.

He ran down the stairs rather than using the elevator. He had become barefoot on one foot, and he didn't even notice when his shoe came off. What he saw really destabilized him. He seemed to have lost touch with his present environment. His heart was fixated on what he had seen. He could not believe such a thing could happen in Christendom. Stephen not being conscious was another aspect that left him bewildered.

"Raphael! Raphael!" The driver, who was supposed to take them to the airport, called out to him, but he was too preoccupied to hear anything. They had been waiting for him by the car, and since they didn't see him, the Apostle sent the driver to look for him. Raphael

hadn't taken his phone, so there was no way to contact him. The driver had been searching all around the hotel, exploring places where he suspected Raphael might have gone.

Raphael still hadn't regained his composure. He ran back up the stairs. The driver, calling out to him, was perplexed. "What could be wrong?" he thought and decided to follow him.

He entered the room and found Stephen still in bed with Theresa. Theresa was now awake and sitting, looking around the room, trying to remember what was going on. She tried hard but still couldn't recall anything. When Raphael entered the room, she held her towel tightly.

Raphael felt the highest level of disgust at that point. His eyes bulged, and his stomach churned. "What in heaven's name is this?" he thought.

He had been shocked when he first saw Stephen in bed with a woman, and he didn't even bother to give the woman a second look. But when he saw Theresa sitting, he recognized her. He was dazed and stood frozen on the spot.

"What kind of bad dream am I having?" he wondered.

HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Raj of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

He couldn't process the situation. It was definitely not what he was thinking because how could the wife of the mighty apostle be with her husband's personal assistant? How did it even happen?

The driver finally found Raphael. He had tried his best to keep up with him but lost him just when he got to the corridor. He could not barge into any room to look for him and instead walked across the corridor in the hope of finding him. He reached an open door and mustered the confidence to look inside. He knew it was rude to peer into another person's room, but he needed to find Raphael so they could get to the airport on time. He glanced inside and saw Raphael standing as if struck by lightning.

"What is going on?" the driver was about to ask when he noticed what had made Raphael react like that.

For a few seconds, he was left speechless before bursting into laughter. No one understood why he was laughing since nothing funny was happening.

Theresa felt too ashamed to stand up. She was fully aware of her surroundings now. She recalled everything that happened right before she fell asleep. She must have slept throughout the night. Her head pounded as though a party was raging inside her brain.

However, at that moment, she was not worried about her headache. Her concern was the two men staring at her and the one who had begun laughing uncontrollably as if he was crazy.

She didn't know what to do. Should she speak? Retreat to the bathroom? Plead with them? What was she supposed to do? She hoped they would leave so she could gather herself.

"What did you do to him?" the driver asked after his contemptuous laughter subsided. "It wasn't enough that you slept with your husband's P.A, but you have also killed him." Raphael remained silent, appearing surprised, disappointed, and hurt.

Theresa didn't understand. Had she killed someone? Was Stephen dead? She looked beside her in search of answers.

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

The driver was not ready to let Theresa off the hook. He kept shouting, accusing Theresa of killing Stephen. She wanted to wear her clothes, but he packed them.

"The whole world will know what you have done today. You must have gotten away with this evil deed in the past, but today is the last day for you. You have been caught. So this is how you go around killing young and innocent men after taking their virtues."

Raphael tried to wake Stephen, but he could not get him to wake up. The driver started taking pictures. Raphael tried to stop him, but he would not budge. He was determined to disgrace Theresa and put an end to evil, according to his words.

"I will let the whole world know the evil going on in the church. So, this is what you people do behind closed doors? After killing innocent people, you will start riding exotic cars, living in big houses, buying private jets, and building large auditoriums. So, this is how you do it? Yet, you people will climb the pulpit and be speaking in tongues, you will start prophesying to get people to give you money, not knowing that this is the secret behind your power. An end has come to your evil today."

The driver kept shouting. Raphael, on the other hand, was busy trying to make him stop.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

"I will not be surprised if her husband, the great Apostle, is in on this as well. He must have been the one who uses his wife's sexual affair to service the covenant for riches."

"What?"

"Sit down there. You don't know anything. We, who are outside the church, know what is happening in the church more than all of you. You have allowed religion to blind your eyes, and that is why you can't see the truth. All these men of God are fake. They are using the power of the devil for miracles. Why do you think that with all the churches in this nation, we still have this much level of evil?"

