PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

A Novel



MOYOSORE TENIOLA

AUTHOR OF HUSBAND'S HOUSE AND OMOSHALEWA

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APPRECIATION

First and foremost, my greatest appreciation goes to THE ALMIGHTY GOD, MY LORD and MY GOD, the one who has deemed it fit to count me worthy to be a vessel in HIS HOLY hands and to fulfill purpose. May HIS name alone be exalted forever more.

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eat the fruits of your labour.

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And finally, to all my wonderful readers, thank you so much for reading my works. Thank you for the motivation all the way. If you wouldn't read, my writing would have been in vain. Thank you so much. May God bless you and yours. Amen.

I love you all.

DEDICATION

This Novel is dedicated to the Almighty God, the game changer, the Intentional God. Only you can turn the life of a man around for good.

CHAPTER 1

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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"So, since there are no questions, shall we call it a day?" Dr. Murewa addressed the class in his usual manner.

"I think I didn't give you an assignment last time we had lecture." He added, brushing his shiny dark beards with his fingers.

The lecture hall which consisted of over 180 students went still. No one moved, no one spoke... After receiving the thorough lecture of Dr Murewa for two good hours, most of the students were already famished. Some didn't take breakfast before coming for lecture that morning but you dare not come late or miss Dr. Murewa's lectures. He is known among students to be a highly principled and disciplined man in the whole of Stan University, even among his colleagues... He upholds strong moral standards and he was never found among lecturers who drink at clubs every evening neither was he caught at any time flirting with any of the female students... He is a handsome young man in his late thirties, one of the young and brilliant lecturers

that Stan University could boast of...

"Or did I give you an assignment?" He asked the students.

Some of them began to murmur...

"Victoria! Where is she?" Dr Murewa called out suddenly.

Victoria flinched at the corner where she sat. Someone called her... Of course, Dr Murewa called her name! She was petrified... Since she gained admission to study Guidance and Counselling at Stan University, she never had any personal or close relationship with any of the lecturers, including Dr. Murewa.

"Is that me? I hope I didn't fail my test." She thought...

She was so absorbed in her thoughts that she was no more aware of what was going on around her. It was when nearly all the students around her turned their gaze to her that she snapped out of her thoughts... Immediately Dr Murewa called her name, the Class Governor had asked,

"Sir, we have three Victorias in this class sir..."

"Victoria Manasseh!" Dr. Murewa emphasized, interrupting the Class Rep.

All eyes were turned to Victoria where she was seated near the window, just about five rows away from Dr. Murewa... That had always been her favourite spot whenever she came for lectures...

Victoria scrambled to her feet when she saw Dr Murewa's gaze settle on her.

"Yes, you are the only one I trust in this class to say the truth, so tell me, did I give you an assignment the last time I came to your class?" Dr Murewa asked her.

Victoria went dumb. She knew the consequence of saying the truth, of course, she was going to get into the bad books of her colleagues and at the same time, she would never tell a lie, not even for something as trivial as this...
"Never tell a lie no matter what. The truth will always prevail,

so do not cover the truth. Always be truthful, God rewards everyone who is righteous..." She remembered her mother's admonition, which she would usually end with, "All liars shall perish in Hell!"

The murmurings around her increased... One or two of the students tapped her leg, a signal to her not to say the truth. Dr. Murewa's assignments were always stressful and time demanding. They were usually based on research and they are not the kind of research work that you can pay the Cyber cafe guys to do for you... You must be able to apply your personal knowledge and cite reasonable, tangible and real life instances to buttress your points further...

Victoria cleared her throat and said, "You did sir."

The class went wild with anger. The murmurings continued...

"Omo ale (Bastard!)" One of the male students cursed her.

"Silence!" Dr. Murewa ordered. "You think I didn't know that

I gave you an assignment? I'm not as daft as you guys... I simply put her to a test and I am glad she didn't disappoint me. I know the rest of you would never say the truth. She is the only one in the whole of this class that I trust. I have been watching her since 100 level... Most of you don't have integrity at all and you came to study Guidance and Counselling. When you are not truthful, how do you guide and how do you counsel?" He asked.

The murmurings continued... Some even laughed at Victoria. They believed she was only trying to gain Dr Murewa's attention. He is one of the very few lecturers on campus that wasn't close to students at all. So, for Dr. Murewa to like you or even know your name, then you must be a super hero!

"Pele o, tester (Sorry oh, examiner...) Continue to test her." One of the ladies around Victoria muttered and hissed.

"Victoria, see me immediately after the class!" Dr. Murewa said. He gathered his books and walked out of the Lecture hall. He stopped at the entrance and addressed the Class

Governor. "First thing on Monday morning, that assignment must reach my table. I am giving a last chance to everyone who haven't done theirs. Good day!"

"Thank you sir!" The whole class chorused.

Victoria quickly picked her books, packed them into her bag and scuttled after Dr Murewa. Some of her mates glared at her on her way out... She got out of the class and soon caught up with Dr Murewa, not primarily because she was eager to know why he wanted to see her but just so she could escape the fury her class members were ready to unleash on her.

"Let me help you with your books sir." Victoria said as soon as she caught up with him, trying to catch her breath at the same time.

"Oh thanks!" Dr. Murewa smiled at her and let go of the books.

For the first time since she knew Dr. Murewa, Victoria saw a

genuine smile on his face.

"How lucky am I to get such a warm smile from such a man as Dr. Murewa?" She thought.

They soon got to his office which was on the second floor of the Guidance and Counselling Department's Staff Building. He opened the door and walked in. Victoria waited outside.

"Come in Victoria!" Dr. Murewa called.

Victoria was timid at first. She had only entered just one lecturer's office, and that was during her registration when she first gained admission into the school... She trudged into the office and dropped Dr Murewa's books carefully on the neatly arranged table. The office was well furnished and everything was perfectly arranged. The lavender scent that filled the room was heavenly. Victoria bowed her head and rested her hands on her laps, her fingers locked into one another waiting for Dr Murewa to speak. Dr. Murewa removed his Blazer and hanged it on his chair. He settled on his seat and laughed quietly when he observed her

posture.

"Come on Victoria, have your seat." He smiled.

"Thank you sir." Victoria curtseyed and took a seat before him.

"So, Victoria. I won't like to take too much of your time because I know you should have another lecture very soon. So, tell me more about yourself. I want to get to know you better."

Victoria's jaw dropped. She began to fidget... She had actually thought Dr Murewa had summoned her concerning her academic performance. She never thought it could be anything personal. She had never gone so close with any lecturer like this not to talk of discussing her private life with him...

CHAPTER 2

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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"Come on Victoria, I mean no harm. I'm not a casanova. So feel free to be with me. I just want to know you better, that is all. I love brilliant, honest and godly students and I do take my time to groom them more..." Dr Murewa smiled in order to allay her fears when he noticed that she was a bit reluctant to open up.

Victoria managed a smile...

"My name is Victoria Manasseh, a 200 level student of Guidance and Counselling like you already know sir..." Dr Murewa smiled impressively, stroking his beards. Victoria continued...

"I am 21 years old. I am a born again Christian by God's grace. I'm an introvert... I love reading novels and I love writing. I also love to sing but I love to write more..." She paused and smiled. What else is there to know about me?" She said. She couldn't believe she was quickly warming up

to Dr Murewa.

"Great! Tell me more about your background." Dr Murewa said.

"I hail from Benue State but we live in Lagos... I am the first child in my family, I have three other siblings, a boy and two girls. I have lost my dad, so my mom is a widow..."

"Oh! E ya... I'm so sorry about that... May God rest his soul." Dr Murewa sympathised.

"Amen, thanks sir... My mom is a petty trader... She sells fruits, daily household items and soft drinks in a shop at the front of our house... My two younger siblings are in secondary school while the last, a girl is in primary five."

"Hmmmm... It's alright. That's fine for today. As time goes on, we will get to know each other better... So tell me, how have you been coping with your financial needs?"

"Ha, sir God is helping... I manage the little stipend my mum

sends to me every month. Though, it hasn't been easy but I believe by the time I finish school by God's grace and I get a good job, things will get better."

"Hmmm... That's a good spirit. I appreciate God in your life. You are a good girl and a child of God indeed... I have been observing you since when you were in 100 level. Now, despite the fact that your mom is hustling to make ends meet, you still chose to live a decent life, unlike lots of ladies on campus right now who are trading their bodies in exchange for money... I want you to keep it up Victoria. A great future lies ahead of you, don't ever allow the devil to mess up with your life okay?"

"Yes sir." Victoria nodded, grateful that an encouragement came at a time she needed it so much. She had been stranded of both cash and foodstuff since two days back... Her mum promised to send her some cash before the end of that week but it was already Friday, yet there was no assurance that her mom would send the money... She had explained to her that she just settled their house rent which had been long overdue... The Landlord only gave her some

consideration because she is a widow but it was almost eight months they owed in arrears and she had to pay some out of it so that the man wouldn't be forced to throw them out in the end...

Victoria had drank the last grain of garri she had in her room the previous night before she went to bed. That morning, she had left home with an empty stomach and had to trek down to the campus from her house. She couldn't afford the #50 to take a Campus Shuttle to school...

She had cried to God that very morning that God should send help to her as she didn't know how she would cope for the weekend... The only person she might have to fall back on is Tamuno, her neighbor at home, where she stayed off campus. Tamuno is a 300 level student of Mass Communication. He had always wanted to date Victoria but she never gave him her attention. Tamuno is from a fairly rich background and he moved with those who were considered to be dangerous guys on campus. He had always been on her neck but Victoria stood her ground.

"How can I ever get entangled with a son of Belial, just because of money?" She had once asked herself... But that morning, before she came to campus, she had determined in her heart that if her mum didn't send her money, she will have to approach Tamuno to borrow her some cash against the following week which she believed her mum would have sent her some money by then...

Dr Murewa dipped his hands into his wallet and counted some cash.

"Here, take this #5,000. Just get whatever you need with the money, I feel you might be in need of money... And please, don't forget what I told you. Don't compromise your faith in Christ. Continue to be good and face your academics squarely. Don't allow any form of distraction to shift your focus... Now run along so you won't miss your next lecture."

Victoria was really excited. She thought it was all a dream. She opened wide her eyes and blinked them, just to ensure she wasn't dreaming and that she heard what Dr Murewa

said right.

"Take it... It's just a gift. Be sure that I mean no harm." He smiled.

Victoria stretched forth her hands... Tears streamed down her pretty ebony black face. She couldn't believe God could answer her prayers this way. She collected the money and quickly went on her knees.

"Thank you very much sir... Ha! This is too much! My God will bless you, you won't lack any good thing..." She continued to shower prayers upon prayers amidst tears of joy."

Dr Murewa laughed. "Come on Victoria, stand up. Are you worshipping me? Please stand up and go for your lectures. Let's thank God."

Victoria stood up, picked up her bag and thanked him again. She skipped excitedly out of the office like a child who had just been offered lots of chocolate bars.

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Dr Murewa entered his apartment at 8pm that evening. He was already tired and famished as a result of the busy day he had.

"Welcome oh! You finally came home. I thought you would stay there till tomorrow." Ibidunni, his wife said as he walked into the living room.

"Ibidun, what is the problem again tonight? Why is it that everyday with you is filled with troubles? What is my offence again? Can't I just have some moment of peace in this house?"

Ibidunni hissed at him and turned her focus to the movie she was watching on TV.

"Can I have my dinner?" Dr Murewa asked.

"Not only dinner, you will even combine supper with it. Please don't disturb me oh! There is food in the kitchen. Go

there and prepare whatever you want. I'm tired tonight, I can't cook."

Dr Murewa tried not to lose his temper.

"It's fine if you are too tired to cook, but telling me to enter the kitchen and cook is quite disrespectful of you. Ibidun, I am your husband, don't I even deserve an iota of respect in this house? Why are you like this?" He roared, still trying hard to suppress his anger.

"Ask your ancestors!" Ibidun hissed and walked out on him.

"Ha! What a great mistake I made to marry you this woman! Ha, I regret the day I met you!" He said after her.

"Talk to the gods!" She shouted back at him.

Dr Murewa collapsed into the nearby chair... He loosened his tie and dropped his head in his hands. He drifted away in thoughts, deep frustrations written all over his face...

CHAPTER 3

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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Dr Johnson Murewa had met Ibidunni two years after he got through with his Master's degree... He had just relocated to the city where Ibidunni lived because he got a job with a food manufacturing company there...

The first Sunday he spent in that city, he had worshipped at Ibidunni's church. It wasn't really a big church, but somehow, he felt at peace the moment he stepped his feet in there... Ibidunni was an usher in the church. She was the one that welcomed him that Sunday morning and ushered him to a seat. She smiled so brightly and seemed to have a very warm personality that stole Johnson's heart away...

He decided to meet with her after the church service. Johnson never had a stable relationship till after he graduated from school (first degree). He had proposed marriage to Priscilla, a lady that stayed in the same neighborhood with him but somehow along the line, Priscilla met someone else who stayed abroad. She

dumped him and travelled out of the country with the new guy. Since then, Johnson had been very careful to approach ladies. He is the shy type when it comes to speaking to ladies and he is a man of weak emotions, so he determined in his heart to take extra caution before he started another relationship... But that very Sunday he met Ibidunni, his heart really cleaved to her. After church service was over, he approached her.

"Hi, my name is Johnson... Johnson Murewa. Can I meet you please?" He introduced himself to her.

"Hi! I am Ibidunni Badmus." She smiled.

The smile melted Johnson's heart...

"You have the smile of an angel." He complimented her. "And you are so beautiful!" He added.

"Thanks." Ibidunni replied, flashing those perfect set of teeth at him again.

"You are welcome... Ermmmm... Actually, I just relocated to this environment and today is my first Sunday in this city, so it's my first time of worshipping in this church. I must say I really enjoyed the service."

"Oh! That's good to hear. It's a pleasure to have you. I hope we will see more of you." Ibidunni replied.

"Sure... I am at peace with this church. I am definitely going to place membership with you... I enjoyed every bit of the service."

"Wow! That's fantastic! I'm glad to hear this. Thanks for worshipping with us."

"It's my pleasure. I hope to see more of you too."

"Sure... By God's grace sir." Ibidunni replied.

Johnson bade her goodbye and left after she had given him the first timers' gift package.

They gradually started getting close... They exchanged contacts two Sundays later and their friendship started... Five months after Johnson met Ibidunni, he decided to propose marriage to her. Deep down within him, he knew he didn't pray about her... He only got carried away with her beauty, her warm personality and her strong devotion to the work of God.

The day he told Matthew his close friend about his intention to propose marriage to Ibidunni, Matthew had urged him to pray about her first before taking the decision.

"I have peace about her already and besides, if you meet this lady, she is such an angel to behold and she is really dedicated to God's service... She is a spirit filled sister. Trust me, if you meet her, you will know that indeed, I am very lucky to have met such an angel." He boasted to Matthew over the phone.

"Well, I just feel you should still check it out with God, you know..."

"Okay. I will do that." Johnson replied

He decided to pray about Ibidunni for the first time since he met her... He didn't really receive any clear conviction or direction from God to go ahead. He started having some strange feelings of doubt and fear but he quickly dismissed them... He concluded that it was Matthew's counsel that was giving him those premonitions... He went ahead to propose to Ibidunni and she said yes. Johnson was so happy...

Within the space of a year and six months, they got married... At first, the honeymoon went smooth but after three months, things went sour between them. Johnson discovered to his greatest shock that all the devotion and seemingly dedicated life of Ibidunni to Christ before he married her were mere facades. Ibidunni was nothing close to a born again Christian that Johnson had thought she was... Since they married, she never read a single page of the scripture or took out time to pray personally on her own except for the morning devotions which of course, Johnson usually forced her to participate in...

Ibidunni nags constantly and complains about almost everything. She uses abusive words and even curses her husband at the slightest provocation. She really became a thorn in his flesh and the worst aspect of the whole matter is that not even their pastor could ever believe this was Ibidunni's true nature. She was very perfect in her pretense.

On Sundays, she would insist they put on the same attire even after they might have had a serious quarrel before leaving home for church. She would hold her husband's hand and smile so sweetly on entering the church auditorium that most of the youth in the church were wishing for a home like theirs...

Ibidunni on countless ocassions had starved her husband of sex especially whenever they had a quarrel... Johnson knew he had made a great mistake, he didn't allow God to choose for him. He was simply carried away by Ibidunni's beauty and fake dedication to God's service.

It's been two good years they got married. Those two years had been like hell for Johnson Murewa. They had no kids

yet. How would they when they only had intercourse at most twice in a month?! Countless nights, she had denied him of sex and Johnson had been burning in silence, hoping that God would change the heart of his wife one day.

****

Dr Murewa stood up slowly. He switched off the Television, picked up his briefcase and headed for the bedroom.

"Indeed there is a way that seemeth right unto man but the end thereof is destruction." He muttered, shaking his head in regret.

He entered the bedroom and saw Ibidunni seated on the bed, holding her phone. It was obvious she was chatting with someone on Whatsapp. That was her usual manner every night before she retired to bed. Dr Murewa tried as much as possible to avoid her that night. He was too tired to go on another round of quarrels again... He undressed, had a warm shower and went to the kitchen to make his dinner. The piercing voice of his wife startled him.

"Johnson!! Johnson!!" She called angrily and raced to the kitchen like the speed of lightning.

"This woman will kill me one day!" Dr Murewa sighed.

"Johnson! Who is Victoria? I said who is Victoria? Answer me now oh! Before I start with you." She screamed as she entered the kitchen.

Her husband smiled sadly and shook his head.

"Before you start with me? You mean you haven't started already?"

"I haven't oh! I haven't at all. You better begin to explain who she is now before hell will be let loosed."

"There is no need for that, we are already in hell you know... Hell can't be worse than this marriage." Dr Murewa replied calmly, not a bit shaken by his wife's outsburst.

She went wild and grabbed the collar of his shirt.

"Johnson, don't joke with me, speak up now! Who is Victoria?" She screamed again.

Dr Murewa laughed quietly in his usual manner.

"You want to kill yourself Ibidun, you want to kill yourself! Leave me alone now. I have vowed to God never to lay a finger on my wife, don't push me to the wall!" He warned her.

"They never born you well! You dare not! Beat me and I bet it with you, you will rot in jail!"

"Ha! How can a man leave home since morning to work only to get home to meet troubles everyday of one's life? Ibidun, why do you choose to be a devil? You refused to cook for me, I came here to sort myself out just to avoid your troubles only for me to enter another trouble. Ibidun, you said you were too tired to cook my dinner but you have all the strength to make trouble. Were you sent from hell to torture my life?"

"That is not my business here... Answer my question now!" She hissed.

She refused to let go of him. She held on to him with her right hand, her left hand on her waist, shaking her body vigorously.

"You better don't kill yourself... Wait, let me get something straight here, Ibidun... You don't take care of me, you don't show me love, you hardly cook my meals, you don't give me sex, you quarrel with me at every given opportunity and yet, you don't want any woman to come close to me! Please what is your agenda? You don't want to be a good wife and at the same time, you want me to stick to you? You can't beat your child and yet expect her not to cry!"

"Enh-enh? So, it is that Victoria that is your new wife now. It is Victoria right? You better warn her not to toil with me if she values her life!"

"It is well with your soul oh! See all your veins coming out... You want to develop a high blood pressure because of an

innocent lady. She is just one of my students, that's all..."

