

TOMILOLA COCO ADEYEMO



SUGAR DADDY
CHRONICLES:LEWA

AN EROTICA

Sugar Daddy Chronicles:
Lewa
By Tomilola Coco Adeyemo

OceanofPDF.com

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DEDICATION

For Sally Kenneth Dadzie, who reassured me I was badass at erotica after reading the first draft of the first few chapters of the Sugar Daddy Chronicles: Lewa manuscript and who motivated me to take up space. Dear readers, if this book turns out to be ass then it's all Sal's fault. But if it turns out to be so fucking good, then it was all me. ♥

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SUGAR DADDY CHRONICLES: LEWA [PLAYLIST]

Dear all, while I was writing SDC: Lewa, I listened to a lot of songs (as I tend to do when I'm writing), and many of them were my usual go-to music for writing romance. However, some of the songs were songs that described specific moments perfectly. In other words, some songs here were music I googled because I wanted to capture specific moments and I needed inspo. They further the story. I've curated a playlist for flow and mood. But you know I'm very big on my readers finding their own meaning and pace and having the liberty to paint the worlds they visualize while they read. So, if you ever feel the need to hit the shuffle button, please do. And hit me up on socials if you're feeling a song that's not here but that SDC: Lewa inspired. Here's [the SDC playlist](#) on YouTube music.

Love, Tomilola.

Glimpse of Us – Joji
Crazy In Love remix – Beyonce
Paint It, Black – Ciara
Can't Help Falling in Love (DARK) (feat. Brooke) – Tommee Profitt
Chasing Cars (Cover) – Tommee Profitt & Fleurie
Chasing Cars – Snow Patrol
Russian Roulette – Rihanna
Baby Can I Hold You – Tracy Chapman
Here and Now – Luther Vandross
Heavenly – Cigarettes After Sex
Thank You In Advance – Boyz II Men
Lazy Love – Ne-Yo
Nothing's Gonna Hurt You Baby – Cigarettes After Sex
Einaudi: Experience – Ludovico Einaudi
Kiss Me – Sauti Sol
Good Kisser – Usher
Hands to Myself – Selena Gomez
Leave The Door Open – Bruno Mars, Anderson. Paak & Silk Sonic
Weak – SWV
Aisan! – Lagbaja
Baby Riddim – FAVE
Now We Are Free – Lisa Gerrard

TRIGGER WARNING

This book contains scenes of violence and sexual assault, including rape.

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CHAPTER ONE

The day I met you, you were at work as a babalawo, dressed in a pristine white buba and sokoto, a white calabash filled with clean water in your hand. I was one of the four girls that Auntie Funke — our madam — had brought to you in your Ajah mansion, the one with five bathrooms, gold chandeliers, and a life-sized painting of Orunmila in the living room. We were there so that we could swear an oath to our madam for life. Or our *Sisi*, as she preferred to be called. Sisi had found us at different places in our lives and she had promised to change our fortune in exchange for our eternal loyalty. Our oath to swear was simple — if we broke the promise sworn to Sisi before the orisas, we'd die a violent death, our bodies unrecognizable for the ones who sired us.

So, we came to you on that chilly night — cold from the roaring storm outside — the realization of the dangerous consequences of our actions sending shivers up my spine. But I was the only one frightened. I'd come to you in the company of braver girls, in the midst of those I was considered the least attractive because Sisi preferred her girls with a 'glow.' As we ascended the winding stairs to where you were rounding off a call, my heart thumped, and my body shivered from trepidation and the downpour that soaked my cheap Instagram-bought two-piece outfit and plastered my newly chemically relaxed hair to my face. We'd just driven through pothole-ridden roads filled with dirty rainwater, past a huge, gated estate to your home that was concealed behind an intimidating fence, away from the public's prying eyes. I'll be honest, I was expecting a small shrine tucked away in a thick forest, an old pot-bellied baba with kola nut-stained teeth on a mat. What I wasn't expecting was the mansion or *you*.

You were a momentary distraction to my anxiousness. In the midst of the darkness we'd entered, your handsomeness illuminated the shroud, and you were an instant calm to the raging storm. I wondered how you'd become a Babalawo and what else you did. Did you like rice, or was it beans? Did you only wear trad or did you also fancy jeans? I was curious. Your name that night was simply 'Sho'. It was what Sisi called you when she drew closer, whispering into your ears, telling you

what I assumed was her clarification of what she hoped our fates would be in your hands. Your eyes were cold and unflinching when you said to the first girl, “Ìwọ, tẹ̀lé mi.” Sisi told you that the girl was Ibibio but that she spoke fluent English and pidgin, so you’d added, “Follow me then.” Your accent had a bit of a foreign tinge, and I remembered fiddling with my fingers in the guest room where I sat with the rest of the girls, thinking, *did he study Babalawo-ism in the UK?* As the thunder roared, my eyes wandered the room with white walls and heavy velvet draping, aware that this journey I had embarked on was going to have a tragic ending.

The girls and I took turns, and I came to you last, petrified and ready to bolt if things got too eerie. Even though I knew Sisi would ensure I died if I ran, I was still prepared to take my chances. In those days, I hadn’t accepted my fate just yet. I was a frightened 24-year-old who’d been lured from my mother’s tiny house in Oyo town by an older woman’s lofty promise of a good life. I’d always shouldered responsibilities for my family and in our unpainted living room with worn-out chairs, I’d hoped that Sisi’s stories of a better life were true so we could finally have a financial breakthrough.

In your shrine, you were standing, waiting for me. Your hazel brown eyes were glazed over with something sinister when your gaze found mine and I didn’t have to be convinced that you were capable of evil.

“Remove your clothes.” I obeyed your low command immediately. When I was naked, I stood with my hands covering myself until I heard you say, “Remove your hands.” When I didn’t move, your voice rose several decibels in irritation. “Answer me joo. Àbí kí lo gbé s’óbò tí mi ò rí rí?” My hands moved to my sides, and I distracted myself with other things in the room. There were figurines — carvings I would have considered cute little things if I wasn’t there to swear death upon myself if I ever betrayed Sisi. “I will divine before Orunmila and then you will swear before Yewa the goddess of the tomb.”

My heart skipped several beats. You laughed then. A dry, humorless laugh that danced around your full lips but that didn’t reach your eyes. I think it was that night that I realized that somewhere deep within me I was hoping you’d reach for my face and tenderly stroke it. I didn’t know what it meant. You were depraved. Why did I want depravity to touch me?

“You’re afraid,” you said, sitting on a mat, throwing the ọ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀ ifá on the ọ̀pọ̀n ifá, your fingers making marks in the iyerusun powder on the ọ̀pọ̀n. “You should be. Because this is a matter of life and death.”

“Yes sir.”

Your eyes grew dark with fury, “I’m not your sir. I’m just the guy who will determine your fate. Sit. What’s your name?”

“Lewa,” I said at first, clearing my throat when my words were barely above a whisper. “Lewa. Omolewa.”

“Yorùbá ni ẹ́.”

“Beeni.”

“Ó da.” I sank to the mat, my hands in my lap. In silence, you divined. Moments passed before you said, “Orunmila says you’re not a bad investment. Good for you. It also says—” Your words trailed off and your brows were knitted in confusion. You looked at me, your eyes even deader than when I walked in. I knew that you had more to say but you were unwilling to utter those words. Years later I’d know what you found but even though I didn’t realize at that point, it altered the course of my journey with Sisi.

You continued, “You will swear before Yewa. To take you to the grave if you ever betray Funke.” I swore, selling my soul to Sisi. She told us it wouldn’t be a hard journey. That we would thank her like Lolade Pepper, the star girl of Yoruba Nollywood and Regina Nzeribe, popular socialite and social media influencer. You gave me water to drink and then you told me my eewo — the taboo my ori didn’t allow. I was to stay away from seafood otherwise my aura would suffer for it. I was also never to repay loyalty with disloyalty. After the water, you gave me a concoction. It was mixed with alligator pepper and local gin. It made me heady. It made me loosen up.

We walked to another room then where Sisi was sitting on an ottoman stool, sipping wine, the silk fabric of her abaya draping over her legs. She was in her fifties, but I could tell she was unwilling to slack in the beauty department. There were blotches on her skin that were fading, left behind by the long use of skin-enhancing products. Her cheeks were tight, and I knew that her face had witnessed the piercing of Botox injections.

“Eléyi ma n ẹ́ bi ẹ́yin o. Alápá stainless ni,” she said disapprovingly when we were in the room. I was still naked and uncomfortable. But

something about that drink made me less aware.

“I’ll handle her.” I didn’t know that handling meant you were going to fuck me. That you were the last stage before we were unveiled as Sisi’s girls at a very high-profile and top-secret party with top politicians and capitalists across West Africa.

You handed me a new lacy negligee. It was my size, and it pushed my boobs up, the rest of the free see-through fabric swirling when I moved.

“You will show him what you can do. If he’s not impressed, then I can’t be impressed, and you’ll be gone.”

I glanced at Sisi, “Gone?”

“Yes. You will be disposed of.” Sisi should have been Yewa herself. Or maybe Oya. Because whenever she was unimpressed, she tore things apart and pronounced instant death. I looked at you, wondering if my mother, Sisi’s cousin, knew what she’d brought me to Lagos for.

“I’ll try my best.” I was infuriated by the entire process especially because I’d thought the trip to Lagos from Oyo town a week before was to find a decent-paying job. I didn’t have high hopes because I’d graduated from a college of education with a second-class lower two years ago. But I’d still been hoping to find a livable wage, not become a jazz-marinated olosho in Ajah Lagos.

You stripped then and I realized what I had to do. I’d only had sex a few times, but it was usually nothing memorable. The first time had been a careless experiment with a teacher at my GCE lesson. I was nineteen and he was twenty-four — a smooth-talking, ridiculously pretty guy whom I’d initially kissed to shut him up from talking me to death about japa culture and my options if I chose to study abroad. I wanted to know how he fucked because my classmates said tall guys had long cocks. “Seduce him. You can only climb on top of him when his cock is straining hard. Otherwise, it means he’s not aroused,” Sisi said in Yoruba, bored. All the other girls had fucked you too, I could tell. What the hell were you and Sisi doing? But I guessed that you could only hire someone whose skills were well-tested.

I flirted with my straps, feeling stupid with every sway of my hips as I moved closer to you and then pushed up the negligee, wishing I had shaved. If my options weren’t fuck you or die, I’d have run then. But I stayed, touching myself the way I did in the bathroom in Oyo — the only place I could touch myself back home. I played with my boobs,

twirling my tongue around each nipple, making sure that I looked at you. There was something about your coldness that heated the cleft between my thighs. When my gaze fell on your cock, you were hard. I could see the veins in your erection so visible and so tight. I refused to move because, somehow, I became bold enough to dare you. Or maybe it was the thing you fed me.

“You want?” The question slipped past my lips before I realized what I was asking you. I parted my legs. I wanted you buried inside of me. This wasn’t an assignment any longer. *I wanted it bad.*

“Come.” I remained standing. Either because of fear or how soft I thought your voice had become. But I didn’t stop touching myself. I didn’t stop pushing my fingers deep into my pussy and smearing my wetness across my dark nipples. “Lewa. Now.” It was as if you were scared Sisi would hear your plea, so you kept your voice low. I was standing by your side and blocking Sisi from seeing your face.

“I didn’t hear you,” I said, drunk on how turned on I was for you.

You glared at me, a low warning tumbling off your full lips, “Don’t let me repeat myself.”

I moved then, climbing the bed, spreading my legs to accommodate your straining erection. You spread me like a fucking rumor, pushing deep inside of me until I could feel every sinful inch of you. It was painful. The sweetest pain I had ever felt in my life. I moved slowly, struggling to breathe and to focus on pleasing you before my orgasm tore through my body. I held your legs with my hands, leaning back as I felt the curls of the hair on your legs. The more I moved, the more moisture I could feel between my legs for you. You fucked me too. And it was so easy to forget Sisi was in the room with us. I didn’t remember her until I felt her hands around my boobs, touching me, her tongue twirling my pebbled nipples.

I opened my eyes when I felt the warmth of her breath on my skin and I forgot myself, completely lost in the pleasure that flooded me. Sisi sucked my tits while you held my waist with both hands and I soon began to moan. I was completely lost when I heard your laughter. “Dis one dey enjoy fuck. Look at her moaning.”

Shame flooded through me when you laughed at me and your eyes inflamed with something else. It was desire. My humiliation turned you on. Your firm hands grabbed my waist.

“Didinrin. You don’t get lost in the pleasure while you’re trying to make

someone feel good. Your job is to ensure the person you're fucking has a good time. It's good sex for them but it's just a job for you. It's supposed to be mechanical." Your words jarred me to reality. You sat up and told me to make room for Sisi while I knelt on the bed. I did and soon Sisi, now naked, lay under me. "Take care of Funke," you ordered. I'd never fucked a woman. But I knew I wasn't being asked. I leaned over Sisi, touching her how I'd like to be touched, hoping she liked it. You bent me over when I pushed Sisi's saggy boobs in my mouth, shoving your cock inside of me from the back. It was hard not to moan, so I mistakenly bit Sisi's taut nipples. She gasped, holding my head, so I pushed her tits further into my mouth. She liked the pain. This whole threesome was wrong, but it didn't feel like it.

Never did I think I'd be a good fit for this. I'd never been considered sexy or pretty by anyone, but this felt good.

I met your thrust from where you were behind me, pushing two of my fingers inside Sisi. She kissed me hungrily, her tongue dancing with mine, her hands playing with my boobs. Sisi kissed so well. I wondered if you kissed better. "Make her cum," you commanded, and I found myself longing for a sign that you liked my pussy. Did the other girls make you feel this way? Did you like being inside of me better? I licked Sisi's engorged clit as you continued to thrust wildly inside of me. She spread out further for me and tugged at my hair, unable to control her moans. My tongue moved from her clit to her opening as she moaned my name, telling me she liked it. I tasted her cum on my tongue as she exploded into my mouth and I heard your grunt as you fucked me harder, pulling out and emptying your warm release on my ass. Sisi shoved me off her at the same time you got off the bed. I curled up in embarrassment, instantly feeling disposed of.

"The governor and his wife will like this one," Sisi said to you in Yoruba as you both got off the bed and held each other. I watched as you kissed her forehead. You and Sisi were together. I should have known. Sisi didn't trust anyone. If you were this close to her, then it must mean something.

"I agree."

"What are we doing about the other girl's body?" Sisi asked as she wore her clothes, and you wore yours. My fingers quivered as I wore my negligee

and began to find my way toward the door.

“Let Albert handle it as usual,” you said. So, one of the girls I came here with had died. Did you kill her?

“Dinner?” Sisi asked you.

“Yeah. Let’s get something to eat on the way to yours.” I was out of the room then, finding my clothes and joining the other girls where we had all previously sat.

“How was it?” Nkechi, one of the girls asked.

“Okay.”

“I can’t believe he fucked us in front of her,” Bunmi, another girl said.

“She was just there watching. Na wa,” Nkechi said. They had all fucked you. But none of them fucked Sisi. It was only me. I didn’t tell them that. They asked about the other girl, and I shrugged. I didn’t tell them she was dead. Although I wondered if you’d been so dissatisfied with her pussy, you had her killed.

We were driven to what would be our home in Lekki phase one and I touched myself again that night before I went to bed. When my orgasm overtook me, it was bliss to think of you. I was playing with fire because I knew Sisi would kill me if I ever fucked you again. What we did was supposed to be a one-time thing, but it was also a very secret guilty pleasure and who had that ever hurt?

The next morning my mother called. “Your siblings have been chased out of school and we need money for rent too. When can you send something?”

“I only start work at the end of the month,” I said, frustrated that my mother hadn’t worked since she left my abusive father many years ago and had always expected me to pay the bills since I was a teenager. I was used to bearing the burden, but my shoulders were starting to ache from the weight of never-ending responsibilities.

“So, work quick and work hard. We need the money.” Then she prayed for me that clients will come to my place of work.

Bunmi, Nkechi, and I showered and watched Nollywood movies on ROK much later. We’d met only the week before, but we’d done spa treatments together, accompanied Sisi to shop for fabrics at Balogun market, and even followed her to a friend’s party in Ikorodu days before. So, we were past the initial awkwardness between strangers.

“Una know say dis tin wey we do na one chance sha. Cos we can never be free,” Nkechi said, as Kunle Remi’s rich on-screen character declared love for Bimbo Ademoye’s keke riding character in the final scene on the plasma screen.

“Freedom is a myth,” Bunmi said in Yoruba, adding quickly in pidgin, “who freedom epp? Plus, the older we become the more useless Sisi will find us abeg. Or can you see any of her older girls around us?”

Nkechi shrugged, “Lewa, you’re quiet. Abi you’re not thinking about what we did?”

“Ah you know my own is to work and send money home. First born tins.”

They laughed. “Assistant parent,” they chorused. I checked my phone and saw the time. Quickly, I excused myself and ran to my room. Once I was sure I was alone, I retrieved the phone no one knew about. A familiar number was calling.

“Hey hubby.”

“Iyawo. How is Lagos?”

I leaned against the wall; my voice low although I was alone. I didn’t want to take chances. “Fine o. Auntie Funke has assured me that I will get a job soonest.” I felt the urge to say how worried I was. “I want to tell you something.”

“What is it?”

“The arrangement here. It’s not what we thought it was. She’s asking that I do certain things.”

“Babe, babe, don’t think too much of it. I’m sure you’re in good hands.” And then I lost the boldness to say anything else.

“Okay,” I said.

“Má gbàgbé àdéhùn wa o, Lewa.”

“I know. I get all the money I can get in three months and come and join you so we can travel.”

“That’s my girl.” After the call, once I hid the phone under my mattress, I opened the door to find you. I was startled.

“Who were you talking to?” you asked, and something told me you knew I was lying when I said with my chin juttet, “My mother.”

You swept me with an unreadable expression and walked away. “Go and get dressed. We have someplace to be.”

“Okay, sir.”

“Call me Dimeji. And be fast.”

I watched you leave, my gaze dropping to the firmness of your butt. Ah, so you did wear jeans. And you looked real nice in them too.

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CHAPTER TWO

That day you took me to a meeting with Godwin, your old friend who ran an influencer marketing company in Victoria Island. We rode on your power bike, and I sat behind you on the supercharged machine, holding onto you for dear life. I'd only ridden an Okada and the speed at which you rode sent fear into my chest but there was also a thrill that I loved. It was the same thrill that I'd get when I first smoked *Colorado* with you. It felt dangerous but it also made me like you more. There's something so hot about a dangerous man with excessive charm. And you had both in abundance. When we slowed down a bit around Ozumba Mbadiwe because of the traffic, I was tempted to place my head on your back. But you were Sisi's man and there were a few people throwing glances our way. I also didn't know if you'd consider it too forward. You were aloof and you acted as though respect meant something to you, so I was careful not to cross boundaries. I didn't want you to be upset with me.

At our destination, I loosened my grip on your body, hopping off and watching you remove your helmet. You were too hot — this getup pushed all my thoughts from my brain to my vagina. I had grown up too fast — raising my siblings and my mother, running things at home, and dabbling in petty trading since I was thirteen, so, I had been left no choice but to be an adult very early on. I had to have adult thoughts and responsibilities because I was raising kids and an adult who refused to grow up. But the thing about you was you made it difficult for me to act reasonably. Since I fucked you, you were all I wanted to do.

"Remove the helmet, madam," you had tucked yours beneath your arm, staring at me as though you were wondering if the breeze had penetrated the helmet and slapped me too hard in the head. I fiddled with the helmet, trying to convince myself that I didn't have too much air in my brain. You stepped closer and sighed, helping me to remove it. I inhaled your scent. It was woody with hints of citrus. It was heady in a very masculine way. It made me hornier for you because something about how you smelled cemented your domineering presence. When you handed me the helmet you said, "The words you swore before Yewa are real. I hope you know that." I was

thrown off. I hadn't expected you to say anything like that. I tucked the helmet beneath my arm just like you.

"I do." I shrugged, falling a step behind you on purpose. I wanted to watch your butt in those jeans as we walked and Jesus Christ, it was tempting to grab. I forced Sisi's face into my mind because I was playing with my life, and sex with you was not the way to go.

"Good." You said, your deep voice snatching my gaze from your butt.

We went to Godwin's home office in his spectacularly big house, one of those Oniru houses I'd frequent much later as a sugar baby. I caught the whiff of tobacco in the office with glass walls and abstract paintings. Godwin was dressed in a silk house robe and pants, bare chested, sitting behind a glass table, working on a campaign for a big liquor brand. He wanted influencers and you knew exactly what he was trying to do. I marveled at how smoothly you inserted your desires into Godwin's project, smoothly easing into conversations the influencers you thought he should be working with. You knew how to be diplomatic with words.

You'd say, "Lolade na my babe but she's not the most punctual person. I go talk true, you know me, Goddy. But she is also the best bet because once you fix the punctuality situation, she'll sell the hell out of your brand to her millions of followers. So, I'll leave the decision to you." You spoke gently too; your voice never rose a decibel whenever you made a point, not even when you strongly disagreed. Godwin was skeptical about all your girls when we walked into his home office. But by the time you were done, he called his assistant to come into his office and include all of your girls in his plans. You made Godwin think your ideas were his. I marveled at how you planted seeds that germinated in his mind without him knowing.

"Maybe one day you will help us find work for this our smallie here. She has some small background in digital marketing."

I gasped and Godwin looked at me. "She looks surprised o. Are you sure?" Godwin asked and laughed. You looked at me and I knew that you were unimpressed by my reaction.

"No mind am. She's like that. She comes to you as though she's nervous and unsure but when she gets on top of things—" I gulped a ball of air when you said that, grabbing the edge of the chair I sat on tightly "—she will work you into gratitude." You were looking at my hand as it tightened

around the edge of the chair, and you were irritated by my inability to keep my composure. I looked away from you because your stare burned a hole in my face. Godwin looked at me with a certain hunger in his eyes. I matched it with a direct stare, watching as he looked like a hungry puppy, leaping for a piece of meat dangling in front of it. Horny piece of shit.

“I look forward to what we can do together,” Godwin said.

“Let me know when you’re ready for her. For now, she has other plans,” you said, standing. We were leaving and Godwin and his assistant followed us.

His assistant flirted with you, and it displeased me. I wondered if you’d invite her to Sisi’s fold so that you could fuck her like you fucked me and the others.

“Sho, are we coming to your red party?” Godwin’s assistant asked you. She was wearing a corseted blouse that hugged her skinny frame and pushed her tits up. The wondrous things Lagos people wore to work.

“Do you want an invite?” you asked, your deep voice softening a bit.

“Yeah, I’ve been asking Goddy but he said I should ask you.” Every word that tumbled off her lips was intended to be flirtatious. I loathed her but I also found myself impressed by how she was telling you with everything but her words that she wanted to fuck you.

“Don’t mind her. I don’t know where she expects me to see invite for a party with major Bank CEOs and top politicians,” Godwin said as he watched you and his assistant eye fuck each other. God, Lagos people were so horny.

“I’ll put your name on the list,” you said.

Godwin’s assistant squealed, “Yay. Don’t worry, I will send you wine as a thank you gift.”

“Or you can drop it yourself tonight,” you told her.

We finally walked towards your bike. I didn’t ogle your ass this time. I was irritated that you were flirting with Godwin’s assistant in my presence.

“You flirt with everyone that way?” I asked as we began to wear our helmets.

“Bold of you to assume you can ask me questions like that.”

“I’m sorry—”

“Good.”

“I didn’t know it was wrong to ask questions when you’re literally with my family member.”

We were still standing by the bike, and you fixed me with an angry stare.

“We fucked in your family member’s presence.”

“Yes, with her permission.”

“Has it then occurred to you that maybe I have her permission to fuck anybody I want?” It didn’t occur to me until then and my face instantly warmed in embarrassment. You didn’t let me off easy, you continued to look at me as if reveling in my shame.

“Oga mi sir! You are here! The moment I saw your okada I knew you must have asked for me!” I looked past you, watching the security guard salute you as though you were both in the army and you were his superior. He made exaggerated remarks about your benevolence in the past and how he’d missed that since you’ve been away. I was grateful that his ostentatious greeting saved me from that embarrassing moment.

“Bala, how far now?” you said, amused by his display. I’d finally seen another side to you.

“Ah, fine o. Na your eye we dey look.”

“My eye? Wetin dey inside?”

Bala laughed, “Na money. Money wey you go dash me, Oga! My wife just born.” Bala swayed his hands back and forth, moving closer to us with each word he spoke.

“Ahan, did she not born one last year?” you asked.

“Time don pass sir.”

We had both mounted your bike, “Be like say wetin I go dash you na condom o,” you said. I chuckled.

“Ah my Oga!” Bala laughed as though he couldn’t believe you were telling him what the right thing to do was.

“Na condom you need, make we talk true.” You were revving your bike, ready to move. I was behind you, ready.

“Oga abeg now,” Bala said, half seriously and half jokingly. You chuckled and gave him a wad of cash. He lay flat on the floor, praying for you. I thought it was excessive, but it also made me wonder if you were a kindhearted guy who just did bad things. Or perhaps a bad guy who occasionally did good things to make himself feel better.

“Open the gate, Bala,” you said. He opened the gate and before we left you said, “One thing you’ll be good to learn in this world is that everything is packaging. The other person doesn’t know more than you half the time,

but the average person always gives the perception that they know.” I knew you were scolding me for how I handled the situation with Godwin earlier. You added, “Hold on tight. I’m passing a shorter route and the road is bad.” I obeyed, leaning against you, holding you tight from the back. On the way home, I realized how out of my depth I was. I also realized that my ovulation was here. It explained exactly why I thought you were good, consumable meat. I had to chill.

Back at the apartment, you told me to get Nkechi and Bunmi. The three of us were soon standing before you as you turned on the tv and the Netflix tudum sound echoed in the living room.

“Oh, please take a seat and stop standing in a firing squad.” We all sat, and you got to business. “We have a party, and you’ll all be working at it. The brief is quite easy — make everybody very happy. If the clients are happy, Funke is happy, and your own happiness is in turn guaranteed. If they’re not, oh well, there goes your chance at happiness.” You leaned back in your seat as you spoke as though we were all discussing mundane things and not actual whoring, “Any questions?” Our ‘Nos’ were scattered but quick. “Great. Thanks for coming to my Ted talk.” As we all scrambled to our feet, you grabbed the remote and sifted through Netflix titles. “Please try not to wear cheap clothes. We’re partying with top politicians and businessmen so unfortunately this will not require a Fashion Nova or Shein wardrobe.”

I wasn’t sure where you’d expected us to find clothes that were up to your standards, but the other girls seemed prepared for the night. I rummaged through my box, unable to find something appropriate. You were a comedian to think that Fashion Nova and Shein were cheap for me. I couldn’t even afford those. Eventually, I settled for an outfit my tailor made for me from aso oke some months before. It was an off-shoulder mini-dress that hugged my skinny frame. It also meant that it accentuated the tiny bulge in my stomach, but it wasn’t something that would make your clients depressed. I found the most decent pair of heels I owned — a gold pair of strappy two-inch heels. Outside my room, I waited for Nkechi and Bunmi and as the minutes flew by, I checked my reflection in the tiny mirror on my compact powder. Had I underdressed? Why weren’t they out yet?

