



THE
CANDLE
IN THE WIND

DE-RACONTEUR

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book by the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Love so great with which the Father has loved me! I am so in love with this Love so much so that I want to live a life of Love until Love comes down to earth to take me up there into His Love Kingdom!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I give all the Glory to the Name of the Lord who was and is and is to come, who will forever be.

I acknowledge Your Hand in all I do and the putting together of this great piece is not an exception. You have been so great to me, Dear Lord!

To the followers and subscribers of my Christian story blog, de-raconteur.com, of a truth, the impact of your support and loyalty cannot be overemphasized. You have been key to my growing love for God and story writing in general. The Lord bless you greatly. Amen.

To those who had at one time or the other clamored for the birth of ‘The Candle In the Wind’ as an e-book accessible to all, I acknowledge you greatly. You made this happen.

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1

Why is this Sunday service taking so long oh Lord?

My tummy was rumbling so loudly that I had to sneak a peep at Bro. Paul sitting close to me to ensure that he wasn't listening to the rhythmical sounds from my inside!

I woke up that morning just like any other day when I felt the sticky thing in-between my legs.

Oh not again Lord!

I knew from that moment that I was going to have to battle with dysmenorrhea- menstrual pain for the rest of the day and I really hated the thought.

I racked my wardrobe for drugs and gosh! My NSAID was exhausted. I angrily threw the empty sachet away and had a warm bath, getting set for the Sunday service.

I had just concluded a three-day fast and was looking rather lean- but it was worth it. It bordered on issues concerning my life and I had to take it seriously.

I didn't know how to hear God!

I would hear so many people say they heard God telling them to do this and that and those and these but I just could not even hear anything! And there were so many issues before me that needed immediate answers.

Well, most times after praying fervently, I would simply tell God to talk to someone or reveal something to someone else if He didn't want to talk to me personally and that was what He had always done.

Probably I was just too filthy!

I had told Him that during the service that day, if He wanted to talk to me, He should do so through all the ministrations in the church- the choir ministration, the drama ministration, the message itself and all.

I was however shocked when the title of the choir piece was 'The End of Job'!

I knew about Job so well and he was not in any way related to my prayer point at all. I needed something else that morning!

Something else!

So as the choir ministered, my pain increased as if vinegar drink was being pumped into my body system. I could feel the body fluid escaping my body as though being pursued vehemently. I cringed.

“Let us jam our hands as our dear father in the Lord, Pastor Idile takes up the mic” He announced in his usually affecting tone. He was one of the reasons for my prayer- Tony!

I sighed deeply.

‘God, are you just going to talk to me? Are you going to speak to me through this man of God? I really need your touch oh Lord’ I uttered silently as my faith got revived again.

Almost immediately, the pastor sang a song in his baritone voice and the awesomeness of the whole thing pushed me down to my knees.

Touch me one more time oh Lord

(Yes dear Lord)

Touch me one more time oh Lord

I need the touch of the Father

I need the touch of the Son

Touch me one more time oh Lord!

I had just mentioned ‘His touch’ at almost the same time the pastor started singing about His touch too!

“The service is definitely for me” I said so loudly that I noticed Bro. Paul looking towards me but I wasn’t moved any longer.

“Who says this God isn’t real, let him come and ask me! This God is too good abeg ooo!” I screamed on the inside of me.

The message snowballed and I listened with rapt attention, slapping my laps together so the pain in my tummy would disappear into the thin air!

The topic was ‘*Confused?*’ -So apt, touching and inspiring!

Oh yes I was confused. Madly confused!

I said yes to Jean's proposal the month before and the relationship had started to bloom greatly until that particular Tony came around that same week!

He was a serving corps member and he was deployed to my area, so he worshipped with us at the central church.

Since I set my eyes on him, my mind had been in a real state of chaos. I was just so confused that I decide to step away from the choir group where he was very vibrant so I could get things straight.

How did I get to meet this Tony? You might be wondering. I was going to the church that very Sunday and as I always did, I was gorgeously dressed for the service. Alighting from my car, I locked the door and since I was late, I started walking as if being pursued towards the entrance- my opened-toes high heeled shoes digging the concrete floor rhythmically as I did.

Just then, Sis. Jane called my name and as I tried to turn back in order to answer her call, I never knew a canal was before me. My shoe nose-dived into the canal but just like the slow motion in any Korean movie, a strong hand held me and pulled me up with a force.

"Sorry ma" He said and I looked into his small, milky face. I blinked severally, trying to get my voice.

Who is this boy?

He bowed slightly before me and off he went- but my eyes went with him! I couldn't even say "Thank you"!

I slapped my head to order that very day to no avail especially when my research told me he was just an ordinary corps member, serving his nation.

"He is just a small boy" I thought to myself but the turmoil in my heart continued.

Whenever I went to the church, I would take a spot in the choir room where I would have the opportunity to get a good look at him without being noticed by anybody.

Whatever he did appealed to me! There was a day I saw him blowing his nose. The way he held the tissue paper was skilled, so appealing to me! Funny me!

Immediately I realized that I wasn't getting things straight again, I had to sit down, fast and pray well so that God would speak to me. So, He would clear my head and put the right thing in there.

“Most time, we think we have arrived and that it is time to settle down because we have the job, beautiful accommodation, money and all but God is saying no! And you’ve got to wait on Him. You shouldn’t hurry to settle down because of what you’ve got. You still have to wait on the Lord to choose for you. You shouldn’t hurry, never!” My pastor killed it!

As I jotted the point down, my body shook violently.

Pastor Idile was stupendously right!

“What else are you waiting for my daughter? You are well employed as a lecturer. You have a degree in Mass Communication and two Masters Degrees in Public Relations and Advertising respectively. What are you waiting for? You are our only daughter and see how big you are. No one would even believe that you are not 25 yet.” My mother complained bitterly the last time we met.

My aged mother and father had been my specimen for a good marriage for many years. Though it took about four decades after their marriage before they had me, the ‘barren years’ really strengthened their love.

Though I was very beautiful, I had the dominant gene of my father- built like a man- with well-built muscles, a deep, bass voice and very hairy skin. In my secondary school days, I was called ‘Miss Gorilla’

Although I battled with inferiority complex for a long period of time, I overcame because of my supportive parents, my choice of career as a presenter since my 'radio voice' was always being begged for and my specialty at my church unit- my bass voice was the spice of any song!

When I wasn't talking of any boyfriend or fiancé yet, it was very natural when my mum called for a dialogue with me.

2

Jean was a single father!

His wife had left him for over five years after he caught her in an adultery act for more than three times. Being the favorite lecturer of his daughter in her final year, I got to know him well as he requested for a private lesson for her at home, during the holiday.

Whenever I visited the beautiful house of his, the way he ran around to prepare food in the kitchen, set the house in order, pet his daughter to listen whenever I taught was overwhelming. He was just too nice!

When he sat me down to say all he had passed through in his marriage, pity rose from my bowels for him and I opened my heart to him. I would buy him gifts, go on picnic with him and Sarah, his daughter and I would help in the kitchen- his skills of combining different ingredients to make something extra-ordinary was highly touching!

In fact, when I realized I was in love with him, I quickly told him about Jesus and he was truly converted as he wept for his sins and forsook his ways.

When he proposed to me, I was shocked. I really loved him but never had I thought about getting married to a man in his late forties. I told him to give me some time and I really calculated the cost.

His daughter loved me!

He didn't divorce his wife- she left him!

He is now a Christian!

He is good looking, accomplished and wonderful to be with!

What else would I need in a man?

I said a big, fat yes!

It all went well with us as we had reported at the marriage committee in the church and our meeting had been adjourned to the following week.

All seemed clear to me until I met Tony!

*"I am going to teach you a song today. I told you earlier that it's a special service today so we are doing everything in another style. Who knows maybe it's for someone here that this service has been designed this way?"*The pastor said again and mouth agape, I nodded like an agama lizard.

My pastor is truly anointed!

He started singing thunderously

I will wait, wait, wait on the Lord

I will wait, wait, wait on the Lord

Learn my lessons well

In his timing he would tell me,

What to do,

Where to go

And what to say...

The pastor's voice rung in the whole building as he sang till the whole hall felt that move and there was the outpouring of the Spirit. I watched as people fell to the ground, raised their hands to Heaven in total awe and surrender to God.

I was too touched to pray!

Suddenly, something struck my heart and as I held my chest to calm the pain, a force pushed me down to my knees; perspiration covered me from head to toes- I was dripping.

I shook as if I had been suffering from fever for a very long time. The goose bumps that covered me and its tingling effects refused to leave as I gnashed my teeth in awe.

No words proceeded from my mouth.

I moaned and moaned again.

There was a stir in my spirit – for the first time! I was praying in the spirit. Prayers that were too superb and extra-ordinary for my mouth to utter!

“Many of us say that the Lord can’t speak to us and that we can’t hear Him because we are not worthy to be spoken to by the Immortal God! Oh what liar you are! The Lord says ‘Call upon me and I. WILL. ANSWER. YOU. What are we talking about here?’” He continued again, his voice shaking so vehemently via the speakers and travelling round the whole hall powerfully. I couldn’t stop shaking.

I was so guilty!

“Guilty as charged Lord! Guilty as charged” I cried as I slapping my laps some more. Oh how wrong I was!

“We prefer the pastor to hear for us even when God is talking yet He is speaking to you. He is talking to you but you keep looking away asking for someone to help you hear from

Him!”The pastor emphasized on and on and I suddenly realized the pain in God’s heart when I limited His ability to talk to me.

*“The wall of partition is broken. Enter in before Him and like Jacob, wrestle in prayers. He needs who would dare seek His face. Wait no more, seek Him! He wants to talk to you. Stop doubting His ability. He is the Lord God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Him? Is there anything too hard for God?”*The pastor asked with a stamp of his feet on the floor.

I cried!

My mouth opened and with my mouth filled with gratitude, I gave Him thanks for talking to me through the pastor.

Then I regrettably said I was sorry for limiting Him. For seeing Him as being selective of whom He talked to.

“Who says there is no God?” I uttered affirmatively as if I had a sword to behead such individual. I stood up from my kneeling position and joined in the thanksgiving session that followed the message session, wiping the sweat and the tears off my face.

The joy in the face of every member was unspeakable! It was so glorious that my heart kept stirring- the new spiritual experience that I had gotten from God during the service!

Blessed is the woman that married this Pastor Idile!

Just like a video camera, my eyes travelled through the church to look for where Mummy Idile was seated but I couldn't sight her. My searching job begun in earnest.

I saw her briefly that morning clad in a blue suit gown and a gold hat. Where could she be?

My eyes travelled to the gallery above me.

There she was!

There was a smile on her face but the smile looked somehow.

Sad? Uncertain? Bitter?

I couldn't figure what was wrong with that smile but I knew it wasn't a happy, grateful smile. I looked on at her and as she nodded severally, dancing, the light above her shone on her and her face glistened. I saw it clearly- *tears!*

Jesus!

What is wrong with her? Is God showing her a vision that is very saddening? What is bothering her Oh God?

I felt she was supposed to be the happiest woman on earth for having such a vibrant man as a husband especially with the wonderful outpouring of the Spirit.

My spirit stirred again!

Is God trying to tell me something?

I placed my head on the pew in front of me. I didn't even realize that the service had been brought to an end. I was overwhelmed within me.

Something is just not right! What is it oh Lord? Talk to me please!

I didn't hear anything! I didn't see anything! It was just darkness I saw and I heard the hooting of car horns outside.

Isn't God going to speak?

3

3.

I heard on knock on the pew which I was seated on.

My eyes still firmly shut, I smiled.

“Is that Jesus?” I asked, very happily.

Jesus has come to speak to me in a very different way. Wonderful!

“Speak on Lord. Your daughter is listening” I said when I didn’t hear any sound.

“Very funny. Okay, it’s not Jesus o. It’s His son” I heard a wonderful male voice very close to me.

Eyes still shut, I racked my brain.

Jesus’ son? Jesus has a son ?

Still in my fantasy, I asked on.

“Angel, you mean?” I asked and I heard a very loud laughter.

I opened my eyes widely but it was blurry because I had closed my eyes firmly for a very long time.

When my sight cleared, right in front me was Tony!

He had drawn a plastic chair and was seated, staring into my face with a funny smile on his face. He obviously was not done making jest of me and I felt so foolish.

“Sis. Precious, you are supposed to be in the drama unit. You’d be a great actress!” He said and I smiled.

What can I say so this brother wouldn’t think me weird!

“Well, you wouldn’t understand” I managed to say and he smiled again. The way his cheeks raised whenever he smiled was beautiful and my heart stirred again.

“I can relate. We just get to a point where we are so confused that we just want God to speak to us. We become so desperate that God just calms down and says, if I don’t talk to her, let’s see if she would still stay.” He said and I smiled

“Hmmm, that’s profound!” I nodded as the words sunk into my skulls.

“Yes my sister. When we so desire that He speaks probably so we could brag about it to our neighbors that God said this or that to us, He withholds His voice. Then, when we do not expect, He would speak. He drops it gently and waits to see who cares to even notice what He had done!” He said on and I watched on with great amazement.

He paused and smiled.

“Sister Precious” He called out and I woke up from my fantasies again.

“Continue my brother. I am being blessed” I said and he laughed, clasping his hands together.

“I am not a pastor o. This look you are giving me be like say you think say I be one kain apostle” He said again and we laughed together.

“But really, that was deep. So so thoughtful! God bless you” I prayed heartily.

“You are very funny Sis. Precious. Whenever I see you, you remind me of my mum. Your stature, your clichés, your voice, your long hair, and your funny talks, everything, just like her!” He said and I blushed.

“That’s wonderful.” Was the only sentence I could utter.

“Yes. That reminds me. Why haven’t you been coming for the choir practice? I had wanted to ask for a long time now but whenever I looked at your side when the service ends, you would have gone. God held you down for me this morning” He said again and I shook my head.

Only if you know what these praises of yours is doing to my heart right now. Please, just stop!

I stopped because I couldn’t face you! Because of you!

These thoughts filled my head but I shook them off and smiled.

“I will resume soon. I just had to step aside for a while. Thanks for your concern” I said and he smiled.

“Ok ma. Thanks too” He said and stood up.

I felt bad all of a sudden. I really hoped I hadn’t said anything to put him off!

“What side are you going to if I could give you a lift?” I asked in compensation and he smiled.

“Two-Road area” He responded, looking down at me. He was quite tall!

“Ok. Let’s go” I said and as I tried to start, I felt something wet down my skirt.

Jesus!

Stains?

Blood Stains?

Oh no! Not at this point!

I was wearing a white skirt since I used heavy flow pad in the morning with the mind that there couldn't be any stain, ah!

"Is anything the problem?" He asked, concern written on his face.

"No. Let's go" I didn't want to appear foolish. I felt that it might be the sweat that was making me feel wet. I stood up suddenly, checked the white pew and oh nah, it was soaked with blood!

I sat right back in the chair and my perspiration started. My heart started beating fast.

Oh, why today oh God!

"What happened that you suddenly sat down?" He asked and I smiled faintly, obviously embarrassed but grateful that he didn't see it.

"I just realized that I wasn't done with the prayers I was doing. I was actually praying for somebody when you interrupted" I said.

Was that a lie?

Well, maybe partly.

Forgive me Lord. Ah, forgive me Lord!

“Ok then. Thanks for the offer then. Pray for me too please” He smiled again as he walked away.

I heaved a sigh of relief.

“Let’s just assume that he is the right guy for me, would this be the right way for him to see me? Stained with my own blood? No, that would only show him how careless I am. I wouldn’t want that” I said aloud, laughing with satisfaction that I was not caught.

But how do I get out of the church like this?

I turned back and saw some men counting the offering.

Oh my! Why wouldn’t they do that in the office? C’mon!

I turned forward and saw some others too, discussing in groups.

What do I do oh my Redeemer?

There was a tap at my shoulder almost immediately and I looked up- Tony!

“Yes?” I asked, almost sharply. He smiled.

“You were supposed to be praying” He said, almost in a challenging tone.

“Yes and you are intruding” I said defiantly.

What a bother!

He smiled once more.

“I have this for you. I thought of sending someone but I found nobody around. Please, don’t be offended” He said, dropped a black polythene bag on the white chair before me and off he went before I could say a word.

I was perturbed.

What could be in the bag?

I opened and the contents of the bag dazed me, leaving me in total shock!

A new pack of sanitary pad, a small white towel, four sachets of water, a roll of tissue paper and a small white wrapper.

Tears gathered in my eyes at that!

Am I supposed to be angry at this guy now or be appreciative? Which?

What an embarrassing day to remember for me oh God!

A paper fell from the bag and I picked it up.

I unfolded it even as tears clouded my eyes.

I am sorry. I just seemed to find out. A medical doctor would just know!

Geez!

Is this guy for real right now?

I squeezed myself in the corner where I was seated as if something should take a hold of me and make me disappear!

4

4.

It was raining so profusely.

As the wipers of my car swept the heavenly tears of rain off my car, I switched on the heater and hummed ‘Amazing Grace’ so happily as my already cold-infested body came back to life gradually.

Though the road through the thick forest that I was driving through was rough, I kept on driving confidently.

I didn’t even know where I was going to but I kept going!

Just then, I saw some images afar off and I slowed down to get a closer view.

When I couldn’t get a proper view, I drove closer and peeped through the window.

Who am I seeing?'

Jesus Christ!

Mrs. Idile, my pastor's wife was seated on a gossip chair on the road fully drenched in the rain. She was shaking so vehemently as her teeth gnashed against themselves.

I drove closer to her side but as I opened the door, the breeze from the windy rain was too much that I had to close it back hurriedly.

How do I approach her?

Why is she in the rain being beaten that way?

Where is her car?

What about her husband?

Taking another look at her, I knew that I had to do something if I didn't want to lose her.

A puddle of water was already forming round her and if care wasn't taken, she would be swept away completely.

I looked behind me, pulled my rain coat from the back seat and put it on. I turned the ignition key and opened the door. Cold breeze rushed inside but I had to do that!

As I jammed the car door, Mrs. Idile looked up at me. She was shivering severely. I noticed that her tummy was protruding and I was shocked.

Mummy Idile is pregnant?

I never knew!

Then, she smiled! Oh that affectionate smile capable of calming a raging storm no matter how big in one's heart!

But that smile looked just weird! It looked just like the one I saw on Sunday. Plus, her lips were blue!

I ran towards her.

“Mummy!” I screamed, very scared. I held her hand and they were like ice.

“Sister Precious” She called out in a husky voice, still smiling.

“Mummy, what is happening to you? Exactly what?” I asked, really concerned.

“It is well my sister” She said, stretching her very wrinkled hands to pat my back.

I withdrew from her touch.

When did her hands become this wrinkled?

Jesus is Lord!

“Mummy, where is daddy? Why are you alone?” I asked again, a weird sensation running down my spine.

She smiled as tears rushed down her eyes.

Though it was raining, I still could distinguish her teary face as her face had gone red. She pointed at her left side and I looked beside her.

Just beside her was my pastor!

He was in a very small glassy shed that looked so warm and comfortable, mere looking at it.

He was helping some men and women get into the same shed, smiling, hugging and praying for them. They all looked really happy together.

“What! Mummy, go inside” I shouted out of frustration. She smiled and shook her head in the negative. She pointed to the shed and I went closer to it. The inscription on the shed almost made me mad!

FULL!

*What is full when I can still see empty seats inside?*⁹

“Daddy!” I called out, very sharply. I was enraged. The pastor looked at me, very happily and opened the glassy door for me.

“Come in my sister” He said but I shook my head.

“I brought my car sir. But mummy is outside. Can’t she come inside?” I asked and he peeped outside.

“Which mummy?” He asked and I shook my head, greatly disappointed.

“Your wife sir” I said and he smiled.

“Mummy would be fine. We have to tend to the sheep first. If you notice, no family member is in here. That was why I sent all the children abroad so that mummy can have time for herself. I must work the work of Him that sent me while it is day, the night cometh when no man can work” He said and closed the door with a great thud.

I was shaken!

I turned behind me to look at her side and I was shocked- she had fallen to her back!

Lord have mercy!

I ran closer to where she was and lifeless as she looked, I saw blood streaming down her legs- she was bleeding!

“Jesus, have mercy!” I screamed loudly.

I was so confused as to what to do. I didn’t have any knowledge of medicine, and I couldn’t even think straight.

“What to do Lord? What to do?” I cried as the rain fell harder.

I heard the sound of an approaching car and looked back.

It was my car!

Who is driving it?

Why are so many weird things happening today, Lord?

I was holding my car keys few minutes before but I couldn’t even find it no matter how hard I searched minutes after!

The car door opened and a guy jumped out- Tony!

I was astounded!

He smiled as he looked at me and immediately wore a frown as he saw Mrs. Idile.

I was shocked as I watched on.

I checked the cloth he was putting on- exactly the same Ankara print as mine. He was looking really good and the rainfall was good on him. He looked really cute!

“MMR, leave the way, please.” He said as he pushed me aside gently, handing me a big umbrella. I unfolded it and it was big enough to cover the three of us!

MMR? What is that?

As he held Mrs. Idile and felt her temperature, I came back to life and concentrated on the dying minister of God.

He felt her pulse with his stethoscope and he looked at me, shaking his head. Tears rolled down his face.

“What?” I screamed, throwing the umbrella away. I pulled at his shirt and he just shook his head on and on, looking downwards.

“We lost her” He dropped the bomb and I almost ran mad.

“Lost who?” I asked and he nodded again. I screamed as I held on to her, crying profusely.

“Mummy, I never knew you were dying. I never knew you were in the rain alone. I would have rushed here to pick you up. I really would have” I cried and as Tony pulled me with his right hand, the rain stopped abruptly and the people in the shed started trooping out. They rushed to the corpse and wailed, trying to console the pastor.

“Why console him? He killed her! The pastor killed her!” I screamed with all my strength as if my life depended on how loud my voice was.

But nobody seemed to hear me!

I looked at Tony who only pulled me up and assisted me into the car. He laid me at the back seat while he entered the driver’s seat. As he turned the ignition key, the heater resumed work, blowing with a very calming alacrity.

I sat up to check the scene I had just left and I saw them laying her down into the grave.

“Mummy Pastor! She can’t be dead! Mummy Pastor! She can’t be dead oh God!”

I screamed on.

“Mummy pastor, she can’t be dead. Mummy pastor!” I screamed on and someone tapped my shoulder.

“Sister Precious” I heard my name clearly and my eyes opened widely. It was Sister Jane.

It was a dream?

Oh my, it looked so real, scarily real!

I sat up and saw tears on Jane’s face.

Jesus!

“Is it true?” I screamed. Smiling faintly, Jane nodded over and over again.

Jesus!

“Mummy Pastor! Mummy Pastor oooo” I started screaming as I sat up from the pew in which I had slept off and started running to the back of the church as if being pursued. Jane called me back to no avail.

“Mummy Pastor ooo...somebody help” I screamed on and on until I looked to my left as I approached the exit door and I heard my name.

“Sister Precious”

Mummy Pastor’s voice!

I turned to look around and there were gathered all the women leaders with Mrs. Idile smiling wholeheartedly at me.

“Is anything the matter my daughter?” She asked, smiling again- her very real, affectionate smile!

“Is this for real? Is this a dream too? Is that mummy pastor? Somebody talk to me.” I cried again as I walked to her side on the podium.

Some women tried to stop me but she signaled at them to leave me alone.

I went beside her, knelt down, felt her legs, touched her calves and hugged her.

She hugged me too!

“Mummy is alive!” I shouted childishly and the women murmured.

“Daughter, go and check yourself in the bathroom. Your cloth is stained at the back” She whispered into my ears and a cold wind of embarrassment ran through my spine.

So, it's still the same day!

That same weird Sunday!

I managed to smile at her.

She smiled back!

She signaled that I bend down and she dipped her hand into her bag to give me a white shawl. I wrapped it round myself and passed through the back door outside with the women's eyes following me- I most assuredly guessed!

Sister Jane was outside and I frowned at her.

“Why were you crying earlier on? And I still asked if it was a true and you nodded. You made me make a fool out of myself today and it's not fair!” I retorted.

“I didn't understand your question Sister Precious. I was only shedding tears of joy because I am so happy for you. You obviously just had a vision. That's something we had both been praying for you for a very long time now. You asked if it was true and I thought you were referring to the vision thing. I smiled happily and told you yes!” She explained and I hugged her.

God heard my prayers!

He spoke to me in a vision!

But what does that mean?

*Mummy Pastor was smiling just so happily when I saw her and I am still as single as ever,
so why was Tony in the same attire with me?*

What was I doing in a wilderness?

*Despite the rough road, my car was able to still drive on as if on a tarmac! What does that
mean?*

What is the problem between the pastor and his wife?

Tony called me MMR. What does that mean?

As I brought out my skirt from the spinner of the washing machine, I heard some rapid footsteps at the staircase and I listened.

The pastor was making a call.

“It’s a great privilege to do so for my wife my dear pastor. I am just going to dedicate this week to her. It’s her birthday and she has to be treated extra-wonderfully. Thanks for booking the hotel for us sir. We should arrive Dubai in the evening tomorrow. I will share the surprise with her very soon. My wife so loves surprises....hahahahahahaha... God bless you sir!...” He said on and on and I smiled happily.

I trust my pastor. Ever romantic!

That dream must have been one of my terrible nightmares!

I had much to think about before I slept off, hence, the terrible dream!

My pastor and his wife are just too anointed to have any problematic issue between them.

I waved the dream off as I quickly wore my skirt, checking out myself in the mirror.

“Sister Precious, do you wanna sleep in the laundry?” Sister Jane called out and I smiled happily as I tip-toed to the door.

“I am coming right away mon amie” I said in a very musical voice- what happens whenever I am satisfied with something or extremely happy.

But then, my spirit stirred- again!

5

5.

“We cannot join you together!”

That was the response of the head of the marriage committee immediately Jean and I entered the church’s board room the next Sunday.

I turned sideways subtly to see Jean’s face and it was expressionless. He was looking indifferent. I sighed repeatedly but silently.

As much as God wasn’t in support of that relationship and I was ready to obey His will, I still loved Jean and his expressionless face actually broke my heart.

He isn’t going to miss me?

Perhaps he never really loved me!

Just then, while my head was bowed still where I stood, I saw some fluids falling to the ground and I was shocked.

Tears!

I looked up at Jean and he was totally broken! He had unknotted his tie, his eyes were closed and his hands were dipped right inside his well combed afro hair. The other hand held his tummy as he let out a squeak that shook the whole room.

The four-man committee members stood abruptly, covering their ears with their hands. They looked really shocked.

I could only watch on as I felt his pains.

He squatted and started a real babyish cry and my heart shattered into pieces the more.

Who does that for God's sake?!

Who leaves a man like this when real men are scarce outside?

Only a foolish person would do so!

Jean was a very good man. Even before I led him to Christ, he had really been a moral man. Never had he for once tried to touch me or played dirty with me during those times.

Even the day he proposed to me, he was very shy to do so. It took the efforts of his daughter to help. He never took advantage of his subordinates.

I had always had a soft spot for mature men and a rather big hatred for ‘baby men’!

And, but for his marriage to Beatrice, I would have loved to get married to him. I had really opened my heart to him.

“You people don’t understand. You don’t!” He cried out again as he blew his nose into the handkerchief he was holding. The committee members sat down, still looking perturbed.

“Understand what?” Mr. Hosanna, one of the marriage committee asked and the others nodded in support.

“I had really endured a very bad marriage where my wife would bring in different men into our matrimonial bed and sleep with them right before my open eyes. If I dared to retort, she would send different touts to beat me up or even deal with me herself....” He swallowed hard and the committee members looked somber as he unfolded the story.

I shook my head as I imagined the whole scenario.

“I had a mixed feeling when she eventually travelled outside the country five years ago with another sugar daddy. I was happy to be free indeed but I hated sleeping around. What do I do?...” He paused as he sat on the floor. He looked really hopeless and a cold shiver ran down my spine.

“I had really been weaned from all emotions and love until I met Precious. If I got married at 20, I should be able to father her but really, I love her so much. I was scared of another failed marriage but I trusted her and wanted to give it a trial once again...”

“Marriage is not trial and error my brother!” Mrs. Hallow, one of the committee members retorted and Jean shook his head.

“Probably my use of English sold me out madam. It wasn’t for a trial at all. I wanted both of us to have a real great future together and all was going well until this committee asked us to come back.” He paused again and sighed in anguish.

“It was really worth the waiting as God met me and told me some vital reasons why this marriage cannot be. There was no way I could tell Precious and I felt we should get here first. Right now, it seemed that God had gotten here ahead of us” He said and the committee members whispered some things to themselves.

“God has been here since, my brother. He is the Word personified and we have the Bible. Everything is in there. If we go ahead and join you together, it would mean adultery. That’s what the Bible says” Mr. Lawal, another member explained.

“Then, what should I do? I should wait for a woman that has gone to join herself with different filthy men? I should?” He cried dejectedly. I understood his plight.

I felt really guilty.

I shouldn’t have met him in the first place.

I had opened up the closed wound in his heart again and poured fresh pepper on it.

“My brother, marriage contract is till death do us part. As long as you are alive and she is alive too, there is no going back. You have to endure it.” Mrs. Hallow said again.

“Endurance! That’s the word!” Mrs. Idile said as she shook her head. She pursed her lips afterwards.

Mummy pastor!

What does she know about endurance?

Some people just find it easy. The only thing she probably endured in her marriage was complaints about salt, not being enough or too much in a meal.

Very funny woman talking about endurance!

“We still have many coming in to see us today and the time isn’t on our side. We have closed your file and we want both of you to really go and pray with all fervency.” Mr. Lawal said with a large, comforting smile.

“My dear Bro Jean, I can feel your pain as I have been in your shoes. My husband left me for another woman and there were pressures here and there that I should remarry but I thank God for my pastor and his wife. Oh what a great specimen of marriage for our generation...” Mrs. Hallow paused and smiled, shaking her head in obvious appreciation while Mrs. Idile smiled too.

A pure, sweet smile!

“My husband is back to me. I have forgiven him and he is now a child of God. You would never know that something like that had ever happened between us if you see us together” Mrs. Hallow completed her own side of consolation.

“And who knows if your wound had actually been opened now because your wife is on the way and so that when she comes, she would find something to nurse, thereby, strengthening your marriage?” Mr. Hosanna explained too.

I looked at Jean on the floor and smiled bitterly.

He was shaking his head vigorously as tears streamed down his face.

Does any of their advice make any sense to him at all?

“It would be hard but that’s why we have Jesus. He can help. Wait for your wife and pray fervently for her soul. Who knows, you may save a soul from hell!” Mrs. Hallow said further.

“And you Sister Precious...”

That was my name right?

It was my turn to be lambasted for almost leading a new convert of mine astray even when I knew the truth. Right?

It was Mrs. Idile.

“My sister, God is never too late. For some people, he comes at twenty years of age, some thirty, some forty, some fifty, even, sixty! He’s never late! How old are you? I am sure you are in your mid-twenties or thereabout. Why would you rush? Do you know what marriage means at all? Marriage is a padlock with its key thrown away! Do you want to miss it? This one that we can still enjoy beautiful renditions of songs through you, if you are sad and unstable in your home, would that still be possible? Sister Precious, are you praying at all?” Mrs. Idile went on and on and I was daunted.

There was an absolute silence.

That was from her heart- deep!

I was speechless.

I realized that I hadn’t said a word since it all started and I looked for something to say.

“I love him...” I was saying when she cut me short again.

She was never violent or lousy.

Mrs. Idile!

What is the matter?

“Love, you say? Any sign whatsoever you have, be it vision, dream, deep love, revelation and all, should still be weighed on the Word of God! Is God saying something to me in His Word about this lady or guy? See, just like our speech could be influenced by the devil, our emotions can also be manipulated and used against God’s Will for our lives” She explained and I looked at the spilt air conditioner.

It was working perfectly well. In fact, 16 degrees Celsius!

Why then is she sweating- profusely?

Is it more than what was being discussed?

I was really being blessed by all she was saying but I was worried about her on the other side.

Is all well with her?

“Some marriages in the church are camouflages. They wear same outfits all the time, they seem to hug and peck and fan, wiping each other’s faces in the church and all and you feel, ‘God give me a happy home like lagbaja’s!’ Do you know what is underneath? Do you?” She banged the table as the pimples of sweat on her face dropped on the table before her.

The vicinity was very solemn.

I looked around me and realized that everyone was taking what she was saying as just being a concerned Pastor’s wife’s advice. But I saw beyond that! Something I would never want to believe myself!

Hurt!

I saw deep hurt in her face!

Jesus!

What exactly is the matter?

Just then, the dream flashed back to my head and I shook it off once more.

It can't be real! It can never be real!

“God will have mercy” Mrs. Hallow said, obviously touched by Mrs. Idile’s ‘speech’

“Please, you both should go and pray more” Mr. Hosanna said too.

“You can go and may God make your ways golden” Mr. Lawal said and Jean stood up, supporting himself with a chair.

“Thanks everyone” He said silently, moving towards the door.

“Thanks” Was all I could say as I approached the door too.

“Sister Precious...” Mrs. Idile’s voice called out to me. I turned back and met her face.

So tender once more- smiling.

“See me in my house tomorrow by 4.pm” She said and I nodded.

“Ok ma”

“I love you so much” She said further and my heart stirred.

She smiled again- that very sad smile!

My heart missed a beat!

Something is just not right!

6

6.

“Welcome ma”

My gardener greeted me as I parked the car, the lawn-mower he was using, making noise as if it was a tractor!

I didn't want to have a headache but my lawn actually needed trimming. The other staff members had left their lawns unattended to but I couldn't. I loved orderliness, beauty and neatness. Since the state government had refused to renovate our quarters for us, I got some money and had the painting done, the plumbing works attended to and then, the lawn!

“Well done Mr. Bright. How work?” I greeted as I pulled the boot lever under my car seat.

“Work fine o madam. It's just this sun” He complained and I smiled. I looked at the back seat and took a bottle of orange juice. It was very cold.

“Catch this” I said and he looked behind him. His face shone as he saw the drink. With open arms, he received it as I threw it and then he shouted for joy.

“It's chilling” He said and I smiled.

Mr. Bright and his ‘wonderful’ English!

I opened the boot and brought out the hamper inside it- an Easter gift for senior staff members in my department. I was privileged to be among.

I took my veggies basket too and walked towards the door.

Gosh! It’s already two o’clock!

“See me in my house tomorrow by 4.pm”

Mrs. Idile’s voice rang in my ears.

“I really have to be fast o.” I said. I was really hungry as I had a really weird appetite while at work.

I had stumbled on a movie where they were eating coconut rice and an idea came into my head. On my way home, I had bought cucumbers, cabbage, leeks, tomatoes, fresh paper, my best mackerel fish, and some coconuts.

I bought enough coconuts because my hair seemed to be losing its vitality. I wanted to make enough coconut oil myself since the homemade is better than the adulterated ones being sold. The shaft from the coconut oil and the coconut water was what I would use to cook.

Yippee!

I was already salivating!

“When I am done doing all those, I will bath and set out for pastor’s house.” I muttered to myself.

Few minutes later, the aroma of my specially prepared coconut rice filled the house. I looked at the bowl where I had poured the coconut oil.

“That should be cold by now!”

I quickly sent a 'BRB' to everyone I was chatting with on Facebook and WhatsApp- I really loved chatting.

I poured the coconut oil into different bottles and set them aside. Then I turned off my gas cooker and opened the pot. I wafted the aroma in and it really was indomitable!

Oops, 3.30pm!

I ran into the bathroom and richly soaped my body. As the shower rained down the thin streams of water upon my hefty body, I felt a tickling sensation and I chuckled repeatedly. I was somewhat happy- but about what?

I had really had a lot to do that very day and though I was fatigued, I had to go and see my pastor's wife for whatever it was she wanted to see me for.

What could she want to see me for?

My happiness waned as I jumped off the bathroom into my bedroom where I performed the normal beauty rituals and wore a very cool colored evening gown and simple slippers.

“Mummy will join you shortly Sister Precious” Abigail, the housemaid told me and I smiled at her.

The best treble part singer in our church!

“Do you mind a bottle of Charis wine?” She asked and I nodded

“No, I don’t mind please” I said and it was soon delivered in a tray. Not too long to after that, the phone on one of the tables rang and Abigail picked the receiver.

“Hello ma...it’s alright ma.” She said and looked at me.

“Mummy said you should come into her room upstairs” She said and I looked surprised.

What!

Me?!

Who am I in that church?

What is my post or position?

What have I done to deserve entering the room of my pastor's wife?

Oh, that would be a very delightful honor for me!

If the other parts of the house could be this beautiful and gigantic, I wonder what the bedroom would look like.

The staircases leading upstairs were sparkly neat!

I was told to take off my shoes and I slipped into some furry slippers before stepping on those staircases.

“God, I’ve got to be rich o! Lord, I ask for the riches of Job but not his sufferings o abeg.” I muttered and thereafter laughed at myself for making that kind of ‘greedy’ prayer request.

I knocked the door.

“Please come in” I heard the voice and I opened the door.

Oh, the sight!

The room was indescribable!

What!

I wanted to run outside and confirm that I was still in the same house I was just coming from but I maintained my cool.

The room was disorganized. The settees were not well arranged and there were clothes hanging on the chairs and around the necks of the gigantic wardrobes. Beautiful shoes were scattered all over the floor and I gasped.

“Sister Precious” I heard that voice and I was geared back to reality. I was lost in my own world of irritation that I had forgotten why I was there.

I looked at the bed where the sound was coming from and I almost ran back!

“Mummy!” I called out, really surprised. Mummy Pastor smiled sadly.

“Good evening” She greeted but I couldn’t reply instantly. My brain just couldn’t comprehend what was up!

I couldn’t hide my shock and despair.

Her head was neatly scraped- totally! Like a widow in her mourning mood!

Jesus!

The gown she was putting on was black and she didn’t look like the normal mummy I knew. Tears gathered in my eyes as I looked at her.

“Mummy!” I called out in a heart-renting way again as I ran to her and fell on the bed, holding her hands as I wept.

“Mummy, what’s wrong?” I asked in a very sorrowful way. She smiled but I saw the tears welling up in her eyes.

“I wanted someone to clear up my room for me. And I chose you” She said calmly and I broke out into a serious fit of crying.

What!

Mummy needed help to clear up her room?

Oh my God!

I scanned the room and I cried again.

Whatever it is that is happening to Mummy Pastor must be very serious!

Oh my goodness!

Oh my God!

I looked at her.

She wasn't crying.

She had tears in her eyes but they were not falling. She looked really worn!

I stood up, removed my long evening gown and thank God my undies were moderate enough, I set out to work even as I cried '*Oh my God!*' repeatedly.

After rearranging the furniture and returning the books to where they were supposed to be, I hung the neat clothes and dumped the dirty ones in the large laundry baskets. I saw a vacuum cleaner.

There is even a vacuum cleaner and mummy still couldn't clean her room? Oh my!

I ignited the machine and it swallowed all the dirt on the floor for me.

I went to the bed and faced Mummy Pastor.

“Mummy, please, let me lay the bed” I said and she sighed, held the pole on which the bed lamp hung with great difficulty and then stood up. I saw that protruding tummy.

The dream flashed back to my memory!

She's pregnant for real! Oh my God!

I pulled a plastic chair for her and she sat in it with care.

As I pulled the large, heavy white-turned brown duvet off the bed, I saw already used tissue papers. Some were very dry; some were still wet.

I dumped the duvet into one of the laundry baskets and the tissue papers fell to the ground- they could make a rug!

She must have cried loads and from the look of things, it didn't just start yesterday!

By the time I was done with the laying of the bed and all, the five large laundry baskets and the dustbin were filled to the brim.

“Carry everything and drop them outside the room. Abigail will come and get them outside. This is the first time anybody would enter this room apart from my husband. Even my children are not allowed to. I just needed an urgent help and my spirit pointed at you. Thanks so much.” She said and I could only nod as I did as I was instructed.

I then pulled the curtains, dusted the window panes, sprayed the air-freshener and switched on the split air conditioner while I wore my gown again. I couldn’t even think of entering the bathroom for a wash. I was aghast.

She smiled. I shook my head and my jaws dropped.

“Mummy, it’s time to get back into bed” I said again and she tried to stand up but couldn’t. I went closer to her and pulled her up.

Oh how light she felt in my hands!

As she hid under the newly laid duvet, she signaled for me to sit down on the chair adjoining the bed which I did.

I was not happy!

What exactly is happening?

What's the smiling pretense?

Does she think I am a baby?

“Sister Precious, could I perhaps call you Precious?” She asked humbly and my heart softened. I forced a smile.

“Definitely ma” I replied and she smiled again.

“Thanks my daughter.” She said and looked into my face. I looked into her eyes as well.

Pains!

Despair!

Loneliness!

Misery!

Despondency!

That was all I saw- No hope whatsoever!

She took my hand and though her hand seemed beautiful and fresh on the outside, it was scaly as she touched me.

“It seems that you know something about me, Precious” She said and I was shocked

“Ma, I don’t know anything o, nothing!” I retorted quickly.

What is she saying?

“That Sunday, you were shouting my name, looking for me all over the church. You even screamed ‘She’s alive’ when you saw me. That?” She looked at me questionably and I shook my head.

“Ma...” I was saying when she cut me short.

“During the marriage committee session, while I was talking, why did you look into my eyes so penetratingly? Tell me if you know something please. I need to know” She squeezed my hand as she pleaded, tears streaming down her face.

Oh mine!

What do I have to say now? I really don't know anything at all.

“Precious, when you look into my eyes as you do, what do you see? Please tell me. I am sure you know something. Tell me exactly what you see that others don't. What you see that my fellow women leaders don't. What exactly you see that even my children don't. What you see that my...my...even my...my hus...husb...husband doesn't see” She pleaded further, stuttering greatly and I shook my head regrettably.

That's it!

Exactly what I wanted to know!

Something is very wrong and no one knows- not even my pastor!

But what's it?

This suspense is killing me Lord Jesus!

She smiled again and I could not help but speak my mind.

“Mummy, for real, all I see is fear, loneliness, frustration, pain, hurt, despondency, dejection, depression. All I see on a closer look is negativity mum! That’s all I see and I don’t understand why it should be so” I blurted out. I was tired of seeing her that way. She looked so weird.

Even her haircut was scary- bare!

Her big tummy!

Her untidy room!

Her hurtful face!

Her smile!

Oh how much beautiful and expensive attires cover the problems of so many people!

We only look at their attires and envy them.

We look at the hats and say, 'oh beautiful!' Not knowing that a sorrowful bare head hides underneath.

Lord Jesus!

“Thank you for saying your mind my daughter. Thanks, thanks, thanks o, thank you, thanks” The more she said the words slowly, the more they tugged at my emotions. The more I wanted to know where the problem laid and put an end to it.

“Mummy, what is the problem with you? Talk to me. I can handle it. I might not be able to proffer solutions to the problems but I can help share in the burden. Talk to me ma” I pestered and she smiled.

“I will talk to you and that was why I chose you. But...” She was saying when the phone rang and she picked the receiver.

“Yes Abigail...good...lead him upstairs...thanks love” She said and dropped the receiver. She looked at me and smiled again.

“You have to go now Precious. I will see you some other time. I need to attend to someone now. Its urgent.” She said as she unwound baby wipes and gave them to me. She took some too and wiped her face. I did the same too.

What could the problem be?

What?

What?

What?

As the ‘what’ questions filled my head, I could not think straight anymore.

Is she dying?

That would be scary because she is still very young!

Where is her husband?

As I fumbled with the baby wipes in my hands and descended the stairs, my shoulders hit someone who was going upstairs and I just bowed in apology as I walked away.

Something struck me hard and turned back to look at who had just walked past me.

He was at the door...that stature...oh how familiar!

I racked my brain so tirelessly but it didn't come to my mind who it was.

As I turned the ignition key of my car, I relived the stature again and oh yes!

Tony!

What is Tony doing in there?

Tony is just a serving corps member nah...exactly why would she send me away because she wanted to meet Tony.

"I am sorry. I just seemed to find out. A medical doctor would just know."

Those words rung in my head like I had never heard them before.

Tony is a medical doctor!

Oh geez!

The dream relived and I remembered how Tony bent to examine the dying Mrs. Idile in the dream.

Can that be the meaning?

The dream is all about this?

Wait!

Or has Mrs. Idile been shown that Tony is my husband and she wants to put in good words for me so he would pray about it?

I shook that idea off!

How childish that thought of mine was! She obviously wouldn't do that!

Oh my God!

I dug my hands into my hair again, sighed so deeply, turned the ignition key and as I drove off, I remembered my coconut rice!

“Rice, forgive me o” I said loudly, my tongue turning sour.

I had lost my appetite.

7

7.

Just praise me in advance.

Those were the words that woke me in the very hours of the day and I just had to forgo my sleep and start thanking Him.

I had woken up with a start and there was a kind of peppery sensation in my chest.

I was so shocked and surprised that I felt that way because I had not taken beans or its products during the day neither had I eaten heavily at night. Even if I did, I wasn't suffering from heartburn or asthma so I wondered what the problem could be.

Throwing my beautiful, furry cover cloth aside, I stood up from the bed and scurried to the water dispenser. I pressed the 'hot' button because only hot substance could clear the rubbish that had gathered in my heart- I thought

What is this oh God?

Are you trying to say something to me?

As the cup got filled up with the hot water, I looked over at the wall clock.

Just 2.30a.m.?

As I gulped the water down my throat and it burnt me right where it mattered, I looked up at the ceiling.

Let me even give a thought to my life right now.

Does my life even have direction at all?

Does it even seem as if I am making headway at all?

Something whispered to me so convincingly but quietly-

'Count your blessings and it will surprise you what the Lord had done for you!'

As I gulped the water down, it felt like I was gulping freshly ground pepper down my throat! The sensation did not subside. In fact, it became worse!

Something was tightening round my neck- for real!

Jesus! My Lord Jesus!

Is this death? Is this what it means to die?

I am but a child. Why do I feel this way oh God?

Why?

I dropped the cup on the water dispenser and dragged myself back to the bed- my eyes dilating really badly.

The hold on my neck tightened and my eyes became teary. As I gasped for breath, almost surrendering to whatever force it was, I fell to my knees, holding my neck in anguish and desperation.

“God have mercy” I cried out on my knees, my voice already going croaky.

“You are in the right position to pray!”

The voice was distinct and I wasn't sure if that was God or my conscience.

Pray?

To pray and this is what I've got?

"That's the mistake you make daughter. When you pray, you are not doing God any good but yourself! Who holds your life in His hands?"

"It's God. Only God does" I said weakly

"Who can kill both the body and the soul?"

"It's God alone" I moaned

"All the leadership positions you have held since your primary school days were made possible because of whom?"

"It's because of God o. Who am I? Who am I?"

I started crying.

The realization suddenly dawned on me!

God had woken me up in the night to pray and because of the pains, I had had time to reflect over my life and conclude that I had really achieved nothing in life which God found wrong.

*“If I had woken you up without you having any discomfort, would you have prayed?
Would you find yourself crying and praying fervently as you do now? You say you desire to hear Me speak expressly, yet you make no time to talk to mMe!”*

“No sir. Oh my Lord! I am sorry. I never realized that I had created no time out to hear you. I am sorry Lord” I cried still.

God is speaking to me!

It felt so real!

It had never ever happened to me before and I was thrilled.

I listened and listened again but I heard no voice again. The discomfort had gone and I was wide awake.

I started to cry.

I really hadn't taken God seriously in my life before that time- just the ceremonial devotion thing and ceremonial activities of going to the church and all that.

I had always had almost everything on a platter of gold- everything I had achieved had been in an easy way.

I graduated with the best WAEC and NECO results in the whole federation and I had been on different forms of scholarships till I graduated from the University of Kent, Canterbury as the second best student.

I proceeded to Harvard University on recommendation and by merit and afterwards decided to have another Master's degree because I felt time was still on my side and I wanted more certificates and all- I had that at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana- on scholarship again!

My parents had really never spent money on education for me. I had always been their pride. I felt I was just being favored but as the Holy Spirit ministered to me, it was obvious that I had never ascribed all the glory to God-even for once!

It escaped my mind that every little success that a child of God gets is as a result of the backing of the Almighty God and that we are supposed to send the glory back to Him for all He'd done.

I started all over again, thanking Him for my past successes, my parents, my siblings, my students, and oh mine mine, I had enough things to thank God for!

It was really shocking that I had that much to thank Him for when I thought I had never experienced His touch in a long time.

...and oh the peace that followed!

The joy from the over two hours' thanksgiving prayer session I had lingered for hours as everyone could notice it. I wore a very beautiful smile throughout the day- it was like a permanent plastic surgery had been performed on my face!

“I will go to the school’s studio to have a photo-shoot after the school activities because this smile sure fits me” I found myself thinking.

I had just ended a lecture with the 300Level Students and as I left the class, I hung my bag around my neck and bounced out of the Social Sciences block.

“Aunty Tomboy looks really glad today o”

That was what my very sharp ears heard as I walked down the park to get my car.

“Abi, she has falling in love ni?” Another voice asked and I heard a chorus of scornful laughter.

“Love ke. Abeg jhur...the only thing I like about the woman is that she sabi teach. Ah, if it’s that one, I give it to her. But romance, love, marriage, mba! They no go fit am. She no fit”
Another person said

My heart started racing as I struggled within my heart about what to do.

Should I look back at the students and shout at them to stop it?

No!

That wouldn't be good because if I should sight them, I would so hate them uncontrollably!

Should I hear more from them?

That won't be nice!

It's better to just intensify my footsteps and disappear from them.

But I didn't obey that instinct. I wanted to have more of their stories.

"Who does she remind you of?" One asked again

"Hmmm, let's say Serena Williams. But she is even bigger than Serena!" Another answered

"Wow! That is very correct! I had never even thought about it that much. If she can at least cut down on her weight, even if she can't be as beautiful as Serena, she can manage. Abi?" The third person said.

“Cut down wetin? Can’t you see her arms? She is very built, meaning that she definitely works out. All these hard jobs, you know? Weight lifting and all. If wrk out no dey work foram, wetin go work?” One was saying again and I balled my fist in anger.

Jesus!

See how these children are finishing me- right in my presence!

I could hear them very clearly and they were not even making attempts to reduce their voices.

Geez!

Work out?

Weight lifting?

What do they know about me?

Is that how bad I now look?

I felt so murdered. Those were students that would show me so much love in the class. To think that they could murder my stature so brutally tugged at my sanity.

Nawa o!

“So, except she becomes a baby mama or she marries James Bond o, forget marriage jhur. Who wants to marry big hefty mama and call her wife?” They said again and I was mad.

I walked really fast towards my car, opened and entered.

My head was in a mess.

There were stuffs like cobwebs hanging as curtains in the room of my head and I couldn't think straight.

I placed my head on the steering and it took loud, repeated knocks from some passers-by at my car door to raise my head up again.

What is the problem?

My head that was on the steering had caused the horn to be blaring loudly and the parking lot was in disarray as all eyes was on me.

I could only bow and wave in apology!

The joy that I had started the day with had melted away like a candle beside the fire!

I need to just leave this place- but where to?

I was confused and afraid and discouraged but I didn't know the right thing to do. Tears gathered in my eyes.

Why am I so big?

I zipped my school bag and brought out my hand mirror, opened and checked myself out.

And I am not that bad o. See everything nah, I am so beautiful!

Or is it a full mirror I need?

I turned the ignition key and drove off to the bank beside the Accounting Department.

“Let me have a look at myself in a large mirror because it seems my bathroom mirror has lost its potency and accuracy.” I sighed, unbelted myself and stepped out of the car.

The bank building was glassy hence, I got the opportunity to use the ATM and have a good look at myself also. There was no queue so I moved to an ATM slot and stayed in front of it.

Geez!

I am R-E-A-L-L-Y fat!

See my chest, oh my goodness!

Oh my God! I look like a baboon! Like an orangutan! Like a chimpanzee!

Geez! What do I do?

I withdrew some cash and returned to the car. I quickly switched on my Wi-Fi and then my phone's data connection.

I was going to search for her!

What was that name again?

I racked my brain so much.

Oops, my brain! Are you getting old that you this brain no longer wants to obey me?

Yes! Serena Williams.

Google search loading...

I clicked on the images and looked at her.

She was exactly my look-alike but the beautiful version of me- her weight wasn't that out of control!

I started saving some of the images of the gowns she wore to special occasions.

Even if they were not too decent to my liking, I would make mine decent! Done and dusted, I smiled to myself as I adjusted the rear mirror.

My plastic surgery smile had disappeared so there was no need for any photo-shoot. It was time to change the course!

I decided to go to the boutique to pick up some beautiful gown and then storm the Gym Centre!

I zoomed away with such great alacrity and determination because contrary to those students' prediction, I wanted marriage- a very beautiful, romantic, godly, heaven-bound marriage at that!

God help me oooo.

I ran the treadmill for like ten minutes non-stop before I slowed down a bit to catch my breath. I wiped my sweaty face with the towel hanging round my neck and looking up, I saw him standing, gazing at me with his mouth twisted to the side- Tony!

My heart skipped a beat!

What is he doing here?

I obviously would not like him seeing me all sweaty and manlier in the new sportswear that I had just got as I got registered in the gym center.

What is he doing here?

Just then, still mouth agape, he started clapping.

What for?

“Bravo!” He exclaimed as he clapped on, walking closer to me.

“Good evening” I said, smiling sheepishly, wishing the ground could open and swallow me up.

The students’ comments were obviously getting at me. I felt inferior and unworthy.

“Good evening ma” He said, smiling too.

What’s with the ‘ma’? I was almost getting furious. He saw it and smiled.

“I was only joking but really, you are my boss o. See how you handled a treadmill so perfectly like a man!” He said, still smiling.

Even you Tony!

What’s with this man thing that everybody is talking about today?

It’s not fair that Tony is saying this. Can’t he just keep quiet and not allow someone feel bad continually like this?

It’s just not fair!

He smiled and came over.

“Would you love to train me on how to use the treadmill?” He asked, looking deep into my eyes so much that they hurt.

“And who says I am a gym director or something?” I spat out

I hope that was not too rude.

“I just love this stature of yours and now I know the secret. You work out!” He said, smiling widely.

“I don’t work out. Since I left the NYSC Orientation Camp about 6 years ago, I have never done any rigorous exercise.” I retorted

Get that into your skull before insulting me!

“Wow! That’s so beautiful then. We have very few females that have this kind of stature and for real, it’s wonderful” He said and I looked into his face.

Is he joking right now?

Just trying to console me right?

“Really?” I asked to be sure and he smiled.

“I am serious. You just need a little trimming down and you would be oh my goodness, gorgeous! The treadmill choice is just fine” He said further and I smiled.

It was looking real.

He seems to like me, right?

“Thanks” I managed to say and he smiled.

“It’s okay. I have a question please” He said and I looked up at him

“What?” I asked anxiously

“How old are you?” It was so sharp and concise.

What a blunt guy!

“Are you for real? Asking for my age out of the blues? Did you ask with the intent of receiving answers from me?” I asked and he pouted childishly.

“Please one, please two, please three” He said, childishly and I couldn’t help but laugh out loudly.

What a very playful guy!

“Tell me yours and I will make my addition” I said and his eyes widened.

“Addition? Oh, because I look this small shae? I definitely am older than you” He said and I looked into his face and chuckled.

I was beginning to like him more.

He saw me as younger than him and not his mama...Nice one!

“I guess everyone can see that underneath your muscular genetic build-up lies your very young age” He added and I blushed.

This guy is sweet!

“Ok, guess my age” I said, sweetly and he looked at me, squinting and biting his lower lips.

“Hmmm, you would be 25 in few months’ time?” He asked and my mouth came open widely.

“What! You have been stalking me?” I almost screamed.

“Stalk? Wasn’t it just an innocent gentlemanly guess I made as instructed by you? God does not lie, does He?”

“Of course not!” I replied.

“If I wanted to know your age, I could just ask God and He would tell me, right?” He asked again but I was speechless.

Ask God?

What does that mean?

Why should he be so concerned about my age that he would ask God?

“I didn’t say I asked God o. Don’t get me wrong. I just guessed. Now, let’s treadmill a bit before I leave. I am on call this evening.” He said.

“Your age?” I asked and he smiled as he settled on the belt.

“Just call me egbon” He said and I chuckled.

“For real!” I said, trying to conceal my excitement.

He’s older than me!

Sweet sweet, oh sweet!

Joyfully, I took a hold of the machine horns, pressed the button and on and on, I ran on the spot.

I've got to shed off this fat so that I would look gorgeous for myself!

Or Tony?

...the only man that has seen the best in me and has voiced it out!

“Oh my God, if it is Tony, just speak to him about me Lord. I still don't know how to hear You well. Most times when I really sit, kneel or lie down to hear You speak to me, the only thing I feel rushing into my ears is air! Nothing more!”

“Would you be coming to the choir practice tomorrow?” He asked as he slowed down in his exercise.

“I don't think so” I said and he pouted

“Are you avoiding somebody?” I asked and I threw my head up in the air

This guy's spiritual antenna is sharp!

“Yes I am” I replied and he chuckled

“Me?” He asked again and I almost fell off the treadmill as I held my breath.

How could someone be so blunt, huh?

He laughed.

“Hmmm, I am really not a scary person o. I always enjoyed choir practice whenever you are around” He said and my heart started pumping more than required plasma.

I always did avoid people that are very unapologetically blunt. How could someone that I had never spoken a word to in that choir room say such a thing?

Tony was always the counselor that choristers, especially sisters run to after service. He would be seen smiling happily with them and explaining things to them like a teacher. He never even seemed to notice me!

So what was he saying now?

“I am talking gibberish?” He asked and I nodded in affirmation. He laughed.

“You remember the day we had the choir concert, right?” He asked and I nodded.

I remembered pretty well. He had performed a very beautiful duet with Abigail, Mummy Pastor’s housemaid and it was the bomb!

“What shirt did I even wear that day?” He asked, walking on the treadmill while I still jogged.

“You wore a green shirt on a black trouser at the beginning but you thereafter changed to a white shirt and a blue trouser. At the end, it was one Ankara shirt you wore on a jeans trouser” I explained on and on, gasping for breath as I breathed heavily.

He stopped on the belt.

“Did you notice the cuff links I used that day?” He asked again, maintaining a serious face as if to remember something important.

I didn’t need to rack my brain before spitting the response out.

“Yes. It was different cuff links sha. You used silver ones at first and then ruby colored ones afterwards with matching ties” I said again.

When I did not hear any sound, I stopped on the belt too and looked at him.

He looked really dazed, mouth suspended.

“What?” I asked, quite shocked, breathing heavily from the long period of exercise.

He looked on at me, still dazed.

“Now, who is stalking who?” He asked, still looking dazed.

Hot blood ran through my veins from head to toes and I was covered in embarrassment.

I scrambled for words and found none.

He tested me and caught me red-handed even to his own amazement.

Oh my God!

Should I get angry?

Or mad?

Or cry?

What is the best thing to do right now dear Savior?

I watched as he gently walked away.

I stepped down from the treadmill and sat on a raised part of the gym center, my head bowed low.

I felt a touch on my shoulder not too long after.

“Take” Tony said.

I looked up to find two bottles of water in his hands.

That was exactly what I needed.

Should I collect it?

No!

I looked into his face and his urging smile made me to constipate immediately.

I collected it hurriedly and gulped down almost half.

There was a grave silence between us.

What is on his mind right now?

His phone rang and he received it.

“Yes Abigail...what? Jesus!... do you know what you will do now? Just use a pillow to raise her head. Will join you in a jiffy...oh Lord Jesus!” He exclaimed, cleaned his face with the towel round his neck and looked at me.

“I am sorry. I’ve got to go”

“Isn’t that Mummy Pastor?” I asked and he nodded.

“Yes she is.” He said as he walked to the door hurriedly.

I followed after too.

What could be wrong with Mummy Pastor today dear Savior?

What?

My phone rang.

It was mummy pastor!

“Hello mummy”

“This is Abigail ma.”

“Yes dear, is anything the matter?” I asked

“It’s mummy o and daddy is not around” Her shaky voice rang in my ears.

Is she crying?

I dropped the call.

“Was that Abigail?” Tony asked and I nodded.

“Let’s use your car. Mine isn’t here now” He said and I nodded.

I didn’t even know that he had a car.

Tony drove with such a great speed that I could only pray for God's mercies and a safe journey.

"Should I call the pastor?" I asked Tony and he shot me a 'one in town' look.

"No please." He replied and I was shocked.

What does he know that I don't?

There was a flash in my brain at that point and I remembered that he was the one I saw climbing the stairs to attend to Mummy Pastor the last time I visited.

He must know what is wrong with her.

"Tony, what exactly is wrong with mummy?" I asked and he shook his head.

"Whatever it is requires our urgent prayers for God's intervention" He said and concentrated on the driving.

Oh what a curt answer!

There really must be a problem and that exactly was what I didn't understand.

God, please intervene and keep mummy pastor for us o.

Visit her marriage and her family oh God because I really do not understand anything that is going on round me now.

Everything seemed blurry but I knew that it was just a matter of time and all would be clear to me!

8

8.

Tony drove inside the Idile's compound as if being pursued.

We alighted from the car and ran straight to the front door.

My heart was beating so loudly that it didn't need a microphone before it would be amplified!

What will greet my eyes when I enter?

Jesus!

We pressed the ring and waited shortly before it was opened to us.

“Good afternoon” Abigail greeted us, a faint smile on her lips.

She can still smile?

Even though the smile was faint, I was not expecting that kind of expression from her. I had expected that she would be wailing or sad or shocked especially from her reaction on the phone the other time.

I checked Tony's face too and read the same confusion.

We stepped into the sitting room and I saw a big bowl of half-eaten popcorn and a medium bowl of ice-cream on the glassy stool with the cool 3D images from the television-Barbie Series.

So, Abigail can still watch cartoon, munch popcorn and scoop ice-cream after calling to deliver such news?

Wow!

What then is wrong?

“Where is mummy?” Tony asked and I jolted back to reality.

“She is in the second sitting room. She is with daddy.” She explained, coyly.

Daddy?

She saw the question in my face and smiled.

“Daddy came in the same minute I called you. It was a coincidence” She explained.

“But you said he wasn’t around” I retorted.

“That was what mummy and I thought” She said, fumbling with her hands.

How could even mummy think that her husband was away while he is around?

Are they that distant from each other?

Huh?!!!

And wait!

Why is Abigail shy?

This is a girl that speaks with me with an open mind and all. Why is she being coy and shy and irritatingly slow this afternoon?

I looked at Tony and realized that he was sweating under his nose.

Is he feeling uncomfortable?

Leaving all that aside, I cleared my throat and faced Tony.

“Can we go inside now?” I asked, twisting my mouth to a side.

Whatever it was that was causing the atmosphere to be that way, I didn’t know but I obviously was not comfortable with it.

Abigail widened her nose.

“I think mummy will want only Bro. Tony inside.” She said and I paused to look at Tony’s face.

What is all this about?

“I think I will want her inside with me ma!” Tony said, stressing the ‘ma’ with his eyes widened.

Abigail looked somber.

What is happening between this two?

Exactly what?

Tony held my right hand with a sense of authority and ownership and calmly but strongly pulled me with him as we left the sitting room for the other one.

I was more than dazed!

What is he doing?

Why is he behaving like this?

It felt like I was in between two lovers.

Are they in a relationship and he is using me to make Abigail jealous?

I started burning in my heart so greatly.

As I moaned from inside, the heat in my heart like volcano erupted and burst into my face and my face became bombarded with small beads of sweat.

I snatched my hands from his in anger.

“What is the meaning of all this? Exactly what? Am I meant to be a football passed from one player to the other? Do you even know that I am a grown woman at all? Why are you doing all this?” I blurted out suddenly.

Did I sound jealous?

Did I sound anxious?

Are those questions enough or should I add more?

Why are they toiling with my emotions?

Why, why, why???

I was furious and mad, closing my eyes as I spoke bitterly.

He paused and then he smiled.

“Are you kinda jealous?” He asked with his nose raised, his face clouded in a funny look.

Blood rushed into my face.

“What!” I exclaimed in a husky voice.

He chuckled.

“Don’t worry. I don’t like Abigail like that” He said, smiling.

My heart dropped. I wanted to scream loudly and clearly into his face that “Who cares?”

But I do!

While I was still trying to put words together, he opened the door leading inside and stepped in.

He looked back and saw me still staring into space.

He smiled and pulled me by my right hand.

I slapped his hand off and hissed silently.

Bad boy!

Pastor was seated on the settee when we entered and on a closer look, mummy pastor was asleep on his laps.

She was sleeping peacefully, both of her hands held his knees as if her life depended on that.

I was touched!

In that instant, I forgave the pastor all of the ills I had against him.

He kept on rubbing her bare head with his hands. He did it with love and care and my heart leapt for joy.

This is how it is meant to be!

“Good evening sir” Tony greeted

“Good evening Bro Tony” He replied, smiling broadly.

“Good evening sir” I greeted too, genuflecting respectfully.

“Hmmm, our bride-to-be!” He exclaimed, laughing heartily. I smiled too.

I didn’t understand what he meant at all.

I didn't know if it was just a cliché that adults use or if he meant that my hands have been searched for in my marriage by some man.

I didn't want any costly assumption but I kept mute. I was happy that they were looking just cool together and didn't want to spoil the mood.

“Daddy, I feel like taking a shot of both of you. You look so lovingly godly together” I said.

I didn't even care if my adjective order was correct. All I wanted was a way of conveying my utmost gratitude for such romantic representation of a beautiful godly home.

Pastor laughed.

Oh how handsome he looked!

Enjoyment galore!

“Of course you can my dear daughter” He said and I smiled as I quickly brought out my digital camera.

This will be good for Facebook.

I racked my brain for the umpteenth time for the best title or post that could match the pictures.

After getting some really good shots, I smiled to myself and gave a thumbs up to daddy who laughed out in response.

Tony wore a small smile as he watched on in silence.

“This must be the first time you are visiting our home” The pastor said and I shook my head.

It must have skipped mummy’s mind to tell him.

Didn’t he see that the mouse hole of a bedroom is now sparkling clean?

“This is the second time sir. The first time, mummy wasn’t feeling too well, so I came around to do some things for her” I went on and after I stopped, I wondered who asked me for a long tale.

“Oh, I see! My wife doesn’t rest o. She doesn’t at all. All was as a result of stress. She is better now. You can see her sweating profusely. All fever is gone in the Mighty Name of Jesus.” He said and I smiled broadly.

So it was even fever! Wow! But the fever must have been really severe o.

I looked at Tony and his face was glued to the television as if he was in another world.

“But daddy, mummy has been looking really pale for some time now. It isn’t good for her especially in her present state of health” I said and he looked at me, shocked.

“What state?” He asked

So he doesn’t know?

He doesn’t know that his wife is pregnant?

Oh no!

My doubts started resurfacing.

“Isn’t mummy pregnant?” I asked and he laughed really hard.

“Pregnant at what age? Pregnant at 55? Oh no!” He laughed again.

So, what is in the protruding tummy?

Exactly what?

He touched her stomach gently and Mummy Pastor flinched.

“Mummy started some sit-up exercises and stopped all of a sudden. This is the aftermath. When you discontinue a routine of exercises, something like this is bound to happen.” He explained and I nodded.

I became confused instead of being convinced. I was not new to exercises and sit-ups had been my best bet for a flat tummy.

Even though I stopped for a while and my tummy became enlarged, Mummy Pastor's own looked extra-blown that it felt like there was a whole baby in there.

It is well o.

“Ok sir” I replied when I realized that I had not given an answer all this while.

He smiled again.

“Please pray well o. I want you to bring your sweetheart to me soon o” He said and I smiled.

“Ok sir. The Lord will do it in His time sir” I said and he smiled.

“Ogagun” He called out to Tony and he looked back, smiling sweetly.

“Yes daddy” He replied, calmly.

“I am awaiting your MMR soon o” He said again and Tony laughed as if it was more than what the pastor had said.

This guy tho!- so weird!

The pastor laughed too.

“I am serious o. I am telling you now. Better be prayerful and bring her sharp sharp” He said further, still smiling.

“My MMR will come see you daddy. She’s been so busy. That’s why I haven’t introduced her yet” Tony said and I gulped.

He has someone?

MMR?

What’s that?

What Tony called me in the dream!

MMR!

What does that even mean?

I cleared my throat.

“Daddy, what does MMR mean?” I asked and the men both laughed.

“Bush sister!” Tony said and I gave him a stern knowing look.

“If I don’t know something, I can’t ask again? Huh?” I was almost getting angry.

Bush girl? Me? Does this guy really know who I am and what I have been able to achieve in life?

It’s obvious he doesn’t know. If he does, he wouldn’t call me ‘local’!

“Bro Tony, stop persecuting my daughter o.” Pastor said and Tony became serious as he looked at me.

“I am sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you. I am so sorry” He said again and he meant it. I shrugged.

“MD reigned in many marriages as the ‘My Dear’ thing became rampant. Now, it’s the era of My Missing Rib...MMR” The pastor explained and I smiled.

“I didn’t know that that was it. I am already conversant with the missing rib thing. Nice one.” I said silently.

So, Tony already has someone?

Why all those sweet words tugging at me then?

I wonder who the lucky lady is! She is surely blessed to have him.

The pastor’s phone rang and I went across the room to pick the phone.

The pastor placed his wife gently on the settee as he scurried after me.

He got the phone from me, whispered a ‘thank you’ hurriedly and left the room.

I went back into the sitting room and sat directly opposite Tony.

We said nothing to each other.

I looked over to mummy's side and saw her face clearly.

That bitter smile! Again!

I went towards her and sat on the settee beside her.

She looked really helpless.

I held her close to myself and she clung to me.

Her teeth were beating against one another and I felt really odd- as if something was wrong.

Her eyes were still shut tightly.

Pastor came in and cleared his throat.

“I am so happy that you guys are here.” He said and smiled. Mummy became hot in my hands and I looked into eyes.

Tears ran down her face.

I was shocked because she was obviously still sleeping.

“I just got a call now that I am needed urgently at our church branch in South Africa. I will have to go now. I will put a call through to my wife from there since she still appears to be sleeping.” He said on and mummy’s hands around me tightened.

Is she scared of him going?

Is she trying to say he should not go?

Pastor knotted his tie as he bent down to pick his briefcase.

He came beside us on the settee, and I was thankful that he would perhaps see her tears.

He pecked her forehead and brought out his handkerchief.

He wiped her face.

“She is sweating. You probably should increase the air-conditioner” He said and I was shocked.

Sweat?

Is it not obvious that it is tears and not sweat?

Jesus!

Is this insensitivity or sheer wickedness?

What surname do I give this oh Lord!

“This is my credit card if she needs anything. I will be back soon. I am counting on you all. I love you” He said.

He didn't even wait to get the responses before he jumped out of the room.

Tony's face and mine met and we coincidentally shook our heads.

"What's this? I feel weird" I said as I hugged Mummy Pastor close.

"Prayer. That's the major thing needed now. We need to pray more for them." He said too.

Mummy Pastor sneezed, coughed and tried to sit up.

Tony jumped over to our side and helped her up.

"Sorry ma" He said as he supported her head with the pillow.

Mummy Pastor smiled as tears ran down her face.

My heart dropped.

“Mummy, I asked you the other time. What is happening to you? What is it that even daddy doesn’t know about? Exactly what mum?” I asked in a very shaky voice.

I was becoming sick and tired of everything and I just wanted to put an end to all that she was going through.

Tears ran down her face the more.

“Please Precious. Let’s give her a breathing space” Tony said, trying to pacify me in his own ways but I wouldn’t bulge.

“Please leave me. You already know what the problem is but I don’t. Do you know how I have stayed in perpetual suspense and anxiety for days? Do you?” I was almost crying.

I am not a timid lady. Why is everyone trying to marginalize me? Why?

I didn’t find it funny anymore and I felt like bursting and pulling everything down.

I looked at Mummy Pastor and she smiled at me largely, tears still on her face.

“Daughter, I promised to tell you all, right? Just ask me” She said and closed her eyes bitterly.

I didn’t care anymore. I had been given an open cheque and I had to make use of it wisely, else, it might be withdrawn!

“Mummy, what is in your tummy? Is it really sit-up effect or pregnancy?” I asked and she smiled.

“Precious, please can you...” Tony was saying when Mummy Pastor pulled him beside her. She held us together- Tony on the right and I on the left.

“It’s fibroid tumor” She blurted out and my head banged severally.

Fibroid!

My mind never even went to that at all!

I had only thought that it was either pregnancy or pregnancy!

Mummy smiled bitterly.

My heart broke the more!

“Mummy, are you really that sick? Is fibroid the only thing? Is there anything I should know that I don’t? Is there?” I rushed my words, tears rolling down my face.

“That’s not all my daughter” She said again.

Her voice was so sure.

My eyes widened.

Tony wasn’t even saying anything. His head was bowed all the while Mummy Pastor was talking to me.

Jesus!

I stood up all of a suddenly, banged my back to the wall and there cried bitterly.

“Oh God! This cannot be! You said in Your word that whatever God reveals to us is for our children and ourselves. The dream you showed to me cannot come to pass. It cannot come to pass at all oh God! Arise Jesus!”

I prayed so hard, smashing myself to the ground and crying so bitterly.

Thank God I was still wearing my sporting trousers if not; I would have been in a total mess.

“Oh God! Why? Why Father? Father, why? Jesus!” I cried the more.

“Precious!” Mummy Pastor called out and I looked out towards her. My eyes were obviously bloodshot because though there were no tears on Tony’s face, his eyes were drunk-red!

“Mummy...oh mummy” I cried out the more.

“Daughter, I am just a woman of a bitter life. I had tried to live like that Shunnamite woman who kept on saying ‘It is Well’ but it has not worked for me. Not at all!” She lamented.

“Why mum? Why?” I cried too.

“Probably because I failed in my duties as a good home keeper” She said and I looked up at her.

“Failed? How?” I asked further

She wheezed and Tony stood up suddenly.

He came in with a bottle of water and she gulped some with great difficulty.

I pitied her greatly.

There I was eating whatever I liked and still complaining of the sweetness or this or that!

Oh what ingrate I had been!

“Of course I have failed. Once your husband can no longer sit in the house with you for long; pray with you as usual, eat the food you prepare, sleep in the same bed with you, live

in the same house with you, haven't you failed?" She asked again, looking intently into my face.

That can never be true!- She is only citing examples!

Daddy and mummy still came to church together the last Sunday wearing the same attire, looking gorgeous as ever and radiating God's glory.

So, what's all this?

"Mummy, dad doesn't live at home?" I asked and Tony gave me an 'Isn't it enough?' look but I shrugged.

I was as sorrowful as anyone else.

"I thought you were going to ask me that question when you cleared my room that day but you didn't. Did you see anything that pertained to men's stuff in the room that day? He was long gone"

"What!"

“Yes! We are as good as separated” She blurted out.

It was hard to believe for me and I looked around in shock.

Tony’s head was bowed low still.

‘Separated? How and why?’

I just didn’t understand. Mummy Pastor smiled.

“If God had not stated expressly that He hates divorce, my husband would probably have filed for one” She said still, sadly.

I was overwhelmed! I sat on the floor and bit my lower lip in anguish.

It was as if I had never heard something like that before.

“But mum, you have been awarded couple of the year lots of time now. You and daddy do almost everything in common. So, mummy, I don’t seem to understand anymore”

She laughed so much that she fell into a fit of hard cough.

Tony gave her the bottle of water again and that was when I saw it on his face – his tears!

Men cry but when a real man like Tony who is also a medical doctor cry, it means there is a big problem, right?

“It was all camouflage my daughter! Pretense!”

She started her sad tales amidst her heart-rending coughs.

How Pastor went to rent an apartment at the end of the street so he could have time alone with God and the ministry; how he no longer lived at home; how he refused to eat at home again; how he sent all the kids abroad so Mummy could have time for herself even against her own will.

“Oh how I miss my children!” She cried, holding her chest in serious pain.

“They are not doing any better. Not at all! They are worse than ever now, doing different bad stuffs. He’s ashamed now to bring them back and I am not allowed to go because of

his selfish ambition – his wife can't leave him! Yet he doesn't care. He doesn't know anything about me. All is about the church!" She cried loudly and I sniffed.

Oh oh!

That's the problem now.

The pastor has a mistress- his church!

Now I know!

I watched as she shook so vehemently.

She must be really lonely!

'Mummy, this isn't good for you. This is wrong. Please, let's forget about it and keep on praying' Tony said, holding her hands gently and looking into his face.

"I have never done it! I have preached against it! Never allow the third party into your marriage- but I have broken it. I have allowed the third and the fourth the same night. I

have failed! Frustration forced me! Sickness opened my mouth! Death threate.... “ She paused to shed some tears again, swallowed hard before continuing the sad tale.

“I love my husband and he loved me too. He is just too busy to a fault. He never even realized that I was on low-cut till today and when he saw it, he didn’t bother asking why I did it. He only said it fits me. Oh mine! I never cut my hair. I never did... “ She wailed.

I was taken aback and wanted to talk when Tony held me back from talking.

“Leave her alone. Let me talk to her. God showed my secret to both of you, different nights in different places! What’s there to hide again? What?”

She spoke hopelessly and I heaved a deep sigh.

This is a sad tale Oh God!

I can’t believe it!

So Tony also had a dream as pertaining to the pastor’s wife?

Hmmmmmm... Holy Spirit the Revealer of secrets!

“Why did you meet my husband here as you came? It was because I threatened to send for you guys if he doesn’t show up. Personally, I have missed him and I needed just a touch from him. I knew he would want a good image to be created before his church members and didn’t he succeed? He did! I succeeded too though it was short -lived as I got the opportunity to sleep on his laps with his hands over me once again after a long time.”

I shook my head!

This is more serious than I imagined!

“But mummy, why not have the fibroid removed... You were also saying something about your hair not being cut by yourself. What does that mean?” I reminded her.

I wanted a comprehensive understanding of it all so that I would be able know how to pray too.

She laughed dryly while Tony threw me a ‘Why do you have to ask?’ kind of look.

Is it bad to be inquisitive?

Not at all!

She cleared her throat and looked at me in the face.

‘The answer is clear. I can’t remove the fibroid because my body is not OK. My hair fell off themselves with no one touching them because my body is not Ok. My body is not ok because it is infested with...” She continued sadly when I stamped my foot on the floor.

Can I bear it?

Will the shock be too much for me to bear?

“Mummy, wait!” I almost shouted, my right hand holding my beating chest.

I needed a heart gird at that point so I wouldn’t pass out when I get the shock!

That’s why I hate surprises!

They make my heart race so much that by the time I get the surprise, I start to vomit-the aftermath of the anxiety.

‘OK mummy... I am ready’ I said after a while and she pulled me close and smiled.

She pulled one of my ears and her hands were rough against my skin!

‘Leukemia!’ That was the only thing she said and my head scattered.

Blood cancer!!

Jesus!

Oh my Savior!

As I looked into her face, all I saw was the cancer! It was red, then blue, then black, then white!

I became really delirious.

9

9.

It's the safest thing to do.

Those were the words I heard faintly and I moved my leg.

Where am I?

“Mummy, but God is against that. He never would love it. You would break God’s heart with that decision of yours” A male voice said too.

That should be Tony.

“Well, I know quite alright but it’s funny how I have been going against everything I know in the Bible. It’s funny” I heard some sniffing.

Oh!

That should be Mummy Pastor!

Is she crying?

What happened to me?

Am I sleeping in the middle of an argument as hot as this?

What happened?

I racked my brain for a long period of time and it relived in my face and in my ears.

Leukemia!

Fibroid!

Oh my God!

“Don’t tell me I fainted!” I muttered. I felt a sensational surge run through my spine and I felt almost useless.

Ah, Precious! How could you faint like this- in the presence of Tony?!

Why?

That is why I hate surprises- good or bad!

I wondered why some girls and even married women cherish it when their spouses surprise them.

If it were to be me, my hypothalamus wouldn't just decode the signals well- or probably it decoded it well but my heart wouldn't take it.

“If any guy wants to propose to me, he should sha not go and do mad surprises of balloons and candlelight o. They would have to send for an ambulance if he does that” I said and chuckled silently. The thought alone made me cringe.

There was a deafening silence and I wondered if the duo had left what they were doing or discussing. I opened my eyes halfway and saw Tony staring at me with a funny smile on his face.

He shook his head, fixing his eyes on me.

I shut my eyes quickly.

“What did she just say?” Mummy Pastor asked and my heart jumped into my mouth.

They heard what I said?

I was only lost in my own world. Oh Jesus!

Tony laughed

Oh Lord!

I have to save the situation...what should I do?

I stretched my arms and coughed.

“What sort of a bad dream is this Lord? Tony and I? God forbid! Someone that already has a MMR? Tufiakwa!” I hissed again and pretended to be asleep.

“Jesus! What is happening? She seems to be having a nightmare. Let’s wake her please. Abi?” Mummy Pastor asked and I opened my eyes halfway again to see the frowning face of Tony.

I shut my eyes again and smiled.

Tony laughed hard and pinched my arm.

“Enough of this nightmare sleeping princess” He stressed the ‘nightmare’ so well that I knew assuredly that he understood my tricks.

I tried to harden my heart.

Thank God mummy didn’t understand.

I stretched again and coughed three times before I opened my eyes.

I looked around, pretending to be naive.

I was in Mummy Pastor’s room and it was still as clean as I had left it few weeks back.

She held my shoulder softly and I shuddered.

“Thank God you are alive.” She said with gratitude and smiled deeply.

I smiled too- faintly.

Tony shook his head and his nose was cushioned up in contempt.

What’s with this guy?

“You fainted because you heard the story of my life. What if you experience it?” Mummy asked again and I looked up at her.

She smiled again and I called my spirit, soul and body together.

What if I experienced it for real?

“So, I have decided to file for divorce” She blurted out and my heart rung very loudly.

Divorce?

God forbid!

“Mummy, divorce!” I exclaimed so loudly holding my chest as I stepped out of the bed in which I had been laid.

I didn't hear correctly!

“I can't bear it anymore. Even though it does not costs me anything, divorce is my last resort and I am going in for that” She said and tears ran down my face.

I could imagine the news headlines the following day about my pastor's divorce after a failed marriage. I could imagine critics and enemies wagging their tongues in interviews and my tummy dropped.

This isn't good oh God!

I looked at Mummy Pastor and she looked really resolute.

What else could I say to a woman who had gone through hell in recent times- or even all her life?!

“Mummy, God still hates it. No matter what! Even in Matthew 17 versus 25 or thereabout, He stated His hatred for divorce clearly. Even in the case of adultery, He still hates it!” I tried to pursue my argument.

Mummy Pastor laughed.

“It’s not Matthew 17:25 o lady evangelist. It is Malachi 2: 16” She corrected.

How hard it is to preach to a backslidden preacher! He would only turn you from one side to the other and quote scriptural references with you even before you land.

But, is mummy also a backslider?

The bible says the first shall be the last and the last shall be the first.

Is that bible verse coming to reality already in the life of Mummy Pastor?

I shuddered at the thought.

Mummy put her hand on my shoulder and pressed softly.

“I am going to die anyway. Just two weeks and I would be gone” She said, dejectedly and my heart skipped a beat.

I looked at Tony who buried his face underneath his palms.

“So, why not divorce him before I just waste away like that? Why not?” She asked again, her voice shaking vehemently.

What to do?

Death?

Please Lord, don't allow her die.

I pushed Tony's shoulders but he didn't look up at me.

“Why would she die? Isn’t there anything that can be done? Nothing at all?” I cried

“Miracle” He muttered.

Is he crying too?

Oh Jesus!

I left his shoulder and faced Mummy Pastor again.

“Mummy, tell daddy. He still has the money to do something about this. You can fly out of the country or something. You should not allow an ordinary private doctor to dictate to you what is not”

I didn’t know when the words came out of my mouth but whatever I said sure had an inestimable effect on Tony who looked at me through the space between his fingers and shook his head.

Mummy laughed.

“Who is the ordinary private doctor? Tony? Nope! Don’t ever see him as such. He is definitely a big gun when we talk about medicine.”

I looked at him and lots of thoughts ran through my mind.

A big gun?

“Don’t judge a book by its cover my sweet girl” She said and I just nodded.

What am I supposed to say?

I am sorry?

I am regretful or what exactly?

Isn’t he just a serving corps member?

My mind travelled far and I couldn’t stop wondering.

I shook my head afterwards and focused on Mummy Pastor.

“Ok, let’s assume that he is a big gun for real ma, what is the probability that all he has told you is true?” I talked so childishly that it hurt my heart but I couldn’t just express myself any better.

“It isn’t only me working on her ma. It’s a group of international gynecologists” He explained calmly with an unexplainable look on his face and I felt bad.

Why did he talk that way?

He didn’t like the way I talked- it was so obvious.

“This is the second phase of the leukemia thing my daughter. It’s a relapse” She explained and I looked at her lips as they danced.

I wanted more explanation.

“Dad had a foreign mission in America- Oklahoma to be precise. We went together. You at home would think ‘Oh, love things!’ but we were apart. I ached to see my children while

there and I succeeded.” She paused, gulped down half a bottle of water down her throat and continued.

“When I saw my babies, I was so sad! They looked really awful! My boys’ eyes were red and my only daughter looked like Jezebel! I have never really cried in my entire life like I did that day. I put a call through to my husband to allow us bring them back to Nigeria but he refused and ordered me to come back to Oklahoma- he didn’t even see the children! He only sent money.”

Tears ran down her face and my heart yawned for her.

“While there, my BP rose and since my husband wasn’t even around for me to complain to, I went to the hospital and to my greatest surprise, I was diagnosed of full blown leukemia! I almost died from the shock but chemotherapy begun immediately” She explained and I watched on, warm spittle gathering in every corner of my mouth.

“So, dad knows about the first case of the leukemia?” I asked and she smiled painfully.

“I went through chemotherapy, my hair started falling off, my teeth started becoming really weak, yet on the 3rd day after my 3 weeks’ chemo treatment, which he didn’t know about, he still climbed me and all these marriage intimate things still happened, you know? He didn’t notice that I wasn’t active in bed. He didn’t notice my pain, my teeth, my hair, nothing!”

My body cringed.

I could only imagine that.

That's sheer insensitivity!

“But mummy, you could have told him. You could have” I retorted

“I know I should have. But I was hurt. That wasn't the man I married. He suddenly changed when he was asked to head a large church. Anytime I put my hurts aside to tell him I wasn't well, he wouldn't even let me land before he says I should be a woman of faith and that he would pray with me. I would be embittered the more and would then keep quiet. I am phlegmatic by nature”

She allowed the tears to flow and I allowed mine too.

I had read about these temperaments stuffs and for her to really endure such pains, she was a real phlegmatic and her husband must be a choleric melancholic man not to even notice at all!

“He called that we were to leave for home soon with the mind that I had been with my children all these weeks. I asked my doctors if I could be discharged and I was told surprisingly that I was healing. I was given lots of drugs and we came back home.” She explained and I swallowed.

I watched on as she explained further how the symptoms started again four months before and how she started chemo again.

“When the news got to my hospital in the US, a top Nigerian gynecologist who originally had something doing in this country was sent to take over my treatment...”

“And that’s Tony?” I asked in a very raised voice.

Mummy nodded.

“Oh Lord of lords!” I exclaimed.

Tony shook his head and fixed his gaze on me, eyebrows arched.

“Ah, it is well o. I didn’t know o”

I respected with utmost sincerity medical doctors trained abroad. If nothing, I knew they had been trained with probably the best technologies ever.

“This is the divorce letter. My lawyer brought me a copy today because I requested for it.” She said, spreading it on the bed. I shivered as I held it in my hands.

Tears rolled down my face.

“Mummy, this can’t happen! No!”

“Daughter, let me do it. That will give me joy. Enough of deception and camouflage. It’s time to tell the whole world that I had been a candle in the wind all the while and that since I don’t have a shed anymore, I am giving it up to the wind”

“Mummy, don’t give up at all. Please, don’t” I cried the more but her mind was made up!

Her phone rang and she picked it up.

She winked at us and then placed it on the loud speaker.

“Hello hon” She said.

“You are awake now?” He asked

“Yes”

“I was to go to South Africa but unfortunately, I have been reassigned to anchor a revival next week. I can’t go again”

“That’s not unfortunate at all hon. They want you to have enough time for the wife of your youth. Love things you know? I have missed you”

He laughed loudly.

“Sweetheart! Funny you! Miss me when I just left you few minutes ago?”

I sulked as I saw tears gather in her eyes.

“Do you even know that I am sick? Do you know?” She cried

“Sweetheart! Let the weak say I am strong... Let the poor say I am rich, because of what the Lord has done....” He sang Don Moen’s song so sonorously.

I looked into mummy’s face and I felt really devastated. She looked lonely and lost.

“Dear, come on stop it! Please do! I am not fine. I am tired of everything. I mean everything as a whole. This marriage isn’t working anymore. I want it over! I quit!”

She screamed ‘I quit’ three times before dropping the call.

She panted for few minutes before collecting the bottle of water Tony extended to her.

She gulped almost three times before looking up- and she smiled!

Strange woman!

The gate opened and Mummy Pastor moved to the window to peep.

“It’s him” She said and turned back to the bed.

She picked the divorce form, put it inside a large brown envelope and moved to the door.

“Mummy, please don’t do this to us. Please” I cried out loud and she looked back at me.

“Just watch! Shush your mouth!” She exclaimed and I became mum, still crying.

She opened the door and we followed, tiptoeing.

As she descended down the stairs, we hid behind the balcony and watched from up the stairs.

“Dearie, what was that call about? Exactly what?” He asked as he dropped his briefcase.

Mummy pointed the brown envelope into his face.

“Exactly this” She said.

Pastor collected it, checked and went down on his knees.

“Don’t do this to my ministry please. Please don’t!” He raised his hands towards her and she pushed them away.

“That’s it! The real you! You are very selfish! As selfish as anything! His ministry first. His wife could die for all he cares but his ministry shouldn’t” She was almost screaming.

“But would you love the ministry to die? Why are you talking like this? Why?”

“Your ministry was long dead dearie!” Mummy shouted loudly.

“What!” He exclaimed loudly too, charging at her defensively.

“You want to beat me? Please talk to me Kelvin! You really want to?” She asked in a shaky voice.

“God forbids that I do that. I can never lay my hands on you. I can never beat you”

“Is this the first time you would beat me? You have beaten me on several occasions hon. You have” Her voice shook

“You’re talking strangely. First, you said my ministry had long failed. Then, you said I had beaten you. What is it?”

“Your ministry failed when your marriage failed Kelvin! Your ministry failed when Gem and Ruby started smoking, drinking and clubbing. Your ministry failed when Rose, your only daughter started delving into prostitution as if it is her profession. Your ministry had long long failed, Kelvin!”

She started crying as Pastor stood up from his kneeling posture.

“What are you saying?” He asked, settling in a settee carefully.

“You have beaten me several times. You beat me when you moved out of this house and rented another apartment outside.”

“That was to give you privacy”

“What stupid privacy is that? I ask again. Talk! What stupid privacy is needed between a husband and a wife? What?”

Pastor looked shocked.

“Did you just say stupid? Did you just say so?” He asked.

“Yes I did... Because I am mad! I did because I no longer use my brain. You sent all children abroad against my wish. Wasn’t that a huge slap?”

“I only wanted the best for them”

“And who says the best is only abroad? Since we didn’t agree and you just took laws into your hands, treating my opinion as trash, it was a slap”

“I will change dear. Just tear this form. Tear it. God hates divorce!”

“Yes He does! But the separation for how many years now would be called what? When last did we meet as husband and wife? Sex is a thing of the past between the two of us and you say what! When last did you say you love me? When? Exactly when?”

Pastor’s head was bowed low.

“You’re simply a wicked, insensitive pretentious, bad hypocrite!” She exclaimed again.

“I have been a good wife to you. I had obeyed and submitted to you all day long. What have I gotten in return? Heartache, hate, bitterness, sickness and death!”

She fell on the cushion and cried to stupor for a long time. Pastor has also started crying. He knelt beside her after a while and they both wept.

“Dear, I didn’t know you were hurting. I felt that I was the only one that felt that our marriage was in shambles. I knew something was wrong but I couldn’t place it” He cried.

“You tried prayers too?” She asked defiantly.

“Yes I did but I gave up when it seemed like I was failing and all seemed bad, worse and worst. I will change dear. Give me another chance” He cried.

“Sign the paper” She cried on

“Dear, no! I still love you” The pastor said.

She held his shoulders and shook him.

“Sign it!” She screamed vehemently.

“No love! I will make it work again! I will rock you in my arms like a baby and carry you upstairs when you fall asleep. I will go back to the way we started before. I will sing for you, bring back our children, we will have a very large and lasting reunion. Just trust me again dear. Please”

“Empty promises!” She exclaimed.

He shook his head vigorously.

“Not empty this time around. I am serious. Ok, any goal without a deadline is as good as dead. Give me a week. All would be new again” He said, going on his knees again.

“And I wouldn’t be dead by then?” She asked

“Dead? God forbid!” He exclaimed hurriedly.

“Put it in writing” She said.

“That?...” He asked looking at her intently

“All these promises you have made. Write them down because after a week, it would be all over if there is still no change”

He unzipped his bag, picked a paper and a pen and scribbled something down. He gave it to her.

She nodded affirmatively.

“Sign here” She said again and he obliged.

“All because of your ministry shae?” She asked again and he shook his head.

“Not totally... Because of both my family and our ministry” he said, standing up and straightening up.

“Where are you going to?” She asked, looking up at him.

“To pack my load from that house. I am coming back home” He said, moving to the door.

Mummy Pastor smiled.

He looked back at her.

“Will you love to go with me?” He asked and mummy smiled.

“To prove to me that my husband has changed?”

“Wifey, I promise to be a better man, husband and father. I really do mean it” He said and as he looked up at her, he picked up the divorce paper and tore it to pieces.

“We wouldn’t be needing this.” He said and I said a big amen in my mind.

I loved the turn everything took- It was cool!

As pastor pulled her close to himself, his arm round her neck, mummy looked back at us and smiled.

Then, I saw the tears!

Oh my God!

What expression was that?

Sadness?

Happiness?

What was running through her mind?

That it was too late to mend?

Is she going to die now that we can see silver lining overshadowing the dark clouds?

God please intervene again!

Nothing is impossible for you!

And thanks for this sudden turnaround.

I was happy.

I stood up from the stooping position from which I had watched the drama from upstairs and I met Tony's open smile.

I felt butterflies in my belly.

The space between us was so narrow that I inhaled his scenting shaving cream.

I took a closer look at the face of the man of my dreams- all the contours and all.

From his full eyebrows, to his very white eyeballs, the fleshy nose... I could see the nostrils... His lips. Oh goodness!

“Hmmm... Flee all youthful lust o!” He exclaimed, still in that position.

I came back to my senses.

This guy is too blunt!

I summoned courage.

“Why were you standing so close?” I asked

“Why were you looking into my face intently. You wanted to commit sin?” He asked again and blood rushed into my ears.

This guy wouldn't just kill me with his outrageous level of bluntness o! what!

As I turned to go, I noticed the smile on his face.

It was somehow.

“What is it again!? Why are you gazing so deeply!?” I asked too.

The smile was still on.

“Precious” He called out and I looked on

“What?” I almost shouted

“If it’s not the candlelight and balloons, what style of proposal do you love since you hate surprises” He asked, the contemptuous smile still on his face.

... and I died!

Simply died!

My ears, heart, mind, soul, spirit, all stopped!

10

10.

What's it with all these interrogations oh Lord?

I never planned for such questions when I left the confines of my room that Sunday morning. I had gotten a note while in the auditorium that the Marriage Committee wanted to meet me after the service.

As I was ushered into the Marriage Committee office, it was as if I was being expected for so long to come and present my case.

“Have you started praying at all?”

“Do you think you are getting any younger?”

“My sister, pray!”

“What else are you waiting for?”

“You have different degrees, you have a good accommodation, a car, supportive parents, a very good job and most of all, Jesus!”

“Isn’t there any guy yet?”

“You want to finish Ph.D. first?”

I was speechless by the time they were done questioning me. They didn’t even allow me breathe. They weren’t patient enough to hear my responses.

“Our next meeting is on Tuesday. Take your time to pray between now and Tuesday. The Holy Spirit must minister to you! Be present at our next meeting. Have a great day ahead”

Even though it was so weird, they were right indeed!

When will my prayers for God’s divine revelation be answered?

Exactly when?

Wait Precious, are you really still praying as if you mean it?

I doubt it!

On Monday, I decided to fast and talk to God about the matter.

I couldn't bear to go for the counseling session the next Tuesday and have nothing positive or at least something concrete to say to the committee.

That will really show how irresponsible a Christian I am.

I wouldn't want to risk that.

I started praying from 12am on Monday morning on my knees.

I wept!

I opened my heart!

I looked up and imagined Calvary with all the goodness that Jesus' Blood promised.

God please speak!

I suddenly lost all the words.

I didn't know what to say anymore.

There was a great calm and I tried to listen as I could.

What happened?

Why should there be a silence such as this?

My eyes firmly shut, my teeth tightly set with my fists balled up, I rolled to the floor, almost hopeless.

"I have spoken" I heard silently and still in my position, I was perplexed.

"Who could have spoken? I am alone in here. Who spoke?" I looked around like a mad woman, searching for the voice.

“What did you say?” I asked again, now with a better concentration and commitment.

I heard nothing.

God, please speak again!

Is that you?

A very huge and dark silence rolled across the room!

I became overwhelmed and sad.

Why exactly wouldn't God talk to me expressly?

I had read many books on what could be the cause of spiritual deafness and I couldn't just imagine that after much sacrifices, God would still not hear nor speak to me!

I recently had my restitutions done too- Some lecturers that had gone to talk behind my back that I was a workaholic and whom I had already had in my mind- in malice, I confronted them. I went to meet them, told them they had hurt me and we settled.

All who have hurt me, I had forgiven.

The pledges, tithes and offerings of my income, I offered with a very open heart.

I am nice and welcoming too!

Hospitability would be a very little word to describe how much of a philanthropist I had become!

I had always tried to screen whatever passed through my heart to ensure it was clean! I abhorred bad thoughts by His Grace and so what could the problem be?

Why wouldn't God speak to me?

He spoke and then suddenly to reaffirm that it was He, He refused to say anything again!

What can I do?

Immediately I realized that I was becoming very down in the spirit, I stood up from the floor and put my Bible away in my bed safe.

“You haven’t rounded off your prayers”

I heard something tell me and I twisted my nose to a corner.

That had been the best of God I had ever had.

Is that my conscience talking to me?

I was already used to that one but I needed another real thing...something really GOD!

I walked to the mirror and saw my red, swollen eyes.

I wiped my face and my heart dropped again.

What am I going to tell the Pastor tomorrow?

What?

As I lamented and tears ran into my eyes again, my phone's notification sound beeped and I picked it up to check.

It was a message.

I unlocked my phone and started reading the message.

This is to remind you of our Master Life Discipleship Class today at the University's Worship Centre by 5.00pm. Come prepared and may God bless you.

I had totally forgotten!

I jumped into the bathroom, flew out in a jiffy and started to get ready for the service.

Though I wasn't feeling great, I wondered what made me jump up that way.

I racked my brain the more and sighed.

Definitely not!

“It definitely couldn’t have been because of Tony” I shrugged, trying to convince myself to think straight.

Since he was practicing at the College Hospital of the university where I taught, he worshipped at the school chapel sometimes and so he was made a discipleship teacher.

I joined his class three weeks before when he invited me there and oh my, it’d been so wonderful!

He is a very good teacher of the Word!

The discipleship class was very fun and I really thanked the Lord because my bad mood and ingratitude at God just melted away like a candle beside the fire.

This Tony is just so blessed and anointed of God!

‘God speaks in Diverse ways’ was the topic and see how God just reassured me in so many ways.

Oh my!

All through the programme, I listened with rapt attention and I was blessed!

“I thank all of you that came around to my church on Sunday to honor the outgone corps members. God bless you” He said and the members all responded well.

There was a loud laughter from a corner. I looked towards the corner to check who it was.

Just then, there was a loud sigh from another corner and I turned towards the area again.

What’s happening?

The sighs increased and I wondered what it was. Tony had a perplexed look on his face too.

“What is it nah?” He asked and one girl cleared her throat, a very funny smile on her face.

“Hmmm, our Oga has started keeping secrets from us o” One of the guys said.

That was when I knew that it was a planned one by the whole students —except me!

Tony smiled.

“I don’t seem to understand you dearies” He said, carrying his Bible.

“...even ‘maritally’ God has done it! That was the only line I picked from your testimony last night at the send forth programme” One said, emphasizing the ‘maritally’ well and I got it!

Oh gosh!

This isn’t just fair!

What sort of a demeaning, embarrassing question is this oh Lord?

I shouldn’t have come for the discipleship class!

They just want to spoil my tummy for me and make me sad.

Tony smiled heartily

I looked at everyone present and I felt ashamed of myself! They were all looking happy for him, smiling graciously.

I started practicing how to laugh a real, genuine laughter but as much as I tried to, it was not real at all.

“Of course nah. You want to know her?” He asked and they all screamed ‘Yes’

I didn’t want to be the odd one out, so I said ‘yes’ too.

“I will tell you” He said and I smiled though, but I cried in my heart. It felt as if I had really bad constipation in my heart!

Oh my father!

But the look on his face was not the usual bold, daring one.

He was sweating under his nose and under his lower lip.

Although he was smiling, there was something about the smile that I didn't understand.

Was it fear?

Or shyness?

Or timidity?

Something like that!

"She is a lecturer!" He blurted out and my heart skipped a beat.

"Hmmm" The students exclaimed and clapped joyously.

Lecturer?

"Tell us more" They screamed and he smiled again.

“Her surname is Williams” He said again and they clapped thunderously.

That is my surname!

“The lady would pay for answering the same surname with me o” I tried to mutter and while everyone laughed loudly, he smiled- weirdly!

“And she is seated in here with us as Sister Precious” He dropped, picked up his Bible and turned to go.

All eyes was on me and I was shocked. My heart resigned from its duty for some seconds before I regained my wellness.

As if being consoled, I pulled him back by the collar.

I felt his shivers but I was in worse shivering too and I couldn’t help myself.

“Where are you going to?” I asked in a very shaky voice.

Everyone watched on.

Tony kept on looking downwards.

“You mean that after saying that kind of a thing, you expected me to jump up and say ‘Oh, a great, handsome guy has proposed to an ugly gorilla!’ was that your expectation?” I almost shouted.

The members of the other discipleship centers had started gathering round us.

“What audacity and effrontery do you have to say such a thing while turning back to leave? Exactly what? Answer me!” I shook him by the collar and he said nothing still.

“Are you a celeb? Even if, I don’t care. Is that your proposal? Even if I don’t like candles and fireworks, what sort of a thing is this? Exactly what? I am begging to marry you? Tell me”

I ranted on and I was shocked that my Mr. Macho had suddenly turned ‘vegetables’

“What is happening here?” A voice came from behind me and I looked at him.

It was David, Tony's closest friend.

He looked shocked as he quickly came to his friend's rescue.

He hugged him and like a baby, Tony hid his face in his chest and held unto him tightly.

"Tony, what is it?" He asked and I watched on

Have I done something suicidal?

It was this guy that made me feel stupid as if getting married to him was a big deal or that I had no choice or something. That was why I did that. I had no choice.

They should stop making me feel guilty please!

"Oh, please don't be angry at his sudden outburst" David said, looking at me intently.

I wondered how Tony explained the matter to him when I was so close to them and I heard nothing from their mouths. Their friendship codes must be really tight o!

I could only nod.

“It’s his first time” David said again and Tony covered his face with his hands, obviously embarrassed.

“Awwwww” One group member exclaimed.

“No wonder!” Another group member said

I turned to look around and all eyes was fully set on me.

Chai!

Is it my fault that he has never proposed to any lady before?

But wait o. It’s weird!

Someone of that caliber- from a prestigious hospital in the exposed and sultry America had never asked a lady out?

Of course, he is outdated!

David led Tony away and I felt empty inside.

What drama just unfolded?

I am not a naturally hot tempered person. So what happened?

Was I too overjoyed that I didn't even know what I was doing?

But even if this guy didn't know the right way to go by it, couldn't he ask colleagues to give him clues as to how to do these things?

Couldn't he?

He still has his faults abeg!

“You still have your own faults my dear” That was undoubtedly Alice’s voice and I felt a jab in my heart.

Alice had been my friend from the secondary school and we have had things in common for a long time- she was a lecturer too.

Tony was her greatest crush!

I would never have wanted her to watch that kind of drama- never!

But here she is!

“You have things go easy for you Precious that you sometimes lose focus” She said

Although I felt for her that she must have had her heart broken by the unexpected proposal, I couldn’t stand her long talk of accusation.

“You were not here at the beginning of the whole thing. So, who are you to judge?” I retorted and still maintaining a stern face, she shook her head.

“But you should know that I am too intelligent. I can fix my storyline together even if I start watching the drama from the middle” She said, smiling mockingly.

Of course I know!

She was a really great raconteur- she tells tales as if she was there when they happened!

But she shouldn't bring that in here please!

“You hated surprises and according to the story you earlier told me, you told him you hated candles and fireworks or whatever...the poor guy asked you what you liked then and you thought he was asking for asking sake? Of course no! Oh how I hate clueless people!” She exclaimed and buried her head in her hands.

Oh!

I now understand!

I didn't faint when he said all he had to say. Instead, I gained more strength to pull at his collar. His method was actually the one that could curtail my weak heart from fainting unnecessarily!

Oh my! I never saw it in that light!

Never!

This guy has won again!

Oh Alice!

Oh Tony!

As the crowd dispersed, grumbling, mumbling and gisting as they went, I sat down beside Alice and buried my head into my hands too.

The flashes of the vision I had earlier where I saw Tony and I came to live in my skull television.

How he drove my car!

How he called me MMR!

How he looked deeply into my eyes!

How we were clad in the same type of attire!

How he had always appreciated my rare big stature in real life!

How he had possessively held my hands when we were before Abigail!

Oh my!

I was just so clueless!

Of course, Alice must have a strong hatred for clueless people like me.

Just then, my mind went to the reason we were brought together in the vision.

If the coming together of Tony and I was already coming to pass, chai! That would spell a real, thick trouble o.

A real, thick one!

The scene where Mummy Pastor bled so much that she died and the whole church gathering round her to mourn her and pastor wept relived in my head,

“I reject it in Jesus’ name” I screamed suddenly.

Alice looked up at me questionably but I was not in the mood to start saying anything further!

It’d been three weeks since I last saw her and oh my, I hadn’t visited nor called her!

The lectures had been really hectic especially as I was dealing with final year students.

I packed my stuff quickly and pecked Alice.

“I am sorry friend and thanks for the bash! I’ve got to go somewhere urgently” I said and ran out of the hall with Alice’s eyes following after me- I was so sure!

(PASTOR IDILE)

I was so weak!

But I wouldn't die!

Not at all!

I had been on the mountain for three weeks without food, water or change of raiment.

The pajamas that I wore the very day I left home was the only thing on me.

The dew of heaven had been my source of bath since I got there. Of a truth, the saying that one should pray so that one wouldn't pray was a real big advice!

Because I failed in my responsibility as a father and a husband, I knew that only God could have mercy once again and heal my family.

I was clueless about everything!

I had been a man who had desired a very happy home and it had been the case.

I had a really beautiful wife and three wonderfully intelligent kids.

All went well until I started cheating on my wife!

Of course that was what it was or what would another name for neglecting one's own wife and moving out of the house to another to get glued to a ministry be named?

That was cheating of the highest order!

With her wonderful hat and expensive suits that I bought her for the ministry's occasion, she would enter my car every Sunday with no complaints. She would peck me and pray for me.

I thought she enjoyed me being away from her.

How the devil deceived me!

Oh how clueless I was!

My wife had been blown around like that for a very long time and I didn't know!

She had gone through the painful stress of chemo and I never knew!

The Holy Spirit didn't tell me!

Oh my Father!

She had been the candle in the wind all along.

She had her light up no matter what!

The candle kept on shining and enduring the wind as it blew violently.

But the wind was too powerful that the candle couldn't stay alive anymore!

It died!

I shuddered at the reality of what was on ground and started to pray again.

“God have mercy!” I cried on.

“Go home” the Spirit told me.

I was so conversant with the Voice that I was convinced that it was Him.

“I should go home when I don’t know whatever my fate is? I should go home when the doctor has dictated the path the destiny of my wife is taking? Obviously not oh Lord!” I cried and tried to hold onto the leg of the Lord as if I could see it so He would replace everything in my wife’s body again.

“Go home” The spirit said again and my heart dropped.

The voice didn’t give me peace!

It was just a wary command and I was shaken.

I fell on the rocky surface again and cried the more.

“Pastor!” I heard a voice faintly and I was shocked!

Who could that be?

It was a feminine voice. Who could it be and how did she get to know where I am?

I travelled far into my farm to pray on one of the mountains in it.

Who could have known about it?

“Daddy!” Another voice echoed and I was dazed

It wasn’t getting funny any longer.

That was a male voice.

They were running and panting.

“Pastor Idile!” The feminine voice cried out again and I became scared the more.

My resolve was that I would not leave the place till I got news that my wife was well again but those voices were not nice.

The Spirit’s voice wasn’t assuring either.

I stood up and looked towards the north where the voices were sounding from and I saw them coming!

Tony and Precious!

“Tony!” I shouted and he looked at me and started running again.

“Daddy!....ah, thank God” He screamed

“Precious, what has happened?” I asked faintly and they came before me.

As if being controlled, they held their knees, panting heavily and trying to find the right words.

I surprisingly had a great deal of patience though my heart thumped so loudly and violently.

Tony looked up and oh my, the red eyes and nose!

Precious started sobbing and looked up at me.

Tears!

I fell to the ground again and resolved that I was going to die on the mountain too.

“Daddy, you have to come with us” Tony said hopelessly and I looked into Precious’ face for moral support but her negative nods killed it all.

“Oh God, why?” I cried aloud, my hands raised to the heavens.

I shook so terribly but I had no choice!

If I would faint or die, the wilderness would still be the most appropriate place.

Oh God!

“Just go home” The Spirit said again.

My heart shattered into different irreparable pieces!

11

It'd been a big struggle to quit my addictions!

Same for my big bros!

How the whole thing started was actually what I did not understand!

Drugs, incest, cigars, clubbing, serious fashion lifestyle, all! Dad never envisaged this happening to his kids-neither did we though!

Although since we were young, we had always thought of being 'big boys' and 'big girl' and all those kinds of immoral living.

I never really loved church!

I used to like it when we were in the children church where we sang, ate biscuits and sipped caprisone but immediately we got to the youth church, we were compelled to fast to church, yet, dad would still be asked to wait for meetings after meetings.

Oh those Sundays!

It was different from what I saw on TV or what my friends had told me about their own churches.

There was so much freedom in their churches but ours had always been solemn- no this, no that!

During the long hours of the message, we would start dozing and then nodding like agama lizards, shaking our crossed legs in order to show that we were following in the Spirit!- such pseudo!

While peeping to see if mum was watching, her smiling face would greet me, laden with really loud undertone that I read to be 'Ride on sleeper!' and then she would look back at her husband, nodding as the message sunk into her being.

"What is she learning from the biblical gibberish he is narrating?" Those were the strange thoughts that my brain processed whenever I watched on.

Until I got to know Christ did I realize that the Spirit of God comes in a small still voice most time while at another time, he could come as a mighty rushing wind!

So, even in very solemn assemblies of God's children, without bang or boom, God would be present as they offer themselves holily before Him!

The age difference between Ruby, Gem and I was a year each so by the time both of them graduated, they didn't do well in their international examination and dad wanted them to study abroad by all means.

Dad's dream though!

But we loved it!

The joy of going abroad, posing with different wonders of the world and pasting them on my Facebook wall was mindboggling;

The excitement of leaving the 'dark continent' was killing;

My brothers wanted to go badly and by the time I graduated, we all passed the IOEFL exams and off to America we went!

It was to my dad's greatest joy and my mum's displeasure.

We all wept as she hugged us goodbye but we had to go.

Looking back at that time, I wish we never left!

I wish we had stuck close to those boring sermons for one day, we would have found it as honey in our mouths and music to our souls!

I wish we had been under mum's gentle but disciplinary measures and dad's strict correctional measures too!

I wish we had stayed in our fatherland because being groomed by the noise of generator and being bruised by mosquitoes alone could have been enough discipline to make us sane!

I wish!

I wish!

Oh I wish!

We left years ago and coming back now, it was a great difference.

We were no longer the kids our mother used to think we were!

We knew a whole lot about sex- oh mine!- we practiced incest!

We smoked stuffs!!

We did drugs

We went to clubs to dance and all!

We rocked 'real' fashion!

But for money issues, we would have done real plastic surgeries!

For us, we were not influenced by friends at all. We had seen people around do it and we wondered why they could do it and our own parents kept on restricting us!

All the vices we engaged in were all out of curiosity!

I wished dad and mum had told us that our bodies were really precious to us

They told us though but we thought that they were just being religious about it

How I wish they had been more explicit about these truths!

How I really do wish!

While the three of us rode in our small car from the movie theatre in Los Angeles where we had gone to see a movie, I received a call from Abigail that we should come home immediately.

“Are you for real? Come back home? You think this is Lag?” I had blurted out that day

“I am sorry but you have to find all the means to come back home” she argued

“I think you are sick Ab! What is the problem?” I was getting angry.

“Mummy is dead!” she exclaimed and I chuckled.

“What?” I asked to be sure

It sounded too unrealistic and plastic!

“What!” I exclaimed as my brain booted for a second

“what do you mean?” I screamed and the car screeched to a halt as Ruby and Gem looked back at me with questioning eyes.

I dropped the phone and my head was blocked.

“What does that mean?” I asked dumbly, my heart, muddled up.

“What’s it?” Ruby asked, his eyes widened

“Did somebody die?” Gem asked, expectantly and I nodded

“That was what Abigail said” I said and they both held my hands as if being controlled.

“Who?” they asked almost together

“She said mum” I still said on.

I was unable to decode the message well, so I was seated, blinking hard as if my brain depended on them to function well.

It was a riddle unsolved!

“What! Mum’s dead? Are you fucking kidding me right now?” Ruby screamed

If nothing, the guys had been mum’s favorite for a long time.

“And you are still talking and all? It’s definitely impossible!” Gem cried out too.

Ruby placed his head on the steering and broke down into tears.

“Mum, you can’t die ma. I won’t wear these god-forsaken rings again. I will throw them away but die, no!” He cried and started removing the rings he was wearing.

Those had always been the cause of argument between him and mum before we left Nigeria.

Mum said those numerous rings made him to look like a criminal and that she didn't want that for him.

As they wept, the pictures of mummy smiling, praying on her knees, correcting us in love, caring and laying her hands on dad all relived in my brain and my heart became swollen.

The swelling reached my brain and my whole head became large and heavy.

My eyes couldn't bear the pains that suddenly befell it and immediately, they became clouded and blurry.

I placed my head on the driver's seat and my tears flowed.

Oh precious mum!

As I held her already death-infested, cold and stiff hands, my tears fell upon her lifeless body and I placed my hands on her chest.

Her eyes were tightly shut but the smile on her face remained there- though, very dry!

“Mummy, I had always caused you tears. I had always behaved like a prodigal daughter. I had never for once done you any proud but I know your worth and I really do love you. I can’t believe you are dead mum...” I cried on, tears still streaming down my face.

Ruby screamed again as he turned back from the window side from which he had been staying for long.

“Mum, you can’t just die. We didn’t release you to death and you are going nowhere” He cried aloud.

Abigail sobbed loudly.

“She died since Tuesday and it’s already Thursday. Her doctor even used some embalming chemicals on her if not; she would be smelling by now.” Abigail explained and Ruby charged at her with his blood-shot eyes.

“What do mean? For how many days was Lazarus dead before Jesus raised him?” he asked and no one answered.

“Well, that is even the tip of an iceberg sef. A whole army died and they had already become dry bones....dry...very dry I mean but what happened when God asked the Son of Man if the bones could live?....” He asked on rhetorically

“They lived eventually” Gem replied, teary.

“They were raised up as a very mighty army and God promised life to Israelites that no matter how grave the situation could be, He would come to the situation and save them. Read Ezekiel 37” Ruby preached on.

I watched on

From Ruby who was delivering the sermon, to Gem who was nodding as an enthusiastic church member.

I was really dazed!

When did my brothers become pastors?

While we travelled down to Nigeria, we all held our hands to get strength and as we sat down, we cried silently when we thought about so many things.

Everyone in the airplane noticed us. But a man on the same row with us noticed us more.

He smiled at us and my brothers looked away irritated.

“What sort of a Job’s comforter is this oh Lord?” Gem complained but Ruby just simply adjusted his seat and plugged his earphone.

So the man would not feel embarrassed, I smiled back at him and he started talking with me.

He was a Neuro surgeon and I was studying Neuro sciences too so it was easier for him to get me through that.

I told him about my problems and what had happened to my mum.

He started to preach to me in a way that I had never heard before.

He stirred my faith and consoled me, saying that all would be well whether she eventually lived or not.

My brothers weren't listening so how did they get to hear all these?

Where did they get such a kind of faith from?

Exactly where?

"While on board today, a doctor told us that if we have faith like mustard seed, we can move any mountain...I don't think you have seen a mustard seed before but I have seen it, I have eaten it. Even if I hadn't been a good boy, it's never too late. That was what he said and funny enough, I believe it." He said on and I was amazed.

He actually was listening to the man on the plane then.

"No other choice but to believe it as long as it's gonna bring back my momma" Gem rapped on, tears stains on his face.

"Exactly. I have nothing as I stand. No dime! Only drugs, cigar, beer, whisky, vodka, nonsense! They can't revive mum" Ruby almost screamed loudly.

“Those things didn’t revive Nancy when she died last month. In fact, those things killed her...oh shit!” Ruby lamented on and on

Nancy was the love of his life.

They had always loved each other until she died of Tramadol overdose the month before.

It was a real trying time for us all as Ruby couldn’t take charge of himself no more!

“If Jesus will wake my mum again o, chai, I swear that I would give all over to Him. I will be a changed guy. I will drink no more, smoke no more, and fornicate no more, no more sin! I swear!” Ruby cried on as he knelt down beside mummy, placing his head on her tummy.

“She died of blood cancer! It was the second relapse of the chemotherapy. Even fibroid was another thing.” Abigail said again. She was obviously worn out and tired.

Ruby looked up strictly, stood up, pulled Abigail’s hands and dragged her towards the door.

“I used to think that you were a Christian. You were always preaching to us over the phone. So, where is that faith? Where is the faith that Mr. Douglas talked about? Where?” he said firmly as he dragged her out.

“I was only saying the fact...” She defended herself

“No fact is needed here gal, only faith!” Gem said and I looked up at him.

Even Gem?

“Gerrahere please! I don’t want anyone who isn’t strong to fight this battle with me.” He said as he jammed the door.

He dusted his hands together after turning the key over and over again to lock it.

“No wonder God ordered Joshua to screen the thousands of men first before they started the battle. God doesn’t fight according to the number of people available. He is present where two or more people are gathered” He said as he walked back to the bedside.

“Anyone with shaky faith here should go out of this room.” He said and there was no movement.

“If you all have faith, join your hands with mine then” He said again and we all joined our hands together and we went on our knees.

“Oh Lord, we are sinners...all of us!” He started the prayer of confessing our sins.

The sins, especially our incest act alone would kill mum even if God decided to raise her up.

“Since we have confessed all our sins and have promised never to go into them again by Your grace, we pray that You help us oh Lord in Jesus’ name” He prayed on

“Amen” We all replied.

“Father, heal our mother. Her blood had been said to be cancerous before she died and she had been said to even have fibroid. One thing I believe is that You have our spare parts in Your hands” Ruby prayed on and I opened my eyes to gaze at them.

They were both sweating profusely and shaking all the members of their bodies.

“Oh yes Lord” Gem replied, opening his mouth and closing it as if he had eaten something peppery.

“Toyota has spare parts for all its products, same for Sony, same for LG, so for all other producers. Then let’s talk more of our own God whom we do not deserve even to call on”
He prayed on

How did he get such prayer points?

When last did we step into a church?

It was so strange to me but I loved the feeling of it.

“And Lord, since the salvation of three dirty children depends on it here Lord, glorify
Your name. Please oh Lord.” Gem cried too.

I swallowed hard.

I was the only one who hadn’t been touched by whatever had touched these people.

Only me!

God have mercy!

I closed my eyes firmly and remembered Sunday school, I remembered the little things we had been taught ever.

I wept bitterly

But I didn't feel anything special

I didn't feel anything that would make me weep and quote scriptures like my brothers did.

I felt really bad

I wanted to experience it too...

I was constipated...

>>>>>

It had been three hours now since we started praying but mum remained motionless.

It seemed that our prayers weren't even reaching the ceiling!

Am I the cause of it all?

Do I need to increase my faith?

How do I do so?

My brothers still prayed on although it was obvious that they were getting tired.

The whole floor was filled with perspiration and tears.

“God, I am getting tired but Your Word says in Isaiah 50 verse 7 that Mr. Douglas read that ‘For the Lord God will help me, therefore shall I not be confounded, therefore have I set my face like a flint and I now that I shall not be ashamed’ we have set our eyes like stone today and we wouldn’t want You to drag Your own holy name in the mud because You are able to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think” He prayed on.

If nothing, I was very sure of my brother's great intelligence when it comes to cramming things.

Everything he was saying now was what Mr. Douglas had said and he had retained them in his own memory.

When I couldn't even remember much!

We heard the gate opened and I ran to the window to check.

The doors of a sleek, black car opened and two men and a lady ran inside.

Those men!

Oh!

Daddy!

"Dad is here" I announced and my brothers looked up.

“Glory! Maybe God will respect his own anointing more” Ruby said, standing up and wiping his sweat

“Exactly, ‘cos it’s a must that mum wakes up” Gem said

“Yeah. I hadn’t seen mum in months...I mean long months here and never would I be able to forgive myself if we don’t get to see again. I won’t forgive myself! Never!” Ruby took it personal once more.

“For goodness’ sake, mummy isn’t even 60 yet” Gem said

“60? She is just in her early 50s and God promised that with long life would he satisfy us...is God then a man that He should lie?” Ruby asked again, sharply

“No” Gem and I replied him and he shook his head.

There was a knock at the door.

We hesitated.

The knocks became louder

They became more rapid.

“Who is there?” I asked

“Dad” He replied and I ran to the door.

I opened and saw my father at the door with one fresh guy and one beautifully huge woman like Queen Lateefah!

“Dad” I exclaimed as I jumped into the arms of my father.

I sobbed as I perceived the dew on his pajamas.

Dad had gone to pray alone again!

See how haggard he looks!

Long neck, his hair formed small lumps on his head and he looked unshaved.

He must have been gone for long.

He was weeping too and I realized that there might be no hope.

God must have spoken to him.

If dad should say that it was God's will, that means, we would just have to accept it.

"She's dead?" He asked and I nodded against his chest

"Yes!" I replied again and dad sat on the floor, weeping profusely.

My heart melted and I knew that was all!

It was just too late.

It seemed that Abigail was just too skeptical but for real, she was damn right!

If dad can wail someone's loss, that is all then. No remedy! No hope!

“God gives and He takes away” He said

“No!” Ruby said as he joined us at the door, Gem closely behind him.

“She can’t be dead! Never! God didn’t take her away. Sickness did!... and since the time of John the Baptist, the Kingdom of God suffereth violence and the...”

“...violent takes it by force!” a very weak voice said and Ruby gave me a thumbs up as if I was the one that had completed it.

And It wasn't me o

I didn’t even have much verses in my memory any longer.

So whose voice was that?

Was it this aunty?

She looked huge; her voice should be very deep!

It can't be this uncle...

It was a female's voice.

Whose?

Nobody seemed to notice.

“Dad, I can't believe you are giving up already. Aren't you coming from a prayer programme? So, where is your faith? Where was all you had taught us? Where is your faith?” Ruby asked on

What cute audacity it was!

Dad bent his head and wept hard.

“I am sorry” That was only what he said as he sobbed loudly.

“God doesn’t just seem ready to forgive me all and erase all my sins out of my remembrance. I have really failed in my responsibility. I threw you away all in the name of western education even when God was saying something else. I disregarded my wife’s advice and she was treated like an outcast.... Like a candle in the wind” He paused and wept some more.

We all joined in the crying exercise.

The candle in the wind!

That really described mum.

It really did!

“If my wife died, it would be for God to punish me and teach me that I should always put my family aright before my ministry. It would be an unforgettable experience for me...I have been away for about a month now and since God still allowed her to go, then, who am I?” He cried.

“Who are you? You think you can really survive without the support of this woman? You think so?” Ruby charged at dad

“I don’t think so son. I know I will fail” Dad replied obediently.

“So, why not fight for her life? Why not, so you make all things work together again?”

Ruby was very desperate and the huge aunty watched on with a very great interest, nodding her head with great enthusiasm.

“Why not let’s pray again? Why not let’s call on God once more? If God could heal mum and bring her back to life, we have promised to serve the Lord with the whole of our hearts. If not...” He shook his head and dad looked up at him, obviously broken hearted

“God is good my son no matter what happens” He said

“Yes I know. Gideon asked for signs from God and God gave him. I am asking for a sign from God now to confirm to me that He is good. The sign I request isn’t much, eternal breath should enter into my mum’s body and the vital organs which are faulty in her body should be brought back to life. That’s the sign I require” He said again, his chest rising and falling as he spoke.

“Oh my God!” Dad cried out.

“I agree with you” The huge aunty said

All eyes turned to her...her spoken English command was killing!

She must have great alto...or bass!

“God has to raise her as only there and then can Tony and I get married. She is going to be the Mother in Israel that day” She said and the fresh guy looked at her.

He blushed!

Is he the Tony?

“I agree too” The guy said.

Dad stood up gently with Gem’s help.

“I agree too” Dad said

“Me too” Gem said

“Me too” the weak voice said again.

Ruby looked at me and smiled faintly

“Haven’t you said ‘me too’ before? Why are you saying it again?” He asked and I frowned

“Does that sound like my voice? That was not me o” I said

All eyes turned to face me squarely.

“Who spoke then?” Gem asked

“I noticed that voice too when you were saying violent suffer or suffer violent or something...I wasn’t the one o.” I explained.

“Maybe it’s Abigail then” Ruby said

“Or mummy” Gem said and Ruby looked at him and shook his head

“You think we are joking here?” He asked almost provoked.

Gem shook his head.

“I wasn’t joking either.” He said and Ruby shook his head still.

“Let’s go downstairs and pray please. This is just an unserious boy” Ruby said and everyone started moving towards the stairs.

“But wait everyone.” I called out and everyone stopped again

“what do we want to go and pray about?” I asked and Ruby chuckled

“See question 0. I thought you said you agreed to pray for mum” Ruby said

“Fine, I agreed but we are just like the disciples in the Bible because if I know nothing in the Bible, the day a Bible study teacher came to teach us about this subject, I can never forget!”

“What subject?” Dad asked

“The disciples were praying after Peter was arrested and was in jail. They were praying for his release and God heard them. There was a knock at the door and Rhoda went to check. By the time she saw Peter, she rushed back to tell them it was him but they told Rhoda that she was this or that. It meant they were not praying with faith” I explained in my own way

“So? What are you saying?” Ruby asked, confused

I never really knew how to explain things.

I knew I wouldn’t do well if I was a teacher.

“Why could it not be mummy?” I asked and they all looked at me, surprised.

“What!” Dad exclaimed

“When Gem said it might be mummy, why did you think he was joking and you even said he was just an unserious boy? Why?” I asked, tears gathering in my eyes

I hated it when people don’t seem to understand my point.

“Ok, you are saying mummy could be alive?” Ruby asked.

“Yes” The weak voice sounded again and I widened my eyes, nose and mouth altogether.

“That wasn’t me that spoke again o. it wasn’t me. Mummy must be alive! She must be!” I almost screamed as I pushed Gem out of the way and rushed inside.

My heart jumped into my mouth!

I searched for my voice to no avail!

By the time I found it, it came out very silently

“Mum!” I called out.

There she was, smiling faintly, still lying on her back

“Baby!” She called out weakly.

“It’s impossible!” Ruby exclaimed as he jumped inside and went towards the bed.

“Sweetheart” Daddy called out and mummy smiled faintly.

“My love” She replied, holding her hands towards him

“Oh my God!” The fresh uncle exclaimed and the huge aunty fell to the ground and started rolling, speaking in tongues.

“I saw Jesus!” Mummy said faintly.

“Oh my father!” Gem rushed towards her and fell on her too, crying profusely

“One Doctor came to me with two nurses behind him. One of the nurses held a tray that contained a new liver, lungs, kidneys, womb and all other internal organs with about four large packs of blood and some tubes. The other nurse held an empty tray.”

She paused as she rubbed her husband's head and patted his back.

"The doctor removed all in my inside and oh God! It was so rotten and black!" She said, irritatingly.

I could only imagine.

"After the removal, He used a tube and one machine to drain all the black blood in my body after which He removed the fibroid. It was very big!" She said and I shook my head

Is God really real?

I had only watched this kinda thing on Christian Television Channels.

"He dumped all these in the empty tray and started transfusing blood for me. After that, He replaced my internal organs with the new ones and told me to go back" She completed her tale and Ruby who had started crying increased his cries from gear to gear.

"Oh God is wonderful!" I cried out loud.

God heard the prayers of this dirty filthy rag!

His prayer point exactly!- Ruby's prayer points exactly!

"I surrender all...I surrender all...all to Thee my blessed savior, I surrender all..." Gem sang on and we joined him. We all fell into fits of serious tears as we tried to understand whatever had just happened.

"I will worship forever, love You forever because this God is too good o" The huge aunty sang sonorously and we joined too.

"He's too good" Dad cried too, rolling on the ground.

He spoke weakly.

Just then, there was a loud fart from the bed and we all turned to look towards the bed.

It was mum!

She farted and it was brutal!

Chai!

The fresh uncle laughed, sniffed wetly and rubbed his hands together.

“It must have been a really great surgery that Doctor Jesus performed. After all successful surgical operations, the patient must fart. God is beautiful! She just farted now” He explained and I nodded.

It was strange to me.

Sure I was in the medical line and what he explained was not new to me..

But...

I wondered how operation would be conducted in the spiritual realm and then it would take effect physically that way!

God must be really huge!

“Looks like she has fainted” The fresh uncle announced again and we all rushed towards her and held her different body parts.

“Someone should switch on the air conditioner please and give me space.” The fresh uncle said again as he walked to the wardrobe.

He brought out two saline drips and the intravenous lines and after injecting a particular medicine in it, he set the line in mum’s hands and he smiled at us.

“God has done what no man can do” The uncle said.

“Oh yes! But your face looks familiar uncle” Gem said

He smiled.

“At John Hopkins?” He asked and Gem smiled

“That’s it! I knew it” He exclaimed and rushed at him.

“You are the intelligent radiography students in our college” The fresh uncle said as he patted his back

“And you are the number one youngest gynecologist there. It’s an honor to meet you here holding my mum” Gem said again and he smiled.

“I never knew all these about you” Pastor said and the uncle smiled again.

“You will know everything soon sir” He said and looked at the huge aunty who was busy caressing mum’s hands.

He whispered something into Gem’s ears and he smiled.

After some time, the duo went on their knees.

“Please say yes Precious” They chorused together and the aunty faced them.

Oh, her name is Precious!

She smiled and shook her head.

“Why should I ?” She asked, obviously playfully

“Because God is good and so that mum would be the mother in Israel that day” He said and she twisted her nose to a side.

“Just that reason?” She asked

“And because he loves you” Gem said sweetly

“Yes I do. I love you so much. Please say yes!” He cried out

Precious smiled and faced mummy.

“If mummy says yes, I will” She said and Tony arched his brows.

“Mummy, should I say yes to Tony?” She asked and almost like a magic, mummy nodded, trying to adjust her head on the pillow.

Someone who had fainted o!

Hmmmm

All was just amazing to me

Tony and Gem screamed while Ruby looked on, a bright smile on his face.

“Mummy said yes” Tony and Gem screamed almost together and dad smiled.

“Alright then, I say yes” Precious said and we all clapped happily.

Abigail entered through the door too and clapped, a huge smile on her teary face.

What was she crying for?

I could only wonder.

All that had happen today really did worth crying for though!

“I am happy for you guys. Congratulations” Ruby said and the duo smiled.

“Oh my God, thank You because all is falling into place for my family and these children of mine” Pastor said, his hands clasped together as he focused on his recuperating wife.

“When will you guys be going back to the United States?” Tony asked

“Not any time soon. We are all done with schooling though, so going back to the US would be on a visit” Ruby said and we nodded in agreement.

Tony laughed.

“When are you going back too?” Gem asked Tony and Precious looked up immediately.

“Anytime from now” He said.

Precious frowned and her face dropped.

“It seemed aunty isn’t happy about that o” I said and she gave me a “who sent you?” look.

Tony smiled.

“Should I stay?” Tony asked giving her a cute look.

Precious’ face was stern.

“Go!” She said

Tony smiled.

“And you will be happy about it? Really?” He asked, smiling again.

“Yes” She replied again, her face straight.

Tony laughed.

“So, what is it with that face?” He asked

I smiled as I watched on.

Precious looked forlorn and her face misty.

“Aunty, are you crying?” I asked and everyone turned to look at her.

She didn’t say anything.

“Awwwwnnnn, she will miss me” Tony smiled and it was touching.

“I won’t” She retorted

“So why were you crying?” He teased on

” Because I don’t like long distance courtship. I like it when both parties are around” She explained and we all burst out laughing.

“It’s the same as saying you will seriously miss him my dear” Daddy said, diplomatically.

“I definitely will” She confessed

Tony covered his face babyishly.

“Were you shy before?” Ruby asked, a smile etched on his face.

“Not shy. You guys tend to start feeling yourselves. It’s that feeling that I hate” She confessed again.

We all laughed loudly.

“You guys wouldn’t even let someone sleep” Mum muttered as she stretched.

We all rushed towards her bed, giggling happily.

“I think we should all take some nice shots” Gem said.

“Who will be the photographer?” Tony asked

“Ruby” Gem and I echoed.

He frowned.

“Why? I wouldn’t be in the whole scenario then? Mbanu!”

“Not to worry children. We are all going to show in it. There is a selfie stick in that wardrobe, Emerald, bring it. You are the last born here” Dad intervened and I stood up.

We started taking as many shots as possible.

It was really a time worth living and I really felt alive like a member of a real family!

Mum and even we the children were no longer candles in the wind but now, I felt like we were like a gasoline lamp that even the surrounding insects could only perch on but can’t attack anymore.

All thanks to God the greatest restorer!

N.B: If I tell you the number of reporters that crowded our house from that evening through a whole month and more just to cover the miraculous event that had broken out in my home, you wouldn’t believe it!

I kept wondering how they got to know about what had transpired in our house.

Who do you think leaked the information?

THE END.

REVIEWS

REVIEWS

ONLY GRACE

OMG!...you are blessed! I pray for you that you'll fulfil purpose every day of your life. Your husband is blessed, your children are blessed, your whole family is blessed. My heart prays for you and my spirit is doing that already! Dearie, you're spirit filled, I just know it! You'd have disappointed me if it ends with a tragedy cos my spirit man is not saying that. Sweetheart, take care. Lots to say, but 'no time things'!

TEMITOPE MERCY

Hallelujah! glory be to the God of grace for the end of this great, wonderful, inspiring, encouraging, godly, didactic story. Auntie Lizzy, may God continue to bless you, more grace, more anointing, more inspiration in Jesus' Name. As you've been blessing us with these inspiring stories, in all ramifications of your life may God surprise you. When the roll shall be call up yonder, you shall not be found wanting in Jesus' Name.

Indeed God is a God of possibilities, God of grace, God of mercy. He really proved himself to the Idiles' family...

OLATUNDUN

What a joyful end to the story which was full of great lessons for us all. May the good LORD continue to bless His daughter, Sis. Elizabeth, for us and give her more grace for more exploits.

TOLUWANIMI

A beautiful story that has taught me a lot about Gods tender mercy, patience, dependency on God, prayer, remembering the daughter of who I am, forgiveness (God and man), parenting and many more.

May God continue to give you unction from above. Looking forward to your next write up.

OLUWAKEMI GODDEBBY

Wow!!! Wishing it didn't end but it had to. This God is too good. Your story has increased my faith. More oil to your lamp I pray!

AGOI TEMITOPE

Wow! inspiring, educative, thought provoking, I must confess I have learnt a lot about, Prayer, love, care in the family. God bless you sis Lizzy. Nice one, the Sky is just your beginning...Candle in the wind.

AMII

Hmm! I think this is the third story of yours I've read. You're such a fantastic writer full of the spirit of God. I meditate on your stories for in them I find invaluable biblical teachings and principles

I laugh sometimes, I cry at times and other times I just wish...

God bless you my darling sis

OJEBIYI FAVOUR

Yippee!!!!...Thanks for your stories; they're more than stories. Stories that make you stop for a while, think and make resolutions. Stories that imparts knowledge.

Felt like crying as I read...

MICHAEL CHIDINMA

I can't stop shedding tears of joy...My Faith has just been given a lift. Even though it seems the days of such miracles are gone, God still remains God...I Love you ma and I will like to be like you...

BUSAYO ALLI

I can't thank you enough for this message. That is what I will call it. May God bless you richly and increase you.

TOLULOPE JAGA

Indeed, this story is inspiring. It got me glued to my phone for hours! I enjoyed every part of it and learnt a lot of lessons! God bless you dearie Lizzy...

OLUWATIMILEHIN FAREMI ANANI

Yea yea. I eventually got to read this. Inspiring I must say. God bless and inspire you more in Jesus name. You are different!

TEMITOPE OPEYEMI

Oh, my! My Jesus!!! This piece is so wonderful and life touching. Sincerely ma, I'm blessed. God bless you and may He increase you knowledge-wise and in greater wisdom.

Reading all your pieces has been a foundation for my marital life in embryo. Keep the good work Ma.

FADAIRO JAMES

What a breathtaking story! I love and learned a lot from it. Well done sister, more grease to your elbow. May God give you the grace to accomplish all your missions on earth in Jesus name. Bravo! Gracias !

OTUONYE BLESSING

Waoh, this story is one in a million. I was glued to my phone till the end. I even almost cried at the end. It's a really touching one!

ODUNIYI OLAIIDE

Awesome! I cried for the first time ever reading a story. More ink to your pen dearie, and more of God's grace and wisdom I pray. I must read this through to the very last part.

AKINWUNMI OLUWABUNMI

This story is mind blowing, and not just that but also a blessing as it's addressing so many issues of the heart through the Light of God's word which is truth. I pray for more inspiration by the Spirit of truth as you lead many in the path of truth through your stories.

UGBAH CYNTHIA IFEYINWA

A.M.A.Z.I.N.G

Beautifully done. I'm a fan of yours for life darling. God bless you immensely.

