

One year passed after Loveth's death. And with time, her name slowly disappeared from people's conversations. Nobody heard anything again about her family.

> *"The second will not be like the first."*
>
> — THE LORD'S VOICE

Chief Ejike vanished completely from the story as though he wanted to erase every memory connected to her.

Even the people who once admired Loveth stopped mentioning her name. It was as though she had appeared suddenly in people's lives and disappeared just as suddenly.

But for Evangelist Uche, the memory never disappeared. Not even for one day. Her death broke something inside him permanently.

THE COLLAPSE

After that incident, his ministry began to collapse gradually. The fire he once carried was no longer there. The crusades stopped. The banners stopped appearing around town. The loud announcements about revival programs disappeared.

People began asking questions. "Why Evangelist Uche never host crusade again?" "Why him no dey active like before?" "Something don happen to am?" But nobody truly knew the depth of his pain.

Money finished quickly because programs were no longer coming. Invitations reduced. Church members stopped visiting often. Even his prayer life became weak. Sometimes he would kneel to pray and sleep off on the floor. Other times he would carry the microphone to preach in small gatherings, but the words no longer flowed like before.

Inside him, he knew one truth. He had lost something precious. And he knew exactly when he lost it.

THE RETURN

One afternoon, after battling with himself for many months, Uche finally decided to go and see Precious again. "This time," he told himself, "I must beg her properly." He wore a simple shirt and trousers and entered a taxi quietly.

Throughout the journey, his heart kept beating heavily. What if she insults him? What if she refuses to see him? What if she is already married? That last

thought frightened him the most.

When he finally reached her apartment, he stood outside her door for almost five minutes gathering courage. Then he knocked softly. Kpom. Kpom. A few seconds later, the door opened. Precious stood there. The moment she saw him, surprise flashed across her face.

"Uche?" He lowered his eyes immediately. "Good afternoon." She remained silent briefly before stepping aside. "Come in."

He entered quietly and sat down. The atmosphere inside the room felt strange and uncomfortable. Precious sat opposite him calmly. For some seconds, nobody spoke. Then finally Uche broke the silence.

"Precious… I know say I no deserve forgiveness after everything wey I do to you…" She said nothing. He continued slowly. "I ruined everything with my own hands." Still silence. Tears gathered in his eyes. "I know say I hurt you deeply." Precious folded her arms quietly and listened. "Please forgive me," he whispered.

ADE ARRIVES

The room became silent again. Then suddenly, the door opened. Ade walked in casually holding a nylon bag filled with fruits and groceries. "Babe, see the pineapple wey I buy—" He stopped immediately. His eyes landed on Uche. Uche also looked up instantly. Both men froze.

Ade narrowed his eyes. "Wait… no be Evangelist Uche be this?" Uche swallowed awkwardly. Ade dropped the nylon slowly. "Oga wetin you dey do here?" Precious shifted uncomfortably. Uche stood up immediately. "No misunderstanding. I just came to talk." Ade walked closer protectively. "To talk to my wife-to-be?"

Uche's eyes widened. "Your what?" "My wife-to-be," Ade repeated firmly. The words pierced Uche deeply. He looked at Precious. Then back at Ade. Then suddenly recognition hit him fully. "This no be that same Ade wey Peter send picture that time?" Ade frowned immediately. "First of all, shut up."

The atmosphere changed instantly. "Secondly," Ade continued, "na you maltreat this woman. Na you throw her away." Uche looked shaken. "So una dey together even when me and her dey date?" "No," Ade replied sharply. "We were not together then. I only came into her life after you abandoned her."

Precious finally spoke softly. "Yes." Uche turned toward her slowly. She looked directly into his eyes. "When you broke me, Ade helped me heal." Those words entered his heart like a knife. "He became my peace," she continued quietly. "He became my hope when I lost everything." Ade moved closer and gently held her hand. "And now," Precious said firmly, "he is my future."

"You are lucky." Ade answered calmly, "No. I'm grateful."

Silence filled the room again. Then Precious spoke softly. "Uche… please stop coming after me." He looked at her painfully. "My wedding is in two weeks." The words nearly destroyed him. Two weeks. That was all.

He nodded slowly. "I understand." His voice almost disappeared. Then he turned quietly and walked toward the door. Before leaving completely, he looked back one last time. Ade had wrapped his hand around Precious' waist gently while she rested calmly beside him. Peace. That was what he saw. The peace he once had and lost. Without another word, he walked away.

THAT NIGHT

That night, Uche cried bitterly inside his apartment. Not ordinary tears. The kind of tears that come when a man finally realizes that his greatest enemy was himself. He rolled on the floor praying. "God forgive me…" "God help me…" "I have destroyed my life…"

The pain became unbearable. Finally, he made a decision. He would go to the prayer mountain. Maybe God would still speak to him again. Maybe mercy still remained.

✦ THE PRAYER MOUNTAIN ✦

The next morning, he traveled to a prayer mountain far outside the city. The place was quiet and surrounded by thick trees and rocky hills. Different people were praying at different corners. Some were fasting. Some were crying before God.

Uche found a lonely corner and began praying. Day one passed. Nothing happened. Day two — still silence. Day three — no answer. By the fourth

day, his body had become very weak from fasting. His lips were dry. His eyes looked sunken.

That evening, while praying weakly under a tree, exhaustion suddenly overwhelmed him. He fell into a deep trance. Then he heard a voice.

> *"Uche." The voice shook his spirit. He trembled immediately. "Lord…" Again the voice called. "Uche." He fell on his knees inside the vision. "Yes Lord." The voice spoke again. "You were distracted."*

Uche began crying instantly. "I called you for an assignment. I prepared somebody who would help you fulfill that assignment. But you mishandled what I gave you." Uche whispered fearfully, "Lord… who was the person?" The voice answered clearly. "Precious."

Tears rushed down his face immediately. "But Lord… I thought maybe na my mind…" Then the voice replied powerfully. "If you believed it was your mind, why did you proceed into relationship and preparation for marriage?" Uche became speechless.

> *"Did I not warn you to pray against distraction?" Suddenly Uche remembered. There had truly been moments when God warned him in prayers about distraction. But he had ignored them. "Loveth was a distraction." Uche lowered his head in shame. "If you had obeyed Me completely, you would not have entered confusion."*

Tears dropped heavily from his eyes. "Lord forgive me…" "My mercy remains forever," the Lord answered. "I have forgiven you." Uche cried harder. "Lord restore me… please restore my life…" Then the voice spoke again. "There is a second chance."

Hope entered Uche's heart immediately. But the next statement humbled him deeply. "The second will not be like the first." He listened carefully. "When a man mishandles something precious, mercy may provide another opportunity, but not always the perfect version he first received."

> *"Moses broke the first tablets. The second had to be carved differently. You missed My perfect will. But there is another person who can still help your*

destiny. She will not fully be like the first. But My mercy will still help you."

ZINA

Uche wept deeply on the ground. "Thank You Lord…" The trance slowly ended. He opened his eyes weakly. And immediately he heard a female voice nearby. "Excuse me…" He turned slowly. A young lady stood there holding her Bible and prayer shawl. She looked calm and gentle.

"My name is Zina," she said softly. Uche stared at her quietly. "Are you Evangelist Uche?" He nodded slowly. Then she smiled nervously. "While I was praying over there… the Lord spoke to me."

Uche's heartbeat increased immediately. "What did He say?" The lady lowered her eyes shyly. "He told me… you are my husband." Uche froze completely.

And immediately, the words God spoke moments ago echoed again inside his spirit. "The second will not be like the first."

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✦ WATCH OUT FOR THE NEXT EPISODE ✦

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