The doors to their rooms finally opened twenty minutes later and they stepped out with weaves and glammed-up faces.

“You guys look good,” I couldn’t tell where their outfits were from, but they looked prepared for the night.

“Thank you, Lewa. Ahan you didn’t do make-up?” Nkechi asked as she breezed past me, filling my nostrils with the heavy scent of her perfume.

“I did o. Small.”

“Something you should have done big. It is a night party, babe. How dem go see your face well if you no apply proper make-up?” Bunmi asked as we all made it toward the front door.

“Yeah. Abeg no mind me, make-up is not really my thing like that.” I wished for the conversation to end, so when we reached the door and found Sisi’s driver waiting for us, I was relieved.

“Are you people ready?” he asked.

“Yes,” we chorused. He led us toward a black minivan and once we were in, I found a nice corner at the back because I wanted to be alone with my thoughts.

It was past 11 pm and we drove through Lekki Phase One to link Ikoyi. As Bunmi and Nkechi talked, fell silent, and watched TikTok videos on their phones, my mind wandered back to what the night had in store for us. I was nervous, unsure of what would be expected of me. I had shaved and applied my oil gel generously on my body, especially my recently shaved vagina and sprayed my favorite perfume, but was that enough?

The girls were talking about a trending Bobrisky video, and they wanted to drag me into the conversation. Nkechi said, “He’s always advising women. Is he a woman?”

“No, but some of them make sense if you really look at it sha,” Bunmi quipped.

“You know Bob will always do him,” I said unwilling to contribute further to the conversation. We were at the tall gates of a big mansion in Ikoyi and I held my breath as the towering gates opened for us. The building was massive, concealed in old Ikoyi, flanked by trees, and a large intimidating fence. There were many fancy automobiles outside, many of them with government plate numbers. I wondered how many of these men I’d have to fuck before I made enough money to relocate with my husband

and set my mother up in a good business. Sisi was clear about her percentages, but an uncertainty hung in the air in a business that didn't have clear terms and that the body housed the office building.

"We're here," Nkechi announced in awe, and I realized that the car had stopped moving. "Omo, I have only ever read about houses like this. So, it's real. The cars!" I was in as much awe as Nkechi and I remained frozen in my seat for seconds longer, breathlessly taking in the massive building and the grounds on which it was built. Albert, Sisi's driver, had come to the backseat and he pushed open the door, helping us get out. He was a lean guy that was well-groomed. I wondered briefly if Sisi found other uses for him too. He helped me down with a smile and then led us to the front door. There he stepped aside as a bouncer opened the door to a wide passageway lit from the ceiling with heavy gold chandeliers. There was music and chatter and as we neared the living room, the scent of stupendous wealth. When we entered the living room, the party had started. Too many faces felt familiar and unfamiliar at the same time.

"Sisi and Sho are there," Nkechi said and the three of us gravitated toward you like a magnet to steel.

"Girls, I see you made it," you barely glanced at us, your gaze scanning the room as though you were watching in case anything went wrong. "Please mingle, have some fun, and find me if there's a sign of anything going wrong." You disappeared into the party crowd, slinking through the well-to-do guests with ease. We were left with Sisi and she told us what was needed of us. They were the same things you'd told us — it said a lot, but it wasn't enough. Was I allowed to say I didn't want to have sex when I didn't want to have sex? How much alcohol was too much or too little? I wasn't so averse to having sex with a stranger for the duration of my time here — I'd accepted my role, but I also wasn't so certain what to do if a wealthy and powerful man asked me to do something I didn't want to do.

The girls and I stuck together for a few minutes. Nkechi was telling Bunmi it was silly to capture too much on her phone, but my eyes were scanning the entire room. I looked as though determined to sniff out which group of people were maniacs, and which were saner. Clearly, they were all thieves and frankly, I had no moral standing here but I didn't want to be with a lunatic. Grateful for my comfortable pair of heels, I continued to scan the room, my gaze finally landing on an old man who peered at me

with an intensity that made me squirm. I grabbed a glass of champagne off a passing tray, snatched a tiny saucer containing sliders off another. The deliciousness of the snack distracted me for a couple of seconds, and I was too lost in the moment to see you sneak up behind me.

“It seems as though you’ve caught the eyes of the minister of finance.” I gulped down what was left of the slider and drank some champagne. You stood beside me, your eyes sweeping my outfit. I glimpsed the tiniest trace of admiration before you looked away. “You should go and say hi.” I nodded, still unsure. You sighed. “He doesn’t bite... oh well, he may bite. I don’t know what his kinks are.”

“Sir, you’re not helping,” I assured you.

“Just don’t think too much about it.”

“Okay, I won’t. I just wasn’t sure what anyone would like— “

“You’ve groomed yourself?”

I nodded. “Yes, properly shaved.”

“I didn’t ask for specifics,” you said, wooden, your expression darkened. “Go and make conversations. He won’t need you to talk for long anyway.”

You relieved me of the saucer and the champagne glass, and I gravitated toward the minister — a man who looked like he was one fuck away from the graveyard. Though when he smiled, he looked very attractive, and I could tell that he was one of those moneyed Northerners who’d always had access to a privileged life and now was part of the Nigerian government at the top level. Two champagne glasses later and I felt lighter and looser, laughing more, feeling the buzz of the entire night. The mood was fine, the liquor good, and it all made me want to fuck. As if he knew, he moved closer to say, “I would like to move this conversation to *Signature*. I have a suite there. If you don’t mind?” I shrugged, walking through the crowded room behind the minister. We were chauffeured in his black Benz. It seemed like a recent model and the moment made me heady knowing I’d gone from trekking long distances and hopping Okadas to riding in fancy automobiles in just one week.

During the ride to Eko Signature, we didn’t talk, and we didn’t talk through the ride in the elevator until we got to his suite where he began to yank off his clothing. He swayed when he tried to remove his babariga,

staggering under the influence of alcohol. I helped him pull the clothes off his head, stunned but not fighting when he grabbed my butt and slapped me against his body. He took me to the room and while he stepped into the bathroom, I shed my clothes and shoes. When he returned, he told me to turn around and face the large mirror by the vanity table. I still had my panties on, but he wanted to do the honors, so he grabbed it and ripped it, not satisfied until he'd torn the fabric off of me. Then he grabbed a leather belt and whipped my ass. It was painful but I didn't run. When he removed his cock, thin and long, sheathed it in latex, and shoved it inside of me I surprisingly moaned. I met him thrust for thrust, feeling nothing, not even pain when he grabbed my neck tightly and fucked me mercilessly. Your lesson on mechanical fucking was still stuck in my head. I marveled at the minister's strength at the same time I was worried about him passing out. What were the terms and conditions of clients who died on the job?

The minister wanted anal too and he was rough. He didn't care much about how I felt. I wondered how much he paid Sisi. I juttet it out, he was thin so I could take him, and I let him oil me until I dripped. When we were done, he told me he wanted to see me again. I told him to tell Sisi. Then he smiled and said he would, handing me a cash of N500k for new lingerie. A call came in on his phone and he dismissed me with a wave of the hand. It was late but I knew I had to return to the house. I replied to the messages and voice notes that Nkechi and Bunmi had sent while I was busy with the minister. Their nights had been less eventful than mine. They'd both gotten paired with people who didn't demand too much of their bodies. Nkechi slept with a female senator and the traditional ruler Bunmi went with just wanted her naked while she watched him touch himself until he came. My Uber driver pulled up outside the Lekki duplex thirty minutes later. I took a long shower in the bathroom, counting the money in my hands again.

If my good luck was consistent, I'd be able to go ahead with my plans. I turned on the AC in the room, burrowed under the covers, and slipped into the best sleep I'd had in a long time.

CHAPTER THREE

Five hundred thousand naira was not a lot of money. I realized that after I paid my siblings' school fees and sent money home to my mother for monthly upkeep. I barely had enough left to spend on myself. But by the end of the month, Sisi paid us our 'salary.' She said it was a percentage of what we earned, but she didn't say what percentage and we didn't ask. Two months after I'd been able to put together some money, I traveled to Ijebu Ode in a chartered taxi. An Uber or Bolt would have been too expensive for the trip because it would mean I could buy less for Madé, my husband of two years. I sat in the back of a yellow taxi with its paint peeling, my body feeling every bump along the way.

Madé was working for an insurance company in Ijebu. We'd met while we were in school. He was handsome and he was very vocal about unionism and equity in society, the sort of things that I found interesting because it was different and because, unlike other guys, he didn't think me being 'too intelligent' was an issue. I drew to him like a moth to a flame, falling for him before he'd even said hello. Our first date was outside my hostel, seated on a wooden bench with a bad leg. We'd had to relax against an old tree, our hands tightly held as fellow students threw jibes our way. He was in his final year and so when he went for NYSC, I visited a lot. We'd fuck sometimes, doing it all night, running out of condoms, riding each other until I was so sore I couldn't wear underwear. Our constant fucks were rewarded a year later. I got pregnant and our families insisted that we marry. The baby was stillborn, but we remained married with a plan to escape this life of poverty and travel to Canada once we raised enough money. We were halfway there.

Madé was waiting for me outside when I got to Ijebu. I hadn't been home in a year. My mother had fallen sick and wouldn't work and I'd gone back to Oyo to take care of her and my siblings. I was looking forward to the journey. It also gave me an escape from all that fucking I'd done with the minister in the past two months. During the ride, I slept a bit and then woke up to the taxi driver who kept telling me stories about how Ijebu people were historically food for the orisas.

“So, are you from Ijebu?” he asked me in Yoruba through his rearview mirror as the car wobbled through brown sand. I watched Madé, excited to see him. It was not just a two-day break for me, it was a self-cleansing ritual too. I wanted to scrub my morals clean by basking in the sweatiness of our bodies when we fucked.

“No, I’m not from Ijebu.”

“So, you’re not food? And you look sweet.”

I was happy to be out of the car and in Madé’s arms as he swept me off the ground.

He paid the driver after he retrieved my luggage. It was what made me stay longer with Madé after we lost our child. He may not have had all the money, but he was always trying. We watched the rickety taxi totter through the untarred and eroded road.

His gaze fell to the luggage — boxes of clothes and shoes and then there was the X-box he’d wanted that I’d bought secondhand. “Jola! Jola!”

“Who is Jola?” I asked, removing my sunshades. I was wearing a denim jumpsuit that hugged my body. It was one of the new clothes I recently shopped for while the girls and I were accompanied by Albert to a boutique in Lekki.

“The person that will help my Queen carry her load while I take care of her!”

I squealed as Madé lifted me off the ground again, holding me in his arms as Jola, a teenage girl, followed with all my things.

We were barely alone when Madé removed my clothes, shoving his erect cock inside of me. He fucked me mindlessly, pushing my boobs into his mouth at once. Something about how my body had been used for the past month spurred me to fuck him back with the same passion. I met each wild thrust with the same intensity, realizing that somehow the night in the Ajah mansion was vivid in my mind. The downpour, my nakedness, the threesome, and *you*. I saw you when I didn’t intend to. When Madé gently waited for me to flip on my belly so he could fuck me from behind, I strangely wished he’d grab me the way you did in the bedroom months before. I hadn’t seen you in two months and occasionally I remembered you but for the love of me, I couldn’t explain why I saw you while my husband and I brutally fucked.

I fucked my husband hard because I wanted you out of my mind. When Madé came inside of me, I worked my hand through his limp cock, my eyes on him as I waited for him to harden for me again.

“You’re insatiable,” he said, breathing heavily, looking at me in awe, the standing fan unable to blow enough breeze on our perspiring bodies.

“I’ve missed your cock, Madé.”

“Hmm, I missed your pussy,” he said, breathing hard as he covered my lips with his, pushing smoothly inside me again.

We fucked a lot, only pausing to watch pirated foreign movies on his laptop. “The guy helping with Canada said we don’t need that much anymore. We just need enough to land. I can find something to do until we find our feet.”

“That’s good.”

Madé kissed my forehead, “And you’re sure Funke Oyo will not be sad to see you leave so soon? It sounds like she likes having you around.”

“I don’t think she’ll mind. She has the other girls.”

He yawned, “That’s good to hear.” Madé and I were laying naked on our backs after the third round. My pussy vibrated but somehow, I was insatiable. I knew it had to do with you. I hadn’t even come. When Madé went to sleep beside me, I touched myself to thoughts of you. I came hard and fast to memories of you fucking me. It was the easiest climax I ever had.

I returned to Lagos two days later, thoroughly fucked by my husband and with promises to be free of Nigeria’s hardships and Sisi’s clutches. While I suspected Madé knew the type of work I did with Sisi, I was still mum about the specifics of the job. I told him it was modeling and ushering, which was sometimes true because Sisi had recently taken us to a party where we were introduced as ushers. We’d been dressed as such too. It was easier for him to believe that until I could get out. I couldn’t explain to him what I did and that I secretly liked being fucked by different men. I liked sex. I didn’t mind anal sex. And sometimes, I liked to be fucked rough.

When I returned to Lagos, I realized that Sisi had been looking for me. I had turned off my Lagos phone because I wanted to be unreachable. Nkechi and Bunmi’s messages warned me about an impending outburst. Sisi hated that I wasn’t around when the minister had requested

me out of the blue. I thought on my feet, cooking up an excuse so that I wouldn't get into hot water with Sisi. Bunmi kept calling me, but I couldn't pick up because I needed to find a reason first. I told Sisi I was going to see family, and she insisted on Albert coming to pick me up at the garage. Madé was my family by marriage but I knew Sisi thought it was my mother and siblings. So, when Albert came to pick me up at a different garage because I'd asked, I told him that he couldn't tell Sisi.

"Convince me, madam," he said.

"How?" He was silent. I'd returned to Lagos at night, so when he veered off the expressway into a dark quiet street, I was frightened.

"What is going on? Why are we parked here?" He came to the backseat, locked the door, and unzipped his cargo shorts. His cock, thick and long bobbed to life. "Convince me."

"What?" I gasped, staring too long at his cock before glaring at him. He stroked his cock and curiosity had the better of me. In seconds, I was back to staring at his length.

"I don dey look you since dem bring you. You're a sexy babe. And me sef I wan chop you small. Give me a taste." He cupped my pussy inside the black leggings I was wearing. I was still sore from my husband.

"You're the driver." I wasn't afraid, I was surprised that he'd move to Sisi's girls. He had balls.

"I go fuck you the way no man can do, madam. I've been watching you and I know your pussy will be sweet." I was stunned, thrown off by his seriousness. He said something in Hausa as he stroked his cock, gently rubbing his palm on my vagina.

"You're crazy if you think my pussy is for the driver," I said, yanking his hand off.

"I go ride you so much, madam. You will be sorry for these things you're saying to me now." His smoldering gaze fell on my boobs. I wondered then if the black body suit that showed off my cleavage was a good idea.

"As I said, my pussy is not for the help. I didn't come to Lagos to fuck men like you." He placed a kiss on my cheeks, his hands slowly circling my boobs.

"Are you sure?" He asked. My nipples went rock hard at once and when I opened my mouth to protest again, a moan escaped. I felt a rush of inexplicable excitement. He sucked on my nipples gently, twirling the skin

around them with the same skill. Why was this turning me on?

He was dedicated to the task, each twirl of his tongue pushing moisture between my thighs. When he raised his head, a devilish look on his face, I realized I had been grinding against him.

“What are you doing to me?” I asked, my voice barely audible.

“You will thank me,” his words were a whisper in my ears. How did he know what I’d like? Or did I just like sex so much that I was trying to get it everywhere I could?

“Albert, Sisi was clear about who we should be fucking.”

“Because I won’t pay you for it? Asewo.”

I grabbed his hands, holding them far away from my face. “If you ever call me asewo again, I will destroy you. I’m not playing.” The firmness of my words knocked a retort out of him. “Get off me.” I shoved him off. “Sit.” He was surprised when I peeled off my leggings. He was aware of what was about to happen, so he quickly fished for a condom in his pocket, sheathing himself. I pushed my thong to the side as I sat on top, spreading my legs out until I completely accommodated his length. “This will never happen again. I don’t care what you catch me doing.”

“Okay. Sorry! Fuck!” He said. A look of satisfaction instantly filled his face.

“I’ve been dreaming of this for so long.” Aww, the bloody puppy was never just waiting on the sidelines, was he? He dreamed of pussy he wasn’t ever supposed to touch. Maybe I could make his day.

I moved slowly, shoving my boobs into his mouth. He kissed my boobs again, drawing hard on my nipples as he moved just a little faster inside of me. His thumb circled my clit and I grinded hard against him.

Sisi would never know so why shouldn’t I enjoy this fuck? He leaned in for a kiss but I threw my head back. No, that didn’t come with the package. I increased the pace, watching as he matched my energy.

“You’re so sweet.” He was looking away now, lost in the sweetness of my pussy. I recognized that look — he was feeling it, the warmth, the sweetness, the way my insides wrapped around him, and I simultaneously gave him his time’s worth.

“You’ll never get anything like it,” I promised him. Because I treated each fuck like it was tailored for each man.

“Yes,” he moaned, turning me on even more. I pressed my body hard against his chest so he could really feel and enjoy this moment. He touched my clit, rubbing it with his thumb until my release blinded me and I came screaming his name in the car. Then he moved slowly, pounding me so hard it felt as though the car was shaking. He kissed me hard, fucking me even harder until I tugged hard at his shirt. Then he let out a loud sound as his release shook through him, emptying himself inside the condom. I got off him.

“As I said earlier, never call me asewo again.” I’d been called asewo even before I came to Lagos for this, and I was tired.

“Sorry,” he said with a quickness I liked. He returned to the driver’s seat, and we drove home in silence as if we hadn’t just fucked each other’s brains out.

At home, Albert lied to Sisi smoothly about the park he’d picked me from and how exhausting the drive was. Again, my vagina was providing solutions to terrible situations. Sisi warned me never to leave the house without her permission again. She meant it when she said our lives were different now. I promised her it would never happen again wondering about her as I went to my room. Bunmi and Nkechi came calling hours later and they told me that Sisi had sent Bunmi to the minister.

“He’s so much better than that useless Pastor that Sisi linked me up with. And he is good with gifts o,” Bunmi added, saying that he’d given her money. Lots of it. I realized that I was jealous of the situation. I wasn’t sure what type of person I was becoming but clearly, I didn’t mind fucking for money, and I didn’t want to share sugar daddies. Not a generous one whose gifts were a perfect investment.

“Yeah, he’s okay,” I shrugged, willing to downplay the minister’s generosity.

Nkechi’s attention was divided between our conversation and her phone. She was on TikTok, watching skits and fashion videos. I sat up on my bed, listening to Bunmi tell me about a much older friend of hers who talks to the dead.

“Ah, Bunmi you can lie! Jesus Christ!” Nkechi gasped. “That’s not possible abeg. Abi na juju?”

“It’s necromancy,” I quipped.

“What?” Nkechi asked, confused. “Necro— what? Please that is juju. Jazz.”

Bunmi shrugged, “Whatever you like, you can say. My own point is the woman has promised to set me free from the shackles of whatever oath I took whenever I am ready.”

The words had tumbled off her lips before I realized what she was talking about. I gasped, “Bunmi,” lowering my voice as though Sisi could hear us, “you want to sever ties...”

She nodded, “I don’t know about you people but I came here to make money so I can buy my ring light and start my influencer business. I didn’t come to carry sugar daddy for someone who won’t even tell me how much I am making.” Her plan was dangerous but intriguing. I also wanted to get out and I’d sworn an oath I’d been convinced was real. What if the whole Babalawo thing was fake?

“But what if this thing we did can truly take our lives if we leave Sisi?” I asked. “Remember we still don’t know if she previously had girls and what happened to them.”

Nkechi crossed her legs. “I agree with Lewa. We need to be careful.”

“I know what I want sha and it is not to be here forever. So, you people can think about it if you want. Me, I am setting myself free when the time is right,” Bunmi stood and left the room with Nkechi.

Bunmi was a risk-taker, and she didn’t care how her actions came across. On the night we’d partied in Ikoyi with the powerful and wealthy, she’d posted pictures of her at the party on her social media, clips and moments of that night grew her following from two thousand to five thousand. She knew what to do and how to achieve her aim so maybe she was making a lot of sense. I went to bed considering what she’d said. Would it hurt to try and see if the oath was just mere words and nothing else?

CHAPTER FOUR

I'm snatched out of a deep sleep by loud noises coming from the living room. It's Bunmi and Sisi having a shouting match. At first, I struggled with the grogginess I felt from being rudely awoken from a sleep I'd fallen into to escape my nasty hangover. And then I began to wonder if Bunmi was mad. She'd been clashing with Sisi for a few weeks now, mainly because Sisi had attacked her for collecting money from her sugar daddy without telling her. And then Bunmi found out that the percentage Sisi was giving us was less than 10% of how much she made from each of us. Their first fight had been on our way back from a brunch we had at an upscale hotel in Ikeja GRA and when I tried to get Bunmi to calm down, she accused me of supporting Sisi because she was my family. It was funny because Sisi never treated me like we were related.

In the passage, Nkechi and I almost clashed as we hurried to the living room determined to quench the fire. There, Bunmi was waving a knife at Sisi, incensed. Stunned, Nkechi and I rushed to her side, but she waved the knife at us threateningly, and instinctively we ducked.

"If you both know what is good for you, you will not move an inch toward me!" she shouted furiously, her eyes bulging. "This witch got me arrested today for what?! What did I do to you?" As usual, Sisi detached herself from the situation, falling silent as though she wasn't responsible for the ire. I'd learned that from her in the past months – how to detach myself from a potentially combustible situation so that I couldn't be accused of anything if things got really bad. But the truth was, Sisi was also using this tactic to goad Bunmi. She knew that anything Bunmi did was going to be used against her. Nkechi thought it made Sisi mature, to be able to keep quiet like that in front of chaos. I disagreed. Sisi was devious. She wasn't 'being' mature.

"Please calm down," I said. "We can talk this out."

Bunmi launched herself at Sisi, almost missing her. I struggled to pull her off, trying but failing to shield myself from the sharp knife that dug close to my eyes. I jumped back in pain at the same time strong masculine

arms grabbed me from the floor and flung Bunmi across the room with a force that shocked everyone, even Sisi.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Your voice was too calm for someone who’d just walked into an explosive situation, but I found myself leaning into the feel of your hand, grateful for your rescue. Bunmi’s fury had dissipated, and the knife fell from her hand when she saw the bleeding on my face.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, Lewa,” she rushed toward me, but you stopped her with a hand.

“Get the fuck out of here and go to your room or something.” You looked at me, your eyes hidden beneath your shades, “A ma need lati check oju yi ni hospital.” You glanced at Sisi then, “Everything good?” You were leading me toward the door before Sisi’s response was out.

“Yeah. We clearly have a problem,” she said in Yoruba, her eyes, cold, unreadable. She barely looked my way, dusting her hand as though the whole thing was a minor inconvenience. “We’ll discuss it when you return.”

At the door, you glanced at her and said, “Funke, I know you’re angry but please, don’t do anything while you’re in this state.”

Sisi shrugged, “What can I do? She’s been a pain in my ass but it’s nothing I haven’t handled before.” A look passed between the two of you and I briefly wondered what she meant.

The trip to the hospital was short. There was barely any traffic on the usual route that linked Victoria Island to Lekki and the closer we got, the more I began to feel the pain caused by the slash in my cheek.

“Does that hurt?” you asked when we pulled up outside the hospital. The streets were lined on both sides by cars and there was barely enough space to park inside the hospital compound.

“A little,” I murmured, feeling more pain at that moment.

“It looks like it’s not deep. Let’s hope it’s not.” You grabbed some tissue from the compartment and gently dabbed my face. Your fingers brushed my skin and even with the heat caused by the pain on my face, I found myself responding to your touch. I liked it when you stroked my cheek. I knew that I would from the first day in your home. I just didn’t know it was going to be this type of like. I froze, willing the moment to last much longer. “Come,” you broke contact, and I shook off the tiniest feeling of loss when you did that.

We walked into the hospital. It was much bigger inside than it looked from outside and a nurse was quick to attend to us and lead us to the doctor's office. Unsurprisingly, he was a friend.

"Sho of Lagos! Kiniun to'n cause chaos without flinching! My man! How far now? When you land?" the doctor shook hands with you as he hailed you and you both leaned in for a quick hug.

"Just got back like an hour ago."

The doctor looked at me. He was an inch or two shorter than you, a cute chubby guy with the warmest smile. "Hello madam, I'm Doctor Kesinro. Nice to meet you."

"Lewa," I said simply, offering a tiny smile.

"We're in luck, the cut isn't deep." Dr. Kesinro got to work immediately, helped by a nurse. I held back but when a small ball of cotton wool doused in methylated spirit and held in place by forceps was used, I yelped, grabbing the sheets on the narrow bed in the doctor's office, grinding my teeth as I was determined not to yell as much as the pain I was feeling.

"Sorry. We're almost done," Dr. Kesinro said. He didn't ask what happened and I wondered if he saw your girls this often. He was quick and soon my face was plastered, pain meds handed to me, and we were on our way out of the hospital. Outside, I longed for the comfort of my room so I could use the medication and sleep. It didn't help that I still felt slightly nauseous and woozy from that nasty hangover.

"Please, I hope Bunmi won't get into trouble?" I asked as we returned home.

"She tried to assault Funke and harmed you in the process. I'm sure she'd be punished for that at least."

There was slight traffic on our way back and for that, I was grateful because it bought me time to advocate for Bunmi and to ogle Sisi's man. My gaze fell to your hand, staring harder than I should as you threw the gear into drive and when you deftly controlled the steering wheel. The little hairs on the back of your hands were usually not a turn-on for me but as I watched you drive, it made me want to fuck you again.

When I glanced at you, you were looking at me. "You're silly and you're playing with fire."

“What?” I asked, half-thrown by your words and half-embarrassed that I’d been caught ogling you like a piece of meat.

“Stop looking at me like that. I can tell that you want to fuck me.” I gasped. Your words shouldn’t shock me, but it was quite surprising to hear it said so directly. Subtlety wasn’t your thing. “Bunmi has been trying to get herself into trouble for months. Do you know any reason why?” As the cars in front of us moved and we turned to Lekki, I pushed my hands between my open thighs, holding on tight to the pack of painkillers I was handed at the hospital. I knew Bunmi wanted to be free, but I couldn’t say that because I couldn’t tell her secrets. And because that was also my secret. “I will have you know that I am a Babalawo.”

My heart skipped several beats. I refused to peel my gaze from the cars we sped by. “Are you threatening me?” my voice barely audible because my heart was pounding hard against my chest.

“No. I’m saying there are other ways to force the confession out of your mouth.” Your tone had taken a colder edge. You were speaking with an annoyance that hadn’t previously been there. I didn’t have to look at you to know you were irritated and this was something you’d been trying to figure out for some time.

“Maybe you should force the confession out of my mouth then,” I fired back, slightly irritated by myself for talking to you about Bunmi. What the hell was I expecting from you? An understanding? You were our pimp, so of course, what I was asking for was a tall order. You pulled the car to a screeching halt, jolting me and lurching me forward. I held the seatbelt firmly, grateful for it. Then I gasped, gaping at you in utmost shock. “What’s wrong with you?” I asked.