"Liar! Stinking liar!" She interrupted him. "You think I don't know that you flirt around with some of those girls? And you claim to be busy at your office till night... You know I told you I never wanted you to take this lecturing job but you refused, I know this would happen. You have started flirting with those useless girls... I will not let you give me STDs okay? Nonsense!"

"Okay ma... How will I even transmit the STDs to you? Through Bluetooth? My friend leave my cloth and allow me to eat my noddles in peace."

"Don't worry, I will deal with that Victoria, she will regret the day she ever gained admission to study in that school! No one toys with me and goes scot free. I will deal with her!" She threatened.

She pushed her husband away and stamped out of the kitchen. Dr Murewa straightened his cloth and let out a deep sigh.

"It's official... I married a Jezebel! I am in a very deep mess!" He murmured in despair.

CHAPTER 4

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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Victoria got dressed and set out for lecture on Monday morning. She met Tamuno on the road just as she was about to flag down a campus shuttle.

“Hello Angel! How are you doing?”

“Hi Tamuno! I’m good. How are you too?” She replied.

“I am fine… I noticed you trekked down to school on Friday… I saw you walking down the road… Victoria, why do you choose to suffer yourself when you have someone who can take care of you?”

“And who is the person that can take care of me?”

“Me of course… Victoria, just agree to date me, I promise to take very good care of you. I don’t even like the kind of dresses you put on… You be correct pretty babe now, you are so beautiful with a beautiful figure, allow me to take care

of you… See, I will take you to one of the finest boutiques in town, I will change your level…”

Victoria interrupted him with a loud laughed.

“Tamuno, when will you stop being a drama king? Mr. level changer, it’s too early this Monday morning to be toasting a lady okay? Don’t worry, God my father is taking very good care of me. I'm sure you are not as rich as He is... The glory of the most high is radiating all over me. Can’t you see?”

“Where is it? Can't see anything... Apart from the glowing skin you have and your beautiful face, what else? See your sandals, all worn out... And look at your shirt, the collars are faded, your blue jean skirt has been washed out because of constant usage… Babe, allow me to change your wardrobe… Ermmm... And that reminds me, you think I didn’t see you last week when you went to buy groundnuts and sugar from Mama Chidi’s shop? I know you soaked gari… See, I can stock your foodstuff and even buy you a small fridge and stock it up with fruits and assorted juice of your choice, my dear, say yes to me and you will start living

large…”

“Really? And who told you that living large is my aim for coming to school? Tamuno, you need Jesus… I know you are only after getting me into your bed. That will never happen okay? You said my sandals are worn out, you also analyzed my dress, thanks for your observation, but you failed to see something… You didn’t see my beautiful future… it is bright and shiny. That is where my father is taking me to and I will never allow you to destroy the beautiful relationship I have with my father. He has promised that He will give me a glorious destiny but sin is the only thing that can cause a separation between me and Him... Of course, I will live large but for now, I am working hard to prepare for the beautiful future ahead… I will like to go now. I’m running late for lectures. Good day!”

Tamuno watched her as she walked away.

“This girl is proving so difficult oh! But come to think of it, something is so distinct about her. I have never met a girl as stubborn and confident as this! I think I really like her...

Hmmmm... And she prefers to continue to suffer like this… Well, I won't give up. I will still try my luck next time." He said to himself.

****

Ibidunni picked her phone and dialed a number. Her husband just left for work. She was getting ready to leave home too. She owns a ladies' boutique shop not far from their home... Dr Murewa had left home that morning without talking to her at all. He even refused to go to church on Sunday, the previous day because he was tired of Ibidunni's drama, pretending that all was well but in the real sense, a great fire was engulfing their marriage, courtesy of her… In time past, he would have greeted his wife when he woke up and she wouldn't answer but since their last quarrel, he had kept to himself. This was somehow strange to Ibidunni and she concluded that Victoria must have been the reason why her husband suddenly changed.

"Hello Patricia. How are you?" Ibidunni said over the phone.

“I am fine ma.”

“Good… Thanks so much for the other day.”

“Thank God ma… I saw the credit alert. I am grateful ma.”

“Don’t mention at all. You just ensure you do the job perfectly for me, you will see more of my alerts.” Ibidunni laughed.

“No problem ma… I am on it.”

“Fine… Make sure you trail every of that Victoria’s movement. I want to know how often they converse and if she visits him regularly at his office. Do you understand?”

“Perfectly understood ma.”

“Good… I will call you later. I have to go know.”

“Okay, bye ma.”

****

As soon as Victoria entered the lecture hall and settled down, some of her class members jeered at her because of what she did the last time during Dr Murewa's lecture.

"I hope you have done your assignment now, lecturer pikin." One of them said, while the others laughed at her.

Patricia walked up to where Victoria sat. She smiled at her and sat next to her... Patricia was the same lady that hissed when Dr Murewa said she was testing Victoria… She was the one that sent a message to Ibidunni that evening, she had told her that one Victoria girl has caught the attention of her husband… Though Ibidunni didn't know how Patricia got her number but she was really grateful for the piece of information she gave to her. It was when she later chatted with her on Whatsapp that she got to know that Patricia is one of her customers at her boutique. She saw her face on her DP on Whatsapp and she could recognize her. She decided to seize that opportunity to make Patricia a spy on her husband. She had also sent Patricia some money over the weekend so as to motivate her to do a good job…

“Hi Victoria.” Patricia greeted her cheerfully.

“Hello Patricia.” She responded, a bit surprised that Patricia greeted her and even sat close to her. It was quite unusual.

“How was the weekend?” Patricia asked.

“It was fine and yours?”

“It was fine as well… Vic, I somehow admire what you did on Friday… Though I was also angry at first, but I later got the lesson attached to it. It is good to say the truth. I will like to be your friend… I covet this godly and sincere life that you live and I love to be like you. Can you be my friend please?” Patricia said.

“Sure. Why not? It will be a pleasure.” Victoria answered.

She was glad that Patricia decided to take this positive step. They started chatting… They laughed and talked about lots of things… They got to know each other better. After about an hour, it was obvious that the lecture they were supposed

to have that morning wouldn’t hold. Some of the students said the lecturer wasn't on seat... The Class Governor collected Dr Murewa’s assignment from all the class members and went to submit them at his office.

"Vic, please can we go and get some snacks together? I am famished. I didn’t eat breakfast before leaving home this morning.” Patricia pleaded.

“Alright… No problem.” Victoria replied and they both walked out of the lecture hall. They got the snacks, went back to the hall and settled down again. The Class Governor entered the hall and walked up to where Victoria was seated with Patricia.

“Victoria, Dr Murewa said you should see him immediately.” He said and left.

“Vic, what does that man want from you? I thought they say he doesn’t flirt with students.” Patricia said in an irritating manner.

Victoria smiled and said, “I will be right back Patricia. We will talk about it later.”

She left the class and went straight to Dr Murewa's office... She knocked and entered. Dr Murewa was seated on his chair, his back to the door.

“Good morning sir.” Victoria greeted.

Dr Murewa swirled the chair around as soon as she heard Victoria’s voice. He faced her and Victoria was shocked at what she saw. Little drops of tears stood visibly on Dr Murewa’s face. He brought out his handkerchief and quickly wiped them. Victoria was confused... She didn’t know how to manage the situation. How would she console her lecturer? She had never seen him in such a helpless state and she didn’t even know what could have been strong enough to bother him this much to the extent of bringing tears to his face. She didn't know what to say...

Silence prevailed between them for some minutes… Victoria kept staring at her palms and fingers… At last, she

summoned courage to say something.

“Thanks for the other day sir, I really appreciate your gesture. May God bless you more… Sir, just as you put a smile on my face and encouraged me, whatever it is that is causing this pain and tears for you, I pray God intervene and put a smile on your face in Jesus name.” She said, still staring at her fingers. She couldn’t look at his face again, the pain written on it was deep.

Dr Murewa sighed. He cleared his throat and said,

“Can I confide in you Victoria? It seems you are just the only one I can talk to at this moment and I don't even know why it should be you."

CHAPTER 5

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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Victoria was stunned. "Why on Earth should I be the one Dr Murewa wants to confide in?" She thought.

"You can go ahead sir." She replied quietly, still trying to figure out in her mind what the matter could be.

Dr Murewa stood up and leaned on the wall behind his chair. He folded his arms across his chest and sighed deeply.

"Victoria, I have a wife. Her name is Ibidunni. I love her a lot and I care so much about her. I have loved her since the very day I set my eyes on her. But since we got married, she never gave me peace. It's been one trouble after another... I still love her but she is really giving me a lot of headaches... My marriage is more like hell and it's really frustrating and depressing me. One mistake I made was that I didn't pray about her before I proposed marriage to her. I was blinded by the love I had for her and also by her dedication to God's service... I married her only to discover

that she wasn't the person I thought she was... Right now, I am at my wit's end... I feel I can't cope with her anymore. The worst part of it is that I can't even report her to our pastor, he wouldn't even believe me... Ibidunni is so good at pretense. She acts as if everything is perfect in our marriage but that is far from the truth... I am so depressed right now, I can't even concentrate at work. She makes trouble with me at every slightest opportunity that I am scared of going home at the end of each day... This marriage is like a bondage, I don't even know what to do right now and I don't want to involve my parents or hers in this matter. At least, not yet." He said.

Victoria was quiet... She stared at the file on Dr Murewa's table for some minutes and said,

"Is that all sir?"

"Yes. That is the challenge I am facing right now." He replied humbly. He felt so helpless.

"Sir, have you taken some time to pray about this matter?"

Victoria asked.

"You mean I should pray? About what exactly? I personally feel Ibidunni is doing all these intentionally. I mean, she is a Christian and she knows exactly what is expected of a Christian wife in the home... Though, I hope one day, she will change but I'm wearied of her troubles already."

Victoria sighed and replied,

"Sir, please fast and pray about it. I believe the spiritual controls the physical. Whatever bad trait your wife is exhibiting is of the devil, you need to deal with the root of it in the place of prayers first before you can begin to see the positive physical manifestations... I understand that you may not have prayed before you married her. That was a mistake but our God has the ability to right out wrongs and He also has the power to change the heart of those who do evil and turn them to Himself just like he did to Apostle Paul... Sir, I believe your marriage will work... Ask God for mercy over your past mistake... Then, you will have to stand up to your role as the priest over your home and rebuke

every evil spirit controlling your wife and making her to misbehave... Pronounce and declare into her life the kind of wife and woman you want her to be... Sir, the devil is an enemy of God. He doesn't want marriages to work because he knows that when there is unity between husband and wife especially those who are believers, they will do great exploits for God and his own kingdom will be in trouble... So, he uses different strategies to scatter them. That is why the rate of divorce is getting so high in the world these days. So sir, I believe your marriage will stand by God's grace. Please do not be discouraged. I know God will hear your prayers when you call upon Him."

Dr Murewa was gobsmacked. He looked at Victoria intently.

"How old did you say you are Victoria?" He asked.

"21 years old sir." She replied calmly.

"And you know all these things?" Dr Murewa asked.

He was really marvelled at the counsel Victoria just gave to

him. He never thought of praying about the situation in his home... He suddenly realized why God had prompted him to talk to Victoria... He was at first reluctant. How on Earth would he open up to his student about the challenges in his marriage? But something kept pestering him to talk to her about it and now, he was convinced it was indeed the spirit of God.

Victoria smiled and continued staring at the file on the table.

"Tell me Victoria, how did you make the decision to study Guidance & Counselling?" Dr Murewa asked.

"My dad asked me to."

"Your dad?"

"Yes sir... I remember when I was in my early teens, my dad would ask me, "What will you like to be in future Vicky?" I would simply respond by saying, "I want to be someone who guides others and protect them from making mistakes. I like seeing people happy." My mum would resoond, "You

won't say you want to be an engineer, doctor, lawyer or banker, all you say is I want to guide people. What kind of profession is that?" She would laugh...

One day, during one of such conversations, my dad had replied my mum. He said,

"There is actually a course that has to do with who Victoria wish to become. It is called Guidance and Counselling."

"Are you sure?" My mum had asked him.

"Yes I am... I asked my friend about Victoria's passion and he told me about the course... I will make sure Victoria studies Guidance and Counselling, since that is her wish and we can see it ourselves in the way she relates with people." My dad replied.

My parents weren't schooled but they vowed to see all their children through the University. Dad supported and encouraged me to study the course of my choice, even though some of his friends discouraged him that it's not

really a lucrative course in Nigeria but he didn't listen to them. He really believed in me and in my abilities. "My daughter, you will be a great woman. I can see it in you already." He would assure me...

Victoria paused. Memories of her dad came rushing back to her.

"Sir, why do good people die early?" She asked and broke down into tears.

Dr Murewa was moved. He walked up to her and gave her his handkerchief to wipe her tears.

"It is well Victoria." He said. "It is well... God knows best..."

The door of the office flung open, interrupting his speech. Ibidunni entered with a deep frown on her face.

"Enh?! What's going on here?!" She screamed.

CHAPTER 6

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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Dr Murewa was shocked to see his wife in his office without a prior notice

"What are you doing here Ibidun?" He asked.

"Ask me once again! I don't have a right to be in my husband's office?!" She barked.

She turned to Victoria who was watching her with her mouth opened in complete astonishment.

"Vicky? What are you doing here?"

"Aunty Ibidun! It's a lie! Aunty Ibidun!" Victoria shrieked excitedly and jumped at her. Ibidunni was on time to catch her in a warm embrace...

"Wow! This is unbelievable! Victoria my baby! You are in this school?"

Dr Murewa watched them both in total surprise. "What a small world!" He thought within him. He cleared his throat and said,

"So, you two know each other?"

"Yes sir!" Victoria replied.

"Unbelievable!" Dr Murewa remarked...

"It's indeed a very small world dear!" Ibidunni replied her husband happily. "Victoria was one of my students, infact my favourite student at the private school where I worked after I graduated from school... I'm so happy to see you again my baby!" She embraced her again.

"Same here aunty Ibidun!"

"Wow! You finally studied this your Guidance and Counselling!" Ibidunni laughed and almost immediately, her countenance changed, "Wait oh! Is it the the same Victoria that..." Her voice trailed off. "Never mind, I ..."

Dr Murewa interrupted her, "Yes oh! The same Victoria that you are fighting me for. I wonder who is feeding you with evil and false news." He smiled as he relaxed on his chair.

Ibidunni took her seat beside Victoria, still holding Victoria's hand. She put her hand bag on her husband's table.

"Is this girl crazy? What kind of information did she give to me? The Victoria I know will never date someone's husband!" She said angrily.

"That is because you choose to listen to people who delight in breaking other people's homes." Dr Murewa said.

"I don't understand what you mean ma." Victoria said, looking lost and trying to decode the statement Ibidunni made.

Ibidunni put on a sober look briefly... She turned to Victoria and said,

"Never mind my dear, let me have your contact... Now that

we are both in the same city, you know you have a mummy here now, she laughed."

Victoria dictated her number while Ibidunni saved it on her phone.

"I will hook up with you dear. I'm sure you already have lots of things to tell me."

"Yes aunty. I'm really happy to meet you again."

"Let me release you Victoria. You can go now so you won't miss your next lecture. Thanks so much for your word of advice." Dr Murewa said.

"Thank God sir... Aunty Ibidun, I will be expecting your call. Victoria replied and hugged Ibidunni again." She was about to leave the office when Ibidunni called her back. She counted some money from her bag and handed it over to her.

"Here, take this, I'll call you soon... Be a good girl okay..."

"Thanks so much aunty. I really appreciate you." Victoria replied and left the office joyfully.

She got back to the lecture room... Patricia was eagerly waiting to hear her feedback about what happened in Dr Murewa's office. Immediately Victoria left for Dr Murewa's office earlier, she had called Ibidunni to inform her that Victoria was in her husband's office...

"What took you so long?" Patricia asked Victoria after she had settled down.

Victoria narrated briefly what happened in Dr Murewa's office but she omitted the aspect that has to do with the challenge he was facing in his marriage...

"It's such a small world Patricia, I never would have imagined that my favourite teacher back at secondary school would be my lecturer's wife... She even gave me some money!" Victoria enthused.
"Hmmmm.... Really? That's great." Patricia murmured.

She was crestfallen... Anger was welling up within her but she tried to cover it up. Victoria noticed her changed mood and asked,

"I hope all is well Pat?"

Yea... I feel kind of tired, I had a stressful weekend." She lied.

****

Patricia got back to her room that evening after the lectures and started to map out other plans to deal with Victoria... She was really disappointed about the outcome of her meeting with Ibidunni. She never fathomed that they could know each other... Patricia had always been envious of Victoria for no just reasons... Asides Victoria's academic performance and her beauty, she was always irritated by the way the guys in the class revered and respected her. The peak of it all was when she caught Dr Murewa's attention, she couldn't stomach the envy any longer, she decided to find ways to get her into some trouble...

"I will deal with you Victoria! I won't rest until I make sure you get into trouble." She swore.

She cooked her dinner, ate and went to bed.

In the middle of the night, she had a dream... She saw herself in a thick bush where the darkness was so thick. Suddenly, a very bright light shone on her, nearly blinding her. She quickly covered her face and fell on her knees... Suddenly, an invisible and heavy hand got hold of her hair and started to drag her on the floor. She screamed in pain but the hand didn't let go of her. She was dragged continuously until she nearly gave up the ghost. Then she heard a strange deep voice. The voice was really frightening.

"Touch not my anointed! If you ever touch Victoria, I will cut you into pieces!" The voice roared.

She nearly dropped dead as the voice was really deafening.

She woke up sweating, extremely frightened...

CHAPTER 7

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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Victoria was about to enter the lecture room the following morning when she met Patricia at the corridor... Patricia walked past her and pretended not to see her. Victoria was really surprised at her strange reaction but she still decided to say hello to her. She concluded in her mind that something must have been bothering her. She turned back and quickly caught up with her. She greeted her,

"Patricia, how are you? I hope all is..."

"Don't touch me!" Patricia screamed. She looked terrified and Victoria wondered what could have caused the strange reaction... It was just yesterday that she had decided to be a friend and today, she behaved really strangely. Victoria watched her scurry away like a frightened mouse... Some of their colleagues were at the corridor watching and she was a bit embarrassed but she quickly collected herself together. She shrugged her shoulders and turned back towards the entrance of the lecture room. She entered and

settled down at her usual corner, still trying to reason out why Patricia reacted to her in a strange manner.

"Hello Vic! How are you today?" Someone greeted her from behind.

She turned and saw Olayinka... Olayinka was Victoria's coursemate and male friend. They also attend the same fellowship on campus. He was a very cool headed and reserved guy, A born again Christian to the core... In the whole of the class, Olayinka is the only male figure that Victoria feels comfortable around. They do study together at times in the lecture room after lectures were over. Olayinka was one of the reasons why Victoria looked forward to coming for lectures everyday. He had been a great source of encouragement to her. Though he was from a humble background too, infact most times, he struggled to take three square meals but you would never see Olayinka in a moody state. He was always joyful and this joy most times rubbed off on Victoria whenever she was down or discouraged because of her lack and needs. Olayinka had made some sacrifices for her in time past like

trying to get her some money to buy textbooks while he himself haven't even bought all his own... They were close but there was no strings attached to their friendship even though some of their class members thought they were dating...

Olayinka sat beside Victoria, smiling as usual.

"I'm fine Yinka, good to see you. I tried your line all through yesterday, it wasn't getting through. You didn't tell me you wouldn't return to campus on Sunday... I was really bothered. It was late last night that I saw your message. How was your trip?" Victoria greeted.