“The simple answer is because they are the ones corrupt and causing corruption to gain more ground in society. If you know the evil people do in churches, especially these so-called men of God, you will cry.”

“I know there is evil in the church, but you are wrong to generalize it. Not all men of God are evil; there are a lot of true men of God in this nation. You need to get rid of that negative mentality so that you can find God. Remember, you will stand before God individually to give an account of your life. You wouldn't want to say that you stayed away from God because of one man of God who chose to live for the devil. Your life should be more important to you than whatever evil any man does in the name of being a preacher.”

Raj of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

“I know you will say that, but…”

“But what? What's important now is taking him to the hospital first before we continue this conversation.”

"No! I will make sure I disgrace this evil woman so that she won't be able to do this to any man again," he exclaimed.

His voice attracted the other occupants in the adjacent rooms, and they reported the incident to the manager. The Chief Security Officer (CSO) was sent into the room to investigate the matter.

"I saw this woman sitting on the bed with this man beside her. When we checked the man, we found him dead," the driver explained to the CSO.

The CSO checked Stephen and realized he wasn't dead. He gently poked his face a few times, and he jolted back to reality.

Theresa felt relieved. She seized the opportunity to grab her clothes from the driver and rushed into the bathroom. The CSO apologized for the embarrassment and asked the driver to leave the room.

Raphael stood still, staring at Stephen. What explanation would he give for being in bed with the apostle's wife?

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
TO INSPIRE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Stephen was too taken aback to give any explanation. It took a while for him to regain consciousness of his surroundings or understand why so many people were in his room.

Theresa got dressed and hurried out of the room. She went to the conference hall to look for her bag, which she found at the 'lost and found' corner. She retrieved it and headed back to her room.

She thought her nightmare was over; little did she know it was just beginning. One of the people who rushed into the room, while the driver was shouting, started an Instagram Live session, recording everything that transpired.

She recognized Theresa and couldn't believe she was in bed with another man. She titled the video, "General Overseer of Glorious Saints Assembly, Apostle Timothy's wife, Pastor Mrs. Theresa, found in bed with a man who was found dead."

She didn't even end the live session when the CSO came in and ordered everyone to leave the room. She continued giving speculations of what she perceived could be happening. Like wildfire in a dry field, the video circulated and started trending. Many bloggers and YouTubers picked up the matter, propagating the videos and writing various speculations. Other videos started circulating online, and Theresa, Timothy, and other ministers bore the brunt of the blow.

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Just as Theresa reached the floor where she was staying with Timothy, she found reporters scattered all over the place, waiting for her. Unaware that they were there for her, she walked by casually.

"Yes, she's the one! That's the lady!" someone exclaimed, and they all rushed towards her like a swarm of bees. She didn't understand why they were rushing at her until they started bombarding her with various questions.

She wished the ground would open up and swallow her. She couldn't find her way out of their ambush. They surrounded her and kept bombarding her with questions.

"Is it true you were found in bed with a confirmed dead man?"

"How did he die?"

"What did you do to him?"

"Can you explain why you were in his room?"

"Is it true that the Apostle is involved in what you have done?"

She remained silent, covered her face, and tried to escape from the crowd. It was only when the CSO approached them that they left her, allowing her to walk away. She managed to reach her room,

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

opened the door with her key, and rushed inside. Once inside, she shut the door behind her and broke into tears.

Timothy was sitting on the bed, reading his Bible, when Theresa rushed in. He had called her over a million times after waking up and seeing that she had not been in the room. He wondered where she had been all through the night.

"Why are you crying?" Timothy asked when she ran into the room.

Theresa's heart skipped a beat. What would she tell him? How had everything escalated to that point? How would she tell the media that Stephen was not dead and Timothy was not involved in her shenanigans?

She was about to speak when Timothy's phone rang. She didn't need a prophet to tell her what Timothy was hearing on the phone. His face moved from shock to anger, then a flicker of fear. Theresa was ready for hell to break loose on her.

She wished she had told Timothy before he heard from someone else. At that point, there was no covering for her. The whole world already knew what she had done. She didn't know how the press got involved but knew that getting out of that guest house was not going to be easy. She was faced with a great deal of disgrace. How would her children feel? She covered her face in anticipation of the horror that would unleash after Timothy ended the call.