“You asked me to force the confession out of your damn mouth.” I stuttered because you’d yanked the aviator shades off your face, and I saw fury in your eyes. The ire had darkened your expression too and you were facing me in the car, somehow managing to remain calm despite your anger. “What is she on about?”

My voice dropped several decibels. “I don’t know.” A sly smile curved your full lips. I stared too long, and I didn’t realize when you moved closer, your expensive cologne clouding my common sense. Your hand was on my bare thighs, your thumb gently pressed against my skin. You pushed my mini dress up a bit, toying with the fabric of my lacy panties. There was instant moisture, enough for you to dip your cock into me without any

friction. It disturbed me how easily you had an effect on me. And while I was recently sexually liberated, what I felt with you came with a thrill I didn't feel with the others. I felt as though I needed a safety check. My eyes followed your hand movement. I enjoyed the feeling of danger and lust, and it made me wonder if I'd always been this girl and I just needed this bizarre situation to lure it out of me. You pinched my clit through the fabric and every single nerve in my body was alive. I felt my nipples charge, my throat ran dry with anticipation, and the need to have you pounding me was overbearing.

We were parked on a street in Lekki in broad daylight doing this nonsense. Our regard for Sisi wasn't a lot, was it? Or maybe you'd throw me under the bus and tell her I seduced you.

"What is your little friend doing to break away from us, Lewa? I know she's looking for an exit." Your palm was rubbing my clit now and there I was, struggling not to follow the lead of your hand, lost in the ecstasy you gave. Something about this encounter warned me that I'd easily cede control to you if we ever fucked again. I'd figured out how to be in control with the other men. With you, control was going to be a myth.

"I. Don't. Know," I shut my eyes tightly. The pain from the cut was there, mixed with the mild feeling left from the hangover and then there was this pleasure that overrode everything, threatening to burst me into tiny pieces of desire. I bit my lower lip, tugging at your shirt, shutting my eyes... a bloody mistake. The imaginations were wild, and you had the upper hand. I was barely holding on to my sanity, refusing to give you the satisfaction I gave the first time we fucked. I didn't respond to your touch further than what my betrayer of a vagina was doing. I remained still. You tugged softly at my panties, lightly trailing my shaved pussy with vertical lines. I was going to burst.

"I can't..." No. I won't. You had to know that I could, but I wasn't going to. I opened my eyes, struggling hard, unsure of how long I was going to be able to keep up the act. Your finger slipped into my opening, spreading me, trailing me. I was dripping on your fingers, and you just looked at me with that icy stare. You pushed your fingers inside of me and it was the smoothest entry any man had ever had with me. The smoothest, the sweetest... it was always going to be the easiest too.

“No. Dimeji.” A lopsided grin etched your lips. Your eyes were still very dead. Was I the only one incredibly turned on by this nonsense? We didn’t have tinted windows. How soon before someone saw us? My eyes darted and that killed the magic because you followed my eyes and you retrieved your fingers, wiping my wetness on my dress.

“You won’t tell,” you sighed. “I respect your loyalty. The same loyalty I am guessing you have for a secret husband you have hidden away in Ijebu, sneaking out of the house to go and see him and lying about it.” You retrieved your hands. Maybe if I’d been expecting the words, I’d have had time to prepare a better lie. But when the words unconvincingly spluttered from my trembling lips, even I knew it was an effort in futility.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about o,” I said, trying my best to maintain eye contact because I knew you were that type of man. The type to be able to tell a lie was being told if the other person couldn’t hold your gaze.

You spoke in Yoruba, “You’re lucky Funke isn’t aware. And that I am not willing to tell her...” My sigh of relief was trapped in my lungs when you added, “Yet. You tell me what’s going on with that girl or I tell Funke you lied to her. She doesn’t like being lied to. I don’t have to tell you this.”

“What does my husband have to do with anything? Am I not fucking the people you need me to fuck? Did I not fuck you to your satisfaction the other day?” You grabbed my arm and maybe you were as confused as I was about your little action because once you held me, you didn’t do anything else. You just glared at me, silent.

“Maybe you haven’t realized this isn’t a job for a married woman.”

“I’m not complaining.”

Your eyes tapered. “So, you just dash all your life’s savings to a man.”

“I don’t think what I do with my life is any of your business.”

You cackled, holding my jaw, “Your whole life is my business.” I slapped your hand off because there was that feeling between my thighs for you again. And because everything about the moment should infuriate me and not turn me on at the same time. You smiled, decking your shades, and pulling out of the parking spot the same way you pulled up minutes before. And I was back to being turned on by you with an overwhelming need to do something about it.

Soon we were driving back home, the silence in the car was worrisome for me. By the time we reached home, you were like a stranger once more not the man who stuck his fingers in my vagina knowing how badly I wanted him. I worried about the things you knew and how dead I'd be if Sisi ever found out.

"Please don't tell Sisi," I pleaded at the entrance when we'd hopped out of your car.

You approached me menacingly and I jumped back, walking backward until my back was pinned against your sleek SUV. The security alarm on it went off but it didn't faze you as you swept my face with your icy stare.

"You know exactly what to do to buy my silence. You have forty-eight hours or God knows what I'll do. Maybe it'll be worse than telling Funke about your little husband in Ogun state." When you walked away, I realized Sisi was looking through the window and I caught her burning stare on me. My phone was vibrating with a call from the minister and although I was in need of a good sleep, I wanted out of the house as soon as possible.

My heart pounding, I swiped my thumb across my phone screen.

"Hello babe," I called as sweetly as I could. "Should I come over?"

CHAPTER FIVE

When I got to Oniru that day, the minister was delegating tasks to his head of security. He was dressed in a neat and well-starched babariga, sitting at the edge of the long sofa with intricate gold trimmings around it, his hula cap placed gingerly on his head. I didn't know how old he was, but I had googled him a couple of times and knew he'd always been in politics — he was from an elite Northern family and had a wife and children. I didn't bother with anything else because I didn't care to put faces to the names on Google. It pleased me that he was private too; it meant that if anything went wrong, I wouldn't be on social media as the day's tea.

He fell silent when I walked in and approached him. I saw his gaze fall on my recently waxed and generously oiled legs and I knew by the softened look on his face that he was impressed. Sisi hated when we had a strand of hair on our bodies where hair shouldn't grow — our vaginas, legs, chest, and face. A week before, Nkechi had told her that she had PCOS, which meant that hair grew where it had no business growing, but Sisi had been furious that she even had to have the conversation. "If you like, go to the barber's or buy shaving cream. I will not have you carrying hair where it shouldn't grow like a baboon!" And thus continued our intense dedication to grooming the fuck out of our bodies.

"*Masoyi*," the minister said, allowing me the gesture of placing a kiss on his cheek. He never reacted to the kisses, and I was convinced that he only let me because he believed it was something that came with the sugar baby package that he didn't care for but also didn't mind. It was like buying ice cream that came with an extra free topping. One probably didn't ask for it but wouldn't want to be cheated out of it either.

"Go upstairs. I will be with you shortly," his tone curt as usual. He always carried on as though he was unwilling to repeat instructions.

I grew up mainly in Oyo town only visiting a couple of Yoruba cities before now. So, all my knowledge about the Northern elite was what I read in magazines, newspapers, or saw online. I never actively looked for them either. But he ticked the boxes of all the things I'd heard before now. He

was handsome and age had done scarce nothing to take away from his beauty. He was also slim and tall, with skin that looked as though it was bathed in milk all his life. His looks were unassuming, but he fucked brutally. He was condescending too — very dismissive when it wasn't his idea and snobbish when I did something he considered classless whenever we were together. I was always very put together with him. No licking of my fingers when ice cream slipped and fell on my hands, I had to use cutlery the right way when we ate, and I always had to sit properly even though we never visited anywhere public. It was a lot of rules for someone who just wanted a breathing sex doll. Sometimes I wondered how many other girls existed as his sugar babies and if he fucked everyone the way he fucked me.

I went up the stairs, my stilettos clicking as I ascended the marbled stairs. He didn't resume his conversation until I was almost at the entrance of the master bedroom. I knew that his security carried out insidious assignments. I didn't care for that. I came here to fuck, not to learn political intel. I was happy to be excluded from all of that. All I was here for was to take some cock in my pussy and ensure the man was satisfied. And today I needed that more than ever. I needed sexual tension eased and enough time to figure out how to lie about Bunmi. The minister always liked me to take another shower at his with the Chanel bath gels in the bathroom whenever I visited. The room was cool thanks to the air conditioner, and I turned on the heater, turned on the shower to full blast, readying myself for the quick bath and body scrub. I called Bunmi meanwhile and I told her that questions were being asked. She hissed, clearly still irritated by Sisi's actions.

"I have told you that those people don't know anything. If they do, would they need you to be telling them what I am doing or not doing?"

"Bunmi, I am worried o. I think you need to calm down a bit. Maybe if you relax for like a month, we can then get back to your plan?" I didn't know what her specific plans were. I knew that she was still in talks with her friend who was a necromancer and who she was convinced could get her out of Sisi's clutches, but she had to be careful.

"Lewa, if you think that devious woman will not destroy me in that period then you're ignorant."

"You said they don't know anything, now you're saying she can be devious. Which one is it?"

She sighed as though irritated that she had to explain to me, “I’m saying I don’t think their jazz is strong. Anybody can carry a bowl of water and do incantations inside and whatever jazz can be done can also be undone. This doesn’t mean that they’re not devious enough to use physical means to get what they want.”

“Sha be careful.”

“I will be. I need to go. My bobo is waiting for me at *The George*.” I leaned against the marbled countertop, looking at the plaster on my face. I’d have a scar for a bit. I wondered if the prim and proper minister would mind. “Which one is that one again? I thought your guy wasn’t in town?”

“That’s because this isn’t from Sisi.”

My heart plonked. I spoke in whispers as if Sisi had ears in the minister’s bathroom. “Bunmi, you have deals on the side?”

“Yes. Because I need to make my own money before I get out. See, we go yarn later. Gist plenty. He’s taking Nkechi and I to Cubana later tonight. If you want to go, we’ll pick you up. I go text you.” I wanted to ask her so many questions and tell her that something about the oath we swore was real. There was that strange feeling of loss that crept up on me as we spoke, but it had to be the fear I felt for her. Bunmi had suffered in life as I had. She’d been born into a more comfortable family and would have gone to a federal university, but her mother had remarried a man that assaulted her since she was fifteen. When she told her mother, she was thrown out and things got bad for her. So, her fears were valid, but I was scared.

“Okay. Text me,” I said.

“How your face? I’m sorry I cut you. It was never meant for you. I’ll never harm you.”

“I know that, Bunmi.”

She chuckled. “I’ll see you soon. Love you, bye.” The call ended and I drowned my fears and concerns in the warm shower, careful to avoid my face. It was valid that I had fears but the feeling of loss that suddenly wrapped itself around me was unreasonable.

By the time the minister arrived, I had showered and scrubbed but as I rinsed off my body, the glass doors opened. He was naked and he joined me inside, pressing his erection hard against my wet butt. I juttied out my ass, obeying the command of his hand when he bent me forward. He thrust

inside of me, and I held the shower stand for support as I met his thrust. He loved anal as much as he loved to fuck me in the pussy and I knew when he was done here, we'd be moving to anal next. His hands squeezed my boobs hard, his thumbs pressing my nipples as he fucked me from behind. The pain was different today. It was as though he was trying to purge himself of something by pushing all of that pain inside of me. I wanted to shove him off because the need was suddenly gone. If I wasn't in the shower, I'd be dry by now. But I knew that I couldn't. So, I let my usual escape envelop me as I closed my eyes. Sho was what I often thought about when I fucked other men, it made me enjoy it more. "...*I can tell that you want to fuck me.*" The words sent a shudder through me. I matched the minister's fervor, pressing my palms against the wet shower glass, every single thrust met with an energy that surprised me.

"Arghhhhh," the minister groaned, emptying himself inside the condom. He eased out of me, tossing the rubber inside the trash can. "Come."

I rinsed off the lather on my body and joined him in the bedroom, my body covered with the white bathrobe. "What happened to your face?" He was dressed in a flowing silk robe and a pair of house pants.

"An accident at home." I watched him quietly, trying to decipher why he was asking. Was he visibly displeased that his little doll had a scratch? I couldn't tell. He poured himself a glass of cognac and tossed the drink down his throat in an instant. "What type of accident is that?" he asked, pouring himself another glass. For the first time since I arrived, I noticed half-smoked cigarette sticks on the vanity table. There was also an empty bottle of cognac somewhere in the corner, near a half-empty bottle of lube. Had there been someone else here? I didn't really care but he seemed to be in a mood. I could tell in the way his glare swept through my body and he asked questions with obvious irritation. He was drinking a lot too. Perhaps, staying here wasn't as safe as I hoped it would be.

"One of the girls mistakenly scratched me with it."

"Women," he uttered the word like it left a terrible taste in his mouth. "Was it Bunmi?" I didn't know how to feel about discussing Bunmi with him. I didn't need to know that they had sex.

"Yes," my response clipped, and something told me he didn't like it. He wanted to be the only one with an attitude.

"And you're fighting because?"

“It wasn’t a fight.”

“Why would she scratch you then? Is she a cat?” I needed to go. My phone buzzed and it gave me an escape from his questions. It was then that I realized that I had several missed calls from Nkechi and Bunmi. There were messages too. They were both at a restaurant close by and they were wondering if I could come. I rose. “You’re not going anywhere tonight,” the words stopped me in my tracks.

“But Sisi—”

“She said I can have you for as long as I want.”

My heart skipped a few beats. “I need to pick up a few prescription meds from the pharmacy, Isa.”

“Everyone does delivery now. Order it.” He looked towards his laptop bag on the king-sized bed. My phone buzzed with more messages from Bunmi and Nkechi. “Bring my laptop bag.” I took it to him. “I am having a difficult time at work, masoyi,” he said, leaning against the vanity table, his hands clasped between his thighs. His hula cap was on the table near his Swiss watch. There was something feminine about his mien and it lent him a more appealing look.

“What’s going on?” I hoped I laced my words with enough concern because I truly didn’t give a fuck about what was happening at his job.

“The president wants all the ministers in his cabinet who have political ambitions to step down.”

“I didn’t know you had political ambitions.” To be honest, I didn’t know he had any ambitions at all. I barely paid attention to politics because I assumed all Nigerian politicians and top government officials were thieves.

“I intend to run for something. It doesn’t matter. I’m just about to lose my job. And I need an escape.”

I didn’t know why I walked to him, held his hands, and said calmly, “Maybe you should go home?” But I made that move before I properly thought about it, and I instantly paid for it. Anger slit his eyes and his gaze darkened in fury. He shoved me off, watching as I almost lost my balance.

“Get out of my house.”

“Isa, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to.”

“You think I needed *you* to remind me about home?” he asked the question with disbelief mixed with disgust.

“I wasn’t thinking. I’m sorry.” But I was also grateful to be gone.

I hurriedly threw on my clothes and grabbed my bag. He stormed out of the bedroom, furious. I exhaled deeply, all too relieved to be leaving. I called an Uber, grabbing my overnight bag as I walked outside the room. I was halfway down the winding flight of stairs when he began to follow. “Is this about another man?” The question surprised me. A man like Isa shouldn’t worry about another man touching his plaything. Didn’t he have all the wealth and the connections? Surely, powerful, wealthy men could put their egos in check when it came to women.

“No,” I was moving fast but he grabbed my weave and pain seared my scalp. I should’ve worn a wig.

“You think I’m stupid? You were too excited to leave. Where are you going to?”

“Isa, you asked me to leave.”

“And you just decided to leave. Not a single apology for your behavior?” I’d barely let out another word when the back of his hand met with my face. I screamed in shock, lurching forward, and grabbing the railing fast so I didn’t trip and fall down the rest of the stairs. Panic surged through me and crippled me in a second. “This is my problem with you all. One taste of my kindness and you take me for a fool. I try. I try.” He was dragging me up the stairs easily, sending fear into my heart. Did he do this all the time?

“Isa, I beg you!! I didn’t mean to. I’m sorry.” The tiles on the stairs dug into my skin and I was in pain by the time we were at the top of the stairs. He grabbed me and tossed me on the king-sized bed. “Isa, please.” His hands tugged at my clothes, ripping them off. Then he grabbed my hands, pinned them to the top of my head, and shoved his cock inside of me. I was exhausted so I just looked at him with eyes filled with hate. I loathed myself and for the first time since I started to work for Sisi, I questioned my decision. He pounded for a few minutes and then he pulled out of me and spilled his cum all over my body.

I didn’t move for a long time after the assault. And then when I finally rolled over, I opened Instagram, searched for Sho_huncho, and dialed via DM.

CHAPTER SIX

“I’m sorry that this happened to you.” Those were your first words when we arrived at your home in Ajah. I hadn’t been there since the night of the oath swearing. It wasn’t where you wanted to take me when you arrived at Isa’s house in Oniru. You’d wanted to drive me home to Lekki, but I couldn’t bear to return there. My mind had been invaded by too many questions about my life choices. I couldn’t shake them off, and truthfully, I wanted to dwell on the sombreness of it all. Staying in the house Sisi rented for me and the girls would have been a bad idea. I was glad that when I’d said to you “Can we not go to Lekki” your response had been a simple nod and a question, “Is Ajah fine?” I nodded and you drove me to your home.

The compound was dark and your big Mikano generator wasn’t on yet.

“Thanks for coming. I was too scared to call Sisi, and Bunmi and Nkechi are out.”

“It’s okay,” your tone was reassuring, and I was grateful that you showed up and didn’t ask questions that would make me uncomfortable. You were playing music I didn’t recognize in the car. It was soothing and it had chants, the melody so soulful it threatened to make me cry. I wanted to say we could go inside if you wanted to, but you reclined your seat, leaving me to my thoughts.

“What song is this?” I asked, my soul and body brutalized from the day that I’d had.

“Now We Are Free,” you looked at me and added, “It’s the soundtrack for the film *Gladiator*. I like musical scores sometimes. If you don’t want it, I can change it—”

“Stop.” Your hand was already hovering on your phone to change the music. There were so many sides to you that I couldn’t keep up at this point. “Don’t change it. I like it,” I chuckled drily, mouthing ‘Now we are free’ understanding that freedom is a myth. We were all always a slave to something. I was a slave to providing for people, mothering people, gathering, and always trying to build something. The music, sorrowful, reached its climax. There were tears threatening to come up, but I shoved them down, angry. I was so fucking angry at myself and my blasted fate.

“I think we can go inside.” Fifteen or so minutes had passed before I said those words.

I thought you’d fallen asleep to the playlist filled with beautiful musical scores until you said, “You think, or you want to go inside? We can stay here for as long as you need.”

“I’m fine.” You delegated the task of turning on the generator to your security guard and then we went inside, and you offered me a drink. I didn’t want anything. I just wanted to sleep.

“I know I shouldn’t have called you tonight, but you were the first person that came to mind after everything that happened.”

You retrieved a lighter from your pocket and lit a wrapped weed. “Why you dey apologize? You called, you called. No biggie,” you shrugged and walked closer, handing me the lit weed. “Take a drag.” Your woody scent was more tempting than the high the weed could provide.

“Oh, I’ve never smoked weed,” I shook my head, but you didn’t withdraw your hand.

“There’s always a first time. It’ll calm you.” I watched you quietly for a few seconds before I took the weed from you. “Take a long drag, let it settle in your lungs, then only then should you release it. Slowly.” I followed your teaching, a dutiful student under the tutelage of your intense gaze — long drag, settling the smoke in my lungs, slowly, slowly exhaling. You watched me, the softness of your face rivalling the beautiful feeling I got from my first drag. I tried to hand you the burning weed. You nudged me to take another.

“It’s really good weed,” you said as if you were advertising the efficacy of it. “You go soon dey okay.” I indulged in two more drags, getting accustomed, calming myself, before passing it on to you and slowly exhaling.

“The way Isa handled things tonight, the way he touched you, it’s not okay. You should let Funke know.” I gasped as you sat opposite me, crossing your legs leisurely, simultaneously turning on the huge flat screen in the room, football commentary filling the room.

“I don’t think so o. What if she thinks I provoked him?”

“Still not an excuse for him to do what he did tonight.” I shook my head, watching the weed part your lips again, drawn to how easily you did it.

“It’s not necessary.” I hoped you’d let it go. But you didn’t. You looked at me in surprise and irritation, “You like being treated like a doormat?”

“What?” it didn’t matter what your position was, I felt insulted by your words.

“Your husband is bad news, yet you go to him and spend all your money on him and even fuck him.”

“Again, not sure how any of that is your business. Besides, that’s different from telling Sisi that her client is beating me.”

You sighed, “You should rest. You’ve had a crazy day. Take one of the rooms upstairs. Do you have your painkillers here? We can go back to Kesh’s hospital if you need to see a doctor. Also, I’ll talk to Funke.”

I panicked, “About what?”

“None of your business. Do you need to see a doctor?” I couldn’t figure you out no matter how hard I tried. I couldn’t tell if this was you taking care of your business or just being a decent human being. Whatever the case, I was unwilling to let the frustration weigh me down.

“I have the prescribed medication in my bag.”

“The chef just made dinner. How does yam porridge and chicken sound?” I nodded. “I’ll tell him to get it for you.” You stood and I heard you talking to the chef, giving him orders.

I relaxed on the comfortable leather seat, overwrought by the day I had. The pain piled up and I wasn’t sure which one to tend to first. I ignored my buzzing phone, lowering my head instead. I was messed up and for the first time in my life, I admitted it to myself.

“I’m so fucked up.” I didn’t realize how loud I’d spoken until I heard you.

“Hey,” your voice was soft. Too soft. I had to look up at you from where I sat to double-check that it was you. You were looking at me with concern and I quickly tried to adjust. You gently pulled me up and once I found my balance, I snatched my hand from you.

“No need to get soft on me,” I murmured, looking in the direction of the food making its way to the dining table.

“I apologize.”

“For what?”

“For being what you need.” I swept a curious gaze over your face. In one day, in one day Sho, you’d been caregiver, friend, a fucking menace,

my seducer, and now this. What was your damn story? The silence that followed was charged. There was something brewing between us, and it wasn't just the good old lust. There was this need to collapse into your arms, feel your warmth, and stay there while you told me everything would be fine and bad things would stop happening. I gulped a lungful of air and looked away from you.

“How did you find out about Madé?”

“You're in terrible shape. I'm not telling you any of that tonight. Go and get something in your stomach, use that pain medication, and go to bed.” I obeyed. Dinner was delicious but I was filled with misery, and I couldn't take more than a few spoons.

Upstairs, I found clean old shirts of yours neatly folded on the bed. I wore one, feeling the cotton of the shirt against my skin. It was the closest I was getting to your body, and it aroused me. I used my pain medication and thankfully found sleep in the same room I fucked you and Sisi the first time I was in your home. I slept better than I did in Lekki.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

When I woke up the next morning, I felt the most refreshed I had ever been. I couldn't remember any morning when I woke up and I didn't have to jump out of bed to tend to younger siblings, hawk something, or get put together because sugar daddy fit call anytime and office had to be ready. It was too tempting to lay there, just staring at the ceiling, feeling content. I grabbed the heavy sheets, covering my head with them, sneaking in a few more minutes of sleep beneath the freshly laundered duvet. And I got some ten or so minutes in before I heard muffled voices in the living room. I recognized Sisi's voice. She was furious but I couldn't tell what about. Although I could very well guess. I sat up, letting out a deep sigh. The beautiful moment had been cut short by Sisi's voice, but I didn't want you to be the brunt of whatever ire she came here for.

I could tell before I got closer to the kitchen that she was annoyed about yesterday. I walked barefoot to the kitchen, tiptoeing when I got close, leaning near the entrance. Her voice was louder, filled with venom for me. Reflexively, I jumped back, unwilling to be seen but desperate to hear what was being said. You both spoke in Yoruba.

"I am saying I brought her to Lagos and you're not responsible for her. I am. She should have come to me."

"So, this is about her coming to me first. Not that you're angry that she ran from Isa."

Sisi drew a long hiss, "Your victim mentality is the problem here. You expect me to believe that Isa did all that to her? That girl was sleeping around before I brought her to Lagos—"

"Is that an excuse for her to be assaulted?!" you gasped.

"Please stop saying a man like Isa forced that girl. What does she have between her thighs that he hasn't tasted? I'm done having this conversation. I'm too furious to see her face right now but she better be home in an hour! I can't believe you're coddling this one here while the other is running berserk in this city trying to destroy everything we ever built! I will not let anybody destroy my livelihood. You know me too well."

I heard the sound of Sisi's angry footsteps in my direction and so I bailed, my heart leapt to my throat and adrenaline pumped my speed. Quickly, I found the room closest to the Orunmila painting, and as quietly as I could, I snuck into it. I heard the door slam, and it jolted me. A few seconds later, slowly, and quietly, I returned to the living room, leaning near the painting, wondering if I'd made yet another stupid decision by running to you instead of Sisi.

"Why are you standing here like a pole?" you asked, snatching me out of my thoughts.

"Sorry, I heard voices and didn't want to interrupt."

Your captivating coffee-brown eyes swept over my body, and I felt my nipples peak and a deep hunger woke between my thighs for you.

"Did you sleep well?" you asked, your deep voice was deeper when you spoke to me and maybe it had to do with the fact that I was focused on your bare chest, the rippling of muscles, and the tattoos on your upper left chest and right arm. You'd worked out. I could tell by the glistening of your sweaty skin.

"You're quite obvious," you said, unbothered that I looked at you like meat in the market. "And maybe you shouldn't be ogling me like that."

I was embarrassed by the call out, although I tried to hide it. "Sorry. Wasn't intentional."

"If all you can think about is sex, I'm guessing you slept well. What would you like for breakfast?" You strode into the kitchen, and I followed you like I was hypnotized, my eyes on the band of your grey joggers. There was a tattoo on your upper back too. I read the words "*À pè m'órá ẹni là n pe tèmídire.*" They were words I was familiar with – a Yoruba saying that reminded one about the potency of manifesting.

"I don't know if I'm hungry," I murmured.

In the kitchen, you rinsed two green apples and handed me one. "Maybe something light would do. Boiled sweet potatoes and egg stew?" I shrugged, watching as you dug your teeth into the apple, chewing as you threw open cabinets and grabbed things. In my head, everything was in slow motion, the sinewy muscles of your arms moving as you grabbed the frying pan, the way your teeth dug into the apple when you threw open the double-door fridge for eggs, tomatoes, and atarodo. Shit, you were hot and a big temptation—a good distraction from my life's mess. When you

finished the apple and tossed what was left of it into the bin, your foot pushing the lever and slapping it back shut once you were done, I realized that I'd pressed my thighs together tightly on the tall kitchen stool. You looked at me and I looked away, setting the apple on the island, toying with it because it was better to do that than to look at you.

"What did Sisi want?" I asked.

"She was angry that you came to me instead of her."

I looked at you. "I was afraid she'd say the same things she was saying earlier."

"No need to preach to the pope." You'd whisked the eggs and chopped the vegetables and atarodo.

"You're not eating?" I asked.

"Not yet. I have some meetings to attend virtually. I'll deal with those first." You threw the whisked eggs in the fire, waiting for them to fry a bit before flipping them deftly on the cooking gas.

"What meetings?" I asked, curious.

"I run a real-estate business, and some potential client is calling in today."

"Is this a thing you do with Sisi too?" You shook your head, grabbing a bottle of water and twisting the cap.

"No. Just me." I watched as you threw your head back and drank water, a deep thirst dug by that simple act. When my breakfast was ready, you served it with a glass of orange juice in front of me. But the meal I was hungry for wasn't the one served on a plate.

"I need to brush." I needed to get away from you. The onslaught of the feelings that I felt around you was going to get me into deep trouble. Sisi probably assumed I came here because I had an ulterior motive. The effect you had on me was going to get me killed.

"Okay. Go and brush and I'll cover your meal."

"I'll leave after breakfast."

"Why?" you asked, puzzled.

"I'm afraid of Sisi. I don't want problems."

"And where would you go?" You were standing close to me, your confused eyes demanding answers.

"Maybe to—"

"Your husband?"

I shrugged, "Where else would I go? Coming here was a risk. I don't want things to get worse." You placed a hand on my arm, pushing your thumb beneath the big sleeve of the off-white shirt. Your eyes were filled with concern and genuine empathy, the sort I never thought you were capable of. It threatened my resolve to keep my hands to myself.

A year ago, I wouldn't know what to do with a man that I fancied. Now, I'd learned lessons from Nkechi, Bunmi and even Sisi on how to pleasure a man that I wanted. I was tempted to see if those skills would work on you. You'd bewitched me and fuck it, it had nothing to do with your spiritual skills.

"Funke will not do anything to you." Your assurance was endearing, and my breath caught in my throat when your thumb gently massaged my skin. I wasn't hiding anything from you, and I wondered if you wanted to fuck me too.

"We both know what she's capable of."

"I know. But there's no need to be afraid of her. She's human. Like you and I." Before another word came out of my mouth, you pressed your finger deep against my lips. Your touch affected me in many unspeakable ways. Since I got married, I'd never been with a man because I liked them. It had always been transactional and now I knew that it wasn't going to be that way with you. What did that make me? You were talking, your lips were moving but half the things you said were a distant echo. I forced myself back to the present. "...And she won't harm a hair on your head knowing you're here with me." I nodded, beguiled by the softness of your words and the kindness in your eyes. When your hold became firmer, I winced. You were quick to say, "I'm sorry."

"It's okay," my voice was barely audible, and I wasn't sure you heard me until you loosened your hold, your gaze still lingering on my face.

My face burned with the intensity of your stare but even then, I couldn't look away. All the other men I'd been with always felt beyond me, ahead in some way, demanding to be impressed. But there was something about you as my superior that told me we were equal. I couldn't tell. Maybe I was just high on the lust.

Your gaze had settled on the plaster on my face. "Maybe the scar won't be such a bad thing after all. You'd have your own signature." It was a joke that seemed to come out of nowhere, but I liked it. It lightened the situation.

You stepped back and grabbed a bottle of water. “I’ll be in my bedroom. Come if you need anything.” As you walked out of the kitchen, you added, “You should also turn off your phone so that you can properly rest while you’re here. There’s no need to hurry back to anything.”

“Thank you,” I said. You nodded, flashed a smile and you were gone. Renewed by the energy the chemistry with you had sparked, I went up the stairs to the room, brushed, and returned for breakfast. I took your advice and didn’t touch my phone, eating in silence and sleeping on the living room couch.

When I woke up an hour later, I came to your room and knocked. You were rounding up your work call and you sat straight up, your eyes looking into the camera of your Mac. You gestured for me to come in and I walked through the thick carpeted floors to sit on a bucket chair facing you. Your room was reflective of you — the walls were painted in cream and brown, the tall ceilings had canned lights that were mostly dim, lending a dark, warm and cozy feel the moment I stepped in. I eyed the painting of an orisa I didn’t recognize on the wall and the tall beige drapes that hung in your room looked at least three times more expensive than the ones in the Lekki house. You were sitting on a two-seater sofa that backed the foot of your bed, your Mac on your lap and your feet on the cute glass coffee table before you.

My gaze briefly continued the tour of your room and on the bedside table, I saw a lamp, a bottle of lube and condoms.

My mind wandered to you and sex. Who were you fucking? Anyone I knew? Was it Godwin’s assistant? I felt a twinge of jealousy as my gaze returned and I found you looking at me. You gestured for me to come closer and sit near you on the two-seater. I obeyed, careful not to be seen by your client, feeling your hand rest against my leg when I did. You massaged my thigh, and I closed my eyes, soothed by how smoothly you did this. The call was finally coming to an end and your thumb was working its way up my inner thigh but never brushing between it. The meeting wasn’t going so well for you from all indications. The client was making demands that were overbearing and you’d run out of things to say. When the call ended, all you said was, “All right, good day, gentlemen.” Your voice was firm but polite. I could feel your hold on me tighten as though you were holding on to me for sanity. My eyes remained closed.

“Why did you shave?” you asked, and I could have sworn it was an imagination until I opened my eyes and saw you looking at me, ravenous. Long gone was that professional appearance. Now you were immodest in your manner and tone.

“Because that’s what Isa and the others like.”

“I don’t like it.”

I rolled my eyes. “Sorry for doing what I want with my pussy.” Your eyes went wild with want and when you massaged further away from my pussy, I wondered if hairless vaginas were such a turn-off for you.

“Say it again—”

“Sorry for—”

You shook your head, “Not the whole thing.”

“Pussy.”

“Come.”

You snatched me off the chair and replaced your laptop with me, right on top of your erection. You were rock hard. For me. This was wrong. I knew that Sisi would never want us to do this because you were hers but that drenched me with more need for you. I wanted to fuck you because I wasn’t supposed to.

“How’s the pain now?” you asked, the back of your hand caressing my face.

“It’s not as bad as yesterday.” Your hands had found their way up the shirt, pushing my boobs up, your thumbs fondling my rock-hard nipples.

“I want to fuck you. I’ve wanted to fuck you since I laid eyes on you and that’s gotten worse since the day since we did it.” You were acting as though your fingers were scissors trying to cut off my nipples. It was the most erotic thing I’d felt yet. “And you know one thing about last time?” I shook my head, unable to speak from the pleasure that surged through my body. “The room was too crowded.”

You were talking about Sisi. Like me, you’d have preferred it to be just us. I blanked Madé out of my mind with an ease that shocked me.

“We’re not supposed to be doing this,” *I wanted to be doing it though.*

“No. But we will. No one has to know.” Your thumbs were circling my nipples and I held on to you. I realized you’d showered when my nostrils caught the whiff of your body wash. So, you were fresh meat. I wanted you more.

“Yesterday was tough.” your voice was thick with lust. “You sure you’re ready for sex?” I was. If there was anyone who I wanted to make me feel better, it was you.

You brought my head down to yours, letting me feel the warmth of your breath before demanding entry into my mouth. Your kiss was intoxicating, easy to surrender to. It didn’t feel like the other men who wanted me to have too much control or too little. You wanted us to dance to the rhythm of our lust. This was whatever we wanted it to be — a rough fuck or sweet slow sex. You yanked off the shirt, dedicating your mouth to one nipple after the other, your hands squeezing them. The fervent need for you captured my body, I spread out, tugging at the elastic band of your pants. You gave in to my request, letting me free your thick long need for me. I watched it bob to life, smearing my hands with the precum, your eyes fevered with need and yes, yes, I wanted Sisi’s man to look at me this way and fuck me like she didn’t matter. Did you tell me to stay to fuck me?

“Yes. I was going to try my luck.” I pulled back when I realized I had said the words out loud. Your hands cupped my pussy. “Soaking wet. For your family member’s man.” And so, what? I wanted every inch inside of me. What we were doing was dangerous and so what was the point of having wisdom?

You raised me a bit and shoved your cock inside of me, stretching me to my limits before easing me down until every single sinful inch was buried deep inside me. I moaned loudly. “I remember this feeling. So good.” You nibbled on my ears as your hands guided me through each thrust. You fucked so good, like someone who knew how to fuck whatever woman they had in a way they’d liked. You raised your head as my boobs swayed, opening your mouth, making sure they slapped against your lips when they hit your face. My body was still sore but there was a thrilling rush about our fuck that numbed every pain and surrendered my body to yours. When you caught a nipple in your mouth and sucked on it, I grabbed you and dug my fingers into your back.

“Shh, we’re not coming yet,” you murmured, standing without pulling out. When we got to the edge of your bed, you thrust into me a few more times before setting me on the bed, spreading me apart. From where I was, I could see the moisture our body made for this glorious act. I throbbed some more, needing you more than I’d ever needed any man. Slowly, you held my gaze, drilling into me with an intention that burned into my soul. You

wanted me to remember this moment and I swore I wasn't going to forget it.

"You feeling that?" you asked, slowly thrusting in and out of me.

"Yes. Shit. Go harder... faster, please," I begged. You obeyed, fucking me hard and fast until I grabbed the sheets and you got on top of me. I shifted on the bed while you knelt above me, grabbing my legs, and placing them on your shoulders. Your phone was ringing endlessly on the table, but we didn't care, we fucked away and I tasted seventh heaven as you pushed me to my climax. I writhed in the sheets as my release blinded me and I cried out in sheer ecstasy. You followed soon after, pulling out as your release hit, emptying yourself on my stomach. You collapsed to the side, kissing my forehead.

"You see why you can't leave now?" you said with a wink. "Can't take pussy that's that fire away from me. I'm going to fucking beg for it if I have to."

I was laughing, "Abeg, I'm sure you say this a lot."

"Yes, I have had good pussy. Not going to lie. But this is good. I got one taste, and I was done for." Your words were serious, and I didn't know if you were a great liar or you were telling the truth. You kissed my nipples, twirling your tongue on each and I could feel the need for you kindling again. "Please, stay. I'm home for the next couple of days. I want to be inside of you as many times as I can. Stay." You weren't giving me much of a choice, your tongue was dancing around my nipples and your fingers were inside my pussy. I was moving against your fingers without even realizing it.

"Okay," I said, moving as your fingers worked inside me faster. Your thumb was circling my clit and your tongue refused to let go of my boobs.

"Thanks, beautiful," you said, your words vibrating against my chest. "You're so fine, you know that, right?" Did I? Oh, yes, I did. Or did I? I didn't know, I was coming, again. It felt... explosive.

"Yes!" I exploded in a million blissful pieces, your name on my lips. "Sho!!!"

"Yes, baby. I'll show you that I own your fucking pussy. Iwo ma worry."

CHAPTER EIGHT

I woke up the next morning alone in your bed. What we did the day before was fuck, eat, watch tv, sleep, and repeat. You were on your laptop when I woke the following day, typing away, your headset covering your ears. The room was still a bit dark. I sat in bed, resting on my hands, watching you work shirtless. This was a cocoon, a fantasy but I liked being in this daydream with you. It was the first taste of normal and close to happiness I'd ever been. Easily, it knocked off the guilt I should feel about sleeping with my aunt's man.

You glanced up and found me staring at you. "You're awake. Come to Daddy," you said to me, and I peeled the heavy duvet off my body, my feet hitting the cool tiles, walking to you naked, each step toward you a renewed desire to have you buried deep inside of me. You drew me close, planting soft kisses on my lips. "You were out like fucking NEPA," you murmured, and I groaned, immediately lost in the deliriousness of your kiss as your tongue parted my lips.

"Guess who knocked me out?" I asked when we were done, and you'd freed your legs of your laptop so I could sit on you.

"You knocked me out too. I haven't slept as deeply as I did last night in a long time."

"When did you sleep?" I asked.

You briefly lowered your gaze and then said, "Thirty minutes after you did. It was a good sleep."

"So good you couldn't wait to wake up before 6 am and get to work."

You laughed. So unusual, your laughter. I'd never heard it. "Actually, I got to turn those guys from yesterday around. An idea came to me last night and I sent them an email. They've made the down payment on the property. You know who we have to thank for that?" You were nibbling on my lips, your hand cupping my tits. "You, my darling. I haven't had a burst of inspiration like that in a long time." Maybe if you weren't parting my legs and kissing me crazy, I would have called you a liar again.

But you'd conquered me with how your hands touched me, leaving me completely numb and powerless against you. I pressed my body against

yours, slightly raising my body so you could shove your cock deep inside me. You were thick and sitting on you was always going to stretch me, but it was the sweet type of soreness that I liked. You let out a moan when I took your entire length, “fucking hell” tumbled off your lips as I began to slowly ride you. I could tell that you were ceding control when I held on to your neck, threw my head back and held your thighs for support as I rode you slowly but intentionally.

“You’re so good,” you said, leaning against the chair, holding my waist tightly.

“You say that as if you’re surprised,” I said.

The hunger in your face was feral, like a wild animal going for the kill. “Well, guess nothing is separating us then.” You thrust wildly into me then, watching as I lost control again and my tits swayed, moving to the vigorous pounding of my pussy.

“I want to taste your cunt,” you said, slowing down and standing up without warning. Then you placed me on the chair, kneeling and spreading me out. I played with myself as your tongue found my opening, teasing, nibbling without regard for the writhing of my body or the pleasurable moans that escaped my lips. Your fingers threatened to imprint on my skin when you grabbed my waist tightly, your mouth dedicated to your task. My fingers worked my clit with the same mildness and intensity with which you ate me and soon I was holding your head, mumbling nonsense as I came into your mouth.

You kissed my forehead when you rose, my body still vibrating with my release. Your erection was close to my mouth when I grabbed you and worked you into my open mouth. Blowjobs were something I had to learn through porn and those lessons came in so handy because when you gagged me, blocking my airwaves with your cock, I knew the skill was to keep going, holding on to you and meeting your thrust as my eyes moistened. A guttural sound escaped your lips when you came, emptying your cum in my mouth. You looked at me as you retrieved your cock and I swallowed all of you, wiping my lip dry of what had escaped my mouth, my eyes holding yours.

“I’m obsessed with you,” the words came to me with a softness that slapped me in the face. I opened my mouth to say something cheeky, but the sincerity that danced in your coffee-brown eyes kept me silent. You’d heard me before I’d even spoken. “Before you say anything I actually mean

that, and I don't know right now if it's toxic or not but it's there in a way where I feel a growing dependence on you."

Dry laughter escaped my lips, "So maybe I should run then."

"No," you were near me, holding my hand as if you were sure I'd bolt out of the door that very minute. "Stay." And then I leaned further into our cocoon, willing to extend the fantasy until I no longer could.

An hour later we stepped out of the house to buy provisions at a neighborhood store. You wanted me to come out and feel the fresh air on my skin, you'd said. We picked up just a few things in a plastic red basket with you mainly asking me what my favorite brand of anything was. By the time we were done shopping and we walked through the narrow aisle, careful not to collide with other shoppers, I realized how fun this seemed. The little things were fun when you did it with someone you liked. At the counter, the busty cashier with a pretty face and too much lip gloss flashed you a megawatt smile. She knew your name and she called you, "Mr. Sho" with a soft voice as if you were friends. She wondered why "we haven't seen you in a while" and barely acknowledged me. Jealousy swirled in my blood, and I gently pushed the basket filled with provisions toward you. Your fingers gently brushed mine as you relieved the basket of the items we'd just purchased. I remained standing, wooden, listening to the sound of the external keyboard the cashier tapped on, and the sound of the receipt being printed. I left the provisions for you to grab, maybe even take time to discuss world politics with your bestie.

You were right on my heels, pushing the glass door open for me before the security guard could get to it. You dashed him some money and I walked toward your car, shielding my face with my hand from the assault of the late morning sun.

"You're jealous. It's cute." We were being directed out of the tiny parking lot by the same security guard you tipped. He'd abandoned the door for other customers to get by themselves and he put so much effort into getting us out of the space. You were charming and you always found your way around everything and everyone — Godwin, business meetings, security guards and store cashiers. Was that what was happening with us right now? Were you charming me for some reason? But why would that even be a thing? Why would you need to charm me? You returned the security guard's energetic wave with a quick wave, moving as smoothly as the slightly bad road would let you.

“Why are you quiet? I am not even fucking the girl.” I felt relief. It was silly, I knew you weren’t fucking her. But there was relief in hearing you say it.

I said curtly, “You can literally do anything you want, Dimeji. We’re just fucking.”

Your response was quick, “Yup. Glad you remember that.” I felt the flames of jealousy lick my insides.

Whatever was brewing between us was hot on my end. It was dangerous. It was one thing to fuck you, Sisi’s man, a man that I should have no business being with. It was another to like you. Maybe I needed to call one of the men I’d been with recently to wash this stupidity off me. Irritated by my weird feelings, I reflexively reached into the pockets of my jeans for my phone, realizing I hadn’t touched it since you told me not to.

“Fuck,” I murmured, my gaze on the shops and pedestrians we sped by.

We didn’t speak again until we got to yours and I found Sisi’s driver Albert waiting outside. You got out of the car, and he hurried toward you to help with the provisions, his gaze heated when it settled on me walking to the door, wearing nothing but distressed jeans cut-outs and a tank top, no bra under.

I was headed toward the room when you called out to me, “Lewa, breakfast is ready.” We walked to the kitchen together in awkward silence, my irritation building up inside me. In the kitchen, we’re welcomed by the aroma of boiled yams and fried eggs. The chef offered to serve us, and I mounted the tall stool spaces away from you, eating my meal in silence as Albert insisted on seeing you in private. When you stepped away, I wondered if Albert’s message had anything to do with me. If Sisi had any suspicions about sex between us, Albert was going to confirm it. I finished my meal and went to the room, barely stepping out of the shower to hear soft knocks on the door. I opened the door, disappointed that the knocker wasn’t you.

“Yes?” I snapped.

Albert’s hungry gaze swept my frame in a flash. I held tightly to the white towel wrapped around my chest. “Long time.” I remained silent, giving him a few seconds to say whatever he had to say before I slammed the door shut. “I missed you. Why have you left home now?”

“Have a nice day.” I tried to slam the door shut when he put his foot in the way. My eyes fell to his sneakers and before I could push further, he forced his way in. “Calm down na. Can’t I say hi to you again?” I didn’t appreciate the ravenous look in his eyes or what this ‘hi’ meant.

“Get out, please. I need to dress up.”

“So, you can wear cloth, go downstairs, and fuck Sho, abi? Omo, you too like danger o. Your own worse pass Bunmi sef. How you go dey fuck your madam’s husband?”

“Albert, get the hell out this very minute.”

He tugged at the towel, digging his fingers into my skin. “We’ve done it before. I want another taste. Shebi you sef see that nobody can escape your sweet pussy. Abi no be how you collect your madam’s husband be dat? Even the big oga no fit say no.”

The hairs on the back of my neck rose when I felt his breath on my skin. I shoved him off, but he gained balance and grabbed me, throwing me on the bed. I felt a slight pain when I hit the mattress, clawing at him but failing woefully to fight him off. His weight was pressed against my body, and I wondered where he got the zeal to do this. Trying hard, I pushed, pressing my legs together when he fought to pull them apart. Suddenly, the weight was gone off me and, in a flash, I saw him flung across the room, his head hitting hard across the wall as he screamed and slid down.

“Sho! Abeg!” he raised his hands in surrender, pleas tumbling off his lips as you towered above him, your eyes burning with unmistakable fury. You grabbed him by the collar, pulling him up until he stood eye-to-eye with you. He was no match for you in your anger and swiftness. “E no mean anything.”

“Are you crazy? No be for on top am I pull you comot?”

“Sho abeg. E no go happen again.” You released him, watching as he staggered and almost fell. Then you stepped back and pointed towards the door.

“Funke and I were clear about you and the girls. Consider yourself fired.” I was as shocked as Albert. When he scrambled out of the room, I stared at you in shock. “Sorry about that. You’re here to escape the madness not to get groped in a place you should feel safe in.”

“Thanks,” I murmured.

“No need to thank me. You came here to be safe.”

I walked to the wardrobe. "I think he's going to tell Sisi things, and I don't want drama."

"What would he say? That we're fucking? Babes, we're indeed fucking," I found something to wear and began to throw it on.

"Except this is about something else," I paused and looked at you.

"You slept with him." Your words were an accusation, and I took them personally. "You sound as if that's a crime."

"We fuck now. I've tasted you and I hate that you shared your body with Albert."

The words meant what they shouldn't mean. I shrugged off your statement and crossed my arms firmly beneath my boobs. "It was before you and yes I get it, the pussy is for men with money and means and thieving ass politicians."

"You make it sound like it's bottom-barrel prostitution. Having a sugar daddy isn't that." You eviscerated the distance between us and my common sense when you stood in front of me, so close, so unbearably close. "Tell me everything that happened between you two. I hope to God it wasn't by force."

"No. It was a bargain."

I told him everything, painting the picture of how Albert and I fucked until it repulsed him. It pleased me to know he was annoyed by me and him. Maybe it would give him a tiny taste of his own medicine.

"I can't believe you traded pussy for silence."

"What else should I have done? I didn't know you knew."

"Let's hope he's smart enough not to tell Funke anything. He knows that will piss me off." You placed a tender kiss on my forehead, turning around and striding toward the door.

"What did Sisi want?"

"That's my business, Lewa."

"You're fucking me here but yet you're so loyal to her. I've done everything you've asked since I got here, heck, I haven't even spoken to my friends in days!"

You exhaled slowly, reaching out for me, "Come, let's go and do some shopping. That'll relax you."

"What?" I gasped.

"C'mon."

We went to your room and shopped on a popular luxury shopper's website. There were designer shoes, bags, clothes, and

even raw virgin human hair — the sugar baby’s vanity heaven.

“Pick anything you want. She’ll deliver it tonight.” In shock, I gasped, and your thumb stroked my lips gently.

“It’s a lot of money that you’re spending on me.”

“I told you that I love your pussy. I’m obsessed with you, Lewa. And I am known to spend heavily on what I like.” It made me sound like some exotic piece of meat, but it also turned me on. No one had ever protected me the way you did. Or provided me with the things that I needed, let alone wanted. I shopped. Chanel purses, dresses, LV shades, bags, Louboutin shoes, Christian Dior shades, clothes and shoes. I bought only one item of each until you came in and threw a couple more things from each designer into my cart. “Indulge, Lewa. I got money to spend on you.” Bunmi and Nkechi were right, nothing in this world was more erotic than a rich man who wanted you and would go to the ends of the earth to spend on you.

“Will you tell me about how you and Sisi met?” I asked when I was done shopping. I was lying face down on your bed, my box braids cascading my back, watching you where you sat on the two-seater. You’d been texting a lot today. It reminded me that this cocoon thing was about to throw us back into the world. The tiniest wave of sadness hit me.

“It’s not my favorite story to tell,” you murmured, and I could tell it was traumatic for you.

“If you don’t want to, it’s fine,” I said quickly but you shrugged, dropping your phone for the first time in minutes.

“I’ll tell you a story. Sixteen years ago, a bright-eyed teenage boy had just found out who his father was. He was happy, disregarded his late mother’s words about the type of man his father was, and went on his merry little way to find this larger-than-life man he’d only ever read about in the papers. His father was a businessman, a successful one. The type that sponsored political ambitions on a big scale. You know what happened when this boy got to his father’s house?”

I shook my head, completely enthralled by how captivating this story was coming from your lips.

“He was even more awed. He’d arrived in Abeokuta, a poly bag in his hands with nothing but a few shirts and a pair of old jeans, the most optimistic smile on his face. His father lived in a huge mansion and while the boy waited on the tarred road

outside his big estate, he looked towards the blue skies and blessed God. He said, “Ọlórún ọba tóbi” at that moment. And then the gates of this mansion were thrown open and a burly man with balding hair and an unshaved beard stood by the entrance of the pedestrian gate. He asked the boy who he was, immediately ranting about homeless and unfortunate kids roaming the estate. He’d even called out to the security to go to the estate chairman and report it. It was the first moment the boy realized that maybe his father wasn’t the angel the world thought he was. First things first, he looked nothing like those lovely photos in the papers or the man in all those stylish suits on television. But there he was, acting like a monster while reeking of stale liquor. Anyway, when the boy told his father who he was, he seemed... disappointed.” Your eyes were far gone as you spoke and the yearning to reach out and stroke your face consumed me.

“He welcomed him though, took him in and all that, but the boy never did anything right. His father couldn’t stand what he described as the stench of poverty. He wasn’t like his other sons — boys who’d been born after this son with poverty stench — who schooled in a prestigious secondary school in Lagos. But the boy did everything he could to please his father. He did chores with the domestic staff, studied hard during his first term in a nearby school, and always behaved well whenever they had guests. It never worked though. The slightest mistake always made the man beat the shit out of him with leather belts, specifically the buckle, and sometimes whatever he could find. It was once a kitchen knife. If the boy was lucky, it would be objects like remote controls or award plaques.” My heart was beating faster for you, for the boy you were that endured all that pain. It reminded me of the nights when my father staggered in, brimming with alcohol-fuelled rage while he beat my mother or yelled incoherently into the night.

“Dimeji, if you don’t want to continue it’s fine,” I said to you because I understood the pain.

You shrugged. “No, it’s fine.” Barely a few seconds passed and then you continued your story. “But the boy would still apologize just so his dad would love him, and it fuelled his father more. Then he started to do it in front of guests. Guests who would make half-hearted statements about the man hitting his son but who never really cared to stop him. Until one particular guest, one of his father’s mistresses. She was not as refined as the others. She didn’t even try to hide her true self. Everything about her was

loud — the clanging of heavy gold earrings and bangles that she wore, her voice, and the scent of the perfume. She was the first person who held the man's hand in the air before it hit the boy's back."

My voice cracked and I felt my eyes moisten, "Sisi saved you."

Your eyes were filled with anguish. "She came into my life when I needed help the most. I would've run back to my mother had she not been dead. I had no one."

I understood that — the need for a family, or anyone at all, who understood one's deepest desires and wants when no one else seemed to care. The rawness of your vulnerability made me crash into your arms, kissing you with a burning desire that quickly set us both ablaze. My phone vibrated against my skin as we collapsed into the bed, endless notifications vibrating through the device. I groaned when the phone continued to ring.

"Why the hell did you switch on this blasted device? I told you not to." We were unwilling to pull apart, our bodies pressing hard against each other as we raced to feed our raging lust. We were like wild animals, thirsty for passion, unwilling to back down until we were sated.

"It might be important," I said, hoping that it wasn't as I held you with one hand and reached for the phone with the other. It was Nkechi. I hadn't spoken to her in days and that nudged me to pick up the call. "It's a video call, Dimeji."

You groaned and my eyes fell to your bulging shaft. I was at my horniest for you so far and I didn't even think that was possible. "Tell her you'd call back later."

"I need to talk to her. I don't want them to be worried."

You moved over as I swiped the screen, seeing Nkechi, looking as if she'd been on a bender, staring into the screen. "Lewa, where you dey since all these days abeg?"

"I dey with Isa na, I told you."

"Liar. I dey go pick Bunmi for Isa side in one hour." Your hands had found my clit and now I struggled to stay sane on the call. "Who are you with?" Nkechi asked.

"One of my sugar daddies."

"Wrong. Your one and only sugar daddy," you whispered, covering my pussy with your mouth. I swallowed a moan.

“Why you dey do like pesin wey dem dey touch?” Nkechi asked, cocking a brow.

“Abeg, I have to go. Shey you’re fine sha?”

“Yeah, yeah. I have plenty gist for you o. Your madam tinz. Nne, plenty things are happening. Anyway, remember that parole Bunmi bin dey yarn us about na? Update dey o. Big move tinz.”

I nodded, quickly responding, “Ehn, make we yarn later.” I didn’t want you to know anything about what the girls were talking about. If anything, going by everything you just old me, your loyalty lay strongly with Sisi. I wasn’t going to get my girls into trouble.

“And you sure say man no dey dat room with you?” You were pushing two fingers inside me now and it was harder to stay coherent.

“Abeg, NK. Let’s talk later.”

“Okay one last thing, if Sisi asks, you don’t know where Bunmi is. She hasn’t seen her in days and for good reason o.”

I nodded, eager to end the call. “No problem. I’ll call later.”

“I’ll text you the rest of the details. And abeg, read your messages.” Nkechi was gone and I was too happy to fling my phone across the room.

I let out moans the moment the call ended, lost in the paradise your rigid cock sent me to the moment you shoved it deep inside of me.

“It’s going to be difficult to share you with anyone else after this,” you murmured, pounding hard into me. “You’re all mine, Lewa. Not even that man you call husband can touch you anymore.”

I was lost, too lost to argue with you. “Yes. Yes, fuck yes!” I screamed.

CHAPTER NINE

I slept off post fuck, only opening my eyes when my phone wouldn't stop vibrating with messages. You were right, the damn thing was an annoying distraction, and it was a good thing I'd initially turned it off. Groggily, I unlocked it, swiping through messages from Nkechi first. She said they were on their way to Cubana. Something about Bunmi's new man taking us all out and all that. He knew Sisi from way back and was our sure ticket out of the deal we made with her if we wanted to get out. The messages were a lot, so I just put a call across to Nkechi.

"NK," I called, sitting up. You weren't in the room, and I wondered when you left. Basking in the bliss of our mind-blowing sex, I lay supine on the bed, my gaze on the ceiling.

"Lewa. Finally, you return my calls. Abeg, Bunmi and her guy want to leave Cubana o. It's because of you she hasn't left. She's traveling tonight."

"Traveling?" a tiny frown etched my forehead. Had I been away for that long?

"Yes. If you'd been reading messages you would know that she's leaving for Dubai with her guy."

"Like japa?"

"Yes o." I was stunned. I rolled to my side. It felt as though a lot had happened in two days.

"Like just like that?"

"I told you we have gist now. The guy knows Sisi from way back. Remember that time when we were all wondering if Sisi had older girls abi? She clearly did o. And one of those babes was this guy's younger sister. Abeg when you come we go talk. Come to Cubana like now now." I heard Bunmi's voice in the background asking if Nkechi was talking to me. Then she snatched the phone and said, "Lewa, I'm waiting. Be fast. If you don't get here in one hour, we won't be seeing in a long time cos I have a flight to catch and I'll be late if I wait for you."

"Okay. I'll come."

When I got up, I realized some of the outfits I'd shopped for had arrived. I slipped into a sequined mini black Tom Ford dress, a pair of sheer

pantyhose, and black Versace platform heels, hoping to find you in your bedroom. You weren't there. Your chef told me you stepped out an hour before. I ran into traffic on my way and cursed the never-ending traffic-laden Lekki-Epe expressway. Irritated and furious that I'd never get to Club Cubana in time, I busied myself with my phone, reading through messages I'd previously not been able to. My mother was thanking me for the money I sent before and reminded me of our leaking roof. My sister wanted a new phone, there was some contribution to be made for ajo, just so damn much going on. Exasperated, I sighed and closed the messages. It was tiring to be an ATM even if I took my responsibilities seriously.

I leaned against the seat, watching as the late evening sun retreated and the twilight cast itself upon the city. The roads were packed — traffic caused by cars, buses, trailers, and humans. Hawkers crossed the road, skilfully manoeuvring their way through the busy road. A teenage boy hopped out of a moving yellow bus, armed with a black bag as he crossed the road. His clothes were neat but worn out and looking at him disappear through the crowd on the other side of the road reminded me of teenage you.

The roughness and pain of the life you lived. How did you get out? Was it Sisi? Slowly the traffic eased, and the Uber moved, finally driving past what seemed to have caused the traffic — a car and a bus parked in the middle of the road, their drivers arguing hotly. It was 9 pm when I got to Ozumba Mbadiwe and I called Nkechi after calls to Bunmi kept ringing off to let her know I was close.

“NK, I know Bunmi must have left—”

“We can't find her. She's missing. Sisi has taken her.”

“What?”

She talked really fast and it was hard to keep up with a word she said but when she was done, all I could grab was “—then they grabbed her and sped off.”

“Slow down, NK.” She was panicking. I could feel it from where I was and suddenly, I felt unease slink up my spine and the hair on the back of my neck rose. Trepidation gripped me but somehow, I managed to keep it cool. Years and years of being the emotional sponge for my family were paying off.

“Me and Solo are at Cubana. Please come,” her voice broke and when I got to the club, I ran to her and found her a mess.

She was crying, snot running down her nostrils, her hands shaking. “She got a call from Albert. He told her to come out. And then when I came out to look for her minutes later, security told me she left with some men. Then I found this on the floor. Something is very very off about this whole thing.” She showed me Bunmi’s favorite gold hoop on her open palm. Yes, something bad had happened. And wasn’t Albert supposed to be fired? How the hell was he still running Sisi’s errands? I glanced at Nkechi, shoving my questions about Albert to the back of my mind. My friend needed me.

“We need to find her,” I said firmly, holding her shaky hands. A tall handsome guy walked up to us. I figured he was Bunmi’s new guy — Solo. He looked distressed. Nkechi made quick introductions despite herself. “We need to go to the house. Maybe we would see her there.” She glanced at Bunmi’s new man, adding, “Solo will drive us. She’ll probably miss that flight but as long as she’s safe.” I didn’t want to go home. But we needed to. On the drive home, my mother called. I ignored it because I was tired of being billed.

At home, Solo pulled up outside the compound and Nkechi jumped out of the car, charged with both fury and fear. I ran after her, holding her back, worried about the state she was in.

“NK, we can’t confront Sisi like this. It’ll make things worse.”

“She’s right,” Solo said. “That woman and her right-hand man are demons. If this goes wrong, we’d be lucky if we leave with our heads intact.”

I felt an instant compulsion to defend, “Dimeji isn’t that bad.”

Nkechi, eyes reddened with an overflow of tears, glared at me, “You think he’s innocent? He’s worse than she is.”

“We don’t know that he is, NK,” I said, trying to calm Nkechi. She flung my hands off her.

“Maybe if Solo here tells you the role he played in his sister’s disappearance and death you’ll know we’re not dealing with good people here.” My heart was dealt a blow and I could tell before Solo began to talk that this was bad, very bad. And that this could perhaps explain the reason you’d left home after fucking me.

“He and my sister were dating. She thought he was in love with her but all the while he was just keeping tabs on her for Funke because he knew she

had plans to leave just like Bunmi. And then just when she was about to leave, the guy she trusted with her life gave her up. Funke killed her. We found her body days later.” I was shaking, trying my best to keep it together but unable to—jealousy mixed with dread spread through me. Nkechi had begun to bang the gate and I couldn’t even stop her. Not when she started shouting either. I pressed my sweaty palms against my hips, willing for my heart pounding to stop. Had you brought me closer to figure out what was happening between me and the girls? You always had suspicions, but I had been the one to call you. Had I walked into some devious carefully laid out plan?

Nkechi had pushed the security guard out of the way and I followed, wobbly on heels that now threatened to lose balance, overcome by panic. Albert was standing outside, and I knew then that you’d lied to me. I couldn’t tell what the lie was or what exactly was going on, but I’d been a fool in the past few days. You’d played me. My heart sank and I tasted the bitterness of betrayal. Each step I took toward the building felt like a pounding in my ears. Shit. I was a fucking fool. What the hell was I thinking? That my pussy was so good you’d never tasted better before?

Sisi was having dinner with a guest when we stepped into the house and when my mother wouldn’t stop calling, I picked the call. I spoke to her in Yoruba. “Mummy this isn’t a good time to talk—”

“Please I just called to warn you sternly. Lewa, Lewa, Lewa, how many times did I call you?”

“Mummy please this isn’t the time for addition and subtraction abeg.”

“Oh, it better be! Because I don’t understand why you’re parading yourself around Lagos with your Aunty’s husband! Let this be the last time I hear of it because you didn’t learn that nonsense from me. That woman has been a great deal of help to us, and she doesn’t deserve to be treated this way. You’re married for God’s sake!”

“Good night,” I said, hanging up in time to see Nkechi launching herself at Sisi.

I dragged her off, eyeing Solo who regarded the entire debacle without moving an inch. “Will you help?! She’s going to get herself into trouble!” Did he think it was a coincidence that all of this had happened after Bunmi tried to attack Sisi?

“We’re here for war,” he murmured. He was stoic, his poisonous glare roaming Sisi’s body. Sisi was stunned but as usual, she shed off her reaction to the situation. She stared blankly at us, apologizing to her guest as she rescheduled. Albert and two other muscled men marched in, grabbed Nkechi and manned the way. Once Sisi’s guest left, I knew we were in trouble.

“You’re bold sha. I’ll give you that.” She slapped Nkechi hard across the face and she staggered backward. “What the hell do you think you’re doing barging into my house like that and attacking me? And you!” Anger danced in her eyes when she faced me. “You irredeemably stupid child! I brought you to Lagos to rid you of the stench of poverty and your gratitude was opening your dirty legs and fucking my man!” Gone was the woman who made an effort to look calm in the face of the most serious of situations. She was standing close to me, her strong perfume waging war on my nostrils, her long stiletto-shaped acrylic fingernails just a few inches away from my eyes. “I know all your secrets. Every single one of them. You’re very stupid if you ever thought Dimeji would keep anything from me.” Embarrassment flooded me and when she pushed past me, I swayed, grabbing the closest chair for support. “Get me my phone. I’m calling the DPO to arrest these nuisances.”

“Yes ma’am,” I caught the glee on Albert’s face before he disappeared on his errand.

“Funke, you will meet your Waterloo! You murdered Juliet and I’ll prove it!”

Sisi looked at Solo, bored. “Your sister that stole my client’s money and thought she could run away with my N10M worth of jewellery?! Someone that thought she could wreck me? She tried to make my business hers and God fought for me. The same God that will fight for me tonight.” For someone who acted like Satan, Sisi called God’s name a lot.

“Your phone ma,” Albert handed the phone over to her and she looked at the menacing men in the room.

“None of these useless people move an inch, understood?”

“Yes, ma.”

“You’ll know what it is like to sleep at Lion’s building tonight. Ingrates.” I looked at Solo and Nkechi, caught in deep trouble with me. I wish they had a plan. Sisi ordered us to sit on the floor and we did, yanked off the floor by her guards when the police arrived.

We were cuffed and thrown in the back of the van like food sacks, sandwiched by two uniformed policemen who reeked of liquor. As the van moved, I tried to imagine where you were and what you were doing. Did you stay away because of this? Was this your plan? I was too bruised to even find tears. Nkechi and Solo were silent, angry. I looked into the night, wondering where Bunmi was and at the same time, heartbroken and ashamed by where I'd landed myself. It felt as if someone had cut me deep and rubbed hot pepper on my wound.

The van stopped, and I heard voices, mainly yours. You'd shown up somehow. The policemen that sandwiched us remained sitting, trying their best to look alert.

"I can't believe you were playing house with Sho while we were being hunted like game," Nkechi said accusingly. She was staring at me with the same accusation that loaded her words.

"Isa beat and raped me, and I ran to him for help." Maybe if I had said the words out loud to myself before I ran into your arms, I wouldn't have made the move. Because now I felt so stupid.

"You trust that dude too much. One piece of advice? Don't," Solo's warning was firm. He believed the words. You'd helped murder his sister. I wanted to scream. To cry. To throw up. To claw at your fucking handsome face until your blood sank beneath my fingernails. A human shadow was cast upon us, and I looked up to find a policeman. "Which one of you is Lewa?"

Solo, Nkechi, and I exchanged wary looks. "Abeg answer me."

"Who is asking?" I asked.

"Madam, are you Lewa?" the officer asked, irritated. "Please come down and follow me."

"Don't," Nkechi said.

Solo began to speak. "She's right. We don't know why—" The officer yanked me off and pulled me away with him. One of the other officers that had kept watch on us at the back of the van followed too. And then I saw you, with the rest of the policemen, angry, letting them know in a low voice that they'd fucked up.

"This isn't your job, officer. The police have no business arresting innocent citizens. You made this arrest because someone who has access to power has chosen to abuse it and that's very wrong."

The policeman that responded spoke with a calmness I'd never seen in the Nigerian police, "Sir, we were told that they were trespassing."

"This seems to me like someone acting out because they didn't like the direction an argument was going. There are actual criminals in the city of Lagos. Some of them you answer to. These guys aren't part of them." You looked at me and I was so furious at you, I remained silent. Why were you playing the hero? Did you think the optics mattered to me at this point? I already knew who the fuck you were. Your gaze darkened when it fell on my handcuffed wrist.

"We're sorry sir. But can we have madam call the DPO—" You were on the phone in a flash, your gaze still on me.

I couldn't tell what you were thinking. I just knew your eyes were stony and you spoke in a no-nonsense manner. It embarrassingly turned me on too. To see you be in charge and do things. "Evening, sir. Long time o! Hope you're not angry I couldn't stay long at your party the other day." And just like that you'd switched, laughing when you spoke to the DPO who you put on speakerphone. The officers listened to you, quick to uncuff us and let us go as the conversation progressed.

"I'll come around and see you at your new place this weekend, egbon. Thank you so much. Good night."

Our freedom was swift. Once the police van was gone, you looked at Solo who approached you with balled fists and intense fury. He missed you twice because you ducked. Unwilling to be deterred, he tried a third time, hitting your face on the fourth, giving me a satisfaction I hadn't even known I needed. Feeling lucky, Solo tried a fifth and you grabbed his hand and twisted it, pulling it behind him before tossing him off like a trash bag.

"If I were you, I'd stop this nonsense," was all you said before you opened your car. "Get in, I'll drop you where you can pick up your car." I gasped at your offer as though we were all on the same side. Were you a fucking lunatic?

"Dimeji Shogbesan you must be a madman if you think I'd do that! After you killed my sister?!" Solo was still livid, and he yelled at you on the streets of Lekki Phase One. A few passersby looked our way but even that didn't faze you.

“Solomon, I didn’t kill your sister. And that’s all I’m saying about that.”
You unlocked your car, “Lewa get in.”

“She’s not going anywhere with you!” Solo yelled.

You sighed, looking at me, “Lewa?”

“No. I’m not leaving with you.” I couldn’t return with you. It made no sense.

“Lewa, I got you out of that mess—”

“Because you’re working with Sisi, and you want to be the good cop.”

“Oho!” Solo said. Nkechi held my hand and I stood by her side even though all I wanted to do was run into your arms so you could tell me that I was safe with you. You waited. “Lewa, I can give you all the answers you seek if you’ll just come with me.” I didn’t move. And you kept waiting by your car for minutes. I didn’t count how much time passed. It didn’t matter because every passing second hurt. The anger and the pain blinded me.

“Where’s Bunmi?” I asked.

“I can’t tell you that because I don’t know.”

“Did you plan this with Sisi?”

“Come with me, Lewa. Please.” I could. I could trust you again and find myself at the back of a police van because trusting you just wound up in a bad place for me. I shook my head, lowering my head when you got into the car, still waiting for some minutes. After some time, you drove off.

Solo, Nkechi and I found our way back to the house after then to retrieve Solo’s car. You weren’t there and Solo wanted us to just get in the car and leave. I’d almost gotten into the car, but I was bursting with anger and pain that I didn’t know what to do with. I wanted blood.

“Please give me a minute,” I begged a raging Solo and a frustrated Nkechi, not waiting to hear their displeasure as I begged the security to let me see Sisi. It was important, I insisted. He let me in after telling me he’d tell Sisi that the three of us had threatened him with a weapon if I caused trouble inside. I ran in, kneeling and pleading when I saw Sisi. I told her that I hadn’t intended to fuck her man. It was nothing. We only fucked once, and I came to my senses, but I was too ashamed to come back to her. I didn’t know if she believed me, but I begged anyway, rolling on the floor because I knew she reveled in my shame. And this moment meant something — the woman who’d ‘snatched her husband,’ begging this way meant she’d won. I needed her to believe that.

She didn't say a word and before I left, I told her that Albert and I had fucked because he found out about my husband. He was lying to her and sleeping with me, something he wasn't meant to do. I knew he had said things to her that allowed him to secure his job. Sisi still didn't say a word but I saw her eyes flick when I told her about Albert's knowledge of a secret that big. She didn't know about Albert. So, she didn't know all my secrets, eh? I turned to leave, hoping that I'd achieved my aim, relieved when I heard her voice thundering down as she yelled for Albert as I stepped into the compound. I was filled with immense relief. The burning need to raze everything down was doused by the revenge I got on Albert. It felt good to get even.

Outside, I got into Solo's car, sitting in the backseat, a smile unfurling from the corners of my lips. I went to Solo's house with Nkechi with nothing but my phone. I was there for two days. And on the third day, the day before I was going to leave for Ijebu to see Made and let him know that we had to leave the country through other means, Nkechi's screams snatched me from a light sleep around 3 am.

I hadn't been sleeping well since everything that happened at Sisi's and I was lucky if I got two full hours before daybreak. I yanked off the covers, tying a wrapper around the oversized t-shirt Nkechi lent me. As I threw the doors open and ran to the small living room, Solo was sitting with eyes gone cold. He'd been so passionate about finding Bunmi so that he could get his revenge on Sisi and so he'd stalled his trip to Dubai. Now, he just sat, eyes dead. Nkechi was kneeling on the rug in the living room, her hands tightly gripping her chest, uncontrollable sobs escaping her lips.

Bunmi had been found. Dead. Very very dead. Her body missing all of its organs. We were in deep shit.

CHAPTER TEN

Naturally, I went to Ijebu determined to find some comfort away from the pain of Lagos. Nothing had prepared me for what Lagos had quickly become — a place of possibilities that turned to dust and ashes in my mouth. I hated that I also couldn't think about my experience without thinking of my foolishness with you. Worse, I hated that every time I thought about you, I remembered our intimate moments and how increasingly impossible it became to be angry at you. Maybe you weren't telling me the truth about your childhood. I sighed, knowing you were genuine. But I needed something to loathe you for.

In Ijebu, I was met with hostile faces and cold shoulders. Usually, Madé and I went to his apartment together when I arrived. He was always waiting for me. His number hadn't been connecting and I'd left him many messages. Messages I hadn't checked if they were delivered or if I got responses to. I'd been thinking about Bunmi and everything that had happened instead. When I checked my phone, I realized I didn't receive any response from Madé. His apartment was locked. It was a Saturday. Where was he? Quickly, I walked back to where his neighbors and his landlord sat and asked after him.

"He's not here anymore. He has left this place." I was gobsmacked. Left for where? There were no answers. Only cold faces stared at me, unwilling to respond. Had they always been this hostile? Deeply troubled, I trudged through the same way I came, lost in my thoughts, wondering why everything seemed to have suddenly collapsed around me. I'd never *not* met Madé at home. Where the hell was he? Calls kept getting the "unavailable" automated voice messages and messages remained unanswered. Where was I to return to? Sisi would kill me, and Solo's house was a no-go area.

I stopped by the side of the road, directionless, unsure of what to do next. Dejection and pain enveloped me, and I may have stood by the side of the road for an hour, I couldn't tell. Pedestrians threw curious glances my way, and motorbikes and taxis kept slowing down, hoping I'd enter them

somewhere. Unfortunately, I didn't have a destination. I didn't know who I was or what I wanted. This wasn't just a *now* thing. It was a life thing too.

"Aunty, are you going?" a bike man asked after someone had alighted from his bike. I looked at him, quiet.

"Aunty good evening o. How are you? Long time," I turned to look at the woman greeting me. She looked familiar. I recognized her from Madé's compound. A neighbor. A smiling one.

"Good afternoon, madam. I was just coming from your side sef." Maybe she'd have answers to the questions I had.

"I'm surprised to see you came because we haven't seen Oga since he moved out."

The response slapped the taste out of my mouth. "He moved out?" She knew she'd said too much then and she began to hurry away. "No, please. I'm begging you with everything you believe in, tell me where he moved to." She looked at me with sympathy, telling me that Madé had betrayed me. He'd moved on with our plans without me. It was too much to handle given the past few days I'd had.

"I'm sorry I don't know where exactly he went to. But it's not here. It's in Lagos." She began to walk away now, "It's all I know. I'm sorry." I watched her leave the same way I came, weakened by her words. I crouched a bit and then I walked a few spaces away from where I previously stood. Then I crossed the road to the other side and then back.

I needed an outlet, but I hadn't cried since before my mother grabbed my siblings and me and ran from our father. Because she'd told me, "*You have to grow up and be in charge. No time to be weak and be shedding tears.*" So, I'd seen tears as the enemy for so long that I didn't even know if my tear ducts still worked. I placed my hands on my head at the same time another bike slowed down in front of me.

"Madam, to where?" he asked. It was obvious where I had to return to since I was so lost. Where I came from in the first place.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

My home in Oyo town looked smaller than I remembered, but my financial responsibilities remained just as big. I woke up to noises in the house, my siblings arguing about breakfast, neighbors on their way to work, and my mother distancing herself from the ruckus in the home.

I'd been home for two weeks, sleeping on the worn-out three-seater in the sitting room, sharing the space with neatly piled old DVDs, books that were funeral and wedding party souvenirs, tracts and Christian literature, and the old TV.

"I fried the akara for myself last night! Maybe you should have done the same instead of going to Spare Bet with your stupid friend!"

"Are you the one that grinded the beans for the akara? Why do you always think of yourself alone?"

I was scrolling through my phone, miraculously expecting the job applications I'd been sending out since I'd been here to yield something. They hadn't. My numbers on social media weren't going to be getting me ad placements for a while. The last post I did for an organic brightening skincare brand didn't get as many engagements as I normally would, and the money had long been used to pay bills at home. My siblings continued to argue, and my mother continued to ignore them.

"Sister Lewa! Mummy! Come and warn Ekundayo o!" My mother continued to treat the ongoing drama like a virus, distancing herself as though acknowledging it would infect her with the inconvenience of seeking a solution. From where I lay on the chair, I gazed at her from above the edge of my phone.

"Sister Lewa!!!" My siblings were threatening to get physical with each other and I sprung to action.

"Ekundayo, will you get your hands off your sister this very minute?" I asked, sitting up. Ekundayo stepped back immediately, grumbling about how it wasn't all his fault. "Debimpe, you don't own all the food in the house. It's always a good thing to share."

“But sister mi, he didn’t do anything last night, he was busy betting away his destiny!”

“You will bet away your destiny! Is it not the small money I got the last time that we used to fix the leaking roof?” My gaze sharply turned to my mother. Unwavering in her stance, she stood and left the sitting room, exiting into her bedroom.

“Debimpe, share akara with your brother. Ekundayo, I must never see your foot in that betting center again. If I do, you’re going to be in some serious trouble.” Ekundayo started to argue but I raised my hand and spoke firmly, “I’m not going to repeat myself. Now finish your breakfast and go to school!”

“Yes, ma,” both chorused, and I watched them finish their meal and leave for school.

When the house was quiet again, I went to my mother’s room. She was lying on her side in bed, eyes shut. I knew she wasn’t sleeping, not because I could see the slight wink as she carried on with her pretense, but because I knew she was trying to escape a conversation with me.

“Mummy, I know you’re not asleep.” She didn’t move. I waited a few seconds before tapping her until she opened her eyes.

“What is it?” her voice cool, too cool for the fucking liar that she was.

“Why is Ekundayo talking about paying for the same roof I sent you money for?”

“You know your brother can be very forgetful.” We’re both aware that this wasn’t my brother’s forgetfulness. My mother was lying.

“Mummy, I literally was in Lagos prostituting myself away for money to keep our family afloat! But you still lie to me? What do you need all the money for? Are we going to push Ekundayo into a life of gambling after we pushed me into a life of soliciting money with my body?!”

Her retort, cloaked in defense, “Please don’t come in here and yell at your mother like an untrained child! A few months in that horrible Lagos and you think you can look me in the eye?!”

“That’s not the conversation,” I tried to lower my voice. It was part respect and part not wanting her to deviate from the point. “Why did you collect money from me and collect money from Ekundayo for the same thing?”

“He offered. I didn’t see why not.”

I sighed, exasperated, “He’s 15!!!”

“You’re yelling...”

“Because your children, the reason you said you fled an abusive marriage are falling apart! Because we’re doing morally wrong things for our family and you’re just there acting as if it’s normal! THIS ISN’T NORMAL!”

And then she emerged, my ever-ready-to-be emotional mother regardless of the situation. Tears streamed down her face, and I watched in unbelievable shock, although I’d seen this play out since I was a little girl. *It’s not my fault that I am trying my best to give you a better life than your father was offering. We would struggle, yes. But things would be fine. I am a mother. What mother wants her children to do terrible things to survive? I’m trying, bear with me.*

I watched helplessly, unsure of how to let out everything I was feeling. I’d never had an outlet – no tears, no outbursts, nothing. Because all the tears to shed were always hers and she’d sacrificed a better life with my father for us. So, we lived a life of gratitude toward her.

“Okó mi, forgive me. It’s not my fault,” she collapsed into my arms, and I remained standing, weighed down by everything. “Please, I can’t bear you being angry with me,” her words spluttered from her lips in between sobs. Slowly, I wrapped my arms around her, and her tears subsided.

The days after that were a blur that slowly morphed into nights. I still hadn’t heard from Madé. And I sure as hell wasn’t returning to Sisi. Three weeks after I returned home, I got a distressed call from Nkechi. She’d had a nightmare and a recent close shave with death.

“I’d been witnessing strange things. Like one day I went for a jog in the morning and this bat followed me and wouldn’t go away. It even flapped its wings in front of me. Then I had this nightmare where someone was trying to drown me.”

“We’ve all gone through a lot in this past month. I think it’s normal for you to undergo a little stress,” I murmured.

“I’m happy with Solo, Lewa.”

She was already with Solo? “I didn’t know that.”

“I’ve been so carried away. I wanted to call you.”

“No problem,” my sister brought a meal of garri and beans. The beans barely had enough oil and the garri was all we had left in the house.

“Everybody is dealing with something.”

“After the near-death experience, I began to confirm my suspicions. Lewa, this has something to do with Sisi.”

I sighed, gesturing to my sister to take the garri and share it with our brother. “NK, what does this have to do with her?”

“Remember the oath we swore? The entire rites that Sho made sure we participated in?”

It was still sore to hear your name. “And so?”

“Lewa, I looked up Yewa. I don’t know much because I am not Yoruba. But what I read so far says she’s the goddess of the tomb and she has something to do with water. We’re not supposed to ever leave Sisi but clearly, I haven’t gone back to her because I’m hoping life with Solo can buy me a way out. Why do you think Bunmi died?” *Shit*. “Remember, Sho is a Babalawo. I know we like to think he’s fake but he isn’t.”

I stood and paced. I hadn’t eaten in a day, but the news made the meal before me unappealing, and I was instantly filled with dread.

“Lewa, we’re never getting out. We’re doomed.” Maybe it wasn’t real. Maybe it was all a coincidence. Sisi murdered Bunmi. We didn’t have proof, but it was what it was. Bunmi had repeatedly disrespected the woman and she wasn’t going to get away. So maybe this was all just overthinking.

“Let’s not overthink it,” my heart pounded hard.

“I’m trying not to. I just wanted to tell you to be careful.”

“Okay,” I remained frozen until the call was over. I did my best to forget what she said until I heard the loud flapping of wings outside the window much later that night. Fear spread through me, and I jumped in fright.

“What is a bat doing here at this time?” my mother asked, looking around for her bible. “I rebuke you!”

I couldn’t sleep because my dreams were suddenly plagued with nightmares. Was it true or did the phone call just kickstart a series of events that my fear was triggering? By the end of the week, a call from one of the places I’d sent my resume distracted me. It was not a job that would pay a lot, but it’d keep food in our bellies. The following Monday on the first day

of work, I'd dressed up, wearing my mother's dress which was the smartest thing in the house I could wear, given my wardrobe was in Lagos. It was a blue floral wrap dress that was two sizes bigger. I held it in place at the waist with the belt. On my way back from work, I was on a bike, worried that the rider kept moving roughly on the road. I was close to my house when he almost ran into an oncoming vehicle, tried to manoeuvre his way last minute, and veered off the road to face a trailer.

Everything happened fast and then I was on the tarred road, rolling, unable to stop myself. The last thing I heard was panicked voices, cries for help, and then I blacked out.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

I woke up in the hospital. It was getting dark, and the pungent smell of disinfectants and bleach instantly assaulted my nostrils. I tried to move, but the pain from the accident immediately hit me, reminding me of what had happened. I groaned, remembering how I had gotten here. The impatient bike man, the trailers, the cars, me lurching forward as I was thrown off the bike, rolling, rolling until all I saw was darkness. Sisi had struck. I was going to be dead, wasn't I? I covered my face, trying to muffle my groans but it didn't help much. My mother ran toward me, concerned.

"Ajike, how are you, oko mi?"

"My body aches," I managed to say. Even talking seemed a chore. Were there to be many more of this type of accident? Was I meant to die? Or was this just a clear warning?

"Pele. The doctor said you will be fine and it's just minor bruises." *Minor bruises.* I'd laugh if all I could feel wasn't pain and terror. This would get worse, but the doctor and my mother didn't know that.

There was a plaster on my hand and a bandage on my arm. My wounds had been cleaned but I felt a banging headache. I held my head at the same time I perceived your scent. It was familiar because even when you were no longer in the picture, it lingered on my mind, tickling memories of you even though I vehemently fought them. But why was your scent in the hospital? Was I imagining it or were you actually sauntering toward the foot of the bed?

"Mummy..." I called, frowning when I saw you step closer. Or wait. Had I died and gone to heaven? Or maybe it was hell. It was definitely hell. You were the devil. "What is he doing here?" I asked.

"He came to the house looking for you and then we heard you had an accident and he brought me and your siblings here," my mother explained.

"Of course, he did." How convenient that he'd shown up on the day I'd been tossed off a bike after I was supposed to resume work somewhere new.

"He also helped pay the bills. He said you're good friends in Lagos." I glared at you, furious, cursing my current predicament because I wanted to jump at you and scratch the smoothness of your fine face.

My mother didn't know who you were. Or maybe she did. It didn't matter. She couldn't say no to someone else paying her bills.

"He needs to go away. We're not friends," I winced because the headache seemed to worsen when I spoke. Slowly, I touched my head, trying to massage it.

"I can help with your headache," you murmured. You'd stepped closer and sat by the edge of the bed. My stomach knotted at the sight of you in pristine white buba and sokoto, your abeti aja cap made from aso ofi so beautifully placed on your head. My anger waged war against my growing feelings for you but it was so easy to lose against the efficacy of your charm. You owned me in a way that was unacceptable and that was also inexplicable.

"I didn't know you were a doctor," I snapped.

"I'm not. I know a traditionalist."

I chuckled drily, "Someone to continue from where you and your fucking lover finished off? It's a no for me. Get out please." I tried to sit up but my head's throbbing seemed to worsen. I grimaced.

"The person I know is an oníṣègùn, and this headache will go away faster than any painkiller can fix."

I swept you with a gaze filled with visible irritation, "You're very calm for someone who took me fi idiat."

"I'm sorry, Lewa. I can explain. I came to look for you to explain. Please let me help. You know that you need me."

I scoffed, saying as calmly as possible, "Fuck. You."

"As soon as we can, I promise you will." Were you insane? Finding humor in this bleak moment? You were crazy. My mother continued to look from you to me, utterly confused. "Please Lewa," you pleaded but I was willing to take my chances. I didn't know where you stood, and I couldn't bury myself deeper in this shit with Sisi.

"No." I'd made a mistake once and I wasn't going to repeat it. "And please go away this very minute. Seeing you here is worsening the headache."

I tried to sleep that night, but I couldn't. The headache worsened and the shallow sleep I slipped into twice was filled with terrifying dreams. Twice I was pushed beneath deep waters, overpowered by strong arms I couldn't

see or fight off, struggling to breathe, my hands flailing above the surface of the dark, murky waters.

I woke up in the middle of the night, breaking out in sweats, frightened and unable to scream. In fear, I watched my mother sleeping by the foot of my bed, my heart beating so fast I thought it would wake her. I wasn't certain if I imagined Sisi's face but when I covered my face with my hands, she flashed through my mind. I grabbed the sheets on the bed and closed my eyes tightly. It was obvious what I had to do. Even though I fucking hated you for everything you'd done.

You came with the oníṣègùn before daybreak, and we drove in your car to a riverbank where I washed my head and prayed to my orí. And then we walked toward your car in silence. My mother was sitting in the backseat with the door open, waiting for us and the oníṣègùn to join her for the journey back home. I was about to get into the car when you reached for my wrist and gently pulled me to a halt.

"Lewa, please wait." I stared daggers at you, still not talking much because the headache was still there. As water dripped from the tendrils of my uncombed hair, falling on my eyelids, I peered at you through loathful eyes and desired you with the same intensity. You waited for the oníṣègùn to get inside the car before you pulled me gently to the back of it.

I waited for you to get to the point of your visit. It couldn't have been coincidental that you arrived in my hometown on the day I had an accident that almost claimed my life. This wasn't kismet. You and your witch wife had done something to trigger that accident.

"You can't continue to hide here. Nothing good will come out of it. The oath you swore was real. I told you this."

"Not that this piece of info is any of your business, but I didn't have anywhere else to go."

A look of disbelief flashed through your eyes. "You've called me before. Why didn't you come to me this time?"

I gasped, dry laughter escaping my lips, "I honestly think you should consider a career in comedy, Dimeji. Your comedic timing is quite exquisite." I tried to brush past you, but you held my arm, gently pulling me back so I could face you. My gaze fell on your hand around my arm. There was something that threatened to soften my heart toward you with the way

you held me firmly but somehow managing not to inflict pain. It was as though you knew just what to do. I looked into your eyes and thought I glimpsed anguish and frustration, but I couldn't tell why that was. Maybe I just imagined that you were going through the same things that I was going through.

"I know that things were crazy but deep down, you knew that night that I was telling you the truth. Do you know how much trouble I got into with Funke for chasing the police van and setting you guys free?"

"I do not give a flying fuck about you or what you do!"

"I do though. I give a flying, diving, soaring fuck about you and what you do, and I cannot seem to fucking stop. Does that mean anything to you, or do I need to do something else to send the message into your coconut head?" My chest pounded with excitement at your words, the declaration fired up my insides and I wanted you to kiss me so bad it made no sense.

"So why did you get Bunmi killed?"

"If you'd tried to listen for a second, you'd hear me! I didn't kill her. I tried to save her."

"Dimeji, I'm saying this again, please stop taking me for a ride."

You sighed, "I knew that Bunmi wanted an out. It was impossible but she was blinded by anger and arrogance to see that she wasn't getting out of the deal with us. At first, I just wanted to know what she was up to. It's not the first time girls have tried that. I knew the result was always tragic."

"Like your former babe?" You winced, nodding slowly. Jealousy jabbed me in my chest. This thing you did with me was not a one-time thing. I was just another outlet to let loose for you. You fucking bastard. "But you took the information of Bunmi's whereabouts from me, didn't you?"

"It's more than that. I kept you away from your phone because I knew their plans were going to backfire and if you went along with it, you'd die." You sighed, "I was trying to get to her that night before you even got to the club. When I got there, she was gone."

The morning breeze was slightly cooler than the past days and with my head recently washed and the water dripping down the slacked collar of my t-shirt, I felt slightly cold. Instinctively, I wrapped my arms around my chest as much as the bandage and the pain could let me. I must have winced because your hands held me, and you wrapped me in a quick embrace.

"You're cold." I could shove you off but that was hard, and I was tired of

doing hard things – caring for family, being the breadwinner, running away from you – so I just leaned into the warmth of your embrace, listening to the beat of your heart.

“I’m in this town because I knew you’d have questions. I am willing to provide more answers to those, but you swore an oath, and you can’t run from it. You need to return to Lagos with me. Right now. Or else, the next accident might just claim your life.” I shut my eyes tightly, letting you wipe the water off my face. It was the truth. You were the devil, but you were telling the truth.

“Fine, I’ll return to Lagos then.” My headache was barely there anymore, I realized then as we walked to the car. “But I do need one favor from you.”

“Anything.”

“Do you know how I can find my husband?”

“Lewa...” your voice trailed off and I knew that you knew where he was.

“Please, I’m begging. I need to see him.”

You exhaled deeply, “I can figure it out.”

“Thanks.” If Madé wanted to betray me, he could at least do it with his full chest.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

We returned to Lagos together and I slept through most of the ride because I didn't want to talk to you.

"Take me to Lekki," I said. You didn't want to, but I didn't care for what you wanted. I couldn't risk Sisi's wrath by returning to Ajah with you. I also knew that you weren't being completely honest. Because how did you know where I was? How did you conveniently find me every time?

"What would you do?" you asked when we were two streets away from my destination.

"Find another sugar daddy. What else?"

"My friend Goddy's hiring a content manager. If you want the job, I can pull some strings for you." It shouldn't get to me that much that you were offering to help but it did. I didn't respond and when we got to my destination, you handed me the gifts you previously bought for me and a brand-new iPhone.

"Don't return them." I knew it was a plea even though you said the words firmly. I got out of your car as you added, "I'm always a call or text away."

It didn't truly matter. I couldn't tell where you stood, so it didn't matter. Sisi wasn't home and I was grateful for that although it meant I had to sit outside the house and wait for her. The security wasn't going to risk his job by letting me in. When she came, I pleaded with her to take me back. She stared at me with eyes hooded with disgust. I was worse than the other girls, I'd slept with her man. And I was family.

"You're half dead. What must I do with you?" she said, irritated. "Look at you – plasters, bandages, broken bones here and there. Almost nothing of you is left to work with."

"I'll try." I didn't have it in me, but I was also pleading for my life.

"If you say so. Let her in."

Returning to Sisi scared me so much that I was wary of food in the house. I barely ate and that meant I was unable to use my meds properly. So, when I ran out of money to buy miserly street food, I mostly slept and read old novels I'd returned to Lagos with. By the fourth day, a phone call

changed everything. Madé had been found in Yaba. It was the biggest gut punch I'd ever felt. You offered to pick me up and I had you park three buildings away, on a street where Sisi or her eyes couldn't find you. You were angry when you saw me wobbling down the street as though the breeze would blow me away – a pathetic sight.

“Are you not eating?”

“I eat when I can,” I shrugged.

“Lewa, are you trying to kill yourself?”

“Better me than you or your madam.” You refused to drive straight to Yaba. Instead, you found your way to Yakoyo in Lekki so I could eat amala and ewedu. It was the most satisfying meal I'd had in too long. I ate everything, covering my mouth as I belched when I was done. You watched me with keen eyes, refusing to say a word until we left the restaurant and found one of Sisi's men outside.

“Get inside the car,” you said firmly, and I watched you go to him. Your words seemed curt, and he nodded, not sparing a glance my way as he disappeared into the restaurant.

“What did you say to him?” I asked when you got behind the wheel.

“That I'd hurt him and his loved ones if he said anything to Funke.” You fired up the engine, turning on the radio and the AC simultaneously. I strapped myself in place with the seatbelt.

“Would you?”

“I've committed murder, Lewa if that's what you're asking.”

“It wasn't what I was asking but good to have your resume, *Makanaki*.”

You swiftly moved out of the parking spot, rolling down the glass a bit to tip the guy who directed us out of the parking area. “I'm glad your sense of humor has returned. Maybe eat more often so we can have more Nollywood thriller references.”

“Let's not act like the real comedian here, isn't you. A pimp that fucks his girls, including his wife's second cousin and somehow expects her to trust him after spilling all her secrets.”

“I didn't tell her your secrets. Funke and I will never marry. That time has passed.”

We were out of Lekki and to distract myself from staring endlessly at your profile, I asked, “Why are you always showing up to help me?”

“You're not an accident in my life.”

“What?” You peeled your attention off the expressway, focusing on me, your eyes filled with concern and something else that I’d later discover was pain. Pain, despair, and the inevitable advent of death.

“I’m meant to be here. With you. Doing everything I have been doing. Yorubas call it *àkosílẹ̀*.” We were on the third mainland bridge and I felt slight worry as we drew closer to seeing Madé. What was going to happen? Was it a good idea that I’d made this trip? I needed some distraction. I briefly glanced at yellow buses and cabs, other road users, determined not to think about what was going to happen. “Care to explain what that means?”

“I will in due time.”

We neared a busy street in Yaba. Tall, old homes and newly renovated houses lined both ends of the street. Shops carved out of residential buildings sprawled to the road, cartons of noodles, biscuits, and show glasses containing oily fried yam, egg rolls and puff puff visible in a couple of places. When we pulled up outside an untarred road, you pointed to a house with peeling paint and an open gate with wrought rusty iron.

“How did you know this place?” I asked, unable to hear my voice at the sound of my beating heart.

“The Nigerian police can be useful for things like this. All they need is a little motivation,” you rubbed your fingers together.

“Okay.” My throat was parched and I realized how scared I was to confront Madé. I still felt anger and betrayal and even hurt but I was also afraid of the outcome of this. “I am going to confront him,” I said, although I still remained in my seat, strapped in place by the seatbelt.

“Hmm,” you murmured.

“Do you think I should?” I looked at you, uncertain.

“If you want to. I’m here to help with whatever you want to do.” I nodded, trying to brace myself. I exhaled deeply. It wasn’t helping much but it gave me the courage to get out of the car.

With renewed fury charging through me, I stormed into the compound and banged on the first door I saw. I hadn’t even thought about where I was going or if the door was the right one. I just banged and waited, my anger powering my fists. When the door opened, I saw a familiar face. My gaze fell to her stomach, and I saw the tiniest bulge. She eyed me with derision.

“Good afternoon o. How may I help you?” she asked with a boldness she didn’t possess the first day I saw her. The day she’d had to carry my things when I went to Ijebu to see Madé.

“Where’s Madé?” I asked, looking over her shoulders into the dingy room. There was furniture and a Hisense TV that hung from the wall. Pain ripped my heart apart when I realized that they’d lived there for a while.

“You can deliver your message to me.” I glanced at her. Maybe she didn’t know. Maybe she didn’t realize that this journey was never meant to involve her and that she was a passenger who’d been picked up along the way because my money fuelled a vision that was between me and a man with whom I swore an oath of forever.

“Please leave my way. I’m here for Madé, not for you.”

“I said deliver—”

Her words were caught in her throat when I shoved her off the way. “Kóṣì dànù fún mi jàrè.” I burst into the sitting room, yelling for Madé the moment I stepped in. “Come out this very minute!”

“He’s not home you useless woman!” I glanced at her, watching as she got on her feet, realizing that for the first time in my life, I’d hurt someone who hadn’t hurt me. She was doing something morally wrong, but she didn’t owe me shit.

I returned to the entrance, and she jumped in fright. It pleased me to know that I’d sent fear into her heart.

“I guess I’ll wait then.” Her eyes went wide in fear. “Sit down there,” I told her, pointing to a sofa opposite me. On the wall, a portrait of their court wedding hung. There were two other photos in tiny frames on the wall. I blinked rapidly as I looked away, unable to recover from the brutal punch I felt from watching the reel of their lives from the front row.

“Please go away.”

I was broken, betrayed. Maybe if she knew she wouldn’t talk to me in that manner. “I have a knife in my pocket, and I will not hesitate to stab you to death if you try me. Don’t try me.” I didn’t have a knife. I didn’t possess the guts to do any of the things I was threatening her with. But I needed to see Madé. I wanted to understand this, and I’d wait for 365 days if that was what it’d take. “Sit.” She obeyed, looking at me with a mixture of hate and fear. “For how long have you been together?”

“Two years.” My heart cut. I hadn’t even left Oyo then. It was shortly after we lost the baby. I’d stayed back and he’d moved on.

“When did you get married?” Might as well rip off the band-aid.

“Last year. When he was sure that the traveling plans would materialize this year.” Fuck. Wasn’t she a teenager? She barely looked above eighteen.

“Why did you remain in Ijebu?”

“Because he was trying to resign. But we mostly lived here when his office allowed him to work hybrid.” They let him work hybrid?

“You’re a horrible person,” I murmured. “Horrible people don’t get happy endings.” She wasn’t flinching just yet and I wanted her to feel something. Something bad that will leave a bad taste in her mouth.

“They die. Sometimes it’s not a natural death. It’s the type of death that will leave you alive but make you wish you were dead. That child inside of you will experience pain.”

She began to tap her hands above her head, saying, “I reject it in Jesus’ name.”

“You’ll say Amen. Or I’ll stab you and kill the child today anyway.” God, what was this pain? It lodged heavily and I couldn’t breathe properly. I wasn’t sure if I could still think or form coherent thoughts. I just knew I sat there, an empty shell, determined to bring pain to the people who brought me pain.

“Please,” the word fell from her lips, her hands quivering, “please, don’t curse my child. Curse me instead.”

I’d not cried since my mom told me adults didn’t cry. They acted. But as I watched my open wound doused with fuel, I wished that I knew how to cry. I heard movement at the door, and I turned to see Madé with a stunned look on his face.

“Lewa. What are you doing here?”

I stood. “I should be the one asking you that.”

“I live here.” I searched for contrition but nothing on his face showed he was sorry that he was doing this to me.

“You refused to answer my calls and texts.”

“Sorry, I’ve been busy.” There was silence. I waited for more to come but it didn’t.

“You told me you were in Ijebu.”

“See, things changed. I’m sorry things changed but they did.”

“What does that mean, Madé?”

“It means sorry. I can’t continue.”

My legs threatened to give way. “I was working my ass off for us—”

He laughed bitterly, “Yes, you were definitely working your ass off.”

I was gobsmacked by his words. He knew. He definitely knew and passively okayed it. "You told me it was okay to do this!"

"Ehen? And so, what? How was I supposed to know how it would feel to have men touching you that way? The last time we made love you were a different person. So insatiable. So expressive... almost like a harlot. I wasn't enough for you again."

My voice was barely audible, "You were enough for me."

"It was only a matter of time before I wasn't. Please, let's be honest with ourselves." His wife had run to his side now, emboldened by the words he spoke and his boldness. I looked at them, a more convincing picture of a family than I and he ever was. I'd loved and lost. Why hadn't he said something to me? Why did he just make his decision to move on without letting me know?

"I was doing this for our future and to be able to raise enough money for my family as I find my feet abroad. You told me it was okay for the time being. I was trying hard to get out."

"Abegi." The pain was searing, and I winced because it was unbearable. But with every pang of pain came a resolve. This wasn't going to get better. I needed to count my losses and move on.

"You were never going to plan a forever type of thing with me. This whole mess started before I came to Lagos with Sisi." He didn't say anything. He watched me, deadpan. I shrugged and began to walk towards him.

"She has a knife! She's been threatening to stab me!" his wife screamed.

He eyed me warily, "which knife?" he said, glancing around as if hoping to see the knife materialize from thin air. "This one hold knife?" he cackled. "She doesn't have that type of mind." It pained me that he knew me more than I ever knew him. "Wo, just let us part our ways amicably." He moved away from the entrance, gesturing for me to leave.

I stayed long enough to see if I could glimpse the person who I once trusted never to hurt me, but it was either that person didn't exist, or he was long gone. I stepped outside.

"Hey, you good?" you were standing outside the door, leaning against the wall, hands shoved in your pockets like it was just a regular day. I shook my head. I wasn't. You gathered me in your arms, gently stroking it. I wished I could cry. I felt emotionally constipated. We were still standing by the door when Madé stepped out and saw us.

“Who is this man?” he asked and I ignored him. “I just wanted to say sorry that things happened this way. I didn’t plan for it to.” No remorse. No accountability. It reduced the feeling of betrayal. I finally released myself from an embrace that I knew I needed but I was unwilling to get used to.

“Let’s go,” I said.

“Will you be fine?” you asked when we were back on the road.

I shrugged. I didn’t know. “I honestly just wish I could remember how to cry,” I said.

We returned to the island faster than we’d come. You played music. At first it was Tracy Chapman’s “Baby Can I Hold You?” I moved my head to it, lost in the beautiful music and then it was Joji’s “Glimpse of Us.” You know, the thing with beautiful music, intentionally created for the birth, death, or celebration of something or someone, is that you’d relate to it regardless of where you’re from. The chords tugged at the heartstrings of my heart, and I didn’t know who Joji sang for or what was lost at that moment. I just knew that I began to wish. I wished that life had been fairer, that happiness wasn’t so evasive, and that my shoulders didn’t hurt so much from shouldering responsibilities.

“I’m taking you to a friend’s art opening.”

I glanced at you, surprised. “I’m hardly dressed to go anywhere fancy.”

“You needn’t worry about clothes and money when you’re with me. I have more than enough to spend on you.”

“Was this what it was like with Solo’s sister?”

“No. I was fond of her but not in the way that I am fond of you. You’re different. I was definitely not letting her in my house or risking Funke’s wrath to save her. As I said earlier, it’s àkosílẹ̀. You and I are meant to be here, to be doing this—”

I chuckled, “Doing what? Fucking?”

“Fucking. Helping each other out, being there for the other person, saving each other from trouble.” We were turning into a less-busy street in Oniru, driving toward a gated estate.

“How am I helping you?”

“I like who I am with you. It’s different, I feel like I am hiding and truthfully, it doesn’t stop me from doing sinister things. But it’s fresh. It’s good.”

The security at the gate let you in and we drove down a quiet street. A few cars were parked on the side of the road

and the soft hum of generator noises could be heard when we parked at the entrance of a white duplex.

“I wasn’t doing this with Juliet. Maybe if I was, I’d have stopped her from being stupid. I like you, Omolewa. A lot. As you’ve realized, I’ve been with many women, but I have never been fiercely protective of any of them.”

I didn’t respond to what you said about liking me. “How did she die?”

“She went against Funke, stole from her and tried to hijack the business.”

“And Sisi killed her?”

“I don’t know.”

“Would you tell me if you knew?” You shrugged and I glimpsed that look of frustration and anger in your eyes again. There was also pain and something else I couldn’t tell. But what I knew was that there was a stark difference between you and Sisi – you still had a conscience lurking somewhere inside of you. All Sisi had was darkness and a charred soul. “I really wonder how much evil you’ve both done.”

“A lot. We’ll get our karma. Everyone does.”

I laughed as we got out of your car and walked to the gate. “Karma is a myth people came up with to feel better about terrible things happening to them.”

Your eyes became steely, “It’s not. The problem is people like you expect karma to be a big sensational happening or response to something. And then, when it doesn’t happen the way you’ve imagined it, you think it doesn’t exist. The universe doesn’t work your way.”

We went in and I found out that we were at the house of a popular stylist. You wanted them to find something for me to wear to the art event. I watched, somehow in the background how they flirted with you and you didn’t shrug them off or seem put off by it. Everyone liked you, regardless of what they identified as. We sat on a beige couch, and I grabbed a recent Vogue edition off the coffee table, flipping through it as our host disappeared into the room.

“Did you know they found Bunmi’s missing body parts?” I asked you. You nodded. I hoped that you’d say more, but you didn’t. I knew you knew more, and I wasn’t sure if it was okay to trust you still.

“Trust me, Lewa. I won’t hurt you. But I’m also not going to tell you things that will hurt you.” I didn’t even know what that meant but when the stylist

returned with a silk kimono and pants with a sheer bralette, the moment was lost. I liked the outfit and when I switched to it, I glimpsed the impressed look on your face. I got a pair of low-blocked high-heeled slippers to go with the outfit. You paid, we air-kissed them and we were gone in a flash. “I know you wonder how come I am loyal to Funke, but loyalty is all I know. And she’s done a lot for me that I will be eternally grateful to her for.” You sounded tethered and I felt jealousy mixed with mild anger. It was almost as if I was expecting you to be better and abandon her. But what was I thinking? You weren’t even trying to stop Sisi, you were simply working around how to ensure less people felt the impact of her wickedness.

Back in the car, you gave me a present – it was the most beautiful necklace with a blue topaz stone.

“This was my mother’s birthstone. I was pleased to know it was yours too. It has natural healing abilities and will give you everything you need, especially inner peace.”

“Thank you,” I said, somehow knowing this will always be the most precious gift I was ever going to receive. You smiled.

At the art exhibition, you parked and looked at me, gently drawing my face to meet yours. “There’s a rawness about you, a truth that can’t be hidden and maybe you don’t know it, but your eyes speak the truth that your lips can’t say. It’s the same thing when you’re in danger or you’re in a dilemma. Your eyes find me out and speak to me. It’s why I keep coming to you.”

“Because you’re a Babalawo?”

“No. Because I have been in pain, and I know what it means to be a child whose entire life is devoted to pleasing family or a parent. I know about unrequited love. I know about loving and losing.” It was hard to believe that a man like you who looked like Ogun – with hot, ripped muscles, who knew when to wield his weapons, and who fucked like it was an assignment given to you by Olodumare himself – had experienced love and gotten heartbroken.

“You’ve been in love.”

“I don’t think it was love in the real sense of it. I was much younger, and I felt like I owed her everything. But whatever it was, if she hadn’t ripped my heart to shreds, I’d have married her and be devoted for the rest of my life.”

“Sisi?” I asked.

“Yes.” You drove past the toll gate. “I was crazy about her. She groomed me but we never fucked until I was 21. I kept myself for her, though. I never did another woman and I never looked at another even when I was in the UK studying. I got female attention but the only person whose attention I desired was Funke’s. I was madly in love with her. Or at least it felt that way.”

“And now?”

“I’m committed to Funke.” I nodded. Better to focus on the real picture here and not get things twisted with you. “I want you to enjoy this evening, enjoy the conversations, stare at art even if you have no idea what it means, and after, we’ll do dinner somewhere cozy.” You placed a tender kiss on my lips.

“Thanks for today,” I murmured.

“It was nothing. I owe you.”

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

My next sugar daddy came to me in the least expected of places. He was a looker; 6ft glass of dark chocolate, a powerful dresser, smelled like fresh seawater on a beautiful private island and looked like he leapt out of a Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie classic.

I was staring at an acrylic painting that I did not understand, flanked by 'I-Just-Got-Backs' who reeked of expensive perfumes and condescension when I heard his voice.

"Lovely painting of Funmilayo Ransome – Kutu, eh?"

I nodded, "Very beautiful."

He laughed, "I can bet that you have no idea what that is." His voice teased me, and I was slightly embarrassed that my defenses kicked in. "It's art. It's not that deep."

He stepped closer, unmoved that the space between me and the IJGB on my right wasn't a lot. "You're right. Nothing is ever that deep. But please don't let the lovely Ada Nnamani hear you. She likes to think of her art quite differently."

I rolled my eyes. "I might be wrong sha but art that consciously excludes itself is pretentious. No one should take that seriously."

Ada Nnamani sauntered toward us, the deputy governor with her. "Hey, cuz!" She waved at my companion, and I wanted the marbled floors to open up and swallow me.

He noticed my discomfort, "Don't worry. Your secrets are safe with me. Or are they? Perhaps giving me your number can buy my silence."

I smiled. Genuinely. The first real smile in weeks. He drew a well-moisturized hand for a shake, "Chukwudi Nnamani. And if it helps, I also have no idea what dear Ada is trying to achieve here."

My smile deepened as I took his hand, impressed by how soft and firm it felt. "Omolewa Ogunleye." Well-manicured nut-brown hands gripped mine.

"Omolewa." I liked the Igbo accent with which he called my Yoruba name. There was something appealing and erotic about it. "You're beautiful, nne. Can I buy you dinner tonight? I will not forgive myself if I

don't take this further."

I looked around for you because you'd promised me dinner, but I found you with Goddy's assistant, too close, whispering, giving each other googly eyes.

"Your date?" Chukwudi asked me.

I shook my head quickly, looking away, "No."

"So, dinner with me then?" Chukwudi was fresh, the type of man that was way out of my league. It was obvious he was at least a decade older, but he was nothing like Isa or the temporary sugar daddies who I'd been with in the past. Was he unmarried? It wasn't that that minor inconvenience mattered in my business. In fact, it was an incentive. It meant one didn't have to worry about unnecessary attachments or demands on the man's end.

"Excuse me, Chukwudi. Let me check something with my friend."

I found you and pulled you away from Goddy's assistant, dragging you until we were away from where the guests were.

"Who's the guy you're talking to?" you asked.

"I didn't know you had time to look in between eye-fucking another woman."

"I'm always aware of what's going on. Now answer the question."

"A new client."

"What?"

"Is this something Sisi would mind?" Champagne-filled flutes passed by us in steel trays. I grabbed two. As I raised a glass, I peeped annoyance on your face.

"Lewa, why the hell do you need a man? I'm here." I tossed the drinks down my throat in quick succession. This statement was why I needed a drink. I needed to numb my feelings and emotions around you.

"As what?"

"Your fucking sugar daddy if you so wish. I take care of you more than anyone. I fuck you better than anyone—"

"You don't know that."

"And who else does better?" your fingers were trailing my skin and my nipples hardened in my bralet, betraying me, wasting the bloody champagne that was supposed to brace me from your charm. Your gaze fell on my breasts and slowly your fingers teased them. I gasped. Looking around to ensure we weren't being watched. We were standing away from guests, but the corridor led to the bathroom and kitchenette. "I own you,

Lewa. You're mine to fuck and to keep. I don't want you around Chukwudi Nnamani. And FYI, I haven't fucked anyone else since the second time we did it." I shuddered at the feeling of your touch. It was hard to shake you off. But I wanted you to do more – not just lay claim on what's already yours but to also fight what fettered you to the past. In your eyes, I could see desire and fierce protection but you weren't giving me what I truly needed. I felt my heart cut.

"I have seen Sisi's work, and I will not do anything to piss her off again. Will she approve of this man?"

You stopped teasing me, your eyes darkened with anger and hunger, "I want you."

"I can't—"

"You can." I let out a sigh. Couldn't you see? Were you blind to the fact that being around you had only brought me pain and torture? I was done with the bruises – both physical and emotional.

"No," I stepped back. Until I figured out how to escape this life, if I ever did, I intended to stay away from you.

"I'm going to dinner with my new sugar daddy. I'll discuss the terms with Sisi. Goodnight and thanks for today." You grabbed my hand before I could get away. It was hard when I looked at you and saw the fevered desire and the need. But it was foolish. I was done being foolish. I snatched my hand and went to find Chukwudi.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Chukwudi and I gelled in a way where we managed to accept what the other person was. After I told Sisi about him, she gave me an account number where he had to send money quite often. She was the only signatory to the account. And then she gave her blessings. I spent a lot of time with Chukwudi, time spent mostly outdoors the way previous sponsors never did. He didn't care if we were spotted at a popular restaurant or if I took photos in a hotel where he'd just posted from. He knew what I was and I in turn, let him talk endlessly about the lofty dreams he'd achieved.

Chukwudi had lived a life straight out of a poor Nigerian's fantasy — he grew up dirt poor. Then he built everything from scratch. He was accomplished by every 21st-century yardstick of measuring success — Forbes acknowledgment featuring a perfect portrait of him in an expensive crisp suit, a growing capitalist business that'll somehow contribute to the economic development of the Beyonce of third-world countries, Nigeria, and swirling rumors around him and powerful political affiliates. He also looked at life like he was in a Tade Ogidan classic — yes, life could indeed be a thriller, but there was also a place for romance, enjoyment maybe even a happily ever after somewhere on the horizon. His stories were vivid. Some of the pictures he painted he'd lived, others he was hoping to. *Soon*. He talked about Owerri, Isale Eko and Ikoyi. There was also jetting around the world — London, Venice and Paris. But there were bumps along the way too — brushes with the law because of bypassed taxes, questionable inflow, shady transactions. It was always endless. Sometimes he excited me, other times he scared me shitless.

Two months after we started fucking and a month after I'd been staying with him at his suite in Eko Signature, living the baby girl life to utmost satisfaction, he asked me, "Who or What's your first love?" I crossed my legs where I sat by the edge of the bed. I was wearing a matching bra and thong, crossing my legs as I brushed my Kim K blunt-cut virgin hair wig.

"I don't know," I shrugged with an indifference that instantly made me feel stupid.

Chukwudi chuckled, “Everyone has a first love.” I got carried away by his poise when he leaned against a table. He was wearing an unbuttoned sky-blue linen shirt and a white round t-shirt under. His belt was undone, and his black pants hung loosely around his waist. It made me think of sex with him in the most feral way.

I wasn’t ashamed either. Something about him was calm and wild at the same time.

“Maybe some of us don’t have time for frivolities like that.”

He laughed, “Love isn’t a frivolity. It happens to the best of us.”

I shrugged. “I’ve had a hard life, Mr. Man. Mi o raye love oshi.” I had packed my things and worn my dress, stepping closer to re-adjust my mini crochet dress in front of a mirror near him. He smiled as I looked around for my above-the-knee kimono. I took a quick photo in front of the mirror and tagged it, “Don’t wish for it, work for it.” I didn’t even know what the quote meant. It was lifted straight out of Pinterest.

“I’ve had a hard life too. We can do the suffering Olympics if you want.” He handed me a cute shopping bag.

He’d tried to get me an apartment the week before, but Sisi wasn’t having it. There were five other girls in the house, new ones, and Sisi wanted me to remain there with them. If we moved, we’d get ideas. But she let him buy me a car – a Venza that he got me a driver for, as I was still learning how to drive.

“So, what’s your own first love?” I asked, allowing myself to indulge in the conversation he seemed quite determined to have.

“Music. My ex-wife. We met and fell in love on the streets of Benin City. I’d moved there to be with my uncle. We were teenagers who shared a love of music. Hip hop and R&B specifically.”

I was done re-applying my shiny sheer gloss and lining underneath my eyes. As I slipped into my flat slippers, I asked. “So, what happened?”

“We fell out of love. It was hard to admit because we’d both been through the rough times, and we’d finally gotten some success, but it was clear we weren’t going to make it.”

“I’m sorry about that.”

“That’s life for you. Nothing ever goes according to plan.”

I laughed drily, “Tell me about it.”

I was almost at the door when he said, “I want to drive you home today. I want to meet your aunt that you live with.”

“Chuks... I don’t think that’s a good idea. She’s quite protective and not big on visitors.”

He sauntered over, holding my waist and kissing my lips. “I know what you do, babe. I’m not stupid.” Then he added something in Igbo.

“What?”

He said smoothly, “I’m saying that I am aware of the hustling life and that everyone’s path can’t be shiny and smooth. I’m selling energy, you’re selling pussy.”

“Chukwudi, please,” I scoffed, trying to get past him.

“Nne, there is no need to be shy around me. The unfamiliar account name? Living in the same house with like five other girls who are always clubbing and partying and, what do you call it now, ‘chilling?’ Not being available all the time?”

“I am available whenever you need me, babe,” I tried to keep my voice leveled.

“You’re smoother than eighty percent of the other women that do this. I’d give you that. I also respect trying to be more than what you are. But Omolewa, please, I have been around long enough to know what this is.”

I sighed, frustrated. “Okay so now that you know why the hell would you want to meet my aunt?”

“I want her blessings.”

“Huh?”

“I want you and I to take this a bit further. Something more serious.”

“You must be joking.”

“No. I’m not.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A week later Sisi agreed to host Chukwudi in the house. She was dazzled by what he was and the wealth he controlled.

“A man like that wants to come here with you? Impressive,” she said when I told her about Chukwudi’s request. I’d ignored it at first, but he’d been insistent. And I didn’t think Sisi would be so overcome with excitement to have him in the house. I underestimated her obsession with wealthy people. She only allowed him to come after she’d killed a cow, cooked three different soups – ofe nsala, ogbono, and efo riro, cooked jollof and fried rice, and bought Carlo Rossi, Azul, and Hennessy.

I was home through most of the day, waiting for Chukwudi to show up while I sifted through job openings on LinkedIn. What was my first love? What did I like? I’d always just wanted a job that’d give me money. It was why I ended up in Sisi’s world. But what was it I liked? Maybe content marketing was something I could do. I sent in a couple of applications before I slipped into sleep hours later. When I woke, Nkechi was calling me.

“NK, how far?” She wanted to know if it was a good time to come and see Sisi. I knew that she’d been trying and Sisi had been refusing to see her. It was a powerplay and I was worried about Nkechi. “Yes, Chuks is coming to see her tonight. Maybe if you come, it’ll make the whole thing less awkward.”

Nkechi gasped, “Is that a good idea?”

I sighed, “No. I’m convinced that it isn’t. But he wants to. What can I do?”

Nkechi made jokes about him being an investigative journalist. “Maybe he’s writing about runs girls in Nigeria. Who knows? It wasn’t such a long time ago that ‘small girl, big God’ made intellectual people piss their pants.” We laughed and she told me she was on her way to me.

I hurriedly went to look for Sisi to prime her. I didn’t want her to give Nkechi a tough time. Heated arguments coming from the kitchen stopped me in my tracks. It was obvious who she was arguing with, and I briefly wondered if it was a good idea to walk in. I did anyway and my heart did a backflip

when I saw you with her, angrily telling her something.

“We didn’t have this agreement and you’re going to destroy all our lives. Those people are dangerous.”

“We didn’t have a choice.”

You ground your jaw, the words from your lips laced with vitriol, “No. You chose to agree to it because deep inside of you, you’re a despicable human being.”

Sisi laughed, “I’m despicable now, abi? When I saved you from your father, I wasn’t. When we both sold girls into prostitution in Italy, I wasn’t. When you got on your knees, begging me to marry you and forever save and protect you, I wasn’t. But now I am.”

“I was stupid. I was younger. We were both doing terrible things. I have grown, Funke. I’m a changed man.”

“Miss me with that. This is the same attitude you get whenever you tumble inside another vagina. The pussy was too good, and you lost your head. This was your problem with your father. You were so fucking stupid, easily swayed, so damn emotional.” Your hands grabbed her neck, throwing her back against the kitchen island, pinning her hard against it, unmoved by her gasp and fight to get free. I peeped that anger, frustration, and the look of death in your eyes again. When you pinned your body against hers, I could see a hollow look in your eyes. “I remember how you like it rough. Is that what you’re doing now? That little dove can’t give you rough, can she?” I swallowed hard, unable to move an inch.

You’d never fucked me rough and somehow, this wild moment I’d intruded upon moistened the cleft between my legs. Why hadn’t you asked me for rough sex? Did you truly think I wasn’t capable? I couldn’t believe that I got excited about doing that with you. With you, I could stretch myself, I knew that.

“We’re both horrible people. We both have blood on our hands. We deserve each other.” You lowered your head and kissed her roughly, yanking at her blonde wig, your hands rummaging her body as though you were hungrily seeking for something. I looked away.

“We’ve both done terrible things but this...” your voice fell several decibels. “It’s gone too far. I want out. I’m getting out.” You got off her then, stepping back, looking toward the door to find me standing.

“After a decade?!” Sisi yelled. “You must be crazy. You need time. That’s what you need. Take a break. Pick one of the girls upstairs, fuck to

your fill.”

“I want her.”

I should have left when I could because when Sisi looked at me, she was overcome with anger, “No!”

“She’s the one I want.”

She shrugged, “Maybe another threesome.” You didn’t say a word. You remained unmoved. “Dimeji, ọmọ tó bá fọ ilé agbọn, a ríjà agbọn o. You’re playing with the hornet’s nest.” You shrugged, unbothered. “Unfortunately, her new man is coming in an hour. Sorry to you but pick someone else. Not my family who has betrayed me before.” Sisi stormed toward the kitchen entrance, eyeing me with disdain mixed with distrust. “Did you both plan this?” she asked. Quickly, I shook my head. She looked at you, a sinister look in her eyes. “Maybe think about it very well. We’ve done it before. It’ll cure you of this madness,” then she pushed me out of the way to leave.

At first, you and I remained in utmost silence, your eyes devouring me and making me feel naked. The blouse and mini denim skirt barely convinced you I was clothed. “See how beautiful you look. So hot. So very mine,” your thumb traced my cheek, your lips planting a deep kiss on my forehead. “I honestly wish you’d stop giving what’s mine to others,” you were toying with the necklace I never took off, your fingers trailing the pendant and the swell of my boobs.

“We’ve had this conversation.” Even though the burning need for you was at an all-time high. You grabbed me with the same roughness with which you grabbed Sisi, except this one was more erotic because you were doing it to me. Lifting me off the floor, you placed me on the kitchen island, unbothered that some of Sisi’s soups were cooling there.

“Yet, I keep falling.” Your hands were yanking off the buttons on my blouse and you threw my legs apart, unzipping your jeans at the same time. My heart pounded not just because Sisi could catch us but because there was something incredibly hot about watching your self-control slip because of me. “Please, Sisi would kill me,” I was nervous and turned on.

Your eyes tapered, “You’re more afraid of her than you are of me.”

“Yes. Because I know no matter what, you won’t hurt me.”

“I guess you’re right.” The pull was strong and when your hand cupped my pussy, I tore at you, kissing, roaming your body with mine. You lifted

me a bit, shoving your cock inside of me. We fucked like wild animals running out of time. If Sisi found us, I knew for sure that I'd die this time, but the truth was, this was who I was and I didn't bloody care what Sisi did. I slammed my pussy against your cock with need. You satisfied every single desire I'd had since we last fucked.

"I want it rough with you," I murmured as you tugged my hair, pulling it.

"You do? Cuffs, whips, and all?" you were nibbling against my lips, your hands stroking my pebbled nipples.

"Yes."

"Then you'll get it rough. I'm breaking you and that energy businessman up tonight. I've given him enough time to play." You pounded into me with the anger you felt at me for letting someone else touch me. It was the sweetest punishment I'd ever received. We hit our climax at the same time, and you let out a guttural sound that I was worried Sisi would hear.

"I got you a gift," you said when I was readjusting my dress and you were zipping up. "I'll meet you in your room in two minutes. Go."

Excitement coursed through me as I raced to my room. You were there in two minutes, a gift bag in your hand. "Panties?" I asked, raising a black thong. You nodded.

"Wear this inside it." You handed me a pinkish thing shaped like a leaf.

"What's that?" I asked.

"You'll find out." I wore it and peeped the most satisfied smile curled the corners of your lips. "Good girl."

"What?" I asked.

You kissed me deeply. "Nothing."

"I booked a spa appointment for you. Massage, facials, Brazilian wax, the whole experience. Best to clear out an entire day for it. Also, give me your phone." I was stunned at how you carried on as if nothing Sisi had said mattered. And that Chuks didn't exist. I handed my phone to you. You opened the compass, moving to a corner of the room. "I need you to do something for me. Don't ask questions. Okay? Please go outside, get some sand and then some salt and clean water in a basin and bring it here. Make sure no one sees you." I didn't know why you'd asked that, but I did as you'd asked.

When I returned a few minutes later, you told me to be quiet. And then you sat in a corner and muttered incantations over the

sand, the salt, and the water. When you stood, you looked at me and said, “Funke is powerful.” I knew that. But what did any of this have to do with her? “And since you returned, she’s been listening to everything you say in this room.” Fear spread through me, and I shuddered with the realization. I’d always been aware that I was in danger but knowing the specifics was scarier.

“I’ve fortified this room and I will teach you what to say every night before you sleep and every morning after you wake up.” Your fingers curled around my wrist, and you pulled me with you to a corner. “We’re standing in the east of this room. Here, you’d say prayers to your ori every day. Everything you want, you’d tell your ori right here. We’re standing in the east because that’s where the sun rises.” You told me the prayers and I said them, asking my ori for guidance, direction, protection. Each word was said with intent, and something felt final about what you were doing.

When we were done, I looked at you, puzzled, “I know you’re a Babalawo and this isn’t strange. But you still haven’t told me why you’re doing this for me.”

“I’m supposed to. The first night you came to Ajah, I saw something while divining.” Your eyes felt distant like they were back in that room on that stormy night when I came to you and Sisi. “Orunmila told me two things – I was to guide you. It didn’t matter in what direction. I was to be of help to you.”

Surprised, I asked, “And you did just that?”

“I don’t take things like that lightly. I’d never received such messages before. Yes, I’d fucked one of the girls before. Juliet and I were a terrible mistake. We’d first fucked before she ever came to work under Funke, and I had this period where I was going through shit, and I just kept doing it with her. It was stupid. But with you, it was a choice. I was seeking answers. Answers that have led me here.”

“Dimeji,” I searched your eyes for more, “what was the second thing you saw?”

“Death.”

My heart sank. “Whose?”

“Mine.” I think it was the first time I realized I was in love with you. The type of love that I knew wasn’t ever going away, you know? And it was unfair that my first love was the one to be sacrificed. It made no

sense. You were my fucker, my friend and the only person who'd done things for me. I came alive with you, but it was all for you to die?

I moved away from you, "Why?"

"I don't make the decisions."

"Well then fucking ask whoever does!" You didn't move. You'd accepted death. *Why?* "Dimeji?"

"Don't fight it."

"Oh my God..." I felt my energy drain with each syllable.

"Lewa, I've done things in my life that don't make death scare me. Perhaps this is my karma. I don't know. Whatever Olodumare says though, I must accept." I covered my face with my hands in despair.

Love was not a frivolity, it was painful. It was fucking weird. It crept up on you and had you so fucked up you had to make choices. I'd made a choice to love you. It was going to rip me apart, but I wasn't looking back. You were my best bet.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Chukwudi came by an hour later and we sat down to dinner with him. He asked Sisi many questions about her life and business and Sisi just talked and talked. It was what she did that night – drank like a fish and talked. I didn't care to worry about why Chukwudi kept refilling her glass. Or even how awkward things were on the table when Nkechi walked in with a noticeable baby bump. Instead, I was bracing myself for what the night was going to be – I was leaving Sisi, happy to sign my death sentence if it came to that.

"I've been doing the talking," Sisi said as she dropped her glass on the table. "Tell me about yourself, Chukwudi. Who is the great Chukwudi Nnamani?" She was buzzed and she didn't care to conceal it.

I watched you instead, watching you watch me. Your gaze hadn't shifted from me all evening and I knew you knew how much pain I was in. I hated how accepting of your fate you were. Chukwudi kept talking about his book. I rolled my eyes when he mentioned the book for the hundredth time, suddenly feeling a sensation between my thighs. I snatched my gaze from the untouched food on my plate to see a wicked grin on your face—the panties. You were controlling it. Me. My vagina. There was a remote control with which you did that. I couldn't see it because you didn't give me a clue, but I knew it was you. Chukwudi would never think of a thing like this. It was you.

I squirmed, a gasp slipping through my lips. Everyone glanced my way. "Sorry. I didn't realize it had so much pepper," I pointed to the soup on my plate. I had barely touched it, so I put some in my mouth for show. Then I grabbed my phone and pleaded with you to stop via text.

You didn't respond. Nkechi leaned closer, "What are you people doing?" She was looking at you, hawk-eyed. I was now too grateful for the damn book Chukwudi wouldn't stop talking about. "Is he tickling you under or what?" Oh, he was doing worse. But I couldn't trust myself to open my mouth. So, I shook my head, struggling to control the pleasure in my pants. Nkechi chuckled, "Let madam catch you."

I directed my attention to Chuks. He was discussing the themes in his book, *Phoenix*. The list was endless. Poverty. The Lagos dream. Money and power. The influence of social media and celeb culture. Bob fucking Risky. Maybe if I wasn't completely controlled by you, I'd have asked him where he was getting his research done. He was always so busy, where did he get time to write an exposé about all these things?

"Interesting," you said. "What's this story about?" I was threatening to go to the bathroom and remove the panties via text and you barely shifted your gaze from Chuks when you replied via text, "*Your ass will pay for it.*"

I was clearly choosing my punishment. Both were sweet pain. Shit. I placed my elbow on the table, unsuccessfully trying to distract myself.

"You're coming right now, aren't you?" Nkechi asked. I pinched her and she slapped my elbow playfully. My fingers were clutching the fabric of my skirt, my legs pressed together, struggling to swallow the moans that were fighting to spill out of my mouth.

Chukwudi answered your question, "The plot? I'm keeping that bit a secret."

You smiled drily, "That's a shame. You were happy to share the news of this book. Now you won't even tease us." You looked at me, "Or have you had the pleasure of learning about it, Lewa?"

"Yes!" *Shit*. Everyone was staring at me curiously. "No," I shook my head, grateful when Chuks started to talk about how he didn't want to jinx the book. You looked at me as I bit my lower lip. *Fuck*. I'd never come in front of people. I was holding on to the edge of the table and your gaze narrowed when I leaned forward. You mouthed, *come for daddy*, and it freed my orgasm instantly. The muscles of my pussy clenched, and I pressed my legs together firmly as my release vibrated through my body.

And as I recovered and my heart thumped thanks to the orgasm, you poured me a glass of water and gently pushed it toward me on the table, "You must be thirsty." I gulped the water down instantly.

"Ahan you dug up a thirst," Chuks said.

"She did," you replied. "I think she's stressed, and she needs a release."

Dinner soon finished and I took Nkechi to my room so that we could speak. She told me she'd come to appease Sisi because since she got pregnant, she'd realized that she wanted better for herself. She hadn't even thought she could easily get pregnant because of her PCOS and yet here she

was with her little miracle. But Sisi wasn't having it. She'd drunkenly told Nkechi to get out of her sight or suffer the consequences of her betrayal tonight. I held her hand. We laid on our backs as we spoke, talking about our individual journeys, how we'd changed and how much we missed Bunmi. It wasn't lost on me how different I'd become. Or maybe not different, maybe I was growing into a version of myself I'd always just needed to unlock.

"Sho is in love with you," she said.

"You can tell by just looking at him?"

"No, not that. He's normally this scary detached guy but he didn't care about anything or anyone else on that table tonight. He couldn't take his eyes off you. It's either love or some mad obsession. Maybe both. Sisi must be furious."

"I'm no longer scared of her," I looked at Nkechi and shrugged. Pregnancy made her look more beautiful.

Nkechi smiled, "You've really changed. No longer that girl that was living to send money home to mummy and her siblings. It's a good thing."

I laughed. When the laughter died down, I asked her, "NK, you're happy shebi?"

She nodded, "I am. Solo is a good man. I see how he could have convinced Bunmi to leave the country with him in such a short time."

I wanted to protect her happiness with the same fierceness with which I wanted to get out. My phone buzzed with a notification saying I was shortlisted for a dream job I applied for.

I tightened my hold on her, "We'll fight this, NK. And we'll win."

She smiled, "I hope."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

I snuck out with you and followed you to a new apartment in Ikoyi that night. We rode in an elevator to the third floor. There you told me about your father and your relationship with him later in his life. He'd fallen gravely ill, and you'd rushed to his side.

"His other kids didn't even show up. They kept calling and feigning busy schedules. Dem no send deir papa. Na me carry my two left leg go meet di man. Omo, the moment I got to the hospital it was as if he was so disappointed I was the child that showed up."

"So, he never said sorry till he died?" I asked. Your father died a fucking unrepentant asshole.

"It was worse. He didn't want to die so he was doing everything to stay alive. He had plans to expand his business beyond what it had been but the new government in power didn't care much for him. His guys had long left power and he felt disposable. So, to make things work, he used every means within his reach to buy life. Including spiritual means."

"What do you mean?"

"His most trusted Babalawo told him he could buy some more time by using his blood and he could rejuvenate himself to get back on his feet, blah blah blah..."

My heart began to thump in my chest because I knew where this was headed. "His blood," I repeated.

"Yup. So, he looked around and picked the most dispensable relative he could find."

My ears vibrated with the loud thumping of my heartbeat. I was shocked. "You."

You looked away and I knew it was still painful to talk about this.

You were fighting pain and tears. It was so different, so unusual because where I came from, men weren't supposed to be visibly broken. "Dimeji, I am so sorry that happened to you."

"It's okay. It's been seven years."

"What does it matter? It's still heartbreaking. I'm so sorry." I embraced you, placing my head against your beating heart. You held me close and

tight. “We never truly heal from what we’ve been through, do we? We just learn to live with it.”

You chuckled. “My smart girl. It’s something like that.” We were still locked in our embrace. I pulled away gently, looking into your eyes. “How did you know?”

“I was already a student of Ifa at this time. I could divine; I knew my way around *ìṣẹ̀ṣẹ̀*. So, I knew something was off. He didn’t give a shit about me, so it was easy for him to be blindsided by my knowledge of *ìṣẹ̀ṣẹ̀* and that he was trying to harm me. It helped me to prepare myself against the attack.”

“And then he died.”

“Yeah. He suffered a heart attack, and he was gone. I watched him die and I didn’t help,” you tucked more hair behind my ears as if you did this every day. “It was the biggest relief I ever felt. I felt free. Nothing compared to that moment until the day I found you unconscious but alive on that hospital bed in Oyo.”

“That’s why you were making jokes,” I slapped your hand playfully.

“Oh, you had no idea.”

I flopped into the closest chair in the lavishly furnished living room. The house was beautiful with a pool outside the glass door and I wondered who lived there.

“It’s yours. I want you to stay here now.” I gaped at you in wonderment. “I’m going to come clean about quite a number of things tonight.” You laughed softly, perching on the beautifully carved coffee table in the centre of the living room. It was when I looked away from you that I saw a painting I recognized hanging on the wall. It was the one I didn’t understand from Ada Nnamani’s exhibition. You followed my gaze and explained it. “That’s a painting that depicts light and darkness as a beautiful woman. It reminded me of you the moment I saw it.”

It shouldn’t surprise me that you figured the painting out the way others couldn’t. But I asked anyway, “You knew what it was?”

A smile, “Yes.” I looked at the painting and now it made sense to me. The two sides of it – one of tiny elements portraying cheer, stars, illumination, and the other, gloom, nightfall.

Still puzzled, I looked at him, “But why would that remind you of me?”

“Because you possess beauty that’s breathtaking both within and out. The sort of beauty that I knew would bring me death from the moment I laid eyes on you. In that beauty is your light. It radiates. On the other side, there’s a level of darkness inside of you just like every other human being. But yours finds a balance; you’re not afraid to embrace your darkness as much as you embrace your light.”

A weak chuckle escaped my lips, “You say it like it’s a good thing.”

“It is. Everything requires balance. We shouldn’t be extremes of anything.” You glanced at the painting. “There,” you pointed to a part of the painting. The neck of the woman where the light and darkness blended and the elements intertwined. “It also means that new life would come from the death of old things. Death is as important as life. Darkness, as important as light.”

I was enamored by the words you spoke and there was something magical about the moment our gazes locked again. It was my favorite thing about us – creating magic anywhere and everywhere, no matter where we were.

“Okay, artsy man,” I smiled, trying to reduce the heat between us. As though a thing like that was actually possible. “It looks like it costs money.”

“Just two million naira.”

“Dimeji!”

You held my hands, planting feathery kisses on each. “I need to tell you some things now.” I hated that when I looked into your eyes what I saw was a ticking clock. It spread fear through me. I exhaled deeply and nodded.

“Funke and I became close after she saved me from my father’s wrath. You already know this. She’d offer advice, speak to my father, and convince him to give me opportunities he’d withdrawn from me before then just because...” You shrugged. “They weren’t half the things he should’ve done but I was grateful for them. I didn’t have anywhere to go. My dear mother was dead, so I didn’t care that all he gave me were crumbs. I gobbled it all up. And most importantly, I felt indebted to Funke. I was in awe of her. Maybe it was mummy issues, but I fell fast and hard for her. Her word was bond.” You noticed that my gaze had dropped, and you smiled, pressing your palm against my face, “Don’t be jealous of that.”

I retorted, “I’m not!”

“You are. Own it. And also, it doesn’t matter. I’ve fallen for you. In a way where I don’t mind if loving you hurts me. Or takes my life.”

My voice broke. I held on to you. “Dimeji—”

“Shh. I just needed you to know that.” You continued with your story, still holding my hands as you spoke, “Funke remained the only person I could run to. Then at some point, she and my father fell out. Most of their mutual friends took his side and she wanted to be sure that the people who remained were loyal. I swore to her that I was, but she wanted more commitment.”

“Like a lifetime commitment?” I asked.

“Like a blood covenant.” I couldn’t help the gasp that escaped. “We went into this business together because when I was at the Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, I’d come to Lagos and throw these raves that everyone in Lagos’ biggest social circles would talk about for months. There were always women and men willing to fuck for the right amount and opportunities. Media would come – blogs and social media in its early days would eat it up. It was the perfect smokescreen for the business. And at first, it was in black and white – supply dudes and ladies to the people who wanted to sleep with them. Then Juliet happened.” The tone of your voice warned me that things were about to get darker. I held you tighter, my blood, chilling. “She was vivacious. Gorgeous. An aspiring model who’d been doing small small gigs and patching it up with this sugar daddy lifestyle. I liked her zest, but Funke couldn’t stand her from the very first day. She wanted out at some point, and she was like Bunmi. Babe didn’t think any of that oath-swearing shit was real. She also started her own modeling agency and ushering services and she lowkey supplied those girls to the same men that were Funke’s contacts.

“Quickly, she began to eclipse Funke’s influence. She was younger, fresher, smoother-talking. And she had no problems rubbing the obvious in Funke’s face when she felt like it. Funke killed her before she could get far. The same way she killed Bunmi.” Goosebumps rose on my skin. “And she removed every single body part that she could sell because as I recently discovered, she’s into organ trafficking.”

I froze, “Are you...?”

“No, believe me. For all I know, Bunmi’s body parts are in Isa’s secret wardrobe for some occultic reason or the other. Nigerian politicians do things, some of them do human sacrifice. It’s no news.”

Silence enveloped us and for minutes, I didn't know what to say to you. When I finally found the words, I asked, "So why can't you leave her again?"

"Because I can't."

You didn't seem like one to stay back with Sisi if there was no reason. You were loyal to her, but this went beyond loyalty. This was... she had something on you. Did she have something on you? "What does she have on you, Dimeji?" The slight hesitation in your body language told me that you were wary of telling me this. I knew that it was bad and that it could redefine our relationship. The light in me was going to repel it, wasn't it? But you'd also told me I could balance my light and darkness.

I nudged you to go on. "After my father died, I got into some trouble because of his death."

"But you didn't kill him."

"No. But I stood there and watched him die. When the doctor ran to his side to save him, he saw me standing there, unmoved. Everyone's always trying to curry favor with my father and his family, so this guy told his other kids. They hadn't cared enough to visit the man while he was alive but boy, did they have the energy to destroy me." You exhaled deeply, "The first son, Lekan. He was quite powerful, of course. He had me locked up, refused to let me reach out to anyone at all but Funke came looking for me after a few weeks. By the time I got out of the police net, I was consumed with anger and the need for vengeance. I'd been warned sternly not to give in to my anger or seek revenge, but I was so blinded by fury because of everything that had happened to me in life, and that moment was the breaking point. So, I went looking for him.

"Took me days to be able to see him. He was the heir, not exactly accessible. When I walked into his office, he was not apologetic. He remained cocky, telling me I was lucky I got out, but his brother was coming for a meeting soon and he and his brother would ensure that their father's lawyers were going to make sure I wasn't going to be free for long blah blah blah..." You laughed, "Fucking nigga. You know, he'd lived a charmed life. He was the heir, the one who had everything but something about how he talked that day told me how much he loathed me. I was a stain on the family's image. I was not a threat to him, but he wanted me gone. It was crazy and I was over it."

"What did you do?"

Your eyes grew cold, and I knew. “I beat the shit out of his fancy ass. I was so blinded by rage that I couldn’t even see when I beat him so much that he had no life left in him. When I was done, I just stood over his bloodied body, watching him lifeless, hitting him with my boot to be sure he was gone, gone because I knew if he was alive, I was done for. I called Funke, but then I did something terrible, something worse. His secretary rushed in and was going to call security. I held her and, through incantations, compelled her to say that he and his brother got into a fight and his brother beat him to death. That no matter what the evidence was, if anyone saw me and tried to question my activities on the premises, she should fight until she almost lost her life. Then I slapped her until her face was bruised, proof that when she tried to intervene—”

I recoiled, looking away from you. My hands were shaking, and I couldn’t stop them. When you tried to hold me, I jumped back in fright. Your eyes were filled instantly with sadness, “Omolewa, baby, I’d never hurt you.”

I nodded. “I need some time, please. Where’s my room?”

“Lewa, I had to come clean to you—”

“Where’s my room?”

You pointed the bedroom to me, and I walked in, closed the door and curled on the bed.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

When I woke up the next day, you weren't home, but you'd left me a note with a few instructions. It contained where everything was at home. *For the bathing gel and sponge, it's in the bathroom, on the second shelf much like where I think you'd place them. It's ok to tie wrapper around your chest if you want. It's your house. You won't see buckets in the bathroom because believe me, you actually can bathe without buckets and bowl.* I let out laughter, rolling my eyes with each line I read. Then you left me prayers to say to my ori and to ask for absolution of my shortcomings from Olodumare. I was to do it for as long as it took me to feel Olodumare's compassion. I called your number and left texts, but you were unreachable. I visited your house but the gates were locked with a giant padlock.

Days passed and I remained alone, listless, only passing time with prayers and resuming work at the digital marketing company. The concern of what Sisi would do to me for leaving lingered in the back of my mind but it had nothing on the worry I had about where you were and if you were okay. Maybe I shouldn't have run when you told me about your past. I knew you were capable of evil and that certain darkness lived inside of you, so why did it surprise me that you'd murdered your own blood and done devious things to get away?

For weeks, I slept alone in the Ikoyi apartment, losing myself in the exhausting but exciting work. At first, I didn't know much about the work, but it was easy to pick things up when one liked it. I gave up the sugar baby lifestyle – I didn't want anybody else ever again—only you. Two months after you left, I dreamt of sitting by a riverbank with water that threatened to overflow, and when I jumped and ran, a fence stood in between us. My eyes flew open, perspiration beaded on my forehead. In the darkness, I sat up, terrified by what could be happening to you. Then I heard a soft rap on the door and my blood ran cold.

It was 2 am, and I wasn't expecting anyone. I looked into the peephole and saw you waiting. Quickly, I unlocked the door and pulled you inside. You looked dishevelled, your eyes were sunken, and you looked like you were in a hollow place. I repeatedly tried to ask where you had

been, but you only wanted to talk about me. We sat in the kitchen, and I served you bread and butter because you wouldn't let me cook anything for you. After you ate, you told me that something was brewing. Sisi was feeling her life slip through her hands, she'd also pissed some people off and they were going to fight.

"What does this mean?"

"It means she's going to take the fall for all the terrible things some of these guys have done. Including her recent pet project."

The realization of what you were saying hit me – you were going to get caught in the crossfire and Sisi was going to be in deep trouble. It had something to do with Isa, she'd gotten into bed with his enemy in government.

"None of us would survive this. But I am here because I want to know that you're fine. It was a risk, and this was the only time I could come and look for you without being seen." Your eyes roamed the kitchen, and my heart broke in tiny pieces. I knew you truly had people that wanted your head, but I could also tell that you were paranoid. Whatever happened had taken its toll on you.

"Take care of your family but also take care of yourself. Promise me that you would."

"Dimeji stop making me make stupid promises." I finally found my tears. There was no drama, nothing sensational, just good old tears running down my cheeks before I realized they were there.

You wiped my face. "Let it out, babe. Let it all out." I collapsed into your arms, leaning into you as you stroked my back gently. The sobs rocked my body violently and I cried until only hiccups came from me, and then you carried me to take a shower together.

We washed each other – it felt soulful, spiritual because nobody knew our bodies and our souls more than we did each other. Our bodies were tender and clean from the shower, smelling of wild roses and a mild musky scent. You grabbed my essential oils and gently moisturized my body, deliberately massaging between my thighs, your thumb playing around my entrance but not pushing in. You liked that I left some hair on my pussy the way you liked it. I'd been keeping it that way with the hope that you'd return soon. The moisture gathered between my legs, my lips parted slightly, and a slight gasp escaped them. I leaned on my hands, biting my

lips when both of your hands massaged me. It was obvious that you'd come back to be with me. I could tell in the way your hollow eyes hungrily roamed my body. It made me scared of what was coming. It must be a hurricane of tragedy.

Slowly, you eased my back on the silk sheets, getting on top of me, planting kisses from my chin down to my neck and my nipples. My boobs spilled to the sides, and you gathered both in your hands, sucking on my taut nipples when you pushed them into your mouth. I grabbed the sheets, squirming beneath you, lost in the pleasures of your touch. You rose and I watched you from where I lay as you walked to the open closet, grabbing my silk scarves. From where I lay, your bulging shaft taunted me. Your firm butt, your rigid cock, the way you walked like nothing in this world could faze you. When you returned you knelt on the floor behind me, planting kisses from there on my lips. You kissed me long and hard, pulling my hands above my head and tying them until the scarf dug into my wrists. My heart thrummed at the idea of what you were doing. "Close your eyes, wifey." I shut my eyes, breathing fast, realizing that 'wifey' had never sounded so hot. You covered my shut eyes with the other scarf, raising my head to tie it. "Is this too tight?" you asked. "No. It's perfect."

"Good. I want to fuck you the way I like it." Your voice. It was feral. "You'll like it too." I sucked in a deep breath, aware that I would love it before you even said it. I'd been looking forward to loving you like this. Fucking you in the most feral of ways. You gently rolled me over on my stomach and I obeyed, excitement and anxiousness pulsing through me. You trailed your fingers over every curve, contour of my body.

"You're sexier. More perfect than fantasies of you I've created in my head to escape the craziest of days."

I felt the pelting of leather on my butt seconds later and my shock escaped my lips through a loud gasp. There was no warning for the other times the belt hit my bare ass. It was in quick succession – the belt whipping my ass, the sensation biting my skin and my ass dreading but anticipating the next whip. It stopped and I felt your hands on my skin. You gently drew my legs apart, placing soft kisses on my butt, the curve of it, between my legs, and then you sucked on my pussy from behind, pushing my legs apart every time the sensation compelled me to press my legs together. I was trying to grab something, but my hands were tied. The

moans belted off my tongue like music, and I sang your name in a low unrecognizable voice.

“Don’t move.” I didn’t. I couldn’t. Your footsteps retreated and you were back in seconds, rolling me over so I could lay on my back.

My nipples were as sharp as razors as ice cubes teased my tips.

“Dimeji,” I was chanting your name, trying hard to remain still. And then you stopped circling my nipples with the ice, covering both them and the ice with your mouth, sucking on them and licking them. My breathing emerged in agonizing gasps, and I ceded whatever control I had left to you. You continued for minutes, letting the ice fall down to my navel and then my opening. The coolness tickled me. It instantly slipped onto my clit, and you covered both the ice and my clit with your mouth. The delicious thing about my eyes being tied was that I didn’t know what was coming next and it tickled me. My ass had a slight sweet ache, and my body was on fire for you. You pushed your tongue into my opening, swirling, teasing until I exploded into your mouth, my body vibrating with my release.

Your hands grabbed my legs, pushing it up my stomach as I moaned because of the slight pain, easing up as you shoved your cock inside of me, filling me to the hilt. You moved your waist slowly for a couple of seconds and then you banged me, pounding hard into me with reckless abandon. I felt you grunt as your release neared, then you yanked the scarf off my eyes, pulling me so I could straddle you. I moved slowly and intentionally, pausing so that your release didn’t come.

You grabbed me firmly, and I laughed. “Payback’s a bitch,” I murmured.

“Is it?” you asked, sucking hard on my tits because you knew how to get me. I lost it again, my tied hands behind me as you thrust into me from beneath. It was rough and fast, and it threatened to rip me in two. But I loved it. *I love you.* Your climax came and you grunted through your release. “I love you,” you murmured as we lay side by side, “I love you.” I looked at you, needing you to remember regardless of what came next how I felt. “I love you, Dimeji Shogbesan. You are the love of my life and I take you the way you are – with the darkness, darkness and more darkness.” You smiled. “Aya mi Ọwọ́n.”

In three months, the reason you were never going to return again came up as a conversation at work. I was in the lunchroom, eating chicken breast

and moin moin, when my co-workers began to talk about breaking news. Isa and another top government official were in some scuffle that had now become an organ trafficking thing. Isa was arrested in the UK and the other guy was being looked for. There were names – former Ibadan big girl Funke Alao alias Funke Oyo and her estranged wingman Dimeji Shogbesan. Your photo was everywhere, side by side with Funke's. There was a manhunt. No one knew where you were, but they were searching. The food went stale in my mouth, and I swallowed hard what I'd chewed. I hadn't seen you since you left my apartment before dawn three months ago. I'd hoped that the silence that followed that period meant you'd return one day. But you were never going to. Your half-siblings were declining to talk. Investigative journalists and blogs were having a field day.

I fled the lunchroom, unbothered by the eyes that followed me, pushing through doors to the bathroom, where I locked myself in and emptied the little food in my stomach. I cried a lot, unable to control the tears and unwilling to. I couldn't do much in the coming days. My mother and my siblings were in Lagos, and it was a good thing. I could have killed myself from the fear of what was to come. I stopped eating, always with my phone, not knowing what to do. I went to Ajah once, sitting in the car, hoping something would change. But nothing changed. There were recovered bodies and bones from our house in Lekki. And then the story continued to build when *Phoenix* launched. Chukwudi's book was an instant bestseller because, *surprise!* It was about me – the woman who'd started the rift between you and your former business partner. Chukwudi hadn't said that but influencers and blogs with reports coming from 'sources' had said it. I could smell a PR move when I saw one. There was no point returning to work, I was in no state to. Maybe my employers wouldn't even want me to.

Days turned into weeks, and I walked around, feeling unrecognizable. Then one morning, I was sitting in front of my mirror, looking at my uncombed hair and my gaunt reflection. My mother came in with breakfast and begged for my forgiveness. "I know I brought this upon you because I know this wouldn't have happened if you didn't have to take up responsibilities that were bigger than you. Forgive me."

I tried to smile but she placed my head gently on her shoulders. I was weak. Too weak. And then my phone rang. It was Nkechi's number.

“Hello?” But it wasn’t Nkechi, it was Solo. My heart skipped several beats. Why was Solo calling with Nkechi’s phone? Were we both nearing our end now that Sisi was in trouble? It was obvious that even if the powerful people got out of this, she wouldn’t. So maybe we were all going down together.

“Lewa. How are you?”

I shrugged like he could see me, “Okay. Where is NK? I sent her a text yesterday morning.”

“She was rushed to the hospital this morning. I’m here. Waiting. Scared. I saw the news. She told me everything about the oath and we’ve just been hoping it wouldn’t happen because it hadn’t happened,” he laughed drily. I could hear the pain in his voice, “I’m sorry. I can’t...” The fear. “I’m scared.”

It lifted some weight off my shoulders. I wasn’t alone. “Don’t be. We’ll fight this somehow.”

“What if something bad happens?”

I remembered what you’d taught me. Your tattoo À pè m’órá ẹnì là n’pe tèmídirẹ. I could manifest what I wanted. I could pray to my ori. “We’ll fight it.” I slowly walked to the east in my room. “Solo, I’m going to need you to do something for me. Don’t ask questions. Just do it.”

“Okay.” I prayed to my ori earnestly. And I prayed for Nkechi too. Solo called later in the evening. Nkechi had given birth to a baby girl. She was weak but the doctors assured them that she’d be fine. Solo was happy.

Nkechi spoke to me on the phone, her voice weak, “Ore mi, we fought. We’re going to be okay.”

“Yes, nwanne m nwanyị. We will be okay.”

And then I went and showered, doused my hair with shampoo, washed it and combed it. Then I went to the living room where my family sat, forlorn. “Mummy,” I called to my mother. “Mo fẹ jẹun.” I’d never seen her run so fast in my life. She ran to the kitchen, my siblings following suit.

CHAPTER TWENTY

AN ETERNITY LATER

SHO

Being in a different country constantly reminded me of familiar things. Sometimes it was a street reminiscent of Lagos or a moment in a restaurant that tickled a memory in Abuja.

Today, being in a different country reminded me of you. I hadn't seen you in an eternity. I stopped counting the years when it threatened to run me mad. In the early days, when I was determined to be in solitude to seek absolution from Olodumare, the hardest thing to do had been to part from you. I didn't want to be with you because being with you meant children, a happy marriage, and forever. And you'd been through enough pain. I didn't want our blood to inherit my bad karma. But then my resolve always cracked with every reminder of you. And in those days, anything was a strong enough reminder. Some days it was the breeze that carried a scent that reminded me of you—other days, it was someone I thought looked like you in a crowd. It was hell. But I was never going to return to you. I had long accepted that you could have married someone else. That your life would have been a dream that didn't need disruption. It killed me, more than it killed me to lose everything. Funke was long dead, murdered by the same devils she ate with. I'd hoped that meant you were free.

Now as I walked the free roads in the countryside where I lived in Ghana, it was a woman leaning by a car, dressed in stylish clothes, hair in a ponytail that reminded me of you. I was strolling as I did in the evenings when I walked past the woman, pulled to a halt just after I'd walked past her. When I turned, I was afraid to touch her because I wasn't sure if it was you or if my mind had finally gone haywire. Living on a farm in solitude was lonely, to say the least. Sometimes all I had were the clucking of chickens and bleating goats that strayed. But the longer I stared, the more your features confirmed it was you.

You looked the most beautiful I'd ever seen you. Life had been as good to you as I had hoped and prayed it would be.

“Hello? Yes, I am here waiting. Please come quick.” You hadn’t ended the call when you looked at the madman before you. I’d long moved away from the dishevelled look. My hair was natural locs and I was always dressed in white. Always clean. So, I wondered if you recognized me. Or if you thought I was a lunatic staring at you weirdly on a quiet street. I would later realize that you knew who I was instantly. That while I was walking toward you, you’d thought it was me, but you’d gotten tired of calling me out in places when the person you thought was me turned out to be yet another disappointing realization.

“Dimeji,” your voice was soft. It was sweet. It was home. “Is it you? Please tell me it’s you.” I ran to you, grabbing you, sweeping you off the ground and moving you around. My hope. It was you. It had been too long.

“What are you doing here?” we both asked each other.

“Dimeji, I mourned you. Why are you alive but you chose not to find me?” there was pain in your voice, and it caused me pain.

“Who are you waiting for?” I asked and you glanced toward a big white house with a white fence.

You didn’t respond to my question. Instead, you asked, “Where are you headed?”

“My house,” I replied. You were always beautiful, but your beauty was more grown, more graceful. I knew instantly that you’d become a better version of yourself. I was so damn proud.

You unlocked your car and we drove to my unpainted bungalow. The house had previously belonged to an old man that helped me when I wound up in Ghana with the help of an old ally broke – all my investments frozen. Inside, you couldn’t keep your hands off me. I couldn’t either. I hadn’t been with anyone since that last morning with you before I went to wait upon fate to do its thing. We made sweet love. Ending up on the bare floor. Making sweet love again.

“Why did you leave me?” you asked after we’d made love twice. Strands of your hair touched your face. You were still wearing the topaz blue necklace I gave you. The pendant sat between your full boobs and I thought of you as a companion, a life partner and someone I wanted to birth our babies even more in that moment. You told me you always wore it.

“I didn’t want you to inherit my karma. I didn’t want bad things to happen to you because of me. What I’d been told was simple – to guide you

through that passage.”

“But you also told me you saw death.”

“Yes, I did. Death to an old life and birth of a new one it seems.”

You sat up, annoyed, “When you realized it was that, why didn’t you reach out at least? Let me know you were alive and all we needed was time. Do you know how difficult it has been without you?”

“I’m sorry,” I said, stroking your cheek and praying you’d understand that it was something I had to embark upon alone. I asked about your family and you told me that your siblings were now graduates, working nice jobs and your mom now had a shop in Ikorodu where she made good sales.

We talked about what you’d been up to. A promising career in marketing. A nice life. A man too. You’d come to Ghana to see his parents. Jealousy pumped blood into my heart.

“I want you back,” I said to you.

You were sad, every word filled with despair, “Isn’t it too late?”

“I don’t think so. You are mine as I am yours. Nothing can change that. Not even this man. I’ll wait for you to realize that.”

We parted with no hope of seeing each other again. Life continued but it was harder now knowing we’d seen and touched each other again.

Six months later, I heard my chickens cluck and bleating goats stray into my compound. I heard water pouring into the basins. When I opened the door, you were outside, feeding the chickens and shooing the goats away.

“I could never live on a farm,” you said, facing me. “I would eat half the chickens and abandon the rest to their fates.”

Your figure was fuller, you were so womanly and there was a twinkle in your eyes that wasn’t there six months ago. I knew before you closed the distance between us that you were home.

“That’s fine. We’ll live wherever you want.”

“Who told you it’s a ‘we’ thing?”

I leaned against the door, “Because na me get you, Omolewa. Àkọ̀sílẹ̀. Remember? You no dey go anywhere.”

You rolled your eyes playfully before the earnestness took over again, “When you left, I was thoroughly fucked up.”

“I know. I died.” It was the hardest thing I’d ever done.

“That means you can never leave again.”

“I’ll never leave again, Lewa. It’s the only thing I’m not man enough to do.” I pulled you closer, kissing you.

“My forever sugar daddy,” you murmured against my lips.

“I love you.”

I would always be by your side and risk bad karma to protect you. I knew that. And time and time again, years after, before, during, and after I found my feet again, I did.

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Author's Note

Lovelies! Thank you for reading *Sugar Daddy Chronicles: Lewa*. As I write this, I am in my Magodo apartment, hoping that by the time you get to this page, you've felt every emotion and gotten all the points that I am trying to make – that love surpasses all. And truthfully, I should be your favorite romance author. Like seriously.

So, please take time out to drop your review. It helps xx.

Also, because this doubles as an acknowledgment, I'd like to give a massive shout-out to every member of my old reading community. The first ever *Sugar Daddy Chronicles* I wrote was in 2015 while I was working as a writer at 360nobs.com, and my then bosses Noble Igwe and Oye Akideinde had spurred me on to write something hot and spicy for our large audience at the time. It was a challenge I took rather seriously and it quickly gathered a wider audience for me. A year after, I wrote a sequel on my blog with fierce support from my ever-loving community. This year, after I had quite an exhausting experience with a publisher, I felt lost as a writer and for the first time in my life, I doubted my ability to write. A phone call from a good friend & colleague – Yemi Adeyemi – had motivated me to get back into why I loved this in the first place. And then again, my reading community supported the very first (quite embarrassing) draft of this work on Wattpad. I could literally do nothing without my community's fierce support and I thank you for loving me the way you do. I hope we continue to bring joy into our lives.

To the people in my personal life who I sometimes stress out with my rants about life and work – Binyelum Ewulluh & Nike Fagbule – thank you. To my ever-supportive parents – who are pastors, by the way and mustn't read this book – Tunji & Taiwo Adeyemo – thank you. To my younger brothers – Temiloluwa & Tunmise Adeyemo – for always just getting it and being truly supportive, thank you. To my editor, Tahzeeb Akram, who I must now make way more money to afford properly, thank you. You get it, Tahzeeb. Not too many people do. To Lara Kareem, on whose shoulders I could lean while this story found its way to the bookstagram community, thank you. You have no idea how much ease you brought to me with those 'let me handle it.' Olivia Pope who???

To my mentor, my teacher, my friend, the reason I write better daily, Chris Ihidero, thank you.

And finally, to my wealthy husband who's so devoted to me and our future kids, thank you. Now, when the fuck are you showing up?! You taking too long to show up, mf'er.

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