

EPISODE 21 — *Echoes of the Village*

After everything that had happened in Lagos, Precious felt emotionally exhausted. The city no longer felt safe or peaceful to her. Everywhere reminded her of pain,

> *"If I fit survive all those things as pikin… why I no go survive this one too?"*
>
> — PRECIOUS, ALONE ON THE FARM PATH

betrayal, fear, and confusion. She needed silence. She needed space to think. So she decided to travel home to the village where her parents lived. Her younger siblings were still in school, but she had already graduated years ago and was now working in Lagos. Going back home after such a long time felt strange, but deep down, she knew she needed it. She wanted somewhere quiet. Somewhere that still carried pieces of the old Precious before life became complicated. The journey was long and tiring, but by evening she finally arrived.

As soon as she entered the compound, her mother rushed out happily. "*Precious!*" her mother shouted with excitement. Her father followed behind with a smile on his face. "*My daughter is back,*" he said warmly. But the moment they looked closely at her face, their excitement reduced immediately. Something was wrong. The brightness they used to know in her eyes was gone. Her mother held her gently by the shoulders. "*Why your face come be like this? Wetin happen to you?*" Precious forced a weak smile. "*Nothing, Mama. I'm fine.*" Her mother shook her head immediately. "*No lie to me. I be your mother. I know say something dey worry you.*" Her father stepped closer and carried her bag inside quietly. "*First, go bath,*" her mother said softly. "*You don travel far. Go shower. I go prepare food for you. Tomorrow we go talk.*"

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HOME AND THE MANGO TREE

After taking her bath, she sat down and ate quietly with her parents. The food reminded her of home — simple village soup with fresh garri and fish. It had been long since she ate with peace around her. Her mother kept watching her throughout the meal. But Precious was too tired to speak. That night, she slept deeply for the first time in many days.

The next morning, after breakfast, her parents sat with her outside under the mango tree in front of the house. The

morning breeze was calm. Her mother spoke first. "*Now tell us wetin really happen.*" Precious stayed silent for a while. Then slowly, she began to explain everything. She told them about Uche — how they met, how she trusted him, how she believed he was the will of God for her life. She explained the cancelled wedding, the confusion, the rejection, and the humiliation. Then she spoke about Peter and all the fear she had been carrying. By the time she finished, both her parents were speechless.

Her mother shook her head slowly in disappointment. "*A pastor? An evangelist behave like this?*" Her father's face tightened with anger. "*I welcomed that man into my house. I respected him. I did not know this is how he would treat my daughter.*" His voice became heavier. "*To disgrace you like this after everything...*" Her mother sighed deeply. "*My daughter, no man supposed make you suffer like this.*" There was silence for a while. Then her father cleared his throat. "*You cannot continue waiting for that man. You are almost thirty-five now. You need to move on.*" Her mother nodded quickly in agreement. "*God's time is now. Act fast. Look for husband.*"

Precious smiled faintly. "*Mama, no be woman dey find husband. Na husband dey find wife. Bible say, 'He that findeth a wife findeth a good thing.*'" Her parents burst into laughter immediately. Her father pointed at her jokingly. "*See this girl. Even with all these problems, scripture still full your mouth.*" For the first time in a while, Precious laughed softly too. But despite the laughter, her heart remained troubled.

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THE OLD FARM PATHS

Later that afternoon, she decided to take a walk. She walked toward the old farm paths she used to follow as a child. The air smelled of wet soil and trees. The village was quieter than Lagos, calmer, slower. As she walked through the familiar

paths, memories began to return one after another. She remembered following her mother to the farm as a little girl. She remembered harvesting cassava under the hot sun. She remembered carrying heavy firewood on her head while returning home. And suddenly, she smiled to herself.

Back then, she had been known as one of the most beautiful girls in the village. The boys never left her alone. As she walked carrying cassava or firewood, young boys would stop her on the road. "*Fine girl, where you dey go?*" one would shout. She would hiss immediately. "*Leave me joor. I dey go farm.*" Another would block the road jokingly. "*You no go greet person?*" "*Una no get work?*" she would complain. Sometimes they tried touching her playfully, and she would run away angrily while they laughed behind her. Many times she reported them to her mother. But her mother usually laughed instead. "*You too fine. Wetin you expect?*" her mother would tease. Precious smiled at the memory.

Then she remembered the village boy she once dated briefly as a teenager. The boy had liked her sincerely at first. They walked together often and talked almost every evening. But one day, he tried convincing her to sleep with him. She refused immediately and ran away from him. After that day, they became enemies. She sighed softly. "*I really preserved myself,*" she whispered to herself.

Her memories continued. She remembered carrying bowls of hot fufu on her head around the village to sell. Those days were difficult. Sometimes the load was so heavy her neck felt like it would break. During rainy season, the roads became slippery and dangerous. Several times she fell into the mud with cassava scattered everywhere. Sometimes the cassava rolled into nearby streams, and she would jump into the water searching for every single piece because she knew her mother would be upset if anything got lost. Those were hard days. Very hard days. But she survived them.

THE QUESTION SHE ASKED HERSELF

She sat quietly on a fallen tree trunk near the farm, staring at the trees moving gently with the wind. Then another memory entered her mind — her father disciplining her as a child. Precious laughed quietly to herself. She had truly been stubborn. Sometimes her father tied her with rope to a wooden pole and flogged her seriously whenever she misbehaved badly. Even till adulthood, faint marks still remained on parts of her back. She touched her shoulder lightly and smiled sadly. "*All those beatings don finally calm me down,*" she murmured.

Then her expression changed again. She looked into the distance and whispered: "*If I fit survive all those things as pikin… why I no go survive this one too?*" The wind blew softly around her. Tears gathered in her eyes. "*God… how I take reach this point?*" she asked quietly. "*Me wey dey form village princess before. Person don break my heart finish.*" She shook her head slowly. "*And Uche don move to another girl. Chai…*"

THE NAME THAT CAME

Then suddenly, deep inside her heart, she heard a quiet voice. "*What about Ade?*" Precious froze immediately. She lifted her head slowly. "*Ade?*" The name echoed in her mind again. She became thoughtful. Ade had stood by her through everything. He had saved her life. He had listened to her without judging her. He had cared for her genuinely. But she had never truly considered him as a husband. She sat there thinking deeply. Then suddenly, her phone began to ring. She checked the screen. It was Ade. Her heartbeat changed slightly. Slowly, she answered the call. "*Hello…*"

> *"She had never truly considered him as a husband. Then*

his name came — and the phone rang."

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