Ray Of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Timothy dropped the call and didn't know what to do. He felt his world crashing as he saw the various headlines circulating online. How had he gotten caught up in this mess? He didn't know which was more painful: that his wife was having an affair with his P.A. or that the media had involved him.

He was an honest man of God who had achieved everything through the help of the Holy Spirit and hard work. He wasn't involved in anything diabolical, but he had made a mistake by marrying a terrible woman. What could he have done to Theresa that would make her cheat on him and not only do it, but also kill the man in the process and then make the whole world see him as part of the evil?

"What have you done? Why did you do this to me? You should have killed me first before dragging my name through the mud," he said.

He moved closer to her, bit hard into her skin, pushed her against the wall, and cursed.

Timothy could not believe that the image he had worked so hard to build had finally been destroyed. He didn't know what to do. He switched off his phone to stop it from overheating due to the calls and messages coming in.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
TO ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

Theresa wished for nothing but death. It had been a week since her life took a turn for the worse, and everything had been nosediving since then. Timothy left her at the guest house after she witnessed something she had never seen before.

Timothy cried.

He didn't realize the extent of the damage that had been done until he saw that it made headlines. He became the hot topic in the news and every TV discussion. That was not the kind of publicity he needed, with many speculations surrounding his life and ministry.

He contacted the media and the legal team of his ministry, and they had a virtual meeting. His legal advisor suggested holding a press conference to address the situation and press charges against anyone publishing fake news about him.

With some effort, he managed to have all the videos taken down and the blog posts and other related content withdrawn. However, the reporters and nosy bloggers were relentless, determined to find a scoop that could lead to a big story about him.

He managed to get in touch with a friend who arranged a private helicopter to take him back to Lagos. He arrived in Lagos in the early hours of the morning and was relieved to find no reporters

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SERVE ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

waiting at his door. His children had been harassed by reporters and other people who were lashing out at them. He tried to comfort them and explain the situation.

"Your mother was apparently cheating and got caught in bed," he told his confused children.

"According to her, the man was not dead, but the media thought he was. Anyway, all those videos have been taken down. I will be addressing the press tomorrow, and you might be needed to say a few things as well. My legal team will be here shortly to plan out the press conference. In the meantime, I need you to compose yourselves and look your best," Timothy said to his children.

"But where is Mommy? We don't believe any of this," the children questioned.

"Did you even listen to what I said? Your mother's stupid adultery brought all this upon us," Timothy replied angrily.

"Do you realize the extent of the damage she has caused? She wants to destroy my ministry. The devil wants to use her to bring down everything I have built. But I won't sit here and let that happen."

“Mummy can never do anything like that. All this is a setup.”

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENT
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Timothy got tired of going back and forth with his children. He called Theresa, but her phone was off. She had switched it off and thrown it into the bathtub so she would not have to read any of the nasty things people were saying about her.

Those who didn't even know her had one negative comment after another. There were only a few comments that didn't leave her heart shattered into pieces. She had nothing to hold onto or live for anymore.

She was not bold enough to call her children. Merely imagining how they must have felt when they heard the news left her sinking deeper into the wallow of anxiety and defeat. She had used her hand to destroy her life.

Both believers and unbelievers lashed out at her. Everyone pointed fingers at her and called her names. They dragged her in the mud and did not stop at that; they dragged the name of the Almighty God along with her in the mud. She wished everything would just be a bad dream that she would have to wake up from. She could not wait to wake up and not have to deal with the shame anymore.

She was grateful she had her ATM card with her. She extended her stay at the hotel and would not step out of the room. The hotel maintained her anonymity, and they would not allow any reporter to get inside. She was too afraid to step out.

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENT
SAFE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

The phone beside the bed rang. Hadn't she told the receptionist that she would not be needing anything, neither did she want to see anyone, so she would not be entertaining any calls?

"Hello, ma'am. Your husband is on the line. He said your personal cellphone was not reachable, and he needed to speak to you."

She felt a flicker of hope when she heard that. Timothy, who didn't say a word to her after crying, was finally calling. She had begged him profusely before he left, but he maintained silence. That was Timothy's way of punishing her. He would be quiet and live as though she didn't exist when he didn't want to deal with her. She never imagined that he would call or even want to speak to her.