"It was fine thanks. I'm so sorry I didn't get in touch, I had a flat battery all through yesterday before I later charged my phone late in the evening... I actually planned to return to campus on Sunday like I promised but something came up at home, so I had to wait till Monday afternoon. How was lecture yesterday? I asked my roommate to help me give Dr Murewa's assignment to the Class Governor."

"Lecture was fine... How's everyone at home?" Victoria replied.

"Doing great. We thank God... What exactly happened between you and Patricia? I was looking at the corridor area and I saw her reactions to you as you were about to enter the class. What transpired between you two?" Olayinka asked.

"In fact, it's so strange and I am really surprised too." Victoria answered.

She went ahead to narrate in details what happened the previous day both between her and Patricia and also at Dr Murewa's office.

Olayinka smiled and replied,

"From the statement Mrs Murewa made about someone giving her some information that you were dating her husband, one can infer that Patricia was likely to be the informant. It's an assumption though... But one thing I am

sure of is that, she is up to no good. My spirit doesn't even agree with hers. Please don't let out anything about your personal life to her. You can be a friend but don't be so close." He advised.

"Alright. Thanks for the advice. I'll watch out." Victoria replied.

****

SOME WEEKS LATER...

It was past 2am in the middle of the night. Dr Murewa just finished a session of prayers. He had taken to Victoria's advice to pray for his wife and marriage and he had been praying, fasting and holding vigils, even though Ibidunni never joined him. There had been no changes so far in Ibidunni's attitudes but Dr Murewa persevered in prayers, hoping that one day, things will get better and Ibidunni will change...

That very night, after he finished the prayers, a thought

crossed his mind.

"Why not engage your wife in a discussion right now about all that is happening in your marriage?"

"This is the voice of the devil... Waking up Ibidunni in the middle of the night is like waking up a Lion." He thought.

Ibidunni suddenly turned in her sleep to where her husband sat at the edge of the bed. She opened her eyes slowly. He looked at her and their eyes met.

"Why are you awake?" She asked nonchalantly.

"Praying." He simply responded.

The voice came to him again. "Talk to her."

"Ibidun, can I have a word with you?" He asked in a trembling voice. He expected her to refuse, just as he had predicted but he was surprised at her reaction.

"Okay... Let me ease myself, I will be right back." She

replied and stood up from the bed sluggishly. She went to the adjoining restroom and came back in a jiffy.

Dr Murewa rubbed her eyes in order to be sure that he wasn't dreaming.
"Could that be Ibidun's voice? Or she wasn't fully awake?" He thought.

Ibidunni sat at the other side of the bed and waited for her husband to speak.

Dr Murewa was still trying to practise the best line to drop in order not to stir up a quarrel when Ibidunni spoke, but not in her usual aggressive way.

"I'm waiting, what do you want to tell me?"

"Ermm... Actually, I want to..." Dr Murewa was visibly struggling with how best to start his conversation. He was very careful because he didn't want to attack her personality in order not to kickstart another round of quarrel especially since it was midnight. He sighed and started

again.

"Ibidun, I love you so much and I really desire to spend the rest of my life with you. I have loved you since the day I set my eyes on you. I want us to have a happy life together, I want you to be the mother of my kids and I want us to grow old together but I don't know why there are so much troubles in our marriage...

Ibidun, on our wedding day, I looked forward to a blissful life with you but everything is turning to a mirage. Is there anything you want me to do or you want me to stop doing, so that we both can enjoy the marital joy and bliss that we had envisaged in our courtship days?"

Ibidunni sighed and stood up. She went to where her husband sat and went on her knees. Her husband was amazed. He thought he was in a dream... Ibidunni was kneeling right in front of him. "This is a miracle!" He thought.

"Johnson, please forgive me. I know I have given you nothing but troubles in this marriage. I have been

quarrelsome, burdensome and troublesome. I have denied you of your conjugal rights several times, I refused to cook your meals on countless ocassions, I never prayed with you or for you unless you forced me to do so. I haven't been a good wife. You are a good man Johnson and I don't even deserve you." She wept.

Dr Murewa was at a loss for words. So Ibidun knew she had been a bad person all the way. But why was she intentionally inflicting pains on him?

"Stand up Ibidun. Please sit and let's talk." Dr Murewa said.

Ibidunni sat beside him. She continued crying.

"But why do you choose to do all that you are doing despite the fact that you knew all along that it was wrong? Why?" He asked.

"I don't even know! One spirit in me would just feel like trigger up a fight with you for no specific reason. Most times, I do feel like I was punishing an innocent man but it's like I

can't just help myself... Since the day you started the vigils, I was never deeply asleep, I heard every of your prayer points and I felt bad that the man I have been inflicting pains on still chose to pray for me! No... I don't deserve you Johnson, please let me go. I need to leave you so that you can marry a woman who will give you the happiness you so much desire... I don't like this life I'm living.

Each time I promise myself to change, I find myself getting worse and I feel I should just surrender to fate. I feel I'm cursed... I see happy couples everyday, I covet their joy but then I couldn't give my husband the joy that will make our marriage a peaceful one. I find myself doing things I shouldn't do... Johnson, I'm sorry for all the pains I have caused you. Please forgive me. Victoria came visiting me two days back, she told me everything... How you had wept because of me right before her in your office and since then, I just felt like committing suicide. Why do I have such a wonderful husband and yet, I give him so much troubles and at the same time, I can't stop myself from doing that which I'm doing. How can I be living like this?" She wept bitterly.

Dr Murewa drew her close and hugged her. She continued sobbing uncontrollably. Tear drops escaped from his own eyes too.

"How great is our God!" He whispered.

When Victoria advised him to pray, it didn't really make sense to him but he was convinced that it was God speaking through her to him, that was why he obeyed.

"Ibidun, we are in this together. We will fight it out together. We shall both break the strong hold of the enemy. If you leave me, who do you expect me to marry? I have made vows with you to love you for better, for worse... I won't let you go... Now that you have opened up, we will pray concerning it together. Will you join me in the fasting and prayers, including the vigils?"

Ibidunni nodded.

"Good... Bring your hands, let us pray."

Ibidunni released her hands to her husband.

"As a priest over your life, I declare you free from every stronghold of the enemy in Jesus name..."

"Amen!"

They prayed together for some minutes before they went to bed. A brand new peace filled Ibidunni's heart.

CHAPTER 8

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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The Lord took total control of Dr Murewa's home since the day Ibidunni agreed to join him in prayers. She stopped the nagging and aggression. The bond of love that flowed between them became so strong. There was no need for any form of pretense again at church or in the public. The display of love is now a genuine one. The following Sunday, Ibidunni shared her testimony at church to the amazement of her husband. She didn't inform him that she would be sharing the testimony.

"Church, join me in praising God for delivering me from an evil spirit that has been tormenting my life and for restoring love, joy and peace into my home. You may not understand but my husband does... All the closeness we seemed to have before now were not genuine... We were only pretending to be fine. I haven't been a good wife all along but I thank God for this restoration. I may not be able to explain in details but I just want to show my appreciation to God because since I had an encounter with God and my

husband prayed for me, I have been delivered and my home has experienced a total peace. I want to use this opportunity to implore every husband and wife in this gathering who may be faking joy but deep in their marriage things are not fine, that you should allow God to take charge, surrender all to him and pray with each other... God is the only one that is able to restore and reshape a home no matter how hopeless the situation may be..."

The congregation was attentive, most of them were really surprised that all these while, things weren't working between them, yet no one suspected. Ibidunni sang a chorus to end her testimony.

"Join me in praising God!
I have seen His goodness,
Join me in praising God!
I have seen his goodness."

Dr Murewa stood up and hugged Ibidunni immediately she stepped down from the podium. The church continued to clap and scream for joy. Some of the couples in church

glanced at each other, it was evident that Ibidunni's testimony was going to have a great effect in building some of the homes in the church who were likely to be struggling like hers.

Dr Murewa commended his wife on their way home.

"You took such a bold and admirable step dear. It caught me by surprise too."

"I'm sorry I didn't inform you. I didn't plan to do it either. It was suddenly impressed on my heart when testifiers were called upon to share their testimonies. If I didn't do it, then I'm an ingrate. What scattered some homes wasn't up to what happened between us but in our case God took the glory. I can't thank you enough sweetheart. Thank you for loving me despite all my stubbornness. How would I have been delivered without your intervention? God bless you for me my crown." She rubbed his shoulders lovingly.

"Love covereth all things my dear. Love is bigger than any mountain... I thank God too and I thank God for Victoria. If

not for her, hmmmm... I was nearly contemplating a divorce because I thought you were behaving that way to me because I didn't meet your expectations as a husband. That's why it's good to subject every of one's decision to the leading of the Holy Spirit. I was led to talk to her and see the outcome... If not for Victoria, only God knows where this marriage would have headed to by now." Dr Murewa replied.

"Victoria, I have known her to be a young girl wiser than her age. I remember back then that she used to settle quarrels amidst her colleagues at school. I would call her an advocate and she would laugh that she doesn't want to study law, that her dad had told her to study Guidance and Counselling and she believed that is the right path for her to tread... Infact, she is really studying the right course indeed and I believe she will do great exploits for God in life. I see in her, a vessel God will use to restore many marriages." Ibidunni said.

Dr Murewa manoeuvered the car to avoid a pothole and turned to another direction different from the way to their

house.

"Where are you heading to?" Ibidunni asked.

Her husband smiled and replied,

"Just watch and see, you will behold the glory of the Lord!" He laughed.

"I don't like being put in suspense joor. Where are we going to?" Ibidunni pressed him further.

"Okay... I'm taking you out. I want us to have a nice time together... We must make up for all the lost moments we didn't have together, don't you think so?"

"Wow! I'm excited." Ibidunni shrieked.

****

Few weeks later, Ibidunni was confirmed pregnant. She had gone for a medical check up when she was

experiencing a continuous dizziness nearly every morning and the doctor had run a check on her after which she was declared two months pregnant. Dr Murewa's joy knew no bound. It was such a happy moment for the couple. They went home and went on their knees, thanking God for the gift on the way.

****

Olayinka and Victoria sat on a pavement under one of the trees near their department after lecture one day. They had wanted to study in preparation for their examination but Victoria complained to Olayinka that she wasn't concentrating and also wasn't assimilating what they were reading, so he had suggested they take a walk and also get some fresh air to unwind a bit. They strolled a bit and later settled under the mango tree.

"Yinka, I am getting discouraged, I feel I should drop out of school. Things are hard for my mum back home. To cater for my siblings' school fees have been difficult for my mum of late. I want to go back to Lagos and get a job in order to support my mum to take care of my siblings. Dr Murewa and his wife has been helpful of late but all the money they

gave to me, I sent them to my mum, for how long will I continue to be a burden to that couple? We are still owing three months house rent as we speak, my younger brothers are harassed at school almost everyday because of school fees. To feed back home is difficult, no family is ready to assist my mum. Even to feed and buy necessary handouts here is war... I still don't know why a good man like my dad had to die untimely. This suffering is much. Olayinka, my question is why are things this hard, despite that we are serving God with the whole of our lives? Is God not supposed to compensate us? Why are unbelievers living better lives than us? Look at Tamuno my neighbor, he doesn't even go to church, yet he is living fine, so also I know of other ladies that are wayward, yet their lives aren't as difficult as this. Is suffering part of the qualities of being a Christian?" Victoria asked with a frustrated expression.

"Hmmmm..." Olayinka sighed and smiled. "Yes and no. It's not God's will for us to suffer as His children but at times, there are tests and trials that come our way just so we should be despaired but as children of God, we must press forward to the mark of the high calling of Christ... Vicky,

Psalms 37 vs 1 says,

"Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity."

Also, Romans 8 vs 18 says,

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in us."

Likewise, I Peter 1vs 6-7 says,

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire may be found to praise, honour and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Victoria, please persevere, the genuineness of your faith is more precious than gold. Don't ever trade it for anything. All

of these are trials of faith. The Bible also says in James 1 vs 2&3 that we should count it all joy when we fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of our faith produces patience... Trials can come in any form in the life of a Christian, for yours it may be lack of finance, for some others it may be marital, academics, etc... Victoria, count it all joy, it shows that you are indeed a genuine child of God and the devil wants to use these trials to derail you. Be steadfast and unmovable, your future is bright. Don't look at those who are living wayward lives, focus on God and don't compromise your faith. All will be well... There is this hymn that we normally sing, it says:

Tempted and tried, we're oft made to wonder
Why it should be thus all the day long
While there are others living about us
Never molested though in the wrong.

When death has come and taken our loved ones
It leaves our home so lonely and drear
Then do we wonder why others prosper
Living so wicked year after year.

Chorus:

Farther along we'll know all about it

Farther along we'll understand why

Cheer up my brother

Live in the sunshine

We'll understand it all by and by.

He sang the hymn so beautifully that tears ran down Victoria's cheeks.

"So, cheer up my sister, live in the sunshine, you will understand it better by and by. All will be well okay?" Olayinka encouraged her.

"Thanks so much Olayinka. I can't forget all your words of encouragement, you are heaven sent. Most times, I wonder how convenient it is for you to lay aside your own burdens and bear that of others. How do you do that? Hmmm... I'll like to be like you when I grow up." Victoria teased him.

Olayinka laughed. "When you grow up indeed. Am I not just

three years older than you?"

They both laughed.

Two weeks later, just three days to their examination, Olayinka fell sick. He was rushed to the school's medical center. He was later referred to a government general hospital in town. He was diagnosed of typhoid fever. Before 24hours after his admission, Olayinka gave up the ghost. Victoria nearly ran mad. She wept till her eyes ached. It was as if she was dreaming. This was the second time death mysteriously took away someone so dear to her.

After Olayinka's burial, Victoria became a shadow of herself. She was totally devastated...

CHAPTER 9

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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Examinations commenced and Victoria walked to the exam hall to write her first paper with a very heavy heart. She still found it difficult to believe that Olayinka was gone. Each question on the question paper brought memories of how they both had used some of the past questions to study together in preparation for the exams. She got through with her paper within forty five minutes. She was so tired and her eyeballs ached so much. She wanted to go back to her room as soon as possible in order to rest and prepare for the next paper.

"I hope you are done with all your questions?" The invigilator asked her.

"Yes sir." She nodded and dragged herself out of the hall.

Most of her colleagues followed her movement with sympathetic eyes before returning their concentrations to their examination paper.

Victoria got back to her room and instead of reading in preparation for her next paper which was in two days'time, she continued mourning the death of her friend. She had no appetite whatsoever. She lay on her bed weeping continuously until she slept off.

She saw herself in a very big space, brightness filled everywhere. Olayinka walked up to her, smiling so brightly. He looked so handsome in his glittering white robe and shiny golden crown.

"Wow! Yinka, you look great, what a beautiful robe!" Victoria gasped. "But why did you have to go like that? Yinka why? You were a good person. Why did death take you away just like that? Can you come back? I have really missed you." Victoria said. She started weeping again.

Olayinka smiled happily.

"Victoria, why are you weeping because of me? I am in a better place. No more stress or pain. No more want... I am

so happy in paradise. Victoria, the beauty of where I am is beyond description. The Book of Revelations only gave us a fraction of the picture... Oh! You need to see the real glory and splendour!

Victoria, stop mourning me. I received a great welcome on getting home that I forgot about everything on earth... I was showed that my last assignment was the encouragement I gave to you under that tree. The Master said He had to take me home because I would have backslidden in future and wouldn't have made it to heaven in the end...

But you people are sorrowful because you wouldn't be able to see me again. Be cheerful and be consoled my dear friend... I was able to gain souls for Christ during my short stay on earth and that was all that mattered to the Master... Victoria, you will be a Victor if only you remain steadfast to the end. You have a bright and great future ahead and the Master is going to use you mightily for His glory, if only you can patiently endure the trials. I had the opportunity to engage in dirty deals at school as a means to survive but I stood firm and resisted the devil. Please, do the same...

Remember the words of Apostle Paul in 2Timothy 4vs 7-8:

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also unto all them that love His appearing."

I hope this will be your testimony too. Victoria, I hope to see you in heaven. Please ensure you make it, Heaven is beautiful! Hold on to your faith, stay strong. Don't forget the song I sang the last time before I slept in the Lord...
"Tempted and tried, we're oft made to wonder..."

Olayinka started singing. Tears ran down Victoria's cheeks. He waved at her as he walked away. He continued waving as he sang along, his voice as sonorous as ever. Victoria smiled with tearful eyes and waved back at him, He walked farther, till his voice fainted and Victoria could see him no more.

Victoria woke up. She realized she had been dreaming.

She sat up as she recollected everything that happened in the dream. She sighed deeply and smiled when she remembered the unspeakable joy that reflected on Olayinka's face. She wept and went on her knees and began to pray serious prayers.

"Father Lord, please qualify me by your mercy. Help me in this race, help me not to be derailed no matter what... Grant me the grace to endure the trials and temptations that will come my way... Help me to remain steadfast till the end Lord." She prayed.

Since the time Victoria saw Olayinka in her dream, she had been comforted. Each time she remembered how his face had glowed, she couldn't help but smile. None of her colleagues would understand her though if she had told them that she was happy that Olayinka had to die after all. That would sound funny. So, she kept it to herself. She wrote the rest of her examination with an exceedingly great peace.

****

Victoria went to visit Dr Murewa and his wife, Ibidunni after her exams. It was a Sunday afternoon, she planned leaving for Lagos the following day. Dr Murewa and Ibidunni were glad to host her.

"Aunty, hope you are strong?" Victoria asked Ibidunni.

"Yes dear, I'm coping. Just that I usually feel this constant lack of appetite." She smiled, rubbing her protruding tommy.

"Victoria." Dr Murewa called.
"We have news for you. It's a good news though but you may not like it."

"Ooooh! I'm nervous right now." She replied holding her chest in a funny way.

Ibidunni laughed.

"We are relocating to the UK. I got a job there and my wife will be going with me. We will be going soon because it's

not advisable for her to travel once her pregnancy reaches seven months."

"Huuuuh, I am not happy with this news at all... Aunty Ibidunni, you want to leave me in Nigeria. There is God ooo!" Victoria replied. She was down casted.

Ibidunni laughed. "Don't worry dear. I will always call you. I have to go with my husband, or can only you take care of me?"

"Yes, I can!"

Dr Murewa laughed. "You can't oh. I am taking my wife with me please."

They all laughed... Victoria informed them of her intention to travel back to Lagos the following day for the semester holiday.

"Okay... Your semester break is three weeks. We should travel in two weeks time. That means, we would have gone

before you resume back to school."

"Hmmmmm... It is well sir. I'm feeling lonely already."

Ibidunni hugged her. "Don't worry my baby, we will still talk often, I promise you that."

Dr Murewa asked for Victoria's account details. She gave it to him and he instantly transferred a sum of One Hundred Thousand Naira to her account. She received the credit alert within two minutes. Victoria was overjoyed. She went on her knees to thank him. She kept staring at the screen of her phone excitedly.

"Thank God dear. We want you to give that money to your mum to add it to her business so that she can have more goods to sell and make more profits. Don't you worry, when we get to the UK by God's grace, we will send you more money okay..."

Victoria opened her mouth wide. She threw herself at Ibidunni.

"Easy o. Watch my tommy!" Ibidunni laughed.

"Thank you so much. Ha! My mum will be so delighted at this news. Thank you! I really appreciate. I don't even know what to say... May the Lord keep blessing you more and more..." Victoria prayed.

****

Victoria's mum was really grateful for the help Dr Murewa and his wife gave to her. It really helped to boost her business. She bought more goods, made more sales and of course more profits. She no longer struggled to feed her family... Though, the school fees of her children was still a bit challenging for her at first but as soon as Dr Murewa got settled abroad, he sent some money into Victoria's account at least on a monthly basis. This went a long way in bearing all their financial burdens. Some months later, Ibidunni gave birth to a beautiful baby girl whom they named Victoria. That was the promise she made to Victoria Manasseh, her God daughter.

Two years later, Victoria graduated with a First Class! Her mum, Dr Murewa and Aunty Ibidunni were really proud of her. All her siblings were there on the day of her convocation ceremony.

Ibidunni called her in the morning of the convocation ceremony to congratulate her.

"Congratulations my baby. I am so proud of you. I must not miss your convocation oh. Please tell one of your brothers to record the ceremony, especially the moment you walk up to the podium to receive your award." She said.

"Thanks aunty. I will definitely do that... I have to go now!" Victoria replied as she slipped into her convocation gown.

"Okay dear... Talk to you later."

The ceremony was glorious. Victoria's mum was filled with great joy as she watched her beautiful daughter march up to the podium to have a handshake with the Vice Chancellor and to receive her prize.

"Isaac must be happy and proud of her daughter wherever he is." She whispered as tears rolled down her face.

Tamuno walked up to Victoria after she stepped down from the podium and congratulated her. Victoria was surprised to see him.

"Thanks Tamuno. It's great to see you again! I thought you should be away for your National Youth Service." She replied.

"Yes, I came to attend my sister's convocation too." Tamuno responded.

"Really? Wow! It's nice to have you around."

"Same here... You are really looking good and I must commend you Victoria, you are a very decent girl. Please keep it up and keep serving your God. Your life is a lesson to me... You are a perfect example of contentment, I mean, despite all that I offered to give you back then, despite how much I pestered you till I graduated, you stood your ground.

I wish you all the very best of luck. See you at the top."

"Thanks Tamuno." Victoria replied.

Tamuno shook hands with her and asked, "Can we take a picture together? At least something to remind me of you." He smiled.

"Sure!" Victoria agreed.

He brought out his phone, stretched it out and moved closer to Victoria.

"Say cheese!" He giggled.

"Cheeeeeeeeese!" Victoria smiled broadly.

CHAPTER 10

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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Victoria sat inside her mum's shop one sunny afternoon, relaxing with a novel written by one of her favourite authors... Her mum had gone to the market to get some goods that were out of stock. She had been assisting her mum in her business since she concluded her one year National Youth Service some weeks back. She tried applying for some jobs but she hadn't received any feedback from the companies, so most times she stayed at her mum's shop to attend to customers.

Other times, she was either found reading novels or writing stories and inspirational quotes. She loved to write but she had never published any of her works either soft or hard copies. Dr Murewa had once told her to try to explore her writing talents and see possibilities of turning it into a career.

"There are not many jobs out there and since you love guiding and counseling people, I believe you can achieve

that through your writing career and in the end, make money out of it." He had admonished her.

She really wished she could take up writing as a career but each time she looked at the numerous responsibilities on her mum's shoulders, she would conclude that it's better for her to look for a job for now in order to support her. Two of her younger siblings are now in the University, one of them studying medicine and their expenses are really heavy.

Dr Murewa still kept to his promise of sending them money often but if Victoria didn't work, they may not be able to cope with the increasing expenses in the long run, especially by the time the last born gains admission into the University...

She flipped through the pages of the novel she was reading - "Redeeming Love" by Francine Rivers... A young man pulled over his car in front of the shop and alighted. He approached the shop and greeted her,

"Hello!"

"Hello sir." Victoria replied, closing the novel and rising from her seat to attend to the man.

"How much is your big size detergent?" He asked.

"There is one of three hundred naira and that of five hundred naira sir."

"Okay. Give me that of five hundred naira." The man replied checking through his pocket to bring out some cash.

Victoria wrapped the detergent and gave it to the man while he handed her a one thousand naira note. She was about to give him back the balance when he said she shouldn't bother.

"You can keep the change." He replied smiling.

Victoria felt uncomfortable with the gesture at first, especially because it was coming from someone of the opposite sex. She later shrugged her shoulders and said, "Thanks so much sir. God bless you."

"God bless you too." The young man replied.

He wanted to leave when he caught sight of the novel Victoria was reading which was lying on the wooden bench on which she sat.

"Francine Rivers." He said smiling.

"Yes sir."

"You love reading I guess."

"Sure... I read novels at my leisure time." She replied.

"I thought as much... This is the third time I noticed you reading in this shop each time I passed... It seems it's your favorite hobby."

"Hmmm, one of it sir."

"Okay... What other hobby do you have?"

Victoria felt uncomfortable talking to a stranger about herself but since he was their customer, she simply replied,

"Writing."

She picked the novel to continue her reading in order to discharge the young man but it seemed he wasn't ready to leave anytime soon.

"Really? That's great... Ermmm... If you don't mind, I have a job opportunity for you. It's for writers who can write beautiful fictional stories... You are a graduate I guess."

At the mention of job opportunity, Victoria raised her head and gave the man her full attention.

"Yes sir." She responded spontaneously.

The man continued,

"It's a full time job and all you just need is a pen and a book. They will provide you the laptop computer with which you

will type the articles or stories depending on what they need. They own a very popular website where people shop for books online. You will simply be placed on a salary and I can assure you that it's going to be an attractive one."

Victoria's eyes widened.

"Really?" She asked getting excited.

"Sure... My elder brother is one of the team leaders of the company." The man replied and added,

"By the way, I am Emmanuel, and you are?"

"Victoria." She replied.

"Nice name. Pleased to meet you." He answered smiling.

"The same here." Victoria replied and asked, "So, how do I apply sir?"

"Can you write stories based on fiction very well?" He

asked.

"Very well. I can by God's grace."

"Okay, good... Just send your CV to their email and attach about three to four chapters of one of your works... I will ensure I follow it up and get you shortlisted for their interview. I'll talk to my brother about you. Can I have your phone contact? And your full name please?" He brought out his phone to note her name and save her number.

"Alright sir. Manasseh Victoria Ochanya is my full name..." She replied and also gave him her phone number.

"Okay. I'll follow it up. The name of the company is PenPower On Resources and they are based here in Lagos, you can check their website in case you will like to make some findings about them... Their email address is penpoweronresources07@yahoo.com... You can forward your CV and a part of your story to them. Deadline is 24th of this month." He said.

"Ok sir... Thank you so much, I am really grateful."

"You are welcome... I will call you later." He replied and left in his car.

Victoria was really excited.

"It seems Dr Murewa's advise is going to work for me afterall." She thought.

Two weeks later...

Victoria sat among those who were waiting to be interviewed at PenPower On Resources. She had applied according to Emmanuel's instructions and true to his words, she had received a mail from the company, inviting her for an oral interview...

She was dressed in a smart blue skirt suit and white shirt. She and her mum had really prayed about the job interview and she hoped she will be among the few to be selected at the end of the interview. She had submitted the one she

considered to be the very best out of her stories. It was titled **AGAINST ALL ODDS.** She had written it when she was in 300 level in the University. She edited it again and mailed the first three chapters to the company...

They were about seventy, waiting to be interviewed. They called their names and rearranged them in an alphabetical order. Victoria's surname starts with 'M' so she wasn't among the first set of candidates that were attended to. Gradually, they moved closer to her name. At around past 12pm, she was called into the interview room.

The interview panel consisted of four people. Three guys and a lady. She greeted them and waited till she was asked to sit.

"Victoria Manasseh right?" One of the men said.

"Yes." Victoria replied with a bright smile. She noticed the resemblance between him and Emmanuel and she guessed that must have been his elder brother which he talked about.

"Good… So, tell us more about yourself."

Victoria with an air of confidence, introduced herself again and talked about a few things which included her educational background, work experience, hobbies and so on... When she was done, the lady among them cleared her throat and said,

"Victoria, sincerely your story has been considered as the most captivating among all the ones we received. You are really good, you did quite a great job."

"Thanks ma'am." She replied delightedly.

"But... There is a but..." The lady continued.

The smile on Victoria's face immediately vanished... "What could have been the but?" She thought. "God, please let nothing disqualify me." She prayed in her mind...

CHAPTER 11

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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The lady continued,

"Like I said earlier, you have a very beautiful story and your style of writing is superb but the issue is that it's a Christian story. You see, this is an organization not meant for a particular religion or sect. We are here to render our services to everyone, whether you believe in God or not... Whether you are an Atheist, or you are a Christian, Jewish or any other religion, we render our service to everyone so we wouldn't like to narrow down our articles and novels to the Christian faith." She remarked.

The other two guys nodded their heads in confirmation of what their colleague just said. One of the guys who hasn't spoken since Victoria entered the interview room said,

"Yes, that's right... Secondly, Victoria, as an upcoming writer, for you to ride fast in your career, it's better you write purely romance novels. People read romance stories than

any other ones, so it is advisable for you to upgrade yourself to that. You have a great world of opportunities to seize around you for you to become a shining star but you can't achieve that by writing Christian Stories. People won't patronize such books and we may not even get a single advert on the website on such stories because it won't draw the attention of the audience like romance stories."

"Exactly." The guy that resembles Emmanuel put in.

Victoria's heart sank where she was seated. She didn't know what to say. She stared blankly at the table. She never expected that the company might not subscribe to faith based novels, it didn't even cross her mind. All her novels are Christian stories...

She reasoned in her mind that she has been automatically disqualified as a result of that but the next statement she heard gave her a ray of hope.

"So, can you just do a little bit of editing? I mean can you edit the whole story to make it a romance novel, featuring

some sexual scenes? That is the only condition for you to be selected. We need just five people, and as it is now, your story seems to be the best. We will like to employ you, and if within six months, your story boosts the image and income of the company, you will enjoy a tantalizing offer of getting your works published in hard copies and even if possible, produce into movies where you will be starred, and before you know it, your name will make the headlines." The lady said.

Victoria initially got excited at first about the mouth watering offer, it seemed like a door of blessing and stardom has finally being opened for her but a part of her somehow was not taking it... She would have accepted the offer right away but she felt a restraint in her spirit.

"Ermmm... Can I..." She stuttered and her voice trailed off.

"Yes, go on." The guy that resembles Emmanuel urged her.

"Yes, I wanted to say, can you give me a few days to think about the offer and get back to you?"

They glanced at each other... The lady shrugged and replied,

"It's alright. Kindly get back to us within 48 hours. Anything after 48hours implies that the offer has been cancelled."

She emphasized. She seemed to be the one who had the final say in the company.

"It's fine ma'am. Thanks for the opportunity."

The panel discharged her and she left... All the way home, she debated the offer in her mind. Two different voices were speaking to her.

"This is an opportunity for you to ride into the height of glory and stardom that no member of your father or mother's family has ever reached. This can only be God at work." The first voice said.

"Stay in your calling. This is what you have been called to do... To mend lives and homes by introducing Christ to

them who is the only answer for the world today though your novels. You are the light of the world. Don't renounce your faith and embrace worldliness because of the fleeting things of this world." The still small voice replied.

"Removing Jesus, and putting a bit of sex scenes in your novels doesn't make you wordly. You are only trying to be the best in your career as a child of God. The Bible says "The Righteous shall shine like the brightness of the firmament in the kingdom of their father." You don't stand to gain anything if you don't become a shining star in this career you have chosen. There is no sin in being a star as a child of God... Even the Bible says, "The gift of a man will make way for him, he shall stand before Kings and not mere men." The other voice fired back.

"Stay in your calling. Therein is your glory. The Bible says, "Hold fast to the confession of your faith without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." The still voice came again.

Victoria was confused. She was so lost in thought that she passed the junction of her house a bit before she realized it.

She tapped the bus driver.

"Ha, driver please stop here. I'm sorry. I didn't know we have passed my bus stop oh."

"Hian! Nawa o! (Imagine!) Different people inside Lagos. Were you sleeping before? Abeg wey your money? (Where is your money)" The conductor replied.

Victoria paid her fare and ignored the bus conductor. She was too bothered in her mind to pay attention to his rantings. The bus finally stopped and she alighted. She got home and met her mum in the shop.

"Heeeeee! Welcome! So how did it go?" Her mum asked with a curious excitement on her face.

"It went well mum. Infact, to the glory of God, I was the most preferred." She replied as she settled on the bench beside her mother.

"Ha! Thank God oooh! So, have you been asked to resume?

How much is the salary?" Her mum asked.

"Not yet... We haven't finalized it." She replied.

"Why?"

She narrated to her mum how the interview went and the offer she was given to drop the Christian manuscripts and write purely romance stories.

Her mother sighed. The first statement she made was "Victoria, this is a test of faith."

"Mum, you think so too?"

"I know so my daughter, I don't think so... It is better you remain in that path the Lord has chosen for you. Don't look for a short cut to greatness. Be patient... If they do not appreciate that which you have to offer, don't try to follow their own dictates just because of the money involved. I understand that the offer is a mouth watering one, but then, remember that fulfilling God's will should be the paramount

thing you should pursue as a child of God. Whoever obeys God will never reap emptiness." Her mother advised.

"Hmmmm... Okay mum... I understand. I will get back to them and tell them that I won't change my storyline to romance. I would rather write Christian Stories to gain more souls than to write what people want to read and lose my purpose and place in God."

"That's good my daughter... Your food is in the kitchen. Go and eat. Don't worry, God will provide you your own job and elevate you at the right time."

"Thanks mum." She replied.

As she entered into the house, her phone rang. It was a strange number.

"Hello Victoria, this is Emmanuel."

"Hello sir... Thanks so much... I went for the interview today."

"Yes... My brother called me just now to inform me about you... He said you write only Christian Novels... Victoria, most of these readers don't read Christian books that much. Before you get five hundred people who read Christian books, you would have gotten about three thousand romance novel readers. If you can agree to adjust your novels to suit their targeted audience, I assure you that within a year, you would have made it. I was told you have such a beautiful story line... That's so good to hear, but if you want to 'blow' in your writing career in this country, Christian Novel is not the way to go oh, please...

Don't get me wrong, I am not against God, I am also a Christian, but what I mean is, don't limit your audience, spread your tentacles so you can reach out to many people, and please don't miss this opportunity, apart from the One Hundred thousand Naira monthly salary that you will be given for a start, you will also have opportunities to rise to stardom in your career."

"Alright sir... Thank you so much... I will pray about it."

"Alright then... Take care."

After Emmanuel had ended the call, Victoria was troubled again... She sighed and sat tiredly on her bed. Aside God, she knew there is one person she needs to consult again... Dr Murewa.

CHAPTER 12

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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Victoria finished her meal and sent a message to Dr Murewa via Whatsapp,

"I will like to discuss an issue with you when you are free sir. Thanks and God bless."

After about fifteen minutes, Dr Murewa's call came in through Victoria's phone.

"Hello Victoria, how are you? I hope all is well?"

"I'm fine sir... Yes, all is well sir. How's baby Vicky and aunty Ibidun?"

"They are doing great. How's mum and your siblings?"

"They are fine too sir... So, I need your advice concerning an issue sir... Though, even without praying about it yet my spirit doesn't agree, but then, I still feel like letting you in..."

She narrated in details how she had met Emmanuel and how she had attended the interview at PenPower On Resources and the terms and conditions they gave to her.

Dr Murewa listened attentively and replied,

"Hmmmm... Victoria, there is a verse of the scripture that the Holy Spirit dropped in my mind as you are speaking,

Psalms 137 vs 4&5 says,
"How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? If I forget you Oh Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill!"

Victoria, don't ever try to sing the 'Lord's song' in a foreign land... The stories God has inspired you to write is the Lord's, don't take it to a strange land. Don't ever forget your Lord, so that your right hand won't forget its skill... It will surprise you that the day you ever try to take the decision to write those so called romance stories, you may run dry of inspirations because God is your source, any day you cut yourself off from Him, He will cut you away... That won't be your portion in Jesus name.

"Amen." Victoria replied.

Dr Murewa continued,

"You see, this mandate was placed into your hands by God. He is the one that will sustain and sponsor you. God will never send you on an errand and get you stranded. It can never happen... Ibidun once mentioned it to my hearing that she saw in you a great vessel that God will use to inspire, transform, bless lives and restore homes and I am quite sure that this will manifest through the writing talent God has given to you. So, wait on God. He will come through for you very soon... Alright?"

"Okay sir..."

"Good, so reach out to the company now, don't procrastinate. Don't allow the devil to work on your mind. Tell them you have thought about it and you have concluded to stay in your domain, that is being a Christian author. If working with them is God's will, they will absorb you and create a platform for faith based novels for

interested readers but if it is not God's will, let it not stand. Don't even see it as a lost opportunity, it's not meant for you... You are in your own wilderness for now Victoria, you will soon get to your glorious throne. Don't try to work things out for God. Just obey him. There is a great reward at the end of every obedience, I pray yours won't elude you in Jesus name."

"Amen! Thank you so much sir. I really appreciate you and my spirit is lifted... God will continue to bless you. I'm grateful for this timely counsel."

"You are welcome dear... I have to go now... Talk to you later."

Immediately after the call, Victoria sent a mail to PenPower On Resources and made her stand known to them... She also sent a text message to Emmanuel, appreciating him for his kind gesture and of course told him her final decision. He replied her message instantly,

"It's fine Victoria. I understand you... I wish you good

success as you pursue your purpose in God. Best regards - Emmanuel."

Victoria felt a great relief afterwards... She was totally at peace with her decision.

****

It was a Sunday afternoon. The church service was over and some members were still loitering around in the church auditorium holding one meeting or the other... Victoria was seated at the back of the auditorium, she wanted to see the head of department of the editorial unit. The pastor had announced that if there is anyone who knew a good Christian author who can write inspiring write ups, such should kindly recommend the person as the church is in need of such writers for their monthly bulletin, notice board and also the church website that has just been opened. It's a young adult church not too far from Victoria's house...

Victoria just joined the church about two weeks back. She had told her mum that she was led to join that ministry, and

also because she was tired of being in the midst of aged people in the Orthodox Church that her mum had been attending since when they were young. She had prayed and was sure of God leading her to the new church. She felt fulfilled and inspired the very first day she worshipped with them and since then, she had been praying to God for leading as to which unit to join. She's not the type that would stay in the church without being active. Immediately the pastor made the announcement about the need for Christian writers, she was led to join the editorial department.

"Yes, I was told you wanted to see me sister." The young man in charge of the editorial unit said as he approached her."

She stood up and replied, "Yes sir."

"Please sit, I'm so sorry for keeping you waiting... My name is Joel, and you are sister..."

"Victoria Manasseh." She replied.

"Nice meeting you sis. I perceive you just joined our church because your face doesn't really look familiar."

"Yes, you are right. I joined two Sundays back."

"Wow great to have you here... So, how may I be of help ma?"

"Yes, it's about the announcement that pastor made earlier concerning the need for write ups on the notice board, monthly bulletin publication and the church website." She replied.

"Oh yes! Do you know anyone you can recommend that can write beautiful and inspiring Christian articles?"

"Yes sir, I can... I mean I write... I have written many articles and even some stories, though I haven't published any of them yet."

"Really? That's great! Okay, can I see any of your articles?"
"Sure but I don't have them here. I can send them to you."

"Alright, that will be fine. Let me give you my Whatsapp contact, you can just forward some of your write ups to me."

"It's alright sir."

Victoria collected his contact and she went home. Later in the evening, she brought out the book which contained most of her write ups and typed some of them on her phone. She sent them to brother Joel.

He responded after perusing...

"Wow! You have great articles there!" I can't wait to fix them on the church's notice board and also place on our website... God will continue to use you mightily for His glory."

"Amen. Thanks sir." She replied.

A sense of fulfilment enveloped her and she knew she made the right decision to join the church.

Several weeks later, Victoria's write ups were everywhere on the church's website, Facebook Page and other social media handles of the church. Church members now look forward to read her write-ups which they paste on the church's big notice board every Sunday. A lot were blessed through her short but powerful and inspiring articles.

She took a step further by releasing one of her stories titled **"THE FRIEND I NEVER KNEW"** on the church Whatsapp group after getting a go ahead from Bro Joel. The Whatsapp group which had been inactive for sometime suddenly came alive. Church members looked forward to the next episode, they discussed the turn of events in the captivating story and a lot of the church members even shared the story with friends... The story went viral and many people sent messages to Victoria, thanking God for what the story has done in their lives.

One Sunday after church service, a middle aged man walked up to Victoria and introduced himself as Mr Charles. He is a member of the church too but the face didn't look familiar to Victoria.

"Actually, I am not always in town, I work in Abuja and I pay my family a visit twice in a month. My wife is Susan in the ushering unit... I am really pleased to meet you. I stumbled on one of your write ups on the church Whatsapp group, **"THE DAY I NEVER WOKE UP."** Wow! You are a prolific Holy Spirit filled writer and I must confess that I was deeply touched. My marriage has been experiencing some challenges for some time now, but through that single write up, the Lord has restored me."

"Hallelujah! All glory be to God." Victoria replied.

"So, I told my wife that I would like to have a word with you. She was the one who even pointed you out to me after we closed because I didn't recognize you before now..."

His wife, Susan walked up to her husband and greeted Victoria,

"Happy Sunday sister Vicky."

"Same here ma'am."

"Infact, I really appreciate what God has done through your write up in my marriage. Seriously, it's a testimony. God will continue to bless you with more grace..." Susan said.

"Yes, I told her." Charles put in and added, "As I was saying, I wanted to ask if you have published any of your works, especially the stories."

"Not yet sir."

"Really? Well, in that case, I am willing to help in that area. I work in a publishing firm, infact one of the biggest in West Africa... Accolades Stone Publishers precisely. I'm sure you know the company. Their head office is at Abuja, that's where I work... I will talk with my boss, he is a born again Christian, I am very sure he will help you... You don't bother about the funds, God will take care if it. We will publish the works for you and you will sure make good money from it, that is certain... And before you know it, within a short while, your books will become bestsellers in West Africa. I am

certain about that and I trust God... Your stories are superb and we need talented people like you. You just give me the permission to go ahead and it shall be done."

Victoria was elated... She couldn't find the right words to show her appreciation to Mr Charles.

She kept repeating, "Ha, God will bless you sir... God will bless all that concerns you."

She hugged Susan. "Thank you so much ma, I don't even know how to appreciate you."

"You don't need to my sister. It is God we should thank." She giggled.

Victoria nearly flew home to break the good news to her mum.

She sang all the way,
Jesus you are so good to me,
In all circumstances, in all circumstances,

Oooo-oooh!

Jesus you are so good to me,

In all circumstances, in all circumstances,

Oooo-oooh!

Dependable, dependable God,

It doesn't matter what comes my way,

You are still God,

Intentional, intentional God,

Everything is working out for my good!

CHAPTER 13

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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It was a great moment of rejoicing when Victoria gave the news to her mum.

"Our God indeed never fail. He doesn't forget His own." Victoria's mum enthused.

A week later, Mr Charles called Victoria's number and updated her about his discussion with his boss, Mr Baruwa.

"I have introduced your stories to him and he is willing to help... I told you, he is a good Christian, he would appreciate your works. Infact, he asked me to tell you to come over to see him in Abuja so you both can talk and finalize the contract." Mr Charles said.

"Wow! I'm so excited. Thank you so much sir. I am really grateful. The Lord will not forget you."

"Amen... So, when exactly is convenient for you to come?"

"Next tomorrow sir."

"Alright... I'll send the address to you. Take care..."

Victoria travelled to see Mr Baruwa in Abuja and they eventually struck a deal. The company will publish and market her novels for her in almost all the countries in Africa and she will be given a percentage of the proceeds which for her is a very reasonable and considerate amount... She was given two weeks to edit and compile all her novels and mail it to the company. Victoria appreciated Mr Baruwa for the kind gesture.

"It's nothing my dear. You have obtained God's favour and trust me, your gift will take you before Kings." Mr Baruwa said.

"Amen." Victoria replied.

They discussed more about Victoria's background, education, work experience and her future goals... Mr Baruwa gave Victoria a sum of Fifty Thousand Naira

(#50,000). He urged her to rest in a guest house that will be made available for her and she can return to Lagos by flight the next day. The flight was booked and paid for by the company. Victoria was really nervous as she embarked on the flight. It was her first time. She shut her eyes for nearly half of the journey...

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Mr Baruwa entered his apartment that evening and went straight to his bedroom on the first floor to have a warm shower.

"Your dinner is ready." His wife, Comfort announced as he climbed the stairs.

"Hmmmm..." He grumbled and marched towards his bedroom.

He soon came down to join his wife at the dining table. They had their meal in silence...

"How was work today?" Comfort asked, trying to start a

conversation with her husband.

"Fine." He simply replied and continued eating his meal.

"Do you enjoy the meal?" Comfort asked.

Mr Baruwa dropped his cutlery. It was obvious that he was already pissed.

"Can I just have my meal in peace? If the food isn't good, I would have surely let you know." He said with a deep frown on his face.

"I'm sorry." Comfort apologized.

They ate the rest of their meal in perfect silence.

Mr Baruwa rose from the dinner table and went up the stairs to retire in his bedroom for the night. They both no longer sleep in the same room. He had instructed Comfort to move out of their matrimonial room since five years back.
Presently, their marriage is as good as dead. They hardly

talked and the loneliness has nearly squeezed life out of Comfort. Their two kids, Cecilia and Francis are away studying in one of the best boarding schools in Abuja. They only came home at the end of the term...

Comfort had long become a shadow of herself because her marriage has capsized. She no longer enjoy her husband and the part that drives her crazy is that she simply didn't know why.

Her husband suddenly stopped touching her like he used to do. Since five years back, she practically begged him before he fulfilled his marital duties on her. In the whole of 365 days in a year, they didn't meet for more than ten times and it has been that way...

Comfort has tried to plead with him, seduced him, did all she could, all to no avail. She wasn't willing to involve a third part in her marriage. At forty eight years, she had been married for twenty years, she found it ridiculous to inform third parties about her marital challenges... Her husband is an elder in the church and he is highly respected among

majority of the church members, so she decided to endure, hoping that one day, her husband will come around.

The part that confused her most is that, she had always suspected a strange woman to be involved, but as much as she tried to do some investigations, she never came up with any result. She tried a lot of times to monitor her husband's phone conversations, Whatsapp messages and SMS whenever he left his phone around, but she didn't get any clue and this had been driving her crazy but she kept her calm.

She had married her husband as a virgin, he was her first love. Her husband was already a University graduate when he met her, she was still an undergraduate back then. He had patiently waited for her till she graduated after which they got married. Some years later, after Mr Baruwa had been made the Regional manager of Accolades Stone Publishers, he had asked her to stop working in order to take care of the kids and the home. She had obeyed, hence she became a full housewife...

That very evening, she decided to try her luck again for the

umpteenth time, perhaps her husband would open up to her about whatever offence she had committed that made him to abandon her all these years. She approached his room slowly and knocked on the door.

"Yes? Come in!" He replied.

Comfort opened the door and entered the richly furnished bedroom. She only entered the room anytime she was doing the general cleaning of the whole house. She had become a stranger in her own matrimonial bedroom... She walked to her husband and knelt on both knees.

"My love, the husband of my youth, my joy and crown, what is really happening? What exactly is my offence? Please tell me. This dryness in our relationship is killing me. I can't endure it again. What exactly happened to us? We weren't like this...

Look at us, you are 52 while I am 48, we are both approaching our old age, this is the time we should be close to each other... Our kids are nearly done at high school. No

kids here to interfere with our privacy, yet we are so distant from each other for no specific reason. Everything just changed all of a sudden. Why my love? Please tell me whatever I have done to deserve this treatment from you." Comfort wept.

Her body vibrated as she sobbed. Mr Baruwa looked calm, his face had no particular expression... At last, he spoke,

Comfort, you didn't offend me... At all... You have been a very good wife to me. You have being submissive, loyal and caring to both I and the kids... But..." He stopped in his speech. He sighed and folded his arms across his chest.

"But what?" Comfort asked desperately.

CHAPTER 14

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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Mr Baruwa shifted uncomfortably. He knew his wife was passing through a deep emotional pain but he couldn't just salvage the situation. Comfort kept weeping. She looked at her husband intently and said,

"Please my love, let me know... At least when I know the reason behind all these strange attitudes in you, I can help us both to get a solution. She pleaded.

Mr Baruwa sighed again and replied,

"Actually... The issue is, I don't just find you attractive anymore. The sight of you pisses me off!"

He dropped the words as fast as he could and looked away from her.

Comfort was dumbstruck. She couldn't believe her ears... She was actually expecting him to talk about something she

probably did that pissed him off or maybe something he heard about her. She never expected that the cause of this whole change in her husband had to do with her physical appearance. She stopped weeping, stood up slowly and walked to the standing mirror in the room. She observed herself from head to toe, like she just had the opportunity to view herself in a mirror for the first time in her life... She remained there, observing herself for the next five minutes. Her husband was quiet, expecting her reaction.

"Joseph Baruwa, what exactly is wrong with me?" She spoke suddenly in her usual calm voice... She turned to him and continued, "I am still beautiful... Yes, I know that I am ageing already, you don't expect me to retain the same face and stature of the girl you fell in love with, but at least for my age I am not that bad! You are ageing already too but to me, you are ageing beautifully and I still love you just like that handsome young chap twenty years back... Joseph, what exactly do you want me to do? This is nature, you don't expect that I should have power to alter the course of nature." She started weeping again.

The reason her husband gave for his estrangement launched her into a state of a total emotional break down.

"It's not nature... There are things you can still do to improve on your looks... And asides the looks, you are no more that agile on bed!" He dropped another shocker.

Comfort opened her mouth and then used her palm to cover it. Her husband just dealt her another blow. She allowed the tears to flow freely. The voice of her husband filtered through her ears again.

"I come home everyday to meet you all dressed like a maid, at times you smell of fish, locust bean, and all manner of unpleasant odour... Look at your tommy. See how big it has grown. See the mass of flesh under your arms, you are doing practically nothing to keep yourself in good shape. How can you be active on bed when you are even struggling to lift those legs? See Comfort, I don't want to hurt your feelings, that's why I kept quiet all these years. I preferred to keep to myself because the sight of you turns me off. I mean, when I see my wife, I am supposed to be

turned on but no, the opposite is the case! I can't find the woman I am married to again... Comfort, I can't do this anymore! Let us just stay apart in this house." Mr Baruwa said.

Comfort sighed sadly. Each word her husband spoke pierced her heart, and she felt it might explode soon.

"Is there another woman somewhere?" She asked quietly.

Her husband didn't respond.

"Joseph, how can you be this callous? You noticed all these and yet, you refused to speak out your mind, knowing fully well that I would do anything to satisfy you. You complain that I smell of fish, dress like a maid and I look unkempt, why wouldn't I? You refused to get me either a cook or a maid! You insisted I don't need them since I don't work. And yet you insist you must not see a trace of dirt anywhere around the house.

As big as this house is, I clean it everyday including the

compound. You eat only fresh meal and I cook your meals on time and I still take care of the poultry at the backyard...

You insisted that I shouldn't use washing machine to wash your clothes, that we do not need it since I don't work, I do your laundry even though you can afford to engage the services of a dry cleaner, yet in all of these, I refused to complain, what else do you want me to do?

I wake up 4:30am everyday to prepare your breakfast and lunch and by 5pm, I must be back in the kitchen to get dinner ready because you don't eat late night food. Most of the times you enter the house after close of work, I would still be busy with doing the dishes and cleaning up the kitchen, how exactly do you want me to smell? Like a model who just dressed and sprayed perfume? Don't I bathe every night before joining you in the bed?

And as for the weight gain, you know the only thing responsible for it is the family planning pills I am using, I have once complained to you about it. I have tried other methods but they all had side effects that could be injurious

to my health. If you really love me, why didn't you agree to use condoms so I can maintain my good looks? Most of the changes on me are the outcome of what my body went through so you could be a father and you are here saying these? Joseph you are both selfish and wicked!" Comfort wept loudly. She was totally broken.

Her husband didn't respond to her allegations. He kept a straight face and gazed at the TV ahead of where Comfort stood... She sat tiredly on the floor and cried... After she had wept thoroughly, she stood up gently and walked to the door. She turned back to her husband,

"I know a strange woman is involved. This is not just my husband. But I pray God save you from this waywardness before it's too late." She said and walked out of the room.

Mr Baruwa felt bad because she knew Comfort doesn't deserve what he did to her but he couldn't just help himself... It all started about six years ago...

SIX YEARS EARLIER

Mr Baruwa had attended an official meeting of his company at Johannesburg, South Africa. The CEO had summoned all the regional managers of Accolades Stone Company to an annual meeting where they usually do the evaluation of their performances so far.

Mr Baruwa and his P.A, Bosun went to the meeting together. After the meeting, Mr Baruwa retired for the night in his hotel suite which had been prepared for him. His P.A also lodged in a seperate room. At around 6pm in the evening, he decided to go sight seeing in the premises of the hotel. He went to the pool side and sat there enjoying the cool breeze of the night... He ordered for some soft drinks and sipped it at intervals, while he watched some ladies swimming in the nearby pool... One of them got out of the pool and approached him. She was slim, fair and beautiful. She looked like a lady in her twenties...

"Can I sit with you?" She asked.

"Sure." Mr Baruwa replied.

"My name is Jessica, can I meet you?" She asked as she settled down.

"I am Joseph."

"Hmmm... Joseph the dreamer, it's nice meeting you. I had some dreams of late, I hope you will interprete them to me." She laughed.

Mr Baruwa laughed too. He loved her sense of humour. They got talking about different issues. He got to know that she is actually a Nigerian, she only came to Johannesburg to spend her holiday. She was a final year student in a University in Eastern Nigeria...

They both went to order for some barbeque and settled down again to eat... At 10:30 pm, Mr Baruwa said,

"It's been nice talking to you Jessica, I have to go now. It's getting late. I have a meeting for 8:00am tomorrow morning."

"Oh! Come off it! You mean to say a handsome man like you will have to spend the night alone?" She said seductively.

"Yes of course." Mr Baruwa knew where she was going but he determined to avoid her temptation.

Jessica stood up, walked to his back where he sat and rubbed his chest, trying to seduce him further.

"Ermmmm... Jessica, I am a married man okay and I respect my marriage so much." Mr Baruwa said, removing her hands and trying hard to resist the temptation. He stood up and faced her.

"Yes I know but that doesn't mean you can't enjoy yourself, you know?" Jessica winked at him. "Even David, a man after God's heart slept with another man's wife, yet God never stopped loving him." She added.

"Hmmmm... Do you know the punishment that God meted out to David for what he did?" Mr Baruwa argued.

"Yes I know but remember that this is the dispensation of Jesus, we are in an era of grace, so we can always ask for mercy." She smiled.

"You seem to know the Bible so much." Mr Baruwa smiled. "But I'm sorry, I will never cheat on my wife."

"Hmmmm... Okay then, I respect your decision... Can I at least see you off to your room?"

Mr Baruwa hesitated.

"Come on, I mean no harm..." Jessica urged him.

"Alright then." Mr Baruwa replied.

They both walked to his room.

"At least you will allow me to see how beautiful your suite is." Jessica said when they reached the entrance.

Mr Baruwa knew the game she was playing but somehow,

the temptation was getting too difficult for him to resist, especially from a very beautiful girl like Jessica.... He agreed. They both entered the room... And that was it... The intercourse they both had that night was the type Mr Baruwa had never experienced since he got married. To him, Jessica took him to the moon and back.

Since then, Comfort his wife never appealed to him again and he had been constantly in touch with Jessica who is now staying and working in Abuja after she graduated from the University. Mr Baruwa intentionally got the job for her to keep her close to him.

CHAPTER 15

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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Victoria told Dr Murewa and his wife about how God had led Mr Charles, her church member to be of help to her in a video call they had one evening after she travelled back to Lagos. Dr Murewa was really glad on hearing the news.

"I told you Victoria, God can't send you on an errand and get you stranded. This is just the beginning my dear. More wins are yet to come. Congratulations!"

"I know you are soaring high my baby girl. The sky is simply your starting point." Aunty Ibidunni said.

They both were really happy for her...

True to Mr Baruwa's words, Accolades Stone Publishers published five of Victoria's novels and they were given a wide and intense advert and publicity on almost all the online bookstores in the country and beyond... Hard copies of her books were also shipped down to neighbouring

African countries.

Within a few months, a lot of people requested for more copies of her books as lots of lives were deeply touched through her revelational novels... Her own share of the profit on the books sold were sent to her account from time to time. She could now conveniently sponsor her brothers at school. She got a bigger shop for her mum in town and also pumped money into her business. Her mum began to sell daily needs items and soft drinks in wholesale quantity. She soon became a major distributor for some of the companies she buy goods from.

They moved out of their face to face apartment into a well-furnished three bedroom flat... She also got a small car for her mum so she could move around with... She was able to get a better phone and also a brand new laptop to write her stories... To Victoria, it was all like a dream. She couldn't believe her story could change within such a short duration. God is indeed faithful... After all these years of suffering, God finally remembered them for good. She remembered Olayinka's words... It all began to make sense to her and

she was grateful to God that despite all the trials and temptations that came her way, she didn't give up but held on firmly to God...

One evening, Victoria saw an email message pop up on the screen of her phone. It was a mail from PenPower On Resources. She clicked on it and read the message. She was elated. PenPower On Resources by popular demand have specially created a platform for Christian Novel Readers and they requested that she join the team of 'The Top Best African Writers' on their website to write Christian Stories for them and she will be given a salary of $400 per month.

Victoria stared at her phone in unbelief. If not for the "Dear Victoria" that was at the beginning of the message, she would have thought it was a mix up or something. She didn't know what to say. This is just God at work. She went on her knees and burst into song,

"How great is our God!
Sing with me! How great is our God!

And all will see, How great,
How great, is our God!"

That was how Victoria picked up Writing as a full time career. She accepted the offer of PenPower On Resources and started writing for them. Money kept coming in too from the novels she sold through Accolades Stone Publishers. She started living large.
One day, Emmanuel called her number.

"Hi Victoria! It's been a while." He greeted.

"Hello sir. Please, I don't have this number. Pardon me, I changed my phone." Victoria replied.

"Sure, you would have changed your phone. You are a big girl now." He laughed. "This is Emmanuel, I was the one that told you about PenPower On..."

"Oh! I am so sorry Uncle Emmanuel. Please pardon me." Victoria interrupted him.

"It's alright, I understand. So, how has it been with you? Since you moved from your former house, I haven't been able to see you."

"Yes sir. I am good... We now stay at Diamond Estate."

"Really? That's not far from my house at all."

"Wow! For real?"

"Sure... Ermmmm... I want to see you for something very important. Where can we meet?" He asked.

"When do you want us to see? Hope tomorrow isn't too late."

"No it's not."

"Alright sir. Hmmmm... I will send a description of my mum's shop to you. That is where I'll be tomorrow because she has a function she needs to attend, so I will have to represent her there in order to coordinate her staff."

"Okay then. That will be fine. I will be expecting the address... See you tomorrow."

"Alright sir. I'll send it soon. Bye."

She sent the address to him after the call and resumed her writing.

****

Mr Baruwa sat tiredly on Jessica's sofa. He just closed from work and went straight to see Jessica to unwind a bit before going back home to his sad wife.

Since the day he confessed to Comfort that he no longer found her attractive, Comfort had maintained her cool and she went about her normal business in the home. She didn't even talk about the issue with her husband again and Mr Baruwa was relieved that Comfort had probably accepted her fate... They still went to church together but she constantly wore a sad countenance... Months rolled by and they practically lived like next door neighbours...

Jessica entered the living room with a plate of fried rice and chicken and set it before Mr Baruwa. She went to the fridge and brought out a cold juice for him too and sat beside him.

"Jessica, how many times will I tell you that I wouldn't like to take dinner here because of my wife... The least I can do for her now is to eat her meals. You have taken over her bed, you want to take over her kitchen too?" Mr Baruwa slapped her thigh playfully.

"Baby, how is it my fault na? You told me yourself that she is not good in bed, I jejely live in this house oh, you are the one that keep coming, so what wrong have I done? She should even thank me that I am helping her to service her husband. Is it easy?" Jessica smirked.

"Hmmmm... Madam the madam! That's why I love you. See how fresh my skin is, it's all because of you... Don't worry, I will eat little because I will have to eat at home tonight... I have been refusing her meals now for some time." Mr Baruwa said.

"Whatever..." Jessica replied, running her fingers through his hair.

He ate the meal with relish and left Jessica's place around 9pm after they have had each other to the fullest as usual.

Mr Baruwa entered his house and met his wife watching Television. She greeted him and focused on the TV.

"Where is my food? He asked.

"I didn't cook your meal." She replied bluntly.

"What? So, what exactly do you want me to eat?"

Comfort laughed and replied "The same thing you have been eating since the past two weeks that you have been refusing to eat dinner." She stood up, switched off the TV and went up the stairs to her room.

Mr Baruwa couldn't believe his ears. "Is this Comfort?" He asked himself, wondering what has come over her.

"Come back here Comfort!" He said as he marched up the stairs. He opened the door of her room.

"What has come over you?" He demanded.

"Nothing... And for your information, I want a divorce."

"Wh... what? What... What did you just say?" He stuttered.

Comfort ignored him.

"And what will you tell the church? All those who see you as their role model?"

"Role model my foot! Or you mean to say all those who see you as their father in the Lord. Oh well, you should have thought about that before you start sleeping around. I refuse to die of emotional pains, I have to stay alive to care for my kids..." She removed her wedding rings and threw them at him. "Expect my lawyer to bring the divorce papers for you to sign tomorrow." She replied on a final note.

She carried her luggage and wheeled it down the stairs. Mr Baruwa observed that her bedroom is already nearly empty. She must have been moving her loads in bits and he wasn't aware. He followed and watched her move out of the house."

"Where are you going to stay this night?" He called after her as she was about to open the gate to step out of the compound.

She turned back and scoffed.

"Like you care?" She hissed and walked out.

Mr Baruwa heard the sound of a car engine start and move in the street. Before he could get out to see the car, it has zoomed off. She couldn't see Comfort either. It was certain that she had gone with the car. He bolted the gate and entered the living room in a confused state of mind.

CHAPTER 16

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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Emmanuel got to Victoria's mum's shop around 3:00pm... Victoria welcomed him and entertained with some snacks and juice... After chatting for a while, Emmanuel decided to state the reason for his coming.

"Victoria, I actually came to see you for a very important matter."

"Yes sir, you said so earlier." She responded.

"Ermmmm... Actually, since the day I met you, I have liked you. I usually buy things from your mum each time I passed through your streets back then, so when you started staying there after your youth service, I picked a special interest in you. It was that same interest that made me ask for your hobby the other time and you said you could write... Actually, I must confess that I like you a lot. You are just the perfect model of the wife I have always told God I want to marry. Beautiful, godly, intelligent and humble... Victoria, I

want you to be my life partner. Please, kindly consider my proposal." He said.

Victoria sighed. She understood what Emmanuel said perfectly.

"Okay sir... I will think and pray about it."

"It's time you drop this 'sir' okay?" Emmanuel smiled. "And if I may ask, how old are you?"

"Twenty seven." Victoria smiled back at him.

"Hmmmm.... I'm just thirty four. So you see that the age difference isn't up to saying sir sir, up and down." He said and they both laughed.

"Seven years older is enough to say sir oh!" She said.

Emmanuel laughed and replied, "Mere looking at us, can someone tell that the age gap is that much?" He winked.

"I don't know oh!" Victoria replied timidly.

"Okay Victoria, please think about what I said. I will be expecting your response... Or are you engaged already?" Emmanuel replied on a serious note.

"Nah! Not yet... It's alright... Just give me some time to pray about it." Victoria replied.

"Okay dear... Please do. It's necessary... I am convinced though because I have seen all the qualities I have been asking God for in you. I will be expecting your response."

"Sure. Thanks for coming." Victoria replied.

Emmanuel rose up to take his leave while Victoria saw him off to where he parked his car.

****

"Mummy, what do you think about Mr. Emmanuel?" Victoria asked her mum while they were preparing dinner in the

kitchen that same evening.

"Mr. Emmanuel? Which Emmanuel?" Her mum asked.

"Your former customer. The man that introduced me to PenPower On Resources."

"Oh! I remember him... So, what about him? Why did you ask that question?" Her mum asked.

"You know I told you he said he wanted to see me today..."

"Yes... That's true. You said so. Did he come?"

"Yes ma... I even thought he wanted to talk about my job or probably another opportunity that I could benefit from."

"Hmmmm... So, what did he talk about?" Victoria's mum asked as she chopped the vegetables.

"He asked me to marry him."

"Really? Marry? Hmmmm... I never saw that coming." Her mum responded.

"I didn't too... But I think I like him sha."

"Hmmm... Careful oh. Before you get carried away... You need to pray about him."

"Sure mum... I know. I'm just saying what I feel about him."

"Yes, he is a nice man and I like him too but it is God that searches the heart and knows the deep thoughts of man."

"Yes ma... Though he said he is convinced about me because he saw in me all the qualities he asked God for but I told him I will like to pray about him so I can be convinced too."

"Good... I pray God choose for you my dear. With the kind of ministry you carry, you must not marry just any man. You carry great grace and glory and so you must marry a man who will bring the best out of you and will be there to

encourage and support you all the way. A man that will see your mandate as his, and vice versa... I pray God choose for you. You won't marry wrong in Jesus name." Her mum prayed.

****

After Comfort walked out of her marriage, she went to stay in an apartment she had earlier secured somewhere in town. He husband had refused to sign the divorce papers and at the same time, he didn't call to check on her. She instructed her lawyer to hold on. She concluded that her husband's refusal to sign the letter means that there is still hope for her marriage.

She paid her children a visit at their school one day and briefed them about what happened between her and their dad. But she omitted the part that has to do with their dad going out with another woman. She only told them that he said he no longer loved her like before and so she had to step aside for a while until things get back to normal between them because she hoped so.

"But mum, where will we stay during the holidays?" Cecilia, the older of the two asked her.

"Don't worry my dear, before then, we would have discussed that, I mean I and your dad."

"I will like to stay with you mum." Francis said.

"No Francis... It's possible that you both will have to stay with your dad while I come to check on you often."

"But mum, he said he doesn't love you anymore, why will we stay with him? He might as well wake up one day and tell us he doesn't love us too." Cecilia lamented.

"No my darlings. Your dad is not a bad person okay? He will always love you no matter what. You see, what happened between us was a misunderstanding that usually happen among elderly couples, he didn't mean what he said. I'm sure he will come around very soon okay? Promise me you won't be bitter against him."

"Okay mum." They both replied.

Comfort couldn't hold back the tears. She hugged her two children and cried as she remembered how much she had always wished for 'a happily ever after' life with her husband before things fell apart...

****

Mr Baruwa entered Jessica's apartment one evening after close of work in his usual manner. After Jessica had served him his food, they both settled down to talk in the living room.

"Baby, I will be getting married soon." Jessica announced.

"What did you just say?" Mr Baruwa asked. He was taken aback.

"I'm getting married sooooon!" Jessica emphasized the word soon, like she wanted it to register in his ears.

"You mean you have a fiance all these while and I'm not aware?"

"Baby, you are funny. So, you expect a lady of my age not to have a fiance? God forbid. My fiance is in Canada studying and he's returning to Nigeria very soon because he will soon be done with his studies and we will get married immediately."

Mr Baruwa started sweating... "So, what will happen to us?" He demanded.

"Us? What do you mean by us? Baby, you have your wife, your kids and a home. Don't you want me to get married too?"

"Okay... Alright... Assuming you now get married, what will now happen? How do we see each other?" He asked with a frustrated expression.

"See each other? Oga, e never do you? Haha? You expect me to still date you after marriage? God forbid oh! What if I

get caught in the act by my husband? What will I tell him?"

"My friend, don't joke with me joor... I have been investing in you all these years, now you say you want to marry... Okay, I didn't argue, go and marry but will you abandon me like that? It's not possible!" He screamed angrily at her."

"Wait oh, I don't get... You expect me to date you all my life? Like when I'm pregnant, we will still be seeing each other or how? Joseph please come off it, your wife and kids are the only ones that will be with you till death, or do you plan to marry me? Please oh, I must start my own home too. Whatever we had together was just a fling and nothing more." She retorted.

"So, you didn't know it was a fling all these while that I have been pumping money into your account? All these years? My wife even left me, you didn't remind me it was a fling then?"

"Your wife leaving home, how is that my fault? So you intend to marry me to replace her or what? You said you

pumped money into my account, was it for free? Haven't I serviced you even more than what I get from you?"

"My wife left me because I gave her no attention. It's all your fault because she knew I was seeing someone else!" Mr Baruwa shot back.

"It's not my fault! Okay now, so what do you want me to do?" Jessica asked.

"Good! You are not getting married and that is final!" He said with authority.

Jessica laughed out loud. "Abeg, what does that mean? You want to pause my life? You didn't marry me, and you are asking me not to marry? Joseph, you must be joking!"

"I mean it, every bit of it!" He barked.

"You must be crazy then!" She replied.

Mr Baruwa slapped her. "How dare you?! Not even my wife

would ever tell me that I'm crazy." He fumed with anger.

"What? You slapped me?" Jessica screamed and landed two hot slaps on his cheeks. "That is your wife, not me! This is Jessica!" She shouted at him.

CHAPTER 17

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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Victoria prayed about Emmanuel but she didn't receive any confirmation from God. Instead, her mind was troubled. She somehow lost her peace concerning him... Emmanuel asked her about her decision but she asked him to give her more time because she hadn't heard from God...

One evening, she was working on her laptop when a call came in through her phone. It was an unknown number... She picked it.

"Hello, is that Victoria?" The strange voice asked.

"Yes? This is Victoria. Good evening." Victoria replied thinking the person is one of her fans.

"Ha, that's fine... See, I want to tell you something... I went through my husband's phone yesterday and I stumbled on some chats you both had together. Don't let him deceive you oh! He is an idiot. He is a married man and still

proposing marriage to you... He told me some months back that he wanted a divorce but I refused..."

"Hello ma'am!" Victoria cut in. "Please, it seemed you called a wrong number ma. I'm sorry."

"It's not a wrong number. I copied your number from his phone." The lady retorted.

"And who is your husband? Excuse me ma'am, I don't have any married man I'm dating please. I'm not that kind of person." Victoria affirmed.

"My husband's name is Emmanuel.... Emmanuel Morris." She replied.

Victoria's jaw dropped. "Emma... Emmanuel?" She stammered. She was really astonished at the information. "Madam, are you sure of what you are saying?" She asked.

"Do you need some proofs? Okay, is this your Whatsapp number?" The woman asked.

"Yes it is." She replied.

"Alright, I'll send you some of our wedding pictures. So, you can be sure." She replied confidently.

"Some men are wicked." Victoria said under her breath... "Okay ma'am, I will be expecting them... But wait, your voice sounds so familiar... Have we met before?" She asked.

"I don't think so..." She replied.

"I think so... I am trying to remember..." Victoria paused and closed her eyes trying to reflect...

"Anyways, I do not know you... Just kindly stay away from my..." The woman was saying when Victoria interrupted her.

"Is that Patricia? Patricia Dennis. Graduate of Guidance and Counselling from Stan University." She bellowed.

"Yes..." The strange voice replied slowly. "Yes, I'm Patricia Dennis, now Patricia Morris... Wait, is that Victoria Manasseh?!" She asked.

"Yes I am! Patricia, how are you?"

"Jesus!" Patricia screamed. "You are the one that wants to marry my husband or my husband wants to marry! Heeeeeheeee! What a small world! Emmanuel is a mad man!" She replied furiously.

"I did not know he's married Patricia, he proposed to me some weeks back and I said I'll pray about it... I'm so surprised to hear this... Please believe me, I wasn't aware." Victoria replied.

"Victoria, Emmanuel is married. He told me he wanted a divorce for no particular reason. We have just been married for a year... He has even moved out from our house in the island and has moved to the mainland. I went to his office yesterday and was able to get hold of his phone when he went out of his office to attend to one of his colleagues who needed his attention. That was when I saw the chats he had

with you and I quickly copied your number... I didn't have your number again, otherwise, I would have known you were the one."

"This is serious!" Victoria said.

"Please Victoria, can we see? I have even wanted to see you all these years, I have a confession to make." Patricia pleaded.

"Confession? Okay, where should we meet?" Victoria replied.

They both agreed to meet at an eatery in town. After the call, Victoria let out a loud sigh...
"Some men can be so deceitful!" She hissed angrily.

Some minutes later, she received some messages on her Whatsapp, it was Patricia. She sent some of her traditional and church wedding pictures to her.

"Another story just popped in! This life is so dramatic!

Emmanuel? Thank you Holyspirit for the gift of guidance." She soliloquized.

****

Comfort lay on her bed. It was around 7pm in the evening. She felt so lonely and destabilized... She toyed with the idea of talking to Joseph's parents about what was going on in her marriage but she dismissed the thought. She did not tell her own mum too. For no specific reason, she had a feeling that her husband would come back to her again..

Their pastor had called her one evening and she learnt through him that Joseph had told the whole church that she had travelled and won't be back for some time...
"Hmmmm... Joseph Baruwa... You have combined lying with adultery." She had thought after her conversation with their pastor.

She felt like picking up her phone and tell the pastor the truth behind the whole story but she was somehow restrained from doing so... She knew it would have a strong

negative effect on the body of Christ. Her husband is an elder at church whom everyone reveres so much...

She soliloquized in her bed that evening,

"God, Joseph wasn't like this... Where did something go wrong? He had been devoted to me and the kids all his life... I know he has his own flaws and weaknesses too... He is kind of domineering to some extent, but adultery? My husband hated it with passion. What suddenly went wrong? God please reshape my marriage. Bring back my husband to me... Lord, I have told you I don't want my children to be a product of a broken home. Please come and intervene Lord!" She cried.

"Check yourself too... You have some roles to play." A voice spoke in her heart. She knew it was the Holy Spirit...

"Roles? I have submitted to this man all my life and that is the major thing the scripture commands wives to do!" She argued with the voice.

She waited for a response but everywhere was silent...

CHAPTER 18

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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Comfort wept for the remaining part of the night. She later rose up and had a warm shower. She then lay on her bed to sleep but sleep eluded her. She tossed on her bed for the umpteenth time but she couldn't sleep. She sat up, agitated and frustrated.

"Pray for your husband." The voice came again.

"Lord, please don't go there at all... I should pray for who? A man who hurt me that much? I practically submitted to him all my life!"

"Yes, because I commanded you to submit... You have been obedient and I see it all... But Joseph needs your prayers right now... Pray for him."

"Lord, this is difficult! My heart is bleeding here right now. How can I be praying for a man who said he doesn't like me anymore?!!! Lord, this is ridiculous! Why did you make the

world this way? Why do women suffer this much? We serve and submit to them but they turn around and betray us, yet you ask us to pray? Why do we suffer so much as women? Please forgive us if it is because of the sin that Eve our Mother committed." Comfort replied frustratingly.

"Yes, I made it that way because you are the neck that holds the head, which is your husband. If you don't do the needful, the head will remain where it is... You have the power and the capacity to speak that which you want to happen in the life of your husband and it will be so. Can the head turn without the neck?"

"No Lord." Comfort replied.

There was silence...

Comfort pondered on the words...

"But what do I pray about exactly? He intentionally committed that sin and even after I confronted him, he was still bold enough to tell me I am not longer attractive. He had

no iota of remorse... He even went ahead to lie to the church and pastorate that I travelled and wouldn't be back for a long time! What deceitfulness! He is a cheat and a bloody liar! How do I pray for such a man? This neck is too weak to turn such a rotten head!" She started weeping again.

She wept for a while... Then she heard the voice again,

"Read the epistle of Paul to the Romans, chapter 8 verse 26."

Comfort picked her NKJV Bible and opened it. She read aloud.

"Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

She pondered on the scripture for a while and then went on her knees.

"Lord, help my weaknesses! Help my husband's weaknesses! Deliver my husband from every spirit of adultery and lying. Save my husband from the grip of every strange woman. Lord, establish my home again. Deliver my husband from every lust of the flesh that wages war against his soul..."

She prayed seriously. Her body vibrated as she did... Then she woke up! She checked the time. It was half past four. She had dozed off, where she sat on her bed, her back rested on the pillow at the head of the bed. God has just spoken to her through her dream.
"Thank you so much Lord for this revelation at this time." She whispered.

She immediately removed her duvet, rose up and switched to a prayer mode. She prayed for her husband fervently.

****

Joseph Baruwa found himself in a disrupted state. Since the day she had a misunderstanding with Jessica and they

had slapped each other, they both hadn't talked to each other. Jessica had told him it was over between them. She also told him never to come looking for her again. Joseph left her place that day in serious anger. He felt so belittled that he got slapped by someone like Jessica, just because he stooped so low to sleep with her...

After his anger had subsided, he longed for her loving arms again. He dialed her number several times for several days but she refused to pick neither did she return any of the calls. He would have gone to check on her but that would have bruised his ego... Also, he couldn't call Comfort back. His ego wouldn't allow him to do that either. He had so much missed the ever timely and delicious meals of his wife. Their bedroom activity was the only thing he never missed until Jessica walked out of his life.

For Jessica on the other hand, it was a case of good riddance to bad rubbish. She didn't want Joseph to appear in her life again. She would be getting married and she didn't want her affair with Joseph Baruwa to destroy her relationship with her fiance.

One weekend, Mr Baruwa felt so lonely in his house. He decided to read some books to keep himself busy. He laid his hands on a copy of one of Victoria Manasseh's books, **"THE THORN IN MY FLESH."** He smiled as he remembered her... He hadn't thoroughly gone through all her books. The one he remembered reading halfway was **"TO LIVE AGAIN"** and it was such a powerful novel.

He flipped through the pages of the novel and each of them made him long to read more... It was as if the writer knew his present state of life at the moment... He continued reading and each sentence in the book revealed more of God's mind to him. By the time he finished reading the novel, he was totally broken. For the first time after a very long time, he had shed some tears. The last time he did was when they lost their second baby, Angie.

He went on his knees and began to cry to God for mercy.

****

Victoria and Patricia met as earlier agreed. It was such a

joyous moment for them. They hugged each other in great excitement...

"You are now a big woman oh Victoria!" Patricia said.

"How about you? I'm glad to see you again sis!" Victoria hugged her again.

After they had settled down in the eatery, Victoria said,

"Patricia, I am so sorry I had to reconnect with you through this way. I just pray God step into your marriage and make it whole again."

Patricia sighed and replied,

"I should be the one to apologise to you Victoria. I have wronged you a lot..."

"Me? How?"

"Victoria, you are a good person, a child of God to the core.

Whoever plots evil against you would be seriously dealt with... When we were back at school, I seriously envied you. How could someone have the brains, the beauty, the attention, and the praises of both the students and even the lecturers? I was embittered against you... So, I sought for ways to deal with you...

I was the one who told Mrs Murewa back then that you were having an affair with her husband... When I discovered that you two knew each other and my plan to get you into trouble was truncated, I decided to try another means to indict you. I planned to rope you in a case of sex scandal with a lecturer but God dealt with me one night. I heard it clearly in my dream that if I ever touch Victoria, He would cut me into pieces. That was why I suddenly avoided you since then if you can remember.

My moving close to you back then wasn't from a sincere or pure heart, I was plotting evil... Please Victoria forgive me. Isn't God dealing with me already? My husband has decided to walk out of our marriage after just one year, only to come to you for solace. Victoria, please forgive me and

pray for me. Maybe by doing that, I will have my marriage back." She cried.

Victoria was shocked beyond words... God defended her while she slept and didn't even know anything. She held Patricia's hands and said,

"Who am I to hold anything against you Patricia? I didn't even know anything until you just voiced it out. It is God that you should seek forgiveness from. He is the only one that can forgive you totally, save you and deliver you from every consequence of the sin of your past. I don't hold anything against you dear sis... Let us pray."

Victoria prayed a short prayer with her and led her to Christ. Patricia wept in total repentance and surrender. She felt better after the prayer.

"May your Marriage receive a new and fresh wine in Jesus name." Victoria prayed.

"Amen." Patricia replied.

They ordered for some snacks and discussed a lot of things thereafter. They really had a great time together.

"Patricia, before we go, let's take a selfie together." Victoria smiled.

She brought out her phone.

"Smile!" She said as she took a picture.

They parted ways and Victoria went straight to her home. She settled down after she had prayed, then she brought out her phone from her bag, logged into her Whatsapp account and shared the picture she and Patricia took with Emmanuel. She also attached a message underneath it,

"Do you know this lady?"

She sent the message and waited for his reaction.

CHAPTER 19

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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Emmanuel refused to respond to Victoria's message. He knew she had already gotten an hint that he was married... He simply ignored the message Victoria sent to him on Whatsapp and he never called her again. Victoria told her mum about what she discovered about Emmanuel.

"That is men for you my daughter. That is why you must be careful, prayerful and watchful in choosing your life partner." She admonished her.

****

Comfort Baruwa continued praying for her husband. Each time she did, she felt healed from the wounds she had sustained as a result of the heart break she had earlier suffered from him.

One evening, just after she had dinner, a call came through her phone. It was her husband. She couldn't believe her

eyes. She wiped her face with her palms, just to be sure that what she saw was indeed real... She picked the call with trembling hands. Her heart beating faster, wondering what her husband had to say.

"Hello sweetheart," came the baritone voice of her husband.

Hearing his voice now made her realize how much she had missed him.

"Joseph." She simply replied. "Is that you?" She added.

"Yes, it's me. Please, I need to see you. Where are you?"

"Ermmmm... Why do you want to see me?" She asked.

"I'm sorry about how much I have hurt you all these while. I am so sorry. I need to see you to tender my sincere apology."

"Okay... Just that?"

Silence...

Mr Baruwa was struggling with his ego. Yet, he needed to let his wife know that he has realized his mistakes.

"Not only that... Comfort, I want you back in my life. I have realized my errors and I am ready to retrace my steps. Please, come back home to me." He said.

Comfort sighed and held her chest with her left hand.

"Thank you Jesus." She whispered quietly to herself.
"Are you still there?" Her husband asked.

"Yes. I am."

"Please sweetheart, my life is empty without you. Yes, I slipped and I fell. I am not ashamed to admit it... I have ended that evil relationship and I have found my way back to Christ... Please Comfort, I need you beside me in order to live right again."

"Hmmmm... And you think it's that easy for me to let go of the past, considering how much you have hurt me? What if you find yourself another side chic tomorrow? You said it yourself that I am no more attractive to you." She replied.

"I will never go back to my vomit again by God's grace... I regret all I ever said my dear. I wasn't thinking straight.. My heart was captured by another woman but thank God I'm back. Please believe me, you are the only one that can help me and that can love me unconditionally. Please forgive me." He pleaded.

"Accept your husband and help him to live right again." The still small voice said to Comfort.

"It's alright dear. I forgive you." Comfort replied. Tears welling up in her eyes.

"Really? Are you sure you have forgiven me wholeheartedly?" Her husband asked excitedly.

"Yes." She responded calmly.

"Ha, the devil has been put to shame! Thank you sweetheart... Please where are you? I need to pick you up tonight." He enthused.

"It's past 8pm already Joseph. Don't worry, I'll come home tomorrow morning." Comfort answered.

"No please, it's not late yet. Are you in Abuja? No where is too late for me to reach in Abuja tonight." He replied as he picked up his car key and raced down the stairs.

"Okay. I'll send the address."

Within an hour, Joseph Baruwa was at Comfort's doorstep. He pressed the doorbell anxiously... Comfort opened the door and Mr Baruwa stepped into the small one room self contained apartment. He turned around and gave his wife a warm hug. They hugged each other for some minutes while Comfort wept.

"Please forgive me for all I have put you through sweetheart. I am truly sorry." He held her head to his bossom. "How

have you been coping?" He asked as they both sat down on the sofa. He held her hands in his and observed her weak eyes. He used his left thumb to wipe her tears.

Comfort shrugged her shoulders and said, "God is taking care of me."

"Hmmmm... I'm so sorry for keeping you lonely."

"It's alright... So, I made you dinner, should I serve it now?" She asked.
Joseph drew her closer and replied. "Yes, I have missed your meals but I miss you more... Can we just sit and talk?" He smiled.

Comfort laughed.

They talked about a lot of things... Their togetherness brought old memories and they both were happy. They later ate dinner together and reminisced about the past.

"I'll spend the night here... We'll go home together tomorrow

morning." Joseph said as they finished their meal.

"Okay. That's fine." Comfort replied.

He carried her in his arms and marched to the bedroom where they had a nice time together through the night for the first time after some years.

****

Jessica's fiance, Eric returned to Nigeria and they got married in a grand style. The wedding took place in the bride's home town in the East after which they travelled down to Lagos where they settled. She never heard from Mr Baruwa again and she was glad that she had successfully buried him in her past... They had a blissful honeymoon after which her husband returned to work.

One evening, around seven months after her wedding, she got a call from someone...

"Hello, is that Jessica?" The voice at the other end said as

she picked the call. It was a lady.

"Yes, this is Jessica. Who am I on to please?"

"I have been trying your husband's line and it's not getting through, can I speak with him please?"

"I said who are you and by the way, how did you get my number?" Jessica shouted at her.

"You better take it easy because of your condition. Give the phone to Eric." The lady replied.

"What? Who the hell are you?!" She screamed into the phone again.

Her husband walked into the living room and asked,
"Baby who are you screaming at? Take it easy."

"Sweetie, there is an idiot on the line that wants to speak with you. I don't know who the hell she thinks she is and how she even got my number."

Eric collected the phone from her.

"Hello, this is Eric." He said.

"Hi baby! Why was your phone switched off all through the day? The lady replied.

Eric stole a glance at Jessica and replied the lady through the phone, "I'll call you back soon."

Jessica went wild when she heard what the lady said. She seized the phone from her husband and screamed at the strange lady.

"What did you just say? Who are you? If you know what's good for you, leave my husband, else, I'll show you pepper!" She threatened.

The strange lady laughed and replied her calmly,

"I am not struggling with you okay? I was on my own when

ur hubby came to me. And don't you know something good can't belong to only one person? Eric is a good man, you can't be the only one to enjoy him." She laughed.

"What?" She turned to her husband, "Did you just hear that Eric? What audacity does she have to say this? What an effontery!" She spoke into the phone again, "Hey! Whatever your name is, I am warning you to stay away from my husband or else, you won't live to tell the story." She said with annoyance and ended the call.

"Can you explain what this means? Eric, have you started sleeping around?" She screamed furiously.

"Take it easy dear... Calm down. Allow me to explain."

"Explain what? Explain what exactly? I'm asking you... What do you have to explain when it is glaring that she is your girlfriend. She is even aware that I'm pregnant. So, what explanation do you have to make? You are a disappointment Eric..." She ranted on and on and refused to give her husband a chance to speak.

Eric headed towards the bedroom when he got tired of his wife's ranting. Jessica pulled him back with the collar of his shirt.

"Come back here Eric. Where do you think you are going?" She barked.

"Are you crazy Jessica? If not that you are pregnant, I would have given you a serious beating." Eric thundered at her.
"Oh really? Because of that slut?"

Eric ignored her, picked up his car key and dashed out of the house.

"Where do you think you are going?" Jessica shouted and raced after him. Just before she opened the door, she missed her steps on the tiled floor and fell.

CHAPTER 20

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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Jessica held on to her tommy... She could feel some pains. The door opened and Eric walked in. He had heard a loud thud as he was about to open the door of his car so he rushed back into the house to see what was going on.

"Eric... Eric..." Jessica managed to say as her husband tried to lift her up.

"What happened? How did you fall?"

"Hospital... I feel some excruciating pains." Jessica whispered.

Eric rushed her down to the hospital within twenty minutes. The doctor on duty attended to her immediately while Eric waited at the reception. Few minutes later, the doctor came back to the reception room and Eric sprang to his feet.

"Sir, we need to bring out the baby through Cesarean

Section. She is in labour already. We can't risk allowing her to have a normal delivery because the placenta is lying low."

"Labour? Delivery? But she is just six months pregnant doctor."

"Six months? No sir... According to the scan result I just conducted, the pregnancy is at 37 weeks already. The complete gestation period is 40weeks, so if she births the child now, she is not birthing a premature baby. Her pregnancy is around nine months already. Please get her delivery bag and please you will have to sign some documents before we can proceed with the surgery." The doctor replied.

"Around nine months? But we got married just seven months ago, and according to her, she confirmed she was pregnant one month after our wedding. Doctor, I don't understand what you are talking about." Eric replied frantically.

The doctor patted his shoulder and said,

"We can discuss that later please. We really need to get the surgery done as soon as possible. Please come with me to sign the documents."

The doctor walked briskly to his office while Eric followed him, in a confused state of mind.

"There is only one explanation for this. That child is not mine." He thought within him.

****

Mr & Mrs Baruwa went to visit their pastor at home. Mr Baruwa had confessed to the pastor how he had fallen into the sin of adultery and had lied to everyone in church that his wife had travelled when actually she had moved out of the house... Their pastor had prayed with them after the confession and also asked them to come around later for further counselling. So, they both decided to visit the pastor that evening...

After they had all settled down, the pastor started his speech,

"Sister Comfort, I want you to know that you are the gate keeper in your home and you determine who goes in and who comes out. If you want the devil to come in, or God to come in, it lies in your hands. We as men often make mistakes. Yes, but our ego may not make us admit it. You as the woman should be on guard so that you will help your husband from sinking into his errors...

If at any point in time, the devil is able to strike through your husband, you should stand fast in the place of prayers to restore him...

And then, apart from the spiritual aspect, please improve on your sexual life. Men love varieties. Try different styles... It's a pity that most churches are shying away from lecturing their married couples about these things and it's really destroying a lot of homes... I learnt you both still practise the missionary style... No my sister, try having intercourse with other positions. Don't be ashamed when you are with

your husband. You both can see a sex therapist if need be in order for you to spice your Marriage... It is very important."

"Yes Sister Comfort." Pastor's wife put in and added, "Also, invest in good sets of underwear and nighties, the type that will make your husband's head spark fire!"

They all laughed.

Pastor continued,

"Well, these things may sound funny but they are important and they really go a long way in making our marriages enjoyable... It is when we do our own part that God will do His. A lot of couples neglect these aspects...

Some wives starve their husbands of sex and they begin to cry to God in prayer when their husbands get entangled with a strange woman...

Then, please Bro Joseph, you need to understand the fact

that your wife is your companion and helpmeet, please treat her as such. You don't expect a woman who has slaved away in the kitchen all day, ran diverse kinds of errands and has done house chores to be very agile in bed at night. It can't work. Let's not call on God to do what we should do as humans, let us play our own roles too."

"Yes sir. Thanks sir. We are already trying to get a gardener that will be trimming the flowers and will also be taking care of the poultry. We have gotten a washing machine too." Mr Baruwa replied.

"Oh, that's impressive." Pastor said.

"Thank you sir." Mrs Baruwa replied.

"I want to congratulate you both for finding your way back to God. Some couples aren't that lucky... And I pray the Lord will make your wine fresher and newer in Jesus name." Pastor prayed.

"Amen." They all chorused.

"Shall we have a word of prayer?" The pastor said and then paused. "Oh, lest I forget, that sister that wrote the book you read, **"THE THORN IN MY FLESH."** Please, I will like us to invite her to speak to the youths during their annual convention that is on the way."

"Ok sir. Her name is Victoria."

"Alright. Sister Victoria... Please how can we get in touch with her?"

"Don't worry pastor, I will reach out to her and inform her. She stays in Lagos. Just let me know the date sir, so she can plan and prepare and also clear her schedule towards it."

"Alright sir. I'll get in touch with the Youth Coordinator and get back to you." Pastor answered.

"Okay sir." Mr Baruwa replied.

Pastor prayed with them and the Baruwas departed.

****

Victoria sat with her mum in the living room one Sunday evening. Her mum was reading a Christian women magazine while she was typing a story on her tablet. After some minutes, she paused to relax her fingers which hurt as a result of frequent typing.

"Mummy." She called.

"Yes?" Her mum responded as she flipped a page of the magazine.

"I'm getting nervous. I'm going to be twenty nine very soon and yet no relationship... All those who are coming are either unbelievers or not God's will... I'm getting upset already." She said.

Her mum removed her spectacles and closed the magazine she was reading. She sighed and replied,

"Victoria, don't worry. Keep being busy fulfilling your purpose. I am very sure that your own very husband, whom God has chosen for you will locate you soon. You are working for God remember? Part of your rewards is a good spouse, a beautiful marriage and a happy home. God will do it. Just continue to be busy in God's service. Don't allow the devil to use that to distract you at all. No one serves God and get stranded. Wait for God and while you are waiting, do what waiter's do, serve! Don't get tired of using your talent to serve God especially in church. It will be a testimony very soon." Her mother admonished her.

"Thanks always mum. Thanks for your ever timely counsel. I don't know where I would have been if I do not have a mum like you. You are the best!" She laughed.

****

During that week, Mr Baruwa called Victoria. She was so excited to hear from him after a while... Mr Baruwa informed her about the Youth Program that would be coming up at his church in a months time. She promised to clear her

schedule and attend.

"We want you to be our guest speaker for that day." Mr Baruwa announced.

"Really? Guest Speaker? I thought you only wanted me to attend the program sir."

"No my dear. My pastor specially requested that you should be invited to come and speak to the youths."

"Wow! I am honoured... Alright sir. God will take control." Victoria replied nervously.

"Is that a Yes?"

"I'll pray about it sir and get back to you latest in two days time sir." She replied.

"Alright. I'll be expecting your response."

****

Later in the evening, Victoria informed her mum about the invitation.

"I'm so nervous. Can I speak to that large congregation? I know the church he is talking about. I have once watched one of their TV broadcasts." Victoria said.

"You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you my dear. It's part of your Kingdom assignment. Remember what I told you, be busy for God without any reservations. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the boldness and confidence you need and I trust He will... I believe in you too. "

Victoria was strengthened after her mum encouraged her.

She sent a message to Mr Baruwa to inform him that she would be coming for the program. He in turn sent the details of the program including the theme.

"All expenses would be borne by the church." He added at the end of his message.

Finally the day of the Youth Convention arrived. It started on Friday but Victoria was to come up on Saturday afternoon. She arrived Abuja by flight on Friday evening and was lodged into a hotel...

She woke up very early on Saturday morning and did her quiet time... She was so excited and at the same time nervous that she couldn't sleep well through the night. This would be her first time to face a large congregation of youths to speak... She had her bath and dressed up.

She wore a simple baby pink chiffon top tucked into a black pleated skirt. She used a pink fascinator and wore a pair of black heel shoes to match. Mr Baruwa had told her that the Protocol team would come for her around 10am. She refused to eat the food the hotel brought because she decided to embark on a fast that day....

At exactly 10am, the protocol team arrived and took her in a car to the venue. Around past 12pm, she was informed that she would be coming up in the next 15 minutes... She let out a deep breath and whispered to herself,

"Victoria, you can do this! I receive boldness in Jesus name." She prayed.

After a short worship session, a young man walked up to the podium to introduce the guest speaker. He spoke very fluently and described the guest speaker with beautiful adjectives and accolades that most of the youths in the big auditorium cheered loudly.

"So, ladies and gentlemen, with a standing ovation, join me as I welcome sister Victoria Manasseh to the podium!"

The congregation applauded her as she walked up to the podium. Victoria's heartbeat was getting faster. She approached the pulpit and the young man handed over the microphone to her, beaming with smiles. She looked at him intently for the very first time since he started the introduction. She now realized why his voice had sounded so familiar.

"Tamuno!" She gasped.

"Yes. Tamuno it is!" He smiled at her.

He gave her a side hug and the audience cheered again as they noticed that the two already knew each other somewhere...

CHAPTER 21

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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Meanwhile, a week to the Youth Convention at Abuja, Dr Murewa and his wife, Ibidunni had returned back to Nigeria for a holiday. They paid Victoria and her mum a visit three days after their arrival in Nigeria.

Both mother and daughter were so excited to see the couple, especially baby Victoria who was fast becoming a big girl... It was during their visit that Victoria informed them about the program she would be attending in Abuja. Dr Murewa encouraged her to see the invitation as a call to her mandate...

Dr Murewa and his wife saw Victoria off at the airport the day she travelled to Abuja.

"I believe in you my baby girl! Go and transform lives as usual!" Aunty Ibidunni said and hugged her as she was about to leave.

"Don't forget to watch the live broadcast!" Victoria said as she walked away, waving at them at the departure hall.

"Yes, we will." Dr Murewa shouted after her.

****

Jessica carried her baby girl in her arms to breast feed her. After her delivery, Eric practically abandoned her after he had paid for the surgery. He never went back to the hospital to check on her and the baby...

After she was discharged, she called a friend of hers who picked her up at the hospital. She had to stay at her friend's place because Eric had warned her never to come close to him. He had packed all her belongings and carried them to her parent's house in the village.

Jessica's parents were highly disappointed in their daughter for the shame she had brought on the family. Jessica never showed up at the village since then because of the shame and embarrassment she would have to face

from her parents and of course the entire village community.

She sighed as she gazed at her baby, who clung hungrily to her breast... After some minutes, she was bored so she decided to switch on the TV to see if there is any interesting program or movie going on in any of the channels. She tuned the TV to the channel where the Youth Convention Program was being broadcasted live. The flawless beauty of the young lady at the podium attracted Jessica and she decided to listen to what she had to say.

The congregation was still applauding as Tamuno stepped down from the podium. Soon, the clapping died down... Victoria smiled brightly at the audience. Her fear suddenly disappeared. God really answered her prayers by giving her an unusual boldness, the type that would make her listeners think she had been used to such assignments...

"Good afternoon brothers and sisters!" She smiled cheerfully.

"Good afternoon ma!" The audience chorused.

"I love you ma! I love your novels!" A lady screamed from behind the auditorium.

The audience erupted with laughter. Victoria smiled too and replied,

"I love you too sis. God bless you!"

The congregation applauded her again. After the applause had died down, Victoria resumed her speech,

"My name is Victoria Ochanya Manasseh as you all know... I am an addicted lover of God, a die hard fan of Christ... It's a great privilege to be in your midst this afternoon, I don't take it for granted... I want to specially appreciate my Lord and my God for the grace he bestowed on me to be a vessel in His hands... I also appreciate the pastorate and the organizers of this great event, thanks for this opportunity to minister to God's people, may the Lord bless you and enlarge your ministry...

As you all know, by the special Grace of God, I am a writer... So, I picked up my Bible, my pen and jotter to prepare a detailed message for this program, but somehow I wasn't receiving anything from God... It was so unusual because once I pick my pen and jotter, the inspiration do flow but somehow, for strange reasons, nothing was coming to me as it were...

So, I closed my book. Then the Holy Spirit spoke to me, and that which He told me is what I have come to speak about in this gathering today. The Holy Spirit told me to speak to you about the story of my life! I wasn't quite comfortable with it, I mean, I actually planned to prepare a detailed message and outline a good number of points to discuss with you guys but my Master said No... Who am I to argue? Whatever my Lord says is what I do." She smiled.

"Hmmmm..." The congregation murmured.

"So, I want to talk to you about the story of my life..."

Before then, can we open our Bibles to the book of

Jeremiah chapter 1 vs 5?

Someone from the congregation read the verse.

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.”

"Yes. Thanks my brother... I want you all to know that the Lord has ordained you even before you were born. He had set you apart for a particular assignment here on Earth because He knew you. He knew your abilities... But it's a pity that most of us are not even aware of our Heavenly assignment not to talk of doing it... Some are or were aware but the devil had stolen it from them... The devil has captured so many destinies just because he never wanted them to fulfil purpose. So, I will tell you the story of my life and how I sailed through the hurdles I met on my way till now..." She said.

Victoria went ahead to narrate to the audience about her background, how she, her mom and siblings had struggled

to survive after the death of her father. How she suffered so much at school to the extent that for several nights, she took garri or even nothing at all before going to bed, even as a student...

How temptations came but God helped her to overcome them all. She talked about how God used her friend Olayinka to encourage her all the way and because of Olayinka's seemingly endless admonitions, she encouraged herself and surged ahead. When she got to the point where Olayinka died and left her devastated, a good number of the ladies in the congregation shed some tears. They brought out their handkerchiefs to mop their faces. It was such a sober moment...

There was a perfect silence in the auditorium as everyone listened with rapt attention. Some people in the congregation were comforted when Victoria shared the revelation she had about Olayinka and how he told her that all that matters to the Master in a man's existence is how much he had fulfilled his heavenly mandate... She talked about how God used Dr Murewa who took special interest

in her because she stood for the truth, to help her through school and she even later found out that his wife was her teacher in secondary school... How God helped her despite her challenges to still come out with a First Class...

By the time she narrated how God moved her from suffering to stardom after she rejected the offer by PenPower On Resources because she didn't want to deviate from God's mandate, and she later got a bigger platform to sell her books through Accolades Stone Publishers after which PenPower On Resources called her back, half of the congregation were already on their knees crying to God for mercy. It was indeed a moment of sober reflection...

After ministering to the audience for fifty minutes, the whole hall had been enveloped with the presence of God. It was evident that lots of them had encountered God as a lot of brothers and sisters sat on the bare floor crying for mercy. Some were even rolling on the floor while some knelt and shed bitter tears while praying.

"Is there anyone here who wants to run back to Calvary this afternoon? Have you been living to satisfy just yourself without considering that which the Master sent you to this world to do? Have you because of the love of money abandon Christ? Have you traded your body for money? If the Master should come back at this moment, will you be crowned with Him in glory or you would be condemned in Hell?

I don't want to know the kind of life you have lived, how dirty your past might have been. All I know is that there is a free fountain of life where you can still be made whole this day. If you are ready to rededicate your life to Christ, can you just run to this altar right now? Jesus alone can beautify your life and give you a new beginning. The Lord who promoted me from the ordinary girl I used to be to the woman I am today can still work it out in your life too. If only you can surrender totally to His Lordship..."

Before she finished her statement, over a quarter of the congregation already found their way to the altar.

"Jesus won't condemn you my brother... Jesus is waiting to receive you my sister. Just come as you are... Wherever you are watching this broadcast live all over the country, can you just go on your knees and begin to confess your sins to the Lord? He is faithful and just to forgive and to receive you." Victoria was saying.

The choir began to sing a hymn as more people trooped to the altar.

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.

Dear dying lamb, thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power
Till all the ransomed church of God
Be saved to sin no more.

E'er since by faith I see the blood
Thy flowing wounds supply

Redeeming love has been my theme
And shall be till I die.

Victoria dropped the microphone and stepped down from the podium amidst cries and wailings from those who knelt at the altar. The whole atmosphere was filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit... Tamuno walked to the podium and took over at the pulpit...

****

Jessica placed her baby who was already sleeping into her cot and went on her knees... She had cried her heart out since Victoria started preaching. She was sure the message was meant for her in particular.

"Lord Jesus, please have mercy on me. I know I have been unprofitable to you. I used to sing for you in time past before I gave my heart to the devil... Lord please have mercy on me and reshape my life. It's in shambles already, it's nothing to write home about, you are the one that can give me a new beginning... I surrender all to you Lord. I don't

want to be a total waste to the kingdom... Have mercy on me Lord!" She cried.

****

"Wow! Thank you Lord Jesus!" Victoria's mum said as she went on her knees in the living room where she was watching her daughter live.

She had decided not to go to her shop that day because she wanted to watch the program in the comfort of her home as customers may be distracting her at her shop. She was really grateful to God for how He manifested His power in the midst of the congregation when Victoria ministered.

****

Dr Murewa and Ibidunni were really elated at Victoria's delivery at the program.

"Glory!" Dr Murewa rose from his feet and clapped his hands as Victoria stepped down from the podium.

"Thank you Lord Jesus!" Ibidunni whispered. She shut her eyes and raised her hands in reverence to God.

****

Tamuno prayed for all those who were at the altar and after some minutes, they went back to their seats. After he had raised prayers for the guest speaker, Tamuno shared his testimony about Victoria with the whole congregation.

"The Lord who saved me and turned me to a great vessel in His hands today will do the same for everyone who has totally surrendered to him this afternoon... I knew sister Victoria as an undergraduate. Then, to me, she was just Victoria, an ordinary girl, like she said... She was my neighbour. I lived in the house beside hers. I was really a bad boy at school... I moved with gangs that went partying, drinking, gambling, smoking... We did all manner of things but I thank God that today they are all in the past. Jesus found me!" He said cheerfully.

"Hallelujah!" The congregation shouted excitedly.

Tamuno continued,

"Victoria was a lady I so much admired and I wanted to date her..."

"Ooooooh!!" The audience echoed.

"Yes... But to my uttermost surprise, despite all the money, the influence, and all I used to entice her back then, she refused. She stood her ground that she would never date me. She would ask me to receive Jesus and I would simply laugh at her. Truly like she said, there were times I saw her buy groundnuts to take garri as dinner...

I could remember one morning after such night that I walked up to her and told her that I could stock up her room with foodstuffs and all manner of provisions she wanted and even give her enough money so that she wouldn't have to suffer like this... I can still remember the response she gave to me. I never forgot since then because it rang in my head for a long time... She said,

"Tamuno, I know you are only after getting me into your bed. That will never happen okay? You said my sandals are worn out, you analyzed my faded dress, thanks for your observation, but you failed to see something… You didn't see my beautiful future… It is bright and shiny. That is where my father is taking me to and I will never allow you to destroy the beautiful relationship I have with my father. He has promised that he will give me a glorious destiny but sin is the only thing that can cause a separation between me and Him. Of course, I will live large but for now, I am working hard to prepare for the beautiful future ahead which is God's plan for my life…"

"Hmmmm..." The audience murmured in deep reflection.

The camera focused on Victoria where she sat smiling at Tamuno.

"Wow!" Dr Murewa and his wife said simultaneously.

Tamuno continued,

"My brothers and sisters, I wish every young lady especially those who are on campus can make this kind of resolution. God indeed compensated her, didn't He?"

"He did!" The audience screamed.

"I am proud of you my Ochanya! I bless the day I gave birth to you!" Victoria's mum shrieked.

CHAPTER 22

PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

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Victoria and Tamuno exchanged contacts after the program. They were really happy to see each other again.

"Victoria, you are going places in Jesus name. Thanks for heeding the Master's call." Tamuno said to her as she was about to leave the church premises. The protocol team members were already waiting to take her back to her hotel room.

"Amen. Thanks so much Tamuno. Take care." She waved at him...

Victoria returned to Lagos the following day. Her mum, Dr Murewa and Aunty Ibidunni were glad to receive her back at the airport. Dr Murewa's cousin, Tomiwa, whom they had stayed with since they returned to Nigeria also came along with them. The way they all jumped at her would make one think she had been away for over three years...

"I'm proud of you Victoria!" Dr Murewa said as they all entered the vehicle which had earlier conveyed them to the airport.

The car belonged to Tomiwa...
Tomiwa drove, Dr Murewa sat beside him at the passenger's seat while the three women sat at the back with baby Victoria

"This calls for a great celebration!" Aunty Ibidunni enthused.

"I concur my dear..." Dr Murewa answered. "Tomiwa, take us to that big restaurant near your place." He added.

They went to the restaurant and got some food packed in take away packs. Dr Murewa also ordered for non alcoholic wine and also some ice cream for baby Victoria.

Then, they all headed to Victoria's mum's place. As soon as they entered, they offered a prayer of thanksgiving for about twenty minutes after which they settled down to eat...

Dr Murewa and family spent a little while with Victoria and her mum before they returned to Tomiwa's place.

****

Jessica knocked at the gate of Mr Baruwa's residence. It was a hot Sunday afternoon. The gate was opened by a middle aged man.

"Good afternoon oh. How may I help you? He asked.

"Good afternoon. Please, I want to see Mr Baruwa." Jessica said.

"Okay... What's the name?"

"Please tell him Jessica."

The man dialed his boss' phone number on his phone and told him that a lady, Jessica by name wants to see him. Mr Baruwa peeped through the window and saw Jessica.

"I'll be there shortly." He said and hung up.

"Please wait for him madam." The man told Jessica.

"It's alright." She replied calmly.

"What the hell is she looking for?" Mr Baruwa said almost angrily as he rose up from his seat.

"Who?" Comfort who was relaxing on the sofa in the living room asked.

"Sweetheart, it's the same lady I was seeing that nearly broke our marriage."

Comfort sat up quickly and replied, "Really? Okay, let's go and hear what she has to say."

Mr Baruwa and his wife walked up to Jessica who was still waiting at the entrance of the compound. They noticed she was backing a baby... Before Mr Baruwa could say anything, Jessica went on her knees before Comfort.

"Please ma, I want you to forgive me for all I have done to you and your husband. I am so sorry... Those years were my years of ignorance. Please forgive me. I have met with Jesus and I now have a rebranded life... I hope you will forgive me and pray for me so I can be free from the guilts of my past."

Mrs Baruwa walked to her and lifted her up.

"It's okay dear, I forgive you... The Bible says, "Let He who is without sin first cast the stone." If God didn't condemn you, then who am I to? Let's go inside."

Mr Baruwa led the way and they all walked in. After they had settled down, Jessica said,

"I have another confession to make ma..." Jessica started in a shaky voice. "This baby is for your husband ma."

"What?!" Mr and Mrs Baruwa screamed simultaneously.

"How... How did that happen?" Mr Baruwa asked.

"Actually I didn't know I was already pregnant after we parted ways. I got married six weeks after we parted, only for me to discover that I was pregnant. I tried to terminate it but couldn't. I birthed the baby seven months after my wedding. This made my husband detect that the baby wasn't his because we never had intercourse before we married. He came back to Nigeria and we got married within a week of his return... He had thrown me out already. I was devastated until I had an encounter with Jesus who gave me a brand new beginning. Then, I knew I just have to make this confession."

"It's okay dear. There is no problem about that. We will take in the child anytime you are comfortable to let go of him or her." Comfort said

"Her... She is a girl ma. Her name is Hannah." Jessica put in...

Mr Baruwa was quiet all through. Comfort stroke his hair and said,

"Hannah is an addition to our family. Don't feel bad about this... The young woman has repented. That is all that matters to God." She smiled.

****

THREE MONTHS LATER

Tomiwa paid Victoria a visit at her place. Dr Murewa and Ibidunni had travelled back to the UK... Victoria was working on a story she was about to release. They both have become good friends since they met at the airport...

Tomiwa is a Christian drama minister. He owns a drama ministry which usually went for outreaches in villages and towns to reach out to the lost. He had a vision to start a Christian movie production company and Dr Murewa has promised to support him...

Victoria entertained him with fruit juice and they discussed about her next story and how they can possibly produce it into a movie... After a while, Tomiwa said,

"Victoria, I have been waiting on God for a while now concerning my life partner... Since the day I watched you live on TV at that Youth Convention Program, my spirit has received a great conviction about you but I still decided to pray more. Now, I am very sure. Victoria Manasseh, will you marry me? I promise by God's grace to be the best husband you could ever wish for."

Victoria laughed so hard till Tomiwa felt so embarrassed.

"Why are you laughing at me Victoria?"

She replied,

"Because the Holy Spirit is a revealer of secrets. I already saw this coming. I saw you struggle each time you wanted to say it but yet keep calm. The Lord has shown me you are the one about few weeks back but I wanted you to say it yourself." She laughed again.

"So, is that a Yes? Will you marry me?"

"Yes Brother Tomiwa Ilesanmi, I will marry you." She laughed.

"Glory!!!!" Tomiwa screamed as he jumped on his feet and danced for joy.

EPILOGUE

Jessica retraced her steps back to God. She became a powerful gospel singer that indeed terrorized the kingdom of the devil and converted souls to Christ. She got married to a Pastor in Lagos and their ministry prospered.

Baby Hannah was raised by Mr and Mrs Baruwa. She became the child of their old age.

Victoria and Tomiwa got married six months after Tomiwa proposed marriage to her... Victoria became a great and renowned marriage counselor while the Lord also prospered the vision of Tomiwa to become a Christian movie producer. Many lives and homes were blessed through their books and movies as the Lord continued to use their ministry to transform lives of millions of people all over the globe.

One day, Victoria decided to travel to visit Olayinka's grave. Her husband accompanied her...
She knelt beside the shiny sepulchre and said,

"I know you aren't here anymore Olayinka, you are certainly with the Lord, I can remember that bright countenance you showed, the shiny crown and the sparkling white robes you had on, but this is the only place I can come to say THANK YOU for being a great encouragement to me. I wonder where I would be by now if you weren't there to encourage me never to give up and follow the devil... Thank you so much for living such a short but meaningful life... Even after your death, you still ministered to my soul... I will forever be indebted to you Olayinka. Rest on in the bossom of your Lord till we meet to part no more.

THE END

I Peter chp 1 vs 7 - "That the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ..."

A SPECIAL LOVE NOTE!

If you are yet to give your life to Christ, now is the time, for tomorrow may be too late. If you are still holding your talent back from using it to bless lives and promote God's kingdom, repent today. Do not harden your heart. Do not because of the love of money forsake the Lord your God and miss your lot in eternity.

God bless you and may God be our eternal Home.

Amen.

Written through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by Moyosore Teniola

To read more inspiring stories by the author, follow her on her Official Facebook Page @
Moyosore Teniola - New Birth Novels.

For questions and counseling, contact the author via any of the following:

Mobile: +234-8062087777

Facebook@Moyosore Balogun Teniola

Instagram@moyosorenewbirthnovels

WhatsApp: +234-8062087777

Email: moyosoreteniola87@gmail.com

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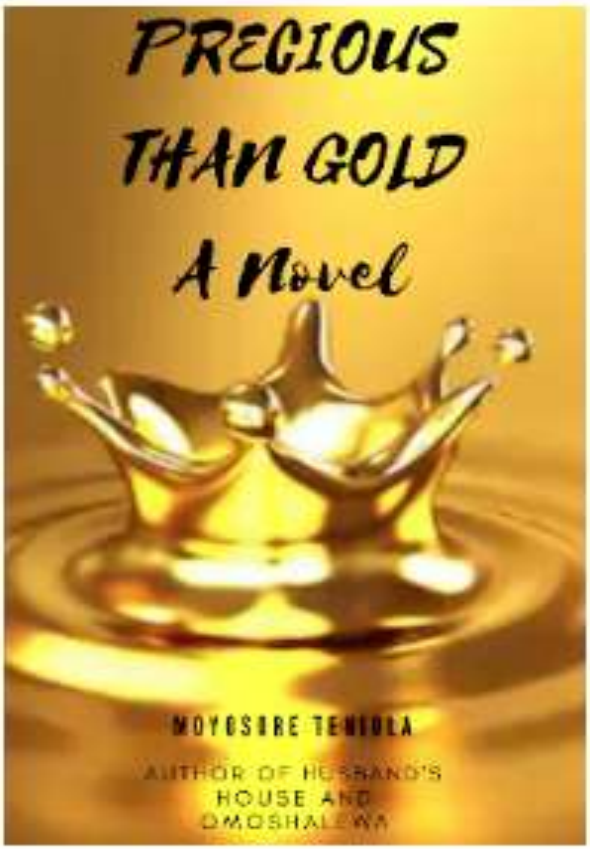
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POLARIS BANK.

God bless you and enlarge your coast. Amen.

JESUS LOVES YOU.

ABOUT THE BOOK



Victoria Manasseh faced a lot of trials and temptations in her life journey. Her mother who is a widow ensured that she made her children grow in the ways of the Lord. After all that she went through, Victoria turned out to be a woman of great impact in the kingdom of God and a blessing to her generation. PRECIOUS THAN GOLD is a powerful novel that establishes the fact that for every single trial a child of God passes through, there is always a victory at the end.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Moyosore Teniola is a writer, an author, a ladies Coach, a wife, a mother and a lover of God.

She is the Founder of Esteem Ladies Foundation, a Non Governmental Organization for women and the girl child which has blessed a lot of lives by God's grace.

She has authored other Christian Novels like HUSBAND'S HOUSE, WHISPERING HOPE, OMOSHALEWA and others, to the glory of God.

She has a burning passion for the girl child, single ladies and married women.

She is happily married to Kehinde Teniola and they are blessed with beautiful children.