"Okay, put him on the phone," Theresa said with a weak voice. She had not spoken for a while, so her voice sounded squeaky. She had only cried, wailed, and sobbed. She had run out of tears and resorted to sighing.

"Theresa, what happened to your phone?" came Timothy's husky voice from the other end of the line.

"I... umm..."

"That is not what is important now," he cut in. "Your children need to speak to you so they can cooperate with us. I have a press conference today to address this mess, but they are insisting that

Rag of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENT
ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

they would not be a part of it if you do not speak to them. I know it's none of their business, but they also need to testify to the fact that they had never seen any diabolical things in the family. Also, they need to state that you did it all on your own without involving any family member."

Theresa's heart broke. The light of hope blew out, and she returned to her doom. How had she thought that Timothy would care about her? He should even be angry with her, but he was only concerned about his image and reputation. That was the only thing he had been concerned about all along. Throughout their marriage, he only loved his image and reputation. He could do anything for his image and reputation but found it difficult to do anything for his family.

"Mummy, we don't believe any of the things we saw on Social Media or the news. We know there must be a mix-up somewhere. Please, tell us your side of the story so we can represent you well at the press conference," Triumph spoke to Theresa.

"Oh, my child. My dear boy! I'm sorry. I'm truly sorry," she choked on her words, and fresh tears broke out.

"Why are you sorry, Mum? Please, don't cry. We understand you are innocent. You did not kill anybody. You were not doing anything with that man," Tabitha said.

Joy of Hope Stories

“What can I say, my children? It's a long story. Please put the phone on speaker so your father can also hear me. He hasn't given me a chance to explain yet. I know no amount of explaining can undo the damage I have done, but I need to get this burden off my chest. I need to confess everything I have done so that I can receive complete pardon and find rest for my soul. I know God has forgiven me, and I hope you all will find a place in your hearts to do the same.”

Theresa started her story from the very beginning, leaving no detail out. She shared both the bad and the ugly, choking many times and stopping to catch her breath, but she did not stop sharing her story.

When she finished, it was as if she had lifted an age-old burden from her shoulders. She felt light, as if the breeze could carry her. But then fear took over as she awaited her children's reaction.

They remained silent for a long time, and she had to call out to them.

"Triumph, Tabitha, are you there?"

"I can't believe this. How could you do such a thing? Can't you divorce him? Must you allow our dad's behavior to turn you into a beast like him? You even killed our younger sibling just because you didn't know his father. This is terrible, Mom. I could have

processed it if it was someone else, but not you. You are a disgrace to motherhood and Christianity. Where is the fear of God you taught us? Didn't you consider how God must have felt while you did all those things? You deceived God and even we your children. I don't even know what to say to you anymore. You are truly a wicked person. No one pushed you into anything. You did what you have always wanted to do. You only use dad as an excuse to justify yourself. Are you the only married woman going through tough times in her home? You should have left him, rather than this evil you have done. I hate you!"

Tabitha banged the phone, and the call went dead.

That was the end of the road for Theresa. What else could she hold onto? Even her children saw her as a disgrace. She couldn't bear to think about what others would think. She felt that the best thing to do at that point was to end her miserable life before the situation got worse.

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

The press conference went well, and Timothy was able to clear himself of any attachment to Theresa's accusation. Things started dying down, and the press soon forgot about them and moved on to the next trending topic.

Theresa remained isolated. She lacked the courage to take her own life, knowing that she would go straight to hell if she attempted it. She didn't even seek comfort in God's presence. Instead, she continued to wallow in self-pity, guilt, fear, and pain, filled with regret. Since she wasn't communicating with anyone, she was becoming more distant.

There was no news about Stephen since that day. She neither saw nor heard about him from any source. She became the target of everyone's attacks. No one even remembered that she didn't commit the adultery, and even if she did, she wasn't alone in it. The man involved in the process went unnoticed.

Everyone spoke about how she was a bad example to womanhood. No one bothered to ask for her side of the story. Even her children, who asked for her perspective, did nothing to alleviate her pain.

What was she expecting anyway? Humans will always be humans. Every person is imperfect and expects perfection from others.

Roy of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAFE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Her children hadn't called back since the day she spoke to them, and Timothy hadn't called either. None of her friends tried to reach out to her. They all distanced themselves from her.

She found a church that broadcasted her services on TV, and she started listening to it. Many other churches did the same, but this particular church stood out to her. It felt as though the pastor was speaking directly to her, as his messages were directed to people living in guilt, depression, and contemplating suicide.

Listening to him became her lifeline, helping her in the healing process. She began to find hope again and gathered the courage to continue living.

Sunday arrived, and she eagerly awaited 9 am to join the service of this man of God. During her self-imposed isolation, she would initially connect to hear Timothy preach, but he never said anything to uplift her spirits.

He would address women, advising them never to be like Theresa. He continued to state that she allowed herself to be used by the devil, and he admonished believers to be watchful so they would not end up like her.

Timothy did not even see himself as guilty of making her do what she did. He simply exonerated himself from any attachments and constantly stated that Theresa gave herself to the devil. He made

no effort to bring her back or talk to her. She lost hope of ever reuniting with him or her children.

She would cry for hours after listening to such sermons from Timothy's church, but she soon stopped listening to his sermons altogether and focused on connecting with that pastor whom God had been using for her.

She had finally found a place of solace at the pastor's services. She patiently waited for the service to start on that particular Sunday. While she waited, she prayed in the Holy Spirit, as the pastor had admonished them to do whenever they felt anxiety welling up in them again.

She didn't realize how time slipped by, and it was already 9 am. The service started with prayers, and she actively participated in every part of it. It wasn't long before the pastor took the stage and began ministering.

"Let's have a seat in God's presence. It's such a delight to be an envoy sharing this word to you today. I believe there is a particular person this message is for. The truth is, everyone seated here falls into at least one category from all the categories of people we will examine this morning."

"What we are considering this morning is not a parable or a proverb; it is something that happened while Jesus was here on

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAFE ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

earth. Before we go ahead to analyze it, let's read the account from the Bible."

"If you closely examine the Bible, you will find out that it was only John who gave us this account. It's in the book of John 8:1-11."

"Jesus was going about his normal business when the scribes and Pharisees accosted him. He did not go to them; they went to him of their own accord. How many times do you carry yourself from your house to other people's houses to accost them and interrupt their daily activities just to make them sin with you? You go with phrases like, "If you know what I saw today" or "If you know who I saw today" and then initiate gossip and backbiting, destroying your fellow brother or sister with your tongue."

"Who are the scribes and the Pharisees? They were the teachers of the law, the custodians of the law of Moses. They were the self-righteous and religious leaders who were in charge of teaching others about the way of God."

"Now, they went to Jesus, and at first glance, you would think that they were sincere. You would think they wanted to maintain order in the house of God, but they had other motives. They said, "Master, we caught this woman in adultery."

Raj of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAFE ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

“Take note that they did not call him "Master" unless they wanted to tempt him or question his authority. So on that day, they called him "Master."

“Let's take a break and bring that home to us. I'm sure there has been a time or more where you went to your pastor, friend, parent, or mentor to report something to them. "I caught your husband in bed with another woman." "I saw your daughter going into that man's house." "I saw your child hugging that girl." "I saw your friend visiting your husband while you were away."

“When you make these reports, what is your intention? Are you like the Pharisees and scribes who were looking to fault Jesus and make themselves look more righteous?”

“They told Jesus, "This is what Moses has said, that such a woman should be stoned to death," and then they asked Jesus, "What do you say?" They wanted to put him in a tight spot to make themselves look good.”

“When you tell on your neighbor for doing something terrible, how do you do it? What do you stand to gain from that? The Pharisees wanted to gain a point against Jesus. Look at their hypocrisy: they brought a woman caught in the act of adultery. Here's a quick question, does a woman commit adultery by herself? Where was the man that was caught with her?”

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENT
SAFE ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Theresa's heart skipped a beat. She could not stop her heart from racing as she listened to the sermon. The pastor continued to analyze the account, causing Theresa to cry. She saw herself in that story. She was just like the woman everyone wanted to stone. She was the sinner they were all pointing out and standing as saints over. She was the sinner they wanted to kill for committing adultery.

“Look at how Jesus handled the situation. Dear believers, men and women of God, church leaders, and spiritual leaders, when such a matter is brought to you, how do you handle it? Do you join the accusers to accuse the person so you can earn a point? Do you exonerate the accused without addressing the situation to please the accussed? Check yourself.”

“Jesus did not answer them. He left them to keep talking. He was quiet and busy writing something in the dust. The Pharisees and scribes were a determined group of people. They would not let him be. They kept pestering him until he gave them an epic sentence.”

"He who is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her." Note that he did not say, "He who has never committed sin," but "he who was free from sin at the moment." At the point when they were accusing her, they were all in bondage to one sin or another. They left the mote in their eyes to remove the speck in their neighbor's eyes. They were hypocrites!”

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

“Are you a hypocrite? Ask yourself that. Before you point fingers and accuse anyone of anything, check yourself. Are you free from sin too? Then when you can say you are free from sin, ask yourself, were you born free? Wasn't there a time when you were also a sinner? Weren't you saved by grace? Did you save yourself? Did you die for yourself? Are you standing today by your power?”

“None of them could stone her because they were all sinners. Then Jesus lifted himself again and saw only the woman. He asked her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours?" Jesus, who had the right to accuse her because he was the only one who had never sinned, said something profound: "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more."

“That was it! That was the final verdict. While she was penitent and sorry for her sins, Jesus had forgiven her. God said, "Whosoever would come to me, I would in no wise cast away." As long as you have repented of your sin in dust and ashes, Jesus is saying to you, "Neither do I condemn you. I have saved you. I do not see you as an adulteress; you are now my precious child."

“I speak this message to you, who are being oppressed by guilt from your past life. I do not condemn you. You are forgiven. You are saved. Your past does not define you anymore. Enter into newness and go and sin no more.”

Ray of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

“To those who continue to remember the sins God had forgiven, who continue to call God’s child a sinner even after God has redeemed them and called them by His name, here is God's word to you. Acts 10:9-16, let's focus on verse 15: "The voice spoke to him a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.'"

“God has cleansed them by the blood of His precious sinless son, and you have no right to call them by their past. I want you to break free from your past today and start seeing yourself the way God sees you.”

Of course, what you did was terrible, of course, you shouldn't have done what you did. You messed up really bad. But you have repented, and I have forgiven you. While you are yet speaking, my mercy is available for you, and I no longer see you as filthy. I look at you and see the blood of my dearly beloved son. Rise from the dust right now and stop living in bondage to your past.

Theresa heard the word directed to her. It was as if God was speaking only to her. She could no longer see the minister; she only saw a mist, and the words kept pouring down to her.

Theresa went on her knees in tears. It was as though a veil was removed from her eyes. She was no longer condemned. No man has the right to call that which God has cleansed unclean. She had been cleansed by God. Jesus had said He did not condemn her, and

therefore no one had the right to condemn her. She would not condemn herself, and therefore she would live her life to the fullest and enjoy God's blessings.

She made up her mind never to find herself in the mud again, and therefore she was saved and not condemned.

THE END

A HOME OF INSPIRING AND GODLY CONTENTS
Ray of Hope Stories
SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN

Other books by Grace Boluwatife Olayemi (Ray of Hope Stories)

* Love So True
* Paulina: A Life With A Difference
* The Greatest Heartbreak
* The Cloak Of Darkness
* Mercy
* The Devil On The Altar
* Lost
* Life Imprisonment
* Publish that Book
* 21 Days To a Better You
* The Light in the Tunnel
* Please, Have Mercy on me!

All these books are available @ https://selar.co/m/Graceola

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ABOUT THE BOOK

As a young woman, struggling in her marriage, Pretty chose the wrong way out of her predicament. She became entangled in a double lifestyle. By the time she wanted to be free, the remnant from her past keeps interfering with her future. Will she ever be free?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Grace Boluwatife Olayemi is a child of God who has the desire to see righteousness prevail in the society. She uses her gift as a writer and speaker to spread the message of hope found only in Christ to a depraved world. She believes in the power of the inspired pen to change an expiring world. She has a YouTube channel where she shares her spoken word videos and life-changing discussions on success, purpose and personal development.

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She has also written other non fiction books like 21 days to a better you, Publish that book, etc.

Rag of Hope Stories
A HOME OF INSPIRING AND SOUL-WINNING TALES
TO SAVE, ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN