



TALITHA CUMI!

DE - R A C O N T E U R

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DE-RACONTEUR

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DEDICATION

This inspiring piece is dedicated:

- God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit;
- To every 'Talithas' out there- you need to live again!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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! Thank You, sir!

To the followers and subscribers of my Christian story blog, deraconteur.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.

Friends and family members who have given in cash and in kind to see this in print, I appreciate you greatly. God bless you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lizzy Oyebola Yakubu is a child of God, a journalist by profession and a teacher by passion. She has a B.Sc. In Mass Communication from Bowen University, Iwo, Nigeria. She has a Master in Journalism also from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

She is an inspiring Christian writer ([Download two of her free e-novels here](#)). She is also a Christian blogger (Check out deraconteur.com to read her writings). She is the founder and provost of the fast-rising Christian writing institute- [De-Raconteur Writer's College](#). She is also the founder of the online home ([The B.U.D. Family International](#)) that houses hundreds of Christian sisters all over the world who have a goal- growth in all areas.

She is a filmmaker and scriptwriter. ([Click here to see the movie 'The Voice of Faith' written partly by her and produced by The B.U.D. Family](#)) and you can also listen to '[WHO AM I, LORD?](#)' a song written and produced by Lizzy in 2018. She is graciously married to Michael- A sweet and godly gentleman. You can subscribe and follow their Christian family vlogging channel on Youtube- [The Yaks Family Vlog](#).

ABOUT THE BOOK

This is definitely one of the best stories I have written so far! The revelation was too precise, all-encompassing and enthralling. How about the reception? It was wide!

Talitha Cumi! was written in episodes on my blog (de-raconteur.com) in 2017 and it was a great success! One of the stories that my subscribers chew in their mouths when they talk about De-Raconteur is Talitha Cumi! You just need to read this too and if you have, you need another session.

It is a story about a young girl, Talitha who lost everything she ever had and thought she had. Sad, depraved, crazy and dead, she needed something beyond the physical to give her life! Settle down and prayerfully allow the words of this book travel into your mind. You will never recover from the experiences garnered from this book; I promise!

Shalom!

SOME PEOPLE'S THOUGHTS ABOUT 'TALITHA CUMI!'

I am sorry I will be having a long post, just to express myself and how I was richly blessed and inspired....Oh my my.....This is more than wow.....I have been hearing people up and down mentioning this wonderful writer's name, Lizzy Oyebola, so I said to myself I will follow you on Facebook to read your post, but this last week someone posted TALITHA CUMI! Episode 1&2 on a WhatsApp group I happen to belong and I read it waiting for the person to post the other episodes, then later a friend called me and told he just finish reading the other episodes, that was when I quickly logged in and I started reading till I just finished the episodes now.... I have learnt so many lessons and my eyes are more open in this story...God bless u ma, more grace, strength, power n aunction to function in Jesus Name...Amen!!!!!!- **Oriola Esther Iyanuoluwa**

I won't recover from the numerous lessons learnt so soon. I want to get it right with God all over again. My head is full. I'm short of words. God have mercy on my soul. Sister, You're a blessing to our generation. The sky is just the platform to your summit-
Iyanuoluwa

Wow this is good, so many lessons learnt. My sis told me about the story and I just felt it's a must read for me, it's really touches me, I seem not to take my eyes off it throughout reading. U are blessed sister, continue the great work- **Ayoola Rachael**

Once again, I couldn't sleep till, I finished the story. More ink to your pen ma More wisdom to write in JESUS name. My mood this evening/morning as been up and down.. I practically cried as the story progressed. And I've learnt a lot. Glory to GOD. This was how I was awake for candle in the wind too. Thank GOD I'm a BUDite. GOD bless you- **Grace Adebambo**

O my my am richly blessed but wait o, I don't like this story- I LOVE it! Thanks to God for this your unique talent. Your stories have been a source of encouragement to a lot of helpless persons like me. I always feel refreshed after reading your stories especially "Mara" and this very "Talitha Cumi". My prayer for you is that as you console and encourage the bleeding heart of many, may Almighty God bath you with incomparable wisdom and insight and as well grant you your heart desires. REMAIN BLESSED- **Obule Paige**

Wow ...I can't just stop crying. Thank you, Sis. Lizzy, I just want to say a very big thank you to the God that inspires you. I also thank you for making yourself useful to God in this area. I love you so much, God bless you for me. All my friends I share your stories with all sent their regard. You are blessing lives and I'm one of them. Much love sis. More of God's grace. You will not lose your reward in Jesus Name. amen. Thanks- **James Victory**

...I don't know where I got the strength to read the whole story throughout the night. And I prayed!! Yes, the Lord really ministered to me through the story, He opened my eyes to how it relates to my situation. Thanks, so much Mama Lizzy for listening to His spirit for this wonderful inspiration because I know you are God's vessel. God bless you continually and abundantly. More inspiration and strength to write in Jesus name- **Temitope Ojo**

This story is so interesting, power-packed, lesson-filled, inspirational...a lot more actually. I was really blessed by this story. God bless you richly to keep blessing us with more inspiring stories that we can learn from. This is one story I would recommend to people time and time again. God bless you again Ma!- **Temilolaoluwa**

Honestly, it was a journey of sober reflection for me- a time for repentance and better understanding of God's own perspective. The Lord bless you richly. Amen- **Nzewi Blessing**

I can't but have wet lashes with this challenging and wonders-filled story. Thank God there are spirit lifting stories like this unlike the ones out there full of immoral representation all in the name of "trends". This is my prayer, Lord, like some useful raw material, make something glorious out of me that will make people glorify You, believe in You and turn to You. Ma'am Lizzy, Love u plenty... continue burning and making impact for Him. You shall not run dry of His anointing, wisdom and grace. with Love from 'Seun- **'Seunlade**

Reading this book over again tonight is a blessing, there's no time I go over it and I won't be pressed to pray. TALITHA CUMI! RACHEAL COME ALIVE!- **Racheal Ayoola**

CHAPTER 1

TALITHA

He was directly in front of me!

His eyes bored into mine so much so that I trembled greatly.

Then, he squinted as if the sight of me gave him a bad headache and I ran mad deep inside me.

He shook his head and thereafter turned around to check me out while I supported my shoulders with my arms crossed as I shook from within.

“Girl!” He called out slowly, facing me again.

But what audacity did I have to answer?

He called me ‘girl’!

He called me a generic name instead of the special name he called me- the precious name he christened me!

I could only shiver and hope that all turned out well.

“I regret the day you were born into this world. I regret! Oh Lord, I regret!” He cried slowly but strongly, his lips shivering as tears ran down his face

I was shocked!

I was broken!

If wind had blown at that minute, I knew I would have fizzled away in it!

Did he mean it?

But....

He could never hurt an ant!

He could never speak loud talk less of shout!

He was always a pride of all women!

Few weeks after we lost my mum in a motor accident, many widows and single ladies in our church bombarded our house to help him do ‘this or that’!

Well, he understood their schemes and since he was always particular about not hurting other people’s feelings, he couldn’t chase them away but he had and held me close to his heart!

He pulled me close and called me his wife till the affection so grew and my reaction to those women chased them all away.

Even if my dad would marry any of them, it had to be someone who would complement him- someone who would try hard to replace my irreplaceable mother!

My peaceful dad deserved the best!

But...

Did he just say those heavy words?

Did he?

My lower lip shook in great shock as I tried to find my legs- they had gone stiff!

“Now, out of my house!” He still said calmly.

I looked into his eyes till one tear, then the next dropped in quick succession down my face!

‘It is just a dream ... a bad dream!’ I tried to assure myself.

“Out!” He said again, and as I locked my eyes into his, I saw such redness that looked just like hell!

“Daddy, it is me ... it’s me Tali...” I was saying, trying to hold his shoulders, to tell him to check me out well.

That I was his one and only- his one and only in the whole wide world.

The look on his face as my hands almost touched him made me withdraw and I sighed as if I had just been saved from running into hot fire!

“Erm....” I tried to find my voice when he grabbed my neck suddenly and looked deep into my eyes fiercely for the first time since I was born.

No one dared to hold me like that!

There was a time back in my secondary school days that someone pulled at my cloth till I fell down and though I had told him it was over and that the matter had been settled, he still went down to school to scold the child and reported him to the school authority for further questioning.

Then, he was holding my neck till I choked?

Really!

I was heartbroken!

If he could do this to me, then I could as well go and die!

“I hate you!” He said calmly as his tears dropped on the front of my silky shirt.

“Ah!” I could only say, my heart really constipated.

“You suck!” He exclaimed finally as he spat into my face.

It was unannounced!

I was not expecting it and the fluid really did reach the whole parts of my face.

It entered my eyes, my nostrils and my mouth!

It was sprinkled like water from a tiny hole in a hose!

“Out of my house!” He shouted eventually, pushed me to the door till I fell flat!

“Dad!” I screamed so painfully.

My buttocks had landed on a piece of nail that was in the wall and the injection was so maddening.

But he was unconcerned.

“Out I say!” He screamed the more.

I cried so well as everything dawned on me really!

I had disappointed him!

I had brought only shame and shame into his perfect life!

And if I should leave his house now, I would never be able to find peace! I knew just that!

I had been his wife.

His love.

His girlfriend.

His companion.

His cook.

His consolation.

His congregation.

His joy.

His pride.

HIS DAUGHTER!

The tears that flowed down my face could make a fountain!

My heart was bleeding raw!

If someone could wake me up that instant from the bad dream it was, I would have gifted such person a million dollar even if it meant selling all my teeth to get it!

Then, as I pulled towards him and made to touch his feet- the feet I had helped massage during the cold season, I felt his firm hands pull at my huge hair!

I screamed as my dad dragged me on and on till like a bag of bad potatoes, he threw me out and I landed under the staircase leading to Mr. Robinson's quarters!

I moaned in pain!

I couldn't get myself anymore especially as I heard him bang the front door!

Asides Mr. Bode-Davies, my dad, there had never been anyone who had shown me the true meaning of love and life!

But...

...he was showing me the meaning of cruelty and hatred also!

Could it be that easy to switch between evil and good, dad?

I wept the more as I held my tummy which tingled in pain.

Hunger?

I had not had any good breakfast since I came back from school during the midnight.

I was serving the rice and beans concoction with some coconut servings I had made before going for night class when my phone rang.

“Guess it’s your dad” Happiness, my roommate announced.

“Daddy ke! He can’t be the one jor. Its past 11pm and he definitely would be sleeping now. I trust him” I said, my hands outstretched to get the phone from Happie.

But it was him!

Why would he be calling so late in the night?

“Hey dad, my sweet mirror, my...” I chanted on, happily, though shocked it was him.

“I am in front of Amina Hall. Come down now” The cold voice had said and I was shocked.

Never had my dad spoken in that manner before- not even when he was having a little quarrel with my mum!

I lost appetite immediately as my tummy started drumming some crazy notes.

I ran downstairs almost immediately, draping a tight cap over the hair I had just recently made!

I looked around the hostel but couldn't find him- then I sighted a familiar figure beside a car

"My dad has bought a car?" I asked myself as I hastened excitedly to his side.

I hugged him happily but he was cold.

"Get into the car. We have to go somewhere tonight"

"Daddy, where?" I asked, so shocked as I checked out the simple silky shirt and skirt I was wearing.

"There is no time to waste time! This car is 5000 naira for 1 hour and the hour is almost exhausted. Get in now!"

"But dad, why are you...." I was still saying, still not used to the coldness in his voice when he gave me the 'baddest' look I had ever received.

I smelt evil!

Quickly without any hesitation, I jumped into the car and he sped off like he was in a racing competition!

It was my worst ride ever!

It was piercingly silent!

I tried holding my breath so my dad wouldn't feel offended by the sound of my wheezing breathing- another asthma fit was almost starting.

Well, he didn't seem to care until I saw the direction where the car turned to!

"Is someone sick? Don't worry about the asthma dad, I will be fine" I said as the wheezing increased.

He stopped, a nurse came close to the car and helped me into the clinic- she was obviously not ready to answer my questions.

TALITHA

I woke up at dawn- beside my father- in our compound- in that same car!

As my eyes cleared, I looked into his face carefully and wondered what caused the tears streaming down his hairy face.

And my dad must be in serious debt, seeing that we were still in the same borrowed car for hours!

“I saw you yesterday with Chris” He eventually spoke to me and I jumped up from my sleeping position, my eyes wide open, my ears standing erect!

That was the worst news ever from my dad!

He saw me ... ah!

He must have seen me in that revealing jump suit I was wearing- oh gosh! And I wouldn't have loved him to see me in that!

And oh, the hairstyle was crazy ... Ah! He shouldn't have seen me!

Then he saw me with Chris ... someone every parent in church had warned their children not to walk with because he was into pop music, he had baby mamas and all of that!

How could daddy see me with Chris?

But what was he doing at Sheraton that day? Chai!

He dropped a paper on my laps, opened the car door and I watched as he staggered inside the house with an obvious sorrow-laden heart!

I opened the letter and another paper fell.

I picked it too.

I unfolded the first and my eyes caught it – Virginity Test, negative!

Tears ran down my face at this!

Ah!

What could have drawn my dad to have me examined for virginity?

What could have caused the suspicion?

“My dad already knows ... He knows...” I repeated as tears cascaded down my face.

I squeezed the two papers and hid inside my blouse- No one should see it ... No one!

I cried and cried to no avail till afternoon when I summoned courage to go and meet him inside, at least so he could go and return the car he had borrowed!

As it dawned on me that the secret, I had so kept from my dad had eventually gotten to his ears and he had confirmed it himself, I shook with fear!

I had lied to him!

I had made him believe he had an angel for a daughter!

I had made him believe that I was so flawless!

I should have opened up to him!

I should have told him it was just with a guy and that it was just because I couldn't control myself again!

I was madly in love!

TALITHA

When I got to school, I met Happiness who happened to be a 'Big girl'- daughter of a popular model.

It was on a fateful day while I sat down before the computer at the business center after I had gone to pay my school fees to access the portal and click for accommodation.

I waited and waited until I learnt that all the rooms were occupied.

I was frustrated!

How do I secure accommodation?

I heard some ladies jubilating over the fact that they eventually clicked rooms and my tummy flickered with envy!

Houses off campus were very expensive!

My dad was a full-time pastor!

My sponsor, Dr. T. Donald, who happened to be my mum's step brother seemed to be tired of taking up my responsibilities as it took him over a month before he sent me my school fees despite having informed him about it five months back!

'Who do I turn to now?'

I rested my head on the table before me as the allocated time I had paid for to browse had been exhausted.

Something fell on my back and before I could turn to check what it was, this beautiful girl fell over me, knocking off the desktop before me with a thud!

She screamed and gathering momentum, though my back sounded as though it was broken, I helped her up, straightened her hair and picked the iPhone which had fallen on my back which she must have been guiding from falling.

“Thanks” She said so sweetly and I nodded as I helped her put her beautiful high-heeled shoes in place.

“Be careful with heels” I said and she nodded, pouting in a babyish manner.

“Thanks, big sis. I must have missed my steps” She said coolly.

‘What!’

‘Do I look that old or is it because of the scarf I am tying? Big sister to this biggie? ... Nah!’

The operators of the business center came around to check the broken desktop and this biggie stood up sharply.

“How much is the desktop? I will replace it. I am so sorry” She said hurriedly as she reached into her purse.

What!

Did the guys ask for a replacement?

What a spoilt, wasteful child!

“Excuse me sir. We are very sorry. She missed her steps. Please, forgive us. It was an accident” I tried to cover up her last statement and one of the men smiled, shaking his head.

“You are well mannered! Girls like this spoilt one are nothing to write home about! They prefer to buy their ways in and out with money instead of saying a simple sorry!” One of the operators said and my biggie stood up to talk.

“I just wanted to avoid embarrassment! I hate destroying things” She said with a shaky voice

“Well, even if it was a monster you met here, didn’t he see that it was an accident? Would it have been bad to say sorry? Wouldn’t even the monster have bulged?” Another operator charged at her and when she couldn’t hold it, she burst out crying.

I had to intervene, settled the whole matter and that was how we became friends!

She had secured a personal executive room in the hostel and gladly offered to take me in!

She introduced me to her uncle too at the College of Medicine, Physiotherapy, exactly my department and he had been of great help to me!

One day, as I weaved her hair into few corn rows after I had deep conditioned it for her, I remembered the ‘big sis’ thing she said and laughed out.

“What’s that?” She asked, looking at me from the mirror she was holding.

“The first day you met me at the cafe, why did you call me big sis?” I asked and it was her turn to laugh out.

Her laughter was so great that it sounded like the roaring of a lion as she beat her laps and coughed out loud and unrestrictedly!

I waited patiently till she landed and she wiped her tears off her face.

“What is so funny?” I asked.

“You really looked like a mama that day!” she said and a surge of embarrassment ran through my nerves.

“What!” I exclaimed, almost irritated.

“If not that we have lived together for a while and I have seen the real, young, milky you, I would still have called you big sis”

“How old are you?” I asked, trying hard to hide my embarrassment.

“I will be 20 in June. And you?” She replied, her dimples deepened as she smiled.

“I will be 18 in April” I replied and she jumped up, excitedly.

“I am even the big sis!” She exclaimed and I frowned.

“You see now?” I raised my nose at her and she knitted her brows into a frown too.

“I see what? Can we go and ask a hundred people who looks older between us? A ninety-nine and one people would choose you!” She said and I was covered up with heat that instant!

She moved to the rack where I hung my bag and threw it down, then my only pair of shoes too was thrown down!

She moved closed to me and tugged at the cap covering my hair.

“Thank God you are bringing this up now, Tally! Thank God! That is no bag, even my nanny at home doesn’t use that crap to take food home to her dogs! And that pair of shoes? ... So, people really do have one pair? Really! I wouldn’t give that to Missy, my cat! And this cap you use in covering your head every time as if you have just come out of widowhood, oh my, it’s old! It’s odd! It’s weird! It’s crap!” She said as if she was rioting over the unpaid salary of her close pal and I could only watch on.

“Well, I know good things too and I would love them but my dad can’t afford it! My dad is a pastor! He is a full-time pastor!” I said as tears tried to invade the territory of my eyes but I fought them.

Never had I regretted my dad’s occupation till that time- when I looked at what I was wearing really and my mum’s old bag and all I had and I spited them all as rags!

“See, I will take you out for shopping tomorrow and I will choose what fits you! You are a princess and you should dress in the regalia of a princess!” She said with authority and seeing a sponsor from the blues, who was I to say no?

I jumped at the offer and off we travelled to Ceddi Plaza, in Uncle Jeff’s car ... Oh my, riches at the highest level!

“This is just a small mall compared to others we have in Nigeria” Happiness said and I looked on, dumbfounded.

The day was fun-filled especially with Uncle Jeff around. He cracked us up with different jokes and bought us very nicely flavored ice-cream.

I had never tasted ice-cream before though I had grown up enjoying the cheap ten-naira cone filled sugar surnamed ice-cream!

When it was time to choose clothes, there was war as I kept saying no to all the clothes, she selected for me!

She was mad as she left me in the dressing room to report to her uncle. I joined them and Uncle Jeff encouraged me to wear one and come to show him so he could tell me how it looked.

As he lifted his eyes to survey me from head to toes in a very short, revealing but classy gown, his face broke out into a large wow!

“You look gorgeous! You look like a royal damsel! You look....” He kept on saying when Happiness covered his mouth.

“I hope it is not like you have fallen for my friend.”

“I guess I have” He said, covering his face and Happiness laughed.

“Don’t mind him. We have told him severally to go and get married o but he is doing fine boy around” She said and I smiled.

“But, I guess I am in love now” He said and excitedly, Happiness pulled at his arm.

“Tell me about it. I promise not to tell anyone, not Aunty Tessie, not my mum, it will be a secret!” She said, excitedly

As he bent to whisper in her ears, all the parts of me heard, though whispered, very loudly in my ears- Talitha!

My name!

My whole body stood at this junction!

**This well certified, handsome, young, medical personnel and lecturer is in love with me?
Poor me?**

He winked at me and all didn't matter anymore!

My heart gave in straight away!

I fell in love too!

That was the beginning of our relationship, although we kept it a secret from Happiness for a while because she felt I was too young for her thirty-one-year-old uncle.

I would spend long hours in his office, we would gist and go on dates, he bought me more fanciful things and gave me rides round the school, he made me feel a kind of love, very different from the one my dad and I shared!

His touches sent signals into my head that scattered the arrangement of flesh, blood and bones up there!

His smiles too were killing!

I remembered that I should keep myself until marriage and should not get myself defiled along the way but what could I do when my flesh wouldn't agree with me?

I was just too close to him for nothing not to happen!

It was a Valentine's day and I visited his Garki Apartment- He was glad to see me really and I was glad to see him too, in a relaxed, tee shirt manner instead of suits all the time!

As he presented a chocolate cake before me, my heart longed for him. My heart longed to be wrapped in his huge masculine arms and feeling so bad that I could not reciprocate his gifts, though I got him some cufflinks and ties, I started to warm up against him. Though he tried to pull away, I pushed nearer to him till he couldn't hold it anymore.

"Tally darling, I love you so much that I would also want you in my arms. That's how I feel too but you, are you sure about this?" He asked, pulling away.

"Yes, I am sure. Take me to bed!" I said, coarsely, my real voice submerged in lust!

And that was it!

"Talitha, I feel ashamed to have pulled such an innocent lady into this mess. You were a virgin Tally! I feel shameful to have cheated a young girl like you. Forgive me!" He went on his knees to say sorry to me and I still stood up to hug him.

He pulled away and tried to cover me up.

"Talitha, I vow not to touch you ever again until I take you to the altar! Please, don't let's do this again. Please" He begged and that was when my sanity returned a bit.

That was the only one time I had sexual intercourse!

After that day, though I wanted more and more of him, he never gave me again!

I was with Chris the day before at Sheraton Hotel but we were there for a departmental assignment and not for anything!

Could I even afford it?

TALITHA

“Talitha, what are you doing under the staircase?”

I heard that voice and knew it was Mr. Robinson, our American neighbor and church member.

I tried to sit down from the sleeping position I had met myself, my face dry from my tear stains.

“Is your dad in?” He asked and I knew what was next.

I quickly jumped up to pull Mr. Robinson back from knocking at our door.

My buttocks hurt from the nail injection earlier and I leaped forward and fell.

**“Hey, sorry darling. You don’t want your dad to know about you? You don’t look good”
He said again and I shook my head.**

**“I offended him. He is still mad at me. Calling him now will worsen it all.” I said as he
tried to pull me up.**

“Oh! Why not try The Fakunle’s house then?” He asked and I nodded.

That was just the best place to go and hide my head!

**Mrs. Fakunle was my mum’s very best friend from childhood till she died- she was even
my mum’s Chief Bridesmaid!**

We had been family friends and they lived across the street.

“Can I drop you off?” Mr. Robinson asked and I shook my head!

“Never mind, Mr. Robinson. I will be fine” I said as I dragged myself down to the gate and off the street.

I couldn’t bring myself to believe that my dad had thrown me outside our home- the two room Boys’ Quarters where we had lived for ten years after mum died.

“My dad threw me out?” I asked myself continually even as my voice competed with my uncontrollable sobs.

TALITHA

“Just sit down outside while Sofia clears the store for you or can you manage to sleep on a mat on the Veranda?” Mrs. Fakunle asked and I couldn’t believe my ears.

“But mom, why can’t she share my room? She always does when she visits” Sofia said to her and the look her mum gave her sent her running up the stairs.

“Just stay outside. I will tell you when to come in Talitha” She repeated and I gently went outside as tears rose up from my tummy and poured out through my eyes and nose and mouth!

First, it was my dad calling me child instead of Queen Talitha and now this beloved mummy of mine who would lovingly call me Princess Tally threw my name in my face!

Why?

Why am I being treated badly?

Why is everyone pushing me away?

As I fell over the stool, something pushed against my chest and I remembered the papers I had squeezed and hidden there.

I sat on the floor dejectedly and heard some footsteps from inside.

“See her! She is sitting on the floor. See her now!” I heard Sammy and Bright, Sofia’s sisters arguing at the window side from inside.

It was disheartening!

These were children that would have ran to hold me, admired my long hair and asked that I gist them about school life but immediately they sighted me, they just ran inside as if I was a plague!

My heart bled!

‘What exactly is my sin?’

‘Or do I have poop smeared across my face?’

Daddy is angry that I wasn’t a virgin though I had pretended to be one- that’s justifiable to an extent.

‘But what do these people know?’

‘Why are they treating me like shit?’

‘What could I have done wrong?’

‘Why can’t I sleep in the same room with the friend of mine whose room I had always shared?’

“Devotion time is 5am tomorrow. When the bell is rung, come downstairs. You can go to the store now; it has been cleared. Pass the back door. Here’s the key. Goodnight” Mrs. Fakunle said as she threw the key at me.

As I looked at the key, I felt like dying!

The cry that was about to elope my mouth would be so disastrous, so I stuffed the papers in my mouth to avoid the sound while tears cascaded my face, my heart peppered with pain!

CHAPTER 2

TALITHA

I dug my sharp, long nails into my cap as I saw Joe smiling at me from the choir stand where he sat.

I couldn't smile back!

My heart was heavy, my eyes ached and I felt ashamed as if I had just been removed from a soak-away all submerged in feces!

I couldn't believe it was me actually sitting down with a casual wear on a Sunday morning looking unkempt- I had not had a change of cloth since the Friday dad had come to pick me up from school.

My phone beeped and I checked the message.

'Is that my Tally? Don't tell me it's you'

It was from Joe!

Joe was the second child of the general overseer of Maranatha Revival Church where I attended.

Why would he be sending me messages in the church while the service was on?

Chai!

He had just returned from Ukraine where he had gone for his first degree and before he left, he told me he liked me and if I could keep myself for a while till, he is ready and I am, he would want to marry me.

He said it jokingly at that time but while he was away, he really kept in touch, chatting, skyping and all. I had always thought it was going to be him until I met Uncle Jeff!

I looked towards the choir stand and nodded, smiling faintly, my heart feeling dead.

‘Wor is stronging you?’

He sent again and I smiled for the first time since Friday night.

That was the way we both normally communicated while we were still very close. I looked towards him and shook my head again!

I was just too exhausted to type!

If I had had my way in the morning, I wouldn't be in the church because of the things that happened at home!

Could I call the Fakunle's place home again?

No! It was just a cover!

I never would be able to stay in that house- never!

When I got to the store room that very night, I felt so horrible!

No, my dad wasn't rich, but we still stayed neat and fine!

As much as the store had been cleaned, my head was baptized with cobwebs as I moved in and with the papers still stuffed in my mouth, I fell to the mattress which was placed on the floor and cried well!

It was when I could hear so loudly in my ears the thumping of the stubborn veins in my forehead that I stopped crying and started removing the cobwebs from my forehead.

Even as I sniffed wetly, all my facial veins stood up strong as if declaring war against me!

I spat out the papers in my mouth which had become wet and caressed my stressed cheeks for a while.

I paused to look around me.

There was a lightly lit lantern at a corner and I could perceive the smell of rotten onions and egusi (melon) seeds.

‘Sleeping in the store room, Talitha? ... wow!’

I wasn't having enough airtime on my phone, neither was I having subscription to chat and truth be told, Uncle Jeff and I had not seen each other in the last three weeks when

we met for the Valentine's day celebration. He still called me sometimes anyways but I missed him so much!

'Who am I supposed to call?'

'Who am I supposed to run to?'

I knew from when my dad had sent me out of our house that things would never be the same anymore for me and really, it was that way!

I heard some crawling movement not far away and pulled my legs to my chest in fear. I was so close to tears again.

Just then, my phone rang.

I picked it up and my heart jolted in me

Happie!

"Tally, I miss you. What's up? I have been trying to reach you since Friday" She said, anxiety in her voice.

“Thanks” I said, I was too excited that I could not speak further

I was excited that there was at least someone out there who could at least hear me out!

Someone who could be scared for me!

Someone who could miss me still!

“What’s wrong? How are you? Where are you? How is daddy too?” She asked, obviously scared.

I was touched so much that tears rushed to my eyes again and I sniffed.

“Are you crying Tally?” She asked, her voice sounding as if she stood up with shock from a chair.

“Let me talk to her. What’s making her cry?” I heard that voice and my heart stopped working!

Uncle Jeff!

“Hello Tally Mine, what’s up? How are you doing?”

“Fine” I whispered, quietly because I didn’t know if Mummy Sofia would shout from downstairs that I should keep quiet!

“Why are you whispering?” He asked and magically it worked!

What I was not able to tell Happie, I told him.

“Dad sent me packing from our house. I am in a neighbor’s house now but I was made to stay in a store-room” I said and started crying.

“What the heck! Why would daddy do that? What happened?” He asked, obviously angry.

“It’s a long...” I had not ended that statement when I heard a loud bang at the door.

“Madam, you are disturbing the whole house ma and we need to sleep because tomorrow is Sunday. Suspend all calls please” Mummy Sofia said.

“Okay ma. Sorry ma”

“Be sorry for yourself” She replied and my mouth remained suspended in shock.

“I’ve got to go now Jay.” I whispered and he sighed

“Oh my! Do you want me to come pick you up tomorrow? Are you in Abuja?” He asked and I nodded as if he could see me over the phone

“Stay strong baby. Be strong please. I love you” He said and though it calmed me a bit, I knew something must be wrong!

As I dropped the call, I clung to my phone for life and wept bitterly!

Why am I being treated so callously?

What happened to this woman?

Sorry for myself? ... ah ah!

I couldn't think straight anymore.

Just then, I heard some crawling and then dragging and then pulling movement and my heart started racing again!

I switched on the torch from my phone and flashed it at where the sound was coming from.

All I could see were catering materials, large stoves and cookers including huge dusty shelves, different sacks and some planks.

I heard the sound again and pointed the torch towards the place.

Just then, I saw that black thing under a shelf not far away.

My heart jumped into my mouth!

Is that a snake?

I stood up suddenly and looked around for an object that I could throw at that area. I found a small stick which I threw and suddenly, there was a movement!

What!

A snake?

As my heart quaked, I got myself a long pipe which I would use to smash the head of any approaching reptile or rodent!

I couldn't believe it was me having a tough time really but it was me- Talitha!

Just as I was about to sit again, my leg hit something wet and I jumped up.

"Snake!" I yelled.

Then, I looked at my leg side and found the papers that had been stuck to my mouth.

“You these papers, what exactly is it with you? What?” I asked sadly as I picked them up.

I fell to the bed and pursed my lips as my head ached seriously

My eyes were madly heavy!

I looked at the reason I was kicked out of the house, the reason why I was being stigmatized- The paper!

I started unfolding again and laid the papers on the bed.

As I unfolded the second paper, I realized I had not opened it at all before.

It was somehow colorful unlike the one I had opened.

“What’s in this one again o?” I asked myself and fully unfolded it.

As I looked into the paper and my eyes caught what was inside, I knew it immediately!

The reason for the strange behavior of these people.

My stomach dropped!

My eyes started spinning!

I dropped the pipe I was holding and relaxed against the wall dejectedly, holding my head in my hands.

I couldn’t cry!

I was in that position till morning, just blinking and staring into space, sometimes, tears would flow, dry up, flow, dry up of its own volition!

I couldn’t feel again for those hours!

I was psychologically unstable at that moment!

When I heard the bell for devotion ring from inside, I couldn't stand up to answer!

All my strength was gone!

“Go and wake that girl up, Sofia” I heard Mummy Sofia say.

“Okay mum” Sofia responded and then I heard a knock at the door.

The door opened and then Sofia, still in her nightie, looking worried ran towards me and hugged me.

“Just wake her up and come back here ni o Sofia!” Mummy Sofia said again, stressing her daughter's name.

“Yes mummy” She said, pecked my forehead and then squeezed something into my head as she went out.

She stayed at the door again and knocked.

“Tally, it’s time for devotion” She said and I smiled a bit.

“That girl can sleep on water. Better knock well. Maybe she doesn’t know we do devotion in our own house.” Mummy Sofia said on and on and I tried standing up.

In fact, anyone could throw stones at me at the moment

I didn’t care anymore but to die!

“We don’t have any other orisa (god) in our house that we worship o! Tally come out!” She kept on shouting from downstairs and I knew that if I didn’t move out very fast, the sorrowful tale would continue.

The whole devotion was about me!

The whole family had to lay their hands on me to deliver me because I had eaten the forbidden fruit!

How did she know about it?

Exactly how did she know something so deep about me?

Did my dad tell her anything?

What does my dad even know?

Who could have gone to tell my dad something like that?

Who knew me so well to have known something so deep about me?

I pulled at my skirt and bit my lower lip as if to cut it off- I was shivering!

“Leave my skirt please. Hey, leave me omode yi (this child)” I heard that from afar, felt a tug at my hand and then, I became startled and opened my eyes

I had started dozing, lost in the world of what had happened the night before.

I looked at the woman beside me and realized that while I bit at my lower lip, I was pulling at her skirt with all my might in my anxiety- in the church.

“I am so sorry ma” I said and she straightened her rumpled skirt while she hissed and muttered some words beneath her breath as she did.

I gasped in exhaustion

“So, this should serve as a lesson to all parents here. Bring up your children in the way of the Lord for the Bible says when he is old, he will not depart from it. Continue to pray for your children. Also, pray for Pastor Bode-Davies, that God should strengthen him. It is not easy to be relieved of one’s position in the church. Please pray for him”

I heard that and jumped to my feet!

Which Mr. Bode-Davies was the general overseer talking about?

It couldn’t be my father!

Why?

I looked towards the podium and saw my father on his knees before the whole church, his head bowed.

There was another man kneeling beside him- Mr. Abraham.

The pastor lifted my dad's head and removed the tag he wore on his neck and he wore it on Mr. Abraham's neck.

The whole church was silent!

But in my inside, there was a great noise!

My dad!

Being humiliated right before my eyes?

Impossible!

Was he the one that erred?

Was it not me?

Why should he be punished for me?

I knew that meant his salary would be stopped!

I knew he would probably die of grief!

Something strange happened in my heart- something so pure, so touching that I realized if I didn't do something at that instant, my dad would never ever forgive me!

"My dad can't be suspended! He didn't err! I did!" I shouted loud and clear and there arose a very loud murmuring in the church.

The woman seated beside me pulled me to my seat.

“What are you doing?” She asked sharply, looking fierce.

“Yes, look at me with those eyes! I don’t care! I just can’t watch my dad being thrown away from where he had served for a whole thirty years. Why? For his daughter’s sins ... no! It’s not reasonable”

“You should have thought of that when you were busy flirting around” The woman said and I became quiet suddenly.

The whole church already knew?

Wow!

“Miss Talitha Bode-Davies, could you please rise” Pastor Adameji, Joe’s father and the general overseer said and I stood up.

“Was it a crime that your father sent you to school?” He asked and all eyes was on me

“No!” I replied silently

“What wrong has the poor man done to you?” He asked on but there was no more reply in my mouth to give.

“Exactly why are you repaying him this way?”

“A reliable source brought the news to my ears last week but I said no! I had to do my understudy. Many of your pictures were sent to me to show how wildly you now dress. I had to call your dad on Friday to run some tests on you! I couldn’t believe my little Tally had become a wild girl but see it before my face- you were wild!” Pastor Adameji said and I gasped.

Well, tears would have started strolling down my face but no!

My heart could no long shed tears.

My inside could bake a cake to a good cook with the hotness going inside anyways!

“Was it for the love of your dad that you were screaming that way Talitha? Why didn’t you think about this humiliation before defiling yourself? Why?” The pastor was almost crying and my dad was there lying on his face!

I had never seen him that way before- so broken!

“Anyways, I didn’t discipline your dad. Your dad asked to be suspended for a while till he settles things with God. May God have mercy on your soul Talitha!” The pastor said, heaving loudly in the mic.

“Amen!” The church echoed and I looked around at the whole congregation as I sank in my seat again.

My eyes caught Joe where he was seated and his head was bent. He shook his head in intervals.

I remained mute till the service ended.

It felt as if even my heart stopped beating.

When I became sane again, I looked around me in the church to see empty pews.

‘So, people actually left me here without even saying hi?’

Wow!

On a norm, many children would have jumped to my side, many youth choristers would have come to say hello but no youth, no child, no adult even cared to say hello? ... really!

As I tried to rub my hands together because I had started sweating in there, I realized that I was holding something in my palm- what Sofia had squeezed in my palm when she came to wake me up.

It was a paper- and as I unfolded it, two thousand-naira notes fell off.

I picked them and checked out the paper

"I know how you feel Tally and though I am shocked myself, I feel sorry for you. You can't be fine as long as you stay in our house. Just take that money and leave the house. Run away. Go back to school! We will chat later"

That was the content and I smiled!

Sofia had been my childhood friend. Though, six months older than her, she knew all about me!

I told her the in and out of everything about me but never did I mention my recent love escapades with Uncle Jeff.

I couldn't tell her even though she told me all about hers.

I remembered the first time Sofia was intimate with a guy- it was with Peter, one of our elder's son and she was telling me, very excitedly.

"It isn't as painful as mummy said it would be." She had told me and I had frowned at it very seriously.

'Now, it is my turn!'

My turn to be advised and counselled but there was no one!

No one could wait behind to counsel me- to tell me that I had made a mistake but that that shouldn't be the end and that God still loved me?

'Or could it be that God now hates me?'

I stood up and started going to the door, dejectedly.

I didn't know exactly what to do again.

It would be best to go back to school which would definitely be a safe haven for me but would that be the end of my relationship with my dad?

As I descended from the stairs, I looked afar and saw my dad on his bike, two women talking to him, his head bent.

'What are they telling him?'

My heart started racing and I felt like I could be swallowed up from earth, so I would be fine and free from the black guilt that hung upon me so greatly.

I walked slowly towards him and when I got beside him, I knelt beside his bike and tried to touch his sandalled foot.

As he turned to look at me, I saw beyond the helmet on his head that covered his face- the dark circles underneath his eyes and the blood-red eyeballs.

My heart cracked into pain the more!

My dad had been sore!

He pushed my hand off him and I fell backwards.

He pedaled his bike and as I tried to gather myself together and sit up, I saw him waving at the two women discussing with him earlier.

“Thanks to you Mrs. Tade and Mrs. Abraham. I will see you later” He said and I buried my face in my hands again as I wept eventually!

My dad was not the normal happy, gentle man again!

As I raised my head thinking the two women were still around, trying to counsel me, I found the duo entering their different cars and driving away.

I was shocked!

‘Is this the definition of the church?’

‘Just being trampled under feet and left there to rottenness?’

Really!

I looked up to the sky and shook my head as the meaning of everything going on really dawned on me!

I picked myself from the ground and dusted my skirt

“I can’t die now! I was blind in lust, oh yes! For a while, my young and fertile mind went astray especially when my lacks were met and I yielded to the flesh ... yes! But what else should I do? What? I should go and die?” I asked myself as I walked out of the church premises.

I was pained in my heart that I had been ridiculed and had failed many people’s trust but I knew right inside me that I couldn’t die!

I’d got to survive anyway.

As I tried to wave a taxi down, a car stopped before me and on a closer look, it was Mrs. Tade.

“Come in dearie” She said, smiling brightly

I was shocked!

‘Is this not the woman who drove off few minutes ago after discussing with my dad?’

I entered the car and sat in the front seat with her.

“How are you dear?”

“Fine” I responded. I was interested in listening to anything she had to discuss with me if she had anything new, anyways.

“Ah, the service was hot today!” She exclaimed and I wondered if it was me, she was actually talking to.

Hot?

What made it hot?

My matter or what?

“You aren’t saying anything?” She asked and I chuckled

‘Isn’t she being childish?’

“Actually, anyone who had seen you close to Jeff Dantata would know this is what it will result into” She said and I shifted in my seat.

I wanted more gist

I loved diarrheic mouths like hers- mouths that continually gave even when their listeners wouldn’t give any!

“Actually, I am in Anatomy department and most times, I see you move in and out with him and I wondered if you were just close on the teacher-student level but from what happened today, I could see I had been wrong” She said and paused.

I was uncomfortable at the silence in the car and I wanted her to tell me more but she was silent.

I saw as her hand snaked out and laid upon my tummy. I winced.

“How do you feel? Any nausea? Any pain? Any weakness?” She asked and that was when I remembered.

Pregnancy Test- Positive- Three weeks old

That was what the other wet paper contained when I checked the night before.

But how could I have believed such news?

How could the first sexual encounter result to pregnancy?

Also, I watched in movies that when one takes in, it would come with vomiting and weakness and lack of appetite but I didn't vomit, neither was I weak and my appetite for food and junks had even skyrocketed.

So, I disregarded the news!

It must have been a mistake!

I had heard that lab attendants make mistakes sometimes- mine must have been a mistake too.

It must have been!

"How are you feeling?" She asked again and I smiled

I could feel the flow of Mrs. Tade's discussion and I was ready to disappoint her.

She was the kind of women that would want you to say something- something that would make the headline at their next Gossiping Women Association!

“Also, at this stage, you would have to change your brasserie dear. Your breasts are becoming massive and ...” she was saying about to touch them with her hand.

I threw her hands away, very angry.

“What is that ma?” I still tried to be polite.

“What is that? You these children ehn! If it is your mum that wants to touch you, you would be aggressive about it but if it were to be a man, you would be laughing sheepishly, right?” She said and I was irritated.

What did this woman take me for?

A bitch?

“Ma, yes, if guys touch me, why won’t I laugh? It’s interesting when they do. Tell me a reason why I should be aggressive with the guy” I said, my heart racing in anger

I was mad!

She clapped her hands together and quickly returned her hand to steer the wheel.

“I knew it! That was exactly what I told Mrs. Fakunle! I knew it was not a mistake at all! She had just become a flirt! I said it! ... ah ah!” She said again, excitedly, a huge smile on her face.

A look that told me she was happy that she had something to take back to her circle of gossips!

But I had my point to hold on to as well!

She saw me with Uncle Jeff on many occasions, she told Mrs. Fakunle about it. Then, the latter said it couldn't be true! She had to get many proofs and probably got me monitored.

“I told her to monitor the girl and see how robust she had become. I was right! I was so right! The jezebel spirit has entered our children. What is your church becoming Lord? Oh, when men slept. Oh, when men slept!” She lamented on and I couldn't but watch on.

I was so dazed!

How could a woman switch between smiling very brightly that she was right and weeping her eyes out now about the church of God?

I was very amazed

“So, have you told the guy? Have his parents been informed?” She asked, her eyes filled with tears.

And my dear heart, I was furious!

“Can you stop the car ma?” I asked as politely as I could ask, my whole frame shaking with anger.

“What? You can’t run away from you shadow no matter how you...” She was saying when I took my hand to pull the door lever

Her eyes shone.

“Are you going to open the door even while I am driving? Are you that ...?” She was still saying and with my hands covering my ears, I screamed!

“Stop this car now!” I screamed in a deafening way that after she had brought the car to a stop, she slapped my shoulder, shocked.

“You need Jesus you this girl!” She exclaimed, obviously still shocked.

“Yes ma. I need Jesus. You need Him more!” I shouted into her face and she paused to look into my face, embarrassed.

I calmed down a bit

“My dad didn’t teach me to disrespect elders ma. But if you want to be a gossip, be one! If you want to be a Christian ma, please be one!” I exclaimed again and with her mouth suspended, she raised her index finger to touch her chest.

“I am a gossip?” She asked, her lips shaking

“Yes ma’am!” I exclaimed and bowed my head. I raised it up immediately to finish delivering my hot lecture.

“The moment you sense something wrong with a youth, you wouldn’t even call the person to caution him or her. Instead, you would start perching around, looking for some ills

here, some faults there. Once you find it, you jump up and say, you said it!” I said again, my heart boiling really hot.

“What!” She said, real tears rushing into her eyes

But I was not done yet.

“You are not different from some normal humans we see everywhere. Celebrities get married and they would hear about it and they would start tweeting that the marriage would fail and for real, few months after, there would be cracks and they would gladly and excitedly jump around saying, I said it! Tell your fellow gossips ma, that unna try wella! You guessed right and the angelic, almost faultless Talitha is reportedly pregnant! Tell them more!” I said and opened the door, hissing very loudly, my hands cold and shaky.

“This was not how your dad brought you up Talitha” Mrs. Tade shivered on as she wasn’t expecting the kind of effrontery with which I had challenged her.

I bent to look back into her face through the car window.

“This was not how Jesus brought you up, Mrs. Tade. Grow up!” I said calmly too, giving her a smile that I knew scattered the molecules in her brain

I hissed and joined the queue waiting for the commuter buses.

I looked back to see the car still parked on the spot.

I had been brutally disrespectful I know but kai, I was hurt!

Why wouldn't anyone think of the repercussion of their actions on my poor heart?

Why?

As tears rushed to my eyes again, I remembered that Uncle Jeff had promised to come pick me up.

Why hadn't he called then?

A bus came and as people struggled to get in, I knew I couldn't!

I waited back and then my phone rang.

Happie!

“Hello Happie!” I said, sniffing slightly.

“Who told you?” She asked, sniffing too. I was confused.

“Told me what?” I asked and she started crying

“I am on my way to Abuja. Just go and stay in Aunty Tessie’s place in Maitama. I will send her address to you now”

“What is the problem?” I asked again, my heart racing

“Tally!” She exclaimed and started crying. The beeper went off.

I was shocked!

I was confused!

I was mad!

School problems?

‘Is our hostel on fire?’

‘Has she heard that I am pregnant and she wants it aborted?’

What could be wrong oh Lord?

As I awaited the arrival of her message, I waved down a taxi and hopped in with all my problems, pain and sorrow.

As we drove past the road, I saw still on the same spot- Mrs. Tade’s car!

Was she that shaken?

CHAPTER 3

DOVE

As I swallowed the very soft pounded yam well wrapped in rich egusi soup, it felt like a huge stone in my throat that wouldn't go down!

I coughed and mum quickly handed me a cup of cold, richly hand squeezed orange juice which I used to forcefully let it sink.

Even as mum handed me the cup, she wasn't looking at my face as she was so engrossed in the discussion going on.

I cleared my throat a number of times just to get someone's attention but they wouldn't even give it to me.

Well, I stood up, moved to the washing hand basin and gently scrubbed my hands. It was the raining sound of the tap that made them realize that someone had stood up from the dining table.

"My Prince, what's wrong? You are not done eating your food" Mummy said with so much worry and I turned to look at her.

"I am done mum" I said but she wasn't convinced

“Daddy, talk to this boy o. Why would he waste my food when he was the one that asked me to pound the yam? Ehn” She started complaining and I smiled.

“Son, what’s up?” Dad asked in a manly way and I smiled.

“I suddenly lost my appetite dad. It felt as if I was swallowing stones” I said and they all looked at me with different funny looks.

Joe with those teary red eyes of his gave me a ‘You must be kidding me’ kind of look;

Daddy looked at me with a shocked ‘My wife’s food? What are you talking about?’ kinda look.

And my mum’s look....

Oh my!

It burnt with fire!

If there was anyone who appreciated mum's food so well and expressed it in kind, it was me.

After each meal, I would normally sing praises of the virtuous woman mum was and give her a sweet, tight hug that would send daddy running to take his queen away from me.

It definitely must have pained my mum so well that the same me that sang 'Hosanna!' was also chanting 'Crucify him!'

That was exactly what I wanted!

A perfect silence, especially today!

"I am so sorry mum! I know you put in so much to get this prepared and then, this your prince doesn't even wanna understand." I said and looked into their faces still.

The looks grew from bad to worse

"Son, what is the matter? Have you taste buds suddenly..." My dad was asking when I clapped dramatically.

“Oh yes dad! That’s the word! My taste buds are dead. They aren’t even responsive no more!” I said again and their expressions grew a bit less than bad.

“What is wrong with you my prince? When did it start?” My mum asked again, looking worried.

I smiled.

I knew she loved me dearly.

Though she tried her best to love Joe and I equally, I knew that I was just so dear to her heart!

I wondered often how she would cope when a woman eventually takes a tight hold of my heart. The jealousy tho!

“It started while we were in the car, it grew worse as I watched mum and Joe pound the yam and it grew worst as we started eating” I said and they all looked puzzled.

Mummy tried standing up to come and meet me but daddy held her down with one of his hands on her shoulder.

I looked at dad's face

I saw confusion and a zeal to get to the root of the matter!

The intelligent chap!

As his eyes ran through my face succinctly, I knew he was trying to relate what I said was wrong with me with the look on my face.

"Son, I still see you salivating. Your Adam's apple is really moving! Also, the expression on your face is showing you are really happy seeing us bothering so much about you. Am I right son?" He said and I smiled as my heart clapped for him.

He obviously had the Holy Spirit in him.

I scratched my head and thought for a while

“Or, could it be heartburn?” I asked them and Joe hissed, resuming his food.

“He sounds pranky!” Joe said, his mouth food-full.

“My prince, is it heartburn or dead taste buds?” Mummy asked, confused

“And what caused it in the car, when we got home and now?” Dad asked too and I nodded

Exactly the questions I wanted them to ask so badly

“The cause...” I seemed to think about it carefully

“I guess the words! The words we’ve been saying, especially Joe, they were unkind! I am very allergic to those kinds of words!” I said and mum still looked puzzled.

Dad nodded slowly and smiled as he gave me a kinda appreciative look, telling me he knew my destination already.

Joe paused to look at me then.

“I don’t get” He said and I cleared my throat, trying to put it in a way they would understand.

“Thoughts give birth to words, shae? The Bible says we should think on words that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, those that have virtues and bring forth praise to God. I guess if we think those kinda thoughts, we shall have beautiful words!” I explained and mummy relaxed in her chair, blinking hard.

“So, what are you saying exactly?” She asked

It was time to face the fact!

“The same way you all felt as I talked about mum’s food in a negative way is the same or worst way Pastor Bode-Davies’ daughter will feel if she hears her pastor’s family deliberating about her matter and crucifying her the more!”

I looked at them for their reaction but daddy was enjoying me so I continued.

“Yes, the poor girl was embarrassed in church today and no one talked about praying for her or waiting after service to counsel her. I asked you mummy, to show me the girl,

you said there was no need and we left her that way and the next thing, everyone started talking about her from the car till we reached home.”

As I spoke, my heart boiled so much that I wished they could all see how I felt.

“Even as you and Joe pounded, the gist still continued, we were still set to start eating and then, no one could even realize that I was choking, the gist continued! Ah ah! I wonder what the members too are doing in their various houses if this is what entails in the pastor’s house”

With this said, everyone kept so silent and even though mum wanted to reply me, daddy held her down on the shoulder once more.

Afterwards, I sat close to her at the table and carefully consumed and enjoyed my pounded yam while they watched for a while before they resumed theirs too.

The whole house was so quiet from that time till I picked up my suit and briefcase and decided that I was moving back to my station in Ibadan.

I did go home in Abuja once in a month because I worked as an On-Air Personality at GTV, Lagos, an international television organization.

As Joe placed my travelling bag in the boot, mum came out with my briefcase which she placed at the back seat. She hugged me briefly and went to stay beside her husband.

“I hope you carried your egusi.” She said and I nodded, smiling slightly.

“Make sure you open your onions to the air so that they wouldn’t get rotten soon o” She said and I smiled.

My typical mum!

That was the first full statement I had heard her said since the dining incidence.

“Alright Maami” I decided to respond in the Ibadan way and she smiled.

“Eat very well o. I don’t like the way your collar bones are showing. No, not at all!” She said again and daddy laughed as he pulled her close to her.

“Iyawo mi atata, which collarbones?” He laughed on but she was serious and I had to nod well so she could feel well.

“Don’t worry mum. I will start eating well ma. It’s just the time, but I will try, shae you hear?” I asked and she frowned a bit.

“That’s why you should go and marry, hmmm” She sighed and I sighed too.

As if I knew it would go in that direction. I jumped into the driver’s seat and peeped outside for a while.

“Joe seems to be ready for marriage. Tell him to tell her, the love of her life to hasten up, mum” I said and looked into mum’s face.

“Who is the her?” She asked, irritation on her face.

“Pastor Bode-Da....” I was saying when Joe suddenly snapped my door shut.

“Just go now. You have said enough. In the multitude of words, there wanteth no sin” Joe quoted for me and I found in mom’s face that she agreed with him.

The look on dad’s face was of confusion as to who to really support- the majority or the minority!

I sighed deeply and turned the ignition key.

“May God help us all.” I said

“Amin!” Mummy said quickly, swinging her hands and raising her nose at me. I smiled

“Alright son, have a nice drive. If it gets too late, please have a stopover at Lokoja or Ibillo because you are going so late now” Daddy said.

“Thanks dad, take care of your wifey” I said and she blushed.

“She is my responsibility; I know what to do. Ese” Daddy said, giving me a ‘Don’t teach me what to do’ kinda look

“Mum, stay strong!” I said as I blew her a kiss with my hand.

“Ose oko mi” She said caringly with her sweet Yoruba intonation.

I loved the way she said that so sweetly that I had always wished my wife would call me that often in the future. Funny me!

“Bro, love yah!” I said, facing Joe and his red eyes greeted me again.

“Bye!” He said as if he couldn’t even wait to see me go!

And I did go!

DOVE

Joe was adopted by my parents when he was barely one. He had just lost his parents in a fatal motor accident. They adopted him when they realized mum couldn’t give birth to anymore child.

I was ten years old then.

Well, with the relationship with him and the way he was brought up by my parents, no one would know she didn’t give birth to him!

She loved him like her son!

We grew up like brothers and were like inseparable friends until I travelled to Canada for my post graduate studies.

Even till then, we were always talking.

I remembered how well he had told me about one Talitha who I barely knew because she was always at the children's church while I was in Abuja- but I knew her parents well.

He had told me about having feelings for her, loving her and caring for her so tightly. I told him then to pray about the issue so well and get back to me. He came back with convictions that made me know for sure that it was God's will.

He told our parents and they were happy about the whole thing saying she was a good girl, well mannered, well-brought up and beautiful.

I was happy about the development and he was even saying he would show her to me after service until events turned to worse at the service.

While at church, I suddenly realized that he had left the choir stand through the back door hurriedly as Pastor Bode-Davies was suspended and I felt he must have been very heartbroken.

From the gallery where I was, I went downstairs to meet him.

He was in tears- his eyes were red and as he saw me, he backed me as he fell into another fit of tears.

I didn't know what to do at that point because I had not even fallen in love before.

I had only always seen the real love he had for the girl!

"Bro, it is well" I managed to say and he came close to me and fell on my chest, hanging his head across my shoulder, weeping profusely.

After some minutes, he stopped to sit down and I bent before him, looking into his red eyes.

"How do you feel now?" I asked and he shook his head.

“I feel so miserable bro! I feel so mise...” He started crying again and I was touched.

“Oh my!” I exclaimed as I patted him on the back.

He had been nursing the feeling for close to six years and he had planned that as soon as he earned some more money and she graduated from the university, he would marry her straightaway!

“She wasn’t mine after all” He said and I lost balance

“What!” I exclaimed, shocked

“Yes bro! Can’t you hear the charge against her? She is pregnant! Pregnant for God knows who” He cried on defiantly.

“Yeah bro, but sit her down and talk to her. She didn’t even know there was a guy here waiting for her, did she?” I asked and he looked into my face.

“I told her before travelling to Ukraine. I told her. But wait, talk to her about what?” He asked, looking pale as if stung by a bee.

“Yeah, because it was just an allegation. It would be nice to hear from the horse’s mouth” I said and he stood up abruptly!

“I can’t sit down and have you feed me with craps like this bro! I can’t!” He was almost screaming, moving close to the door when I pulled him back.

“I said someone cheated on me! She cheated on me big time! And you are here, telling me to hear from her? Impossible!

“As a good communicator, I know that communication is key in all relationships!”

“Well, it was never a relationship and never will be!” He exclaimed and I was shocked.

“You don’t mean it bro! You really waited!”

“Yes, I waited! I kept myself! I didn’t mess up even in a strange land. Small porn, I didn’t watch because I feared addiction and dreaded having to make such horrible, dirty confession to my chaste Talitha! I was wrong!....”

“So, are you...” I was saying when he cut me short.

“Don’t tell me you are actually encouraging me to go into a relationship with a mother. I will marry her and marry some kind of baby? No way! Do I even know if she intends getting married to the father of the child? Chai! I wouldn’t have believed her to be this cheap, man!”

“You really waited bro! Can’t you wait a bit longer?”

“Bro, can you hear yourself? See, the Bible says, they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. Though painful, I have moved on nitemi” He said and left me there thinking so hard about how the feelings had just evaporated into thin air.

I had always envisaged their marriage! I really did watch out for them both!

All the way home, as mum lamented that she was shocked about the news and how ladies of nowadays fall for cheap stuffs, he kept calling her dirty names like bitch, sinner, pig, disgrace to humanity and as much as I tried to tell him to stop, mum kept pampering her baby and patting him on the back.

I was irritated and I had to tell them my mind.

I made up my mind to still call him when he had cooled down to have a bro-to-bro chat!

TALITHA

I couldn't believe a jot of everything Happie was saying.

My head couldn't comprehend it at all!

She was toiling with my heart really!

"I shouldn't have met you!" I started crying really hard, falling on the chair and shaking with so much violence.

Happie was in tears!

I looked around and saw Auntie Tessie, her hands supporting her chin.

“Tally, think about me too. I am so sad as well. It was good we met really but we meet to part and we part to meet” She said, coming close to me and holding my shoulders but I broke free.

“Think of the hell I am about to go and go through too” She said and only then did I pause to think.

I was being selfish!

As much as I didn’t want her to go because I would miss her, I cried harder because I would miss Uncle Jeff!

Because Uncle Jeff meant a lot to me really!

But I was so selfish not to have thought about the emotional trauma she was about going through too.

I had met a very tensed up Aunty Tessie when I got to her place at Maitama.

She welcomed me, made me shower, gave me a change of clothes and served me some fried Irish potatoes and Fanta as she smoked her cigar, blues music playing at the background.

Happie came around the house few minutes later and told me to help her start packing her stuffs as she was traveling.

“My dad is causing some big problem with my mum in the US and I am needed to come over” She said in a shaky voice.

I didn’t understand

“He had not been there for me all my life and now he says he wants to take custody of me. He is just a fool!” She said again as she folded some undies in her panty bag.

“How on earth would you drag my mum to the court for me who you never really cared for? Then he is lying to the media that my mum has sold me to some herbalists and that she should prove him wrong by bringing me before a press conference. Imagine that! He only wants to spoil her career, man!” She exclaimed again, zipped her bag and gave a very long hiss.

“My mum hates to bring me before those damn cameras! She hates the fact that microphones have to be pushed close to me all in the bid to getting my voice. She hates this so much that she has suffered in silence. Oh my! But her contracts are being withdrawn because of these scandalous allegations!” She exclaimed again and tears ran down her face.

“Stop those freaking tears girl!” Auntie Tessie said as she released the tobacco smoke from her mouth, her eyes becoming red in the process.

Happie wiped her tears and smiled at me lovingly as if nothing had happened.

“I have to be strong for my mum! Celebrities live in front of the camera, Tally!” She exclaimed as she slammed her box and started dragging it to the door.

As I was about following her, I noticed her phone was on the bed and picked it for her. It started ringing.

Uncle Jeff!

I went after her and gave the phone to her.

“Hello Uncle ... I am ready ... yes ... I will be on my way right now.” She dropped the phone in her bag and came close to me.

“Uncle Jeff isn’t coming around?” I asked, unable to hide my desire to see him.

“No. He is already at the airport and it’s about time I checked in. I need to go now. I will miss you so much” She said and I nodded as tears ran down my face.

The thought that I wasn’t really going to see Uncle Jeff before he travelled clouded my heart and I fell into fresh fits of tears.

Happie also started crying as she hugged me.

But my heart was far away.

As I sobbed and helped her drag the box to the park, my heart throbbed impatiently.

“But what about his job?” I asked, pretending to be nonchalant. I didn’t want her to realize that I was really bothered about his leaving than hers.

“My dad?” She asked, raising her teary eyes at me.

“I mean your uncle.” I said and she nodded.

“We have that under control already. His job will be fine till he comes back”

That was indefinite.

I needed an answer that would cast my fears out!

I needed to know when he would be back;

How he would react to the news of the pregnancy (If there was really any);

I needed to ask millions of questions which by asking Happie would only land her into more emotional traumas.

When we got to the airport, the checking in was almost over as the announcer was already saying it was about time the Emirates Airline moved.

As she passed her bags under the slider of the machines, she walked through the doors and we stayed behind the red line.

Worried Uncle Jeff was seen pacing to and fro the departure lounge, fixing his gaze on his phone without drifting.

As soon as he sighted Happie, he hurriedly ran towards her as if he had not seen her in days.

A pang of jealousy took a hold of me.

I watched on still until I saw that he was not running to meet her as he ran past her, his face looking so worried.

‘Is he looking at someone behind me?’ I seemed to ask myself as I looked back until with just the red rope between us, he pulled me into a warm embrace.

It was a kind of embrace that cast out fears, doubts and all negativity.

He loved me really!

I was so swept off my feet that I burst into a hot round of tears.

“I will miss you dearly my dear. Stay strong!” He said and disengaged from me almost immediately.

He bowed a bit before his sister- Aunty Tessie and off through the lounge he passed into the terminal and my eyes followed him until clouded with tears, my eyes could see no more!

My heart quaked in great fears of uncertainty and loneliness.

I wiped my tears and looked towards Auntie Tessie who was looking into my eyes very intently.

There were many questions on her face as she looked at me from head the toes.

Questions which I could not decipher at all.

She smiled all of a sudden and patted my shoulder.

“Let’s go home” She said calmly as she turned towards where the car was parked. I followed almost immediately even though my legs were still shaking seriously.

I couldn't believe that I was actually left alone in the whole wide world!

No father; No church; No family friend; No Happie; No Uncle Jeff!

I was all alone

I felt cold in my bones of a sudden.

As we entered the jeep, Auntie Tessy fastened the seat belt and being weak to do anything, she stretched her hands and fixed mine too.

"Thank you, ma" I managed to say

"Hmm" She replied with her nose.

She paused for a while, pushed her head backwards on the headrest and forward again.

She later reached for the drawer and brought out a cigar.

“Could you pass... oh, never mind” She said and I was confused as I felt uncomfortable.

‘Why is she finding it hard to send me to help her do something since we left the lounge?’

What could have happened?

Could it be because her brother hugged me tight and I was crying?

Oh my!

She bent forward towards the glove box and opened it. It hit my leg and she flinched.

“I am so sorry” She said, looking very mad at herself.

I smiled.

“It didn’t hurt ma’am” I said.

She picked a lighter and closed the glove box again.

“I am sorry dear” She said again, her eyes full of worry.

I smiled again.

‘Well, she is just a kind of weird women anyone can meet anywhere’ -that was how Happie had described her to me- but what made her go so weirder was what I was yet to construe.

She lighted the cigar and inhaled for a while, her eyes closed firmly.

I watched her with the side of my eyes as she exhaled the smoke through the window probably so the smell would not permeate the whole car.

She looked at me afterwards and I saw her red eyes.

I sat up and looked shocked

“You were crying ma?” I asked and she smiled

“Not at all. Don’t mind the tears dearie. I let them flow” She said and gave a sad smile.

I was very shocked at the fact that I was just seeing how sad and lonely she looked.

I saw how withdrawn from life she was and my heart clicked that she was very forsaken.

“Baby, are you sick?” She asked me. Her voice was very loving and concerned

But that was the wrong question to ask because I was even the one meaning to ask her if all was well with her spirit, soul and body.

“I am fine ma” I said

“Drop the formalities and call me Tessie” She said and my eyes shone in shock.

“Ma?” I exclaimed and she smiled

“I am Happie’s mum’s elder sister, right? No doubt about that. Call me Tessie still. I like you as a friend” She said again and my heart skipped up the rope like a hundred times before it started somersaulting.

“What! You are like a mother to me, ma” I said again, feeling so awkward.

She inhaled more smoke, shook her mouth as if to let the smoke circulate well before throwing the smoke residue out of the window.

“I will be 45 next month, you?” That was what she asked when she eventually looked at me.

Well, I was finding the whole situation absurd and I needed to tell this woman to stop joking!

“Ma, my mum would be 40 this year if she was alive. You are even older than...” I said and her eyes shone brightly as the tears rushed into her eyes the more.

She took my two hands suddenly and put her face in-between my hands.

Her face felt warm.

She started kissing my hands as she wept profusely.

“No wonder you look sad! Oh my! My pumpkin doesn’t even have a mum. Oh, no wonder she looks sad. She doesn’t have a ...” She continued crying so much that my eyes couldn’t resist the onions of her tears.

I started crying too.

She stopped abruptly again and threw her half cigar tub away though the window.

She opened the vault and brought out a perf bottle which she sprayed before winding up the windows and switching on the air conditioner.

There was silence all the way home and there was a raging storm in my head as I thought about the whole thing.

Was this not the woman who had just been dramatic a few minutes ago?

She drove into a psychiatric hospital environment and smiled at me for a while, then raised a finger before her face to probably ask for an excuse to go out.

But Happie never told me the Aunty Tessie was actually a psychologically sick person!

She came back in, gave me a careful hug and pecked my forehead before starting the drive home.

I felt uneasy.

‘Is she a lesbian?’

When we got home, she turned the ignition key and paused a while.

“Are you okay ma?” I asked, summoning courage to touch her shoulder.

She looked shocked as she looked from my hand on her shoulder to my face and back.

I withdrew my hand and smiled sheepishly

She unfastened her belt and came close to me.

She hugged me suddenly and muttered something beneath her breath and she wept again.

“Thanks” I thought I heard her say.

I remained calm in her embrace.

I was feeling that something was wrong and she needed to feel loved, so I maintained my cool.

But I loved it as my head rested on her chest.

It felt like that was where I was meant to be.

My brain started calculating and I travelled down memory lane in a short while.

I started feeling and imagining as my mum cuddled me even on her sick bed, shortly before she kicked the bucket.

“Mum!” I exclaimed from my dreamland and I felt as Aunty Tessie’s heartbeat increased.

She broke free from the embrace and I opened my eyes from the dreamland where I was.

Her eyes were filled with tears.

Her nose had become red as she sniffed continuously to pull back the mucus that was trying to escape.

Even her cheeks were red.

“You called me mum?” She asked and I didn’t know what I should say.

I was just lost in my thoughts that I muttered ‘mum!’. If I told her that, how would she feel?

Did she feel offended that she heard me call her that because she had no daughter of hers?

Or, did she feel so good that she blushed?

I was confused.

“You don’t like it ma?” I asked and she slapped me slightly across the shoulder as she started another round of tears.

“No ‘ma’ here! Mum feels good. It feels really good! That feels good. It feels really good” She sang on, picked her handbag and opened the door to alight.

I felt good that she felt good but I felt bad that I was feeling bad about the whole thing.

‘Why is she behaving like that?’

The door leading to my seat opened and she unfastened my belt and helped lift my legs as I alighted too.

I was shocked.

I just couldn't bring myself to understand what was happening.

"Take it easy my pumpkin. You will be fine" She said as she led me inside as if I was having some leg issues.

Anyways, I allowed her do all that if they would give her joy!

TALITHA

I closed my eyes firmly

I opened again

I closed them again

I opened my eyes again!

I sat up suddenly and looked all around me, my mouth suspended.

“Am I in paradise?” I asked myself as I was seriously dazed

The room was all pink with different girly toys and barbie dolls carefully arranged in shelves and in the princess cots that were strategically placed in the room.

The center rug was slightly pink but richly furry on the whitish-pink tiles that covered the small, cozy room.

I lay in bed again and rolled on my side to the left and to the right and backwards again.

I jumped up again and did ‘Nepa’ for a while with my eyes before eventually opening my eyes wide.

When we came back, Auntie Tessie made me some chicken and chips and some juice to wash it down while she went inside to do God-knows-what.

She came back inside and told me that she wanted to show me into my room and I went with her.

She brought me into the best room I had ever seen in my entire life.

It was so beautiful and well-kept that I wondered since when the room had been set up and what stress she engaged herself in to ensure the cleanliness.

I couldn't imagine me in a princess room like the one I was.

It was just a day after sleeping in a store room!

Tears started to gather in my eyes again!

I saw as my dad knelt before the church and how the pastor had removed his tag off his neck before everyone!

Then, I saw in the television of my mind and eyes how my dad had pushed me against the wall and I had fallen against the wall on a nail.

How he threw me out of the house like a bag of potatoes;

How Mrs. Tade said some dirty stuffs to me...

When I realized that the television of my mind didn't want to stop transmitting what brought me more heartbreaks, I picked up a pillow and forced my face into it, so everything could be calm and cool again!

I felt a very soft, warm hand pulling gently at the pillow and my hand.

"Don't suffocate yourself baby" I heard her voice and quickly removed the pillow.

I shot her a look that said 'I am fine mum' with a smile that was trying to balance between happiness and sorrow.

"Your eyes are red!" She exclaimed with so much care that I quickly hugged her.

If in all the problem I was going through, with no family or friend, a cigar smoking woman would care to take me inside her home and feel concerned for me, I was just ready!

I was ready to be her daughter!

“I shall be free from all church problems and hypocrisy!” I was saying to myself, not knowing I had spoken aloud.

She looked into my face.

“You have faced church problems too? You have had to face the committee to recount the tales of your past? You have paid your whole earnings as tithe yet the pastor doesn’t even care? You hate church too? You do?” She asked so expectantly, her face shining with such glee.

How did I want to tell her that that was not exactly how the church is?

Or at least that was not what it was meant to be?

What proof did I have to tell her that God exists but that I was as confused as her as to know exactly where those who practiced the religion had gotten it all wrong?

How do I tell her?

“You do too?” She asked again, shaking my shoulders slightly and I smiled slowly as I nodded foolishly.

But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

Those words that I had always heard my dad preach rang in my head and my heart became heavy but I didn’t know what to do.

I didn’t want to break her heart

“But there is God” I tried to say and she smiled sadly

“I wish I know where he lives” She said as she buried her head in her hands.

I knew deep down that there is God and that He is the All-powerful God but I just didn’t know how to tell her.

“Who told you about God most?” She asked suddenly and without thinking I said the truth.

“My dad!”

“Where is he now?” She asked.

“In his house” I said, somehow feeling embittered

“In this Abuja?” She asked again and I nodded

“What does he do?”

“He is a pastor” I said and her eyes shone in shock.

“So, why are you not at home with him?” She asked again and I felt irritated in the trachea.

“I erred” I managed to still say as my throat turned sour.

“And you were chased out of the house? No one to cater for you, no friend, no one and he is a pastor, right? And you tell me this Christianity is real? Huh?” Her voice was quite loud now and my ears were not hearing well anymore.

All sounds were echoing in my ears like the screeching of a microphone.

I felt a sharp pain under my stomach and as I tried to block my ears and hold my tummy at the same time, my irritated, sour throat seemed to purge as I jumped up from the bed, covering my bulging, stressed mouth with my two hands.

I ran off to the toilet

“My pumpkin! Oh my! Oh my!” She exclaimed as she followed after me in a hurry.

As I tried to vomit in the washing basin, I felt a lumpy fluid in my pant.

‘What is happening to me?’

Aunty Tessie pulled at my undies as gradually I fell into her hands while she screamed in fear.

CHAPTER 4

UNCLE JEFF

If I could just see her one more time!

My head swam a bit.

We walked out onto the tarmac and climbing the steps that had been wheeled over to the plane.

Heavy clouds passed over as we boarded the plane.

The doors were pulled closed and the flight attendant gave her safety lesson, the one most of us could even recite.

I was not thrilled at all. I was feeling so empty within.

It began to rain.

The engines started up, the big propellers were becoming a blur, and the plane started moving. My heart pounded as I looked out through the window.

If I could just see her one more time!

I had a window seat and watched us head down the taxiway.

I looked out if someone was waving through the window of the terminal, but I couldn't see through the glass, and besides, they must have turned around and headed for the jeep by the time we had checked through the gate.

We gathered speed and the rain ran in streams across my window. I was aware of myself gripping the armrests intensely, leaning forward, trying to remember the details of the safety talk just moments before.

The engines whined a pitch higher and then, we were off the ground.

My heart sank then!

I sat back now, still staring out through the tiny window as we climbed up into the rain. We flew into the darkness of the clouds themselves, and still I watched the window.

Suddenly, we came out above the clouds and the entire world was cast in a brilliant white.

But my mind was still very black- I felt so lonely and miserable inside!

When next?

I felt Happie's head on my shoulder and that was when I remembered that she was near.

"You will miss her, right?" She asked and I nodded with all sincerity.

Tally had become a part of my life.

Even though I had been a very bad influence to her and I had misguided the young heart, I loved her genuinely.

"I want to marry her" I said and Happie looked into my face sharply.

“You can’t be serious, uncle” She said, I noticed the dark circles underneath her eyes and knew I shouldn’t be discussing something like that with someone who was going to pass through another round of trials soon but she had opened my mouth and I couldn’t close it anymore.

“Is she bad?” I asked and she shook her head, her eyes widened.

“She is too good for you! That’s just it, uncle” She said and I pinched her

She smiled a bit.

“But she looks sick in a way” I said again and she nodded.

“Even I noticed. She has been eating so much recently. Even the day her dad came to carry her from school, even though she had had dinner, she was still cooking some food. I felt her appetite had just awoken weirdly” She said and laughed.

But it was not funny at all. My medical senses had woken up.

“Did you notice she looks bigger and fuller now?” I asked again and she started laughing

“Definitely! Why won’t she be fuller when she is eating bowls of food?” She laughed again.

But I was not convinced.

“Why did her dad come to pick her from school then?” I asked again and she shook her head.

“I don’t know. But she was talking so silently while on phone saying we would see yesterday but I had even forgotten to ask her when we met” She said and my brain did some logical calculations.

“Or, could she be pregnant?” I asked and Happie looked into my face, very shocked.

“She can’t be pregnant! She is a virgin! She has known no man before. Pregnant kwa! Chai, uncle! Except you slept with her anyways because it’s both of you that have been close in recent times”

“Oh!” I could say nothing any further

“Did you sleep with her?” She teased me on but I was not ready to tell her anything if Tally hadn’t told her herself.

“Leave me and sleep” I said and she started laughing

“I trust her though!”

“It’s me you don’t trust, ko?” I raised my nose at her and we laughed together but my mind wasn’t there.

While I hugged her at the lounge, she held on tightly to me but she was rounder. I could feel her curves had grown fuller

Oh my God!

Then, she was crying! Her eyes were very red.

Her heart was beating so hard against my chest as if she had something to tell me.

Could she be pregnant?

Or could she be going through hell because of me?

I sighed heavily and dropped my head backwards as my heart pumped more than expected blood.

I covered my face with my long-nailed hands and muttered

God, be with her please!

TALITHA

“Is Jeff aware?”

That was the first question Auntie Tessie asked me as I opened my eyes from the sleep I had suddenly fallen into.

I looked around to see that I was in the same pinky room that I had inherited as the newly found Auntie Tessie’s daughter.

There was a sweet smell that wafted into my nose and I close my eyes, widened my nostrils wide to enjoy the tactile sensation it had on my whole being.

Then, I felt her warm hands pressing my bare tummy with tenderness and I flung the windows of my eyes open.

I looked into her face and remembered what I felt just before I fainted.

The hot fluid I felt in my panties, in between my legs

Could I have been pregnant really?

Then, probably because of my falls and careless carriages of my weight, I might have lost the baby.

Right?

A sweet smile enveloped my face and Auntie Tessie smiled at me too as she placed a quick peck on my lips

“I know you love him” She said again and then I remembered she had asked a question at first.

“Is Jeff aware?”

Aware of what? I didn’t seem to understand

“I know you love him”

What was Aunty talking about? I didn’t seem to get it.

“The truth is that I understand feelings more than anyone else” She started and I eventually sat down to face her squarely, the pillow holding my back firmly.

I winced as I felt a sharp pain underneath my tummy and quickly held it to pacify the pain whatever the cause might be.

She saw that and rubbed my tummy gently and sweetly.

“Everyone sees me as weird, someone who needs divine intervention, someone with psychiatric problems and all but they don’t know that I know love, hate, jealousy, envy, I know feelings! I can recognize them when I see them” She said again, her face looking saltless.

I swallowed as I listened to her beautiful speech.

“As you saw Jeff probably approaching Happie at the airport, I saw envy in your eyes and when he turned to come towards you again, I saw joy unspeakable!” She said and looked into my eyes, her eyeballs moving steadily as they surveyed my face.

I blushed – she was very correct

“I saw frustration in your face as you asked Happie questions as regards Jeff. Wasn’t he coming? When would he come back? All those questions, I read frustration, unhappiness, fear, uncertainty in them and I wondered what could be happening” She continued and I couldn’t hide my embarrassment really!

This was a woman who could tell me almost exactly what I had in mind all those times.

“I wouldn’t see Happie off to the lounge on a norm because her mum calls me weird and insane and sick and bitch and I had sworn never to have anything to do with her and her

family again because of that” She said with so much vibrancy, the veins in her head and neck gathering momentum and shooting out.

She looked really pained!

“But because I wanted to get to the root of the matter, I followed her to the lounge. Then I saw you and Jeff hugging so intimately. That brother of mine doesn’t show much affection in front of me but he did hug and said sweet things to you and then, I looked into your face and saw tears! I was speechless!” She said and just like a spell, I was covered from my head to toes with goosebumps and tears ran down my face hastily.

She really did watch me!

“Those tears had some elements of fear, uncertainty, sorrow and a lot of questions in them. You wanted to say some things that I really ached to hear but my impatient brother had turned away. I looked and watched and studied to get answers by myself” She said as she touched my forehead, wiping my sweat with such tenderness and gentility.

“I fixed your belt as you couldn’t move, the glove box hit your leg and I felt bad but you still smiled faintly, trying to tell me it was okay but I was not convinced, baby. I looked into your eyes and saw what I felt it was and I smoked right into my head to calm some storms in my brains down. Tears gathered in my eyes and I allowed you see it” She said again and I relived those events in my head.

She had started explaining and giving answers to questions that ran through my mind as I saw her behave weirdly that day.

“You allowed me hug you, you called me mum, you looked tenderly into my face and when I smoked that I felt you would be irritated and disrespect me, you didn’t! It was the best day of my life!” She exclaimed as tears ran into her face.

“I have never given birth to any child myself” She said suddenly and I looked into her face to understand perfectly.

“My mother had just three of us. Mandy, Jeff and I. We were all wayward until I met a man who preached to me and I had to be a born-again person. He married me and just four years into the marriage without kids, he started misbehaving.” She said and paused suddenly.

“Why am I telling you this?” She asked and smiled a bit.

“I guess because I can see something similar about happening to you, darling.” She said and I looked shocked.

Happening to me?

What is she talking about?

“I thank God you hate religion!” She said with such firmness that made her jump up from the bed.

I wanted to tell her that it was not that I hated religion but it was just a temporary problem that shall soon pass that made me say those nasty words earlier but I couldn't speak. I wanted her to land.

“Religion is a mistake! People hide behind religion with their baggage hung across their backs, weighing them down and lie that they are spiritual. That they have some power” She said again as she moved to the table and took a bottle of wine which she uncorked and started gulping down her throat.

I sat up, my heart thumping with so great fear!

She walked back to me and placed her hands on my chest almost immediately. She bent before me and looked deeply into my eyes

“Are you scared of me too?” She asked and I was shocked

“Scared? Scared of my mum? Nah!” I eventually said when I found my voice.

It did work like magic and she sat beside me on the bed, fumbling with my fingers.

“I was the only one of the three children of my mum that chose to practice Christianity. Mandy, Happie’s mum chose our mum’s modelling path and Jeff was just a nominal Christian anyways. I was the one that was keen on taking on the real born-again thing”

“You love Jeff, right?” She asked and as if being controlled by some extra-terrestrial powers, I nodded and she smiled.

“I loved Jerry just as you love Jeff” I watched her lips as she explained to me how she had married Jerry who later became a pastor.

How she was barren for four years and how she had caught Jerry in bed with her housemaid on an occasion and her friend on another occasion and how she had threatened to report to the church.

“But I couldn’t report him. I bore the pains inside of my heart. I was going to die in bitterness but I didn’t! I loved Jerry too much! He was the one who had led me to Christ. He was the one! How could he fall into adultery those times and not feel sorry? I was so sad”

Then, tears started running into her eyes and I was touched.

“My parents asked me to divorce him but I had been taught never to do that. I endured it until I heard he was married with two kids to another woman. I was shocked! I confronted him and he denied until he realized I heard evidences”

“Oh, men!” I exclaimed and she shook her head.

“No! Oh Christians! That is the right thing to say!” She exclaimed and I was very shocked.

“Christians are not that bad, mum! Some weeds are among the wheat indeed but Jesus saves! He delivers!” I eventually spoke out.

“Oh really! And that was why I went to eventually meet the church committee and they sent me for psychiatric tests, right?” She was getting really furious but I was eventually ready to speak for the Lord my God!

I was ready!

“Jerry lied that I was sick upstairs and they also believed. If Jesus saves, why didn’t He reveal to the church that I was innocent and Jerry was lying? Answer me” She said on top of her voice, fastening her eyes on mine so intently.

She moved to the table and grabbed the bottle again. Her throat made some guzzling sounds as the liquor sank deep.

“Everyone in the church started stigmatizing and looking at me one kind as a crazy person. If I was truly crazy, were they supposed to run away from me? Is the Jesus not a Jesus for everybody? Is Jesus for the sane alone? It was published in the media that I was insane and that if anyone finds me, such would be rewarded but pumpkin, I was seated in the couch at home watching as the news was being cast. Why couldn’t He save?” She had started crying and I just couldn’t watch on.

I imagined what she had gone through and the stigma and I knew beyond all reasonable doubts that they had chased a soul to hell!

“My popular family was stained! My family members turned their backs at me. My mum cursed me for going the Jesus’ way. And you tell me He saves, really? I chose Him and He couldn’t defend His name, huh?” She asked me again, looking so furious.

“I can understand mum” I had started crying too.

“He left this country with his two children and wife to God knows where. I remained in here waiting for years. It was after a few years that the church realized that it was all a lie. Why? They chased me to drag me back into their lives of misery but never! I will rather sink in hell than sleep in an unfair heaven!” She said vehemently and I covered my mouth.

She had gone really deep!

I will rather sink in hell than sleep in an unfair heaven!

Oh my!

“But mum, it’s actually a life without Jesus that is full of misery” I said and she shook her head and looked into my face.

“I actually thought you were free and you know the truth! I was wrong!” She said, looking disappointed.

“Jesus is the only way, the truth and the life mum” I said as I made to bend beside her.

She shot me a dangerous look that made me retreat to the bed.

“OK mum, now without Jesus, are you any better? Are you fulfilled? Are you happy? Is everything...” I was saying when she threw the bottle at the wall.

The bottle shattered and broke into pieces.

She started weeping as she charged at me

“My life isn’t any better, no! I am miserable, tick! I am sick in all places, double yes! I am not happy, affirmed! But yes, I know I don’t believe in some powers that will fail me. I smoke and drink and wait for the day I will die and finish! I am responsible for me! I am not committed to some incapable gods” She said as she pulled at my collar.

“The Almighty God is the most capable God ever! He is the only true God! Nothing can give you joy asides Him. You don’t do Him any favor by accepting Him. You do yourself a favor.” As I spoke, she tightened her grip on my neck as her tears fell on my blouse.

I struggled to talk still as she released her grip on my neck gradually.

“Mum, you just don’t smoke and drink and wait for the day you will die and finish! You can never finish! There is still life after death. Your reception to God in this life will determine His reception of you in the hereafter.” I said and she fell to the floor, wailing so loudly.

I adjusted my ruffled blouse and swallowed some spittle to moisturize my desert-throat.

“Mum, I love you and I care about you so much” I said and realized that she calmed down a bit though she still jerked intermittently between her sobs.

I bent beside her and had her look into my face.

She looked like a rain-soaked puppy who needed warmth.

I wrapped my arms around her and patted her back with care as my heart emitted real love like I had never felt before.

“When you sat with me in the car and cared for me, I realized that you are someone lovable. I found my mum in you!” I said and she pushed me away from her and looked deep into my eyes.

“Are you for real? You found your mum in me?” She asked as tears strolled down her face the more.

But I was very sincere!

“I did! I do!” I said and she hugged me again as she wept profusely.

“Thank you! Thanks! I had never heard someone whisper in my ears that I am loved in ten years. Never! Not friends, not parents, not family, Not Happie, not Mandy, not Jeff, nobody! This means a lot to me, Pumpkin, it does” She sobbed on.

DOVE

“Oh my my my my! With that beautiful song by Frank Edwards featuring Don Moen titled Ka Anyi Bulie, we have come to the end of this programme. I really know and I am sure that you have enjoyed the programme- Tango With Dove” I swallowed as I adjusted the headset and smiled into the mic.

I loved my job so well!

“All thanks to God Almighty who has been the anchor so far. My producer Olotu Ifeoluwa, my audio assistant Don Mic himself, oh my! I so enjoy working with you” I said and the duo smiled at me through the glassy window

“All thanks to all who contributed too from home. Your responses make us really happy here and it gladdens our heart that you are always staying tuned. Thanks to all who called Somidipe, Chidinma, Hassan, Tally erm sorry Tally..erm, sorry Sally.” I paused at this and then quickly resumed as my producer shot me a quick look.

“Till next week when I will be coming your way with a new edition of the show, I remain yours faithfully, Bowen Adameji but my friends call me Dove. Have a wonderful day” I said and quickly drew up the red switch before me.

I covered my face, muttered some words of prayer and then picked up my notebook and the bottle of water that was right in front of me.

Thank You Jesus!

I walked through towards the control room to say hello to my crew members.

“Nice job, Dove!” My producer said and shook my hands

“Another meritorious award this year!” The audio assistant said and I could only laugh.

If that happened, that would make the fifth award in less than two years!

“But, what’s with Tally?” My producer asked and I stopped in my tracks.

“Tally?” I asked, so shocked.

“Do you have a girlfriend now?” He asked, laughing so mischievously.

“I don’t have but why Tally?” I wanted to know

The only Tally I knew was the one at home- Joe’s coveted but embattled jewel!

“Ah, I should ask you that question nah. You kept saying Tally when what you wanted to say was Sally. That wanted to spoil your beautiful presentation”

“Really! I didn’t even pay much attention to that” I said and he smiled.

“This is the second time you are making that mistake since you came back from Abuja. Let’s see when next you make it. I will disturb your programme” He joked around.

“Tally? Oh my ... sorry, really?” I asked to be sure.

“You just said it again now. Tally instead of really” He said again. They began to laugh so loud but I could only gasp.

“What sort of a mistake is this Lord?” I asked myself as I swiped my ID card against the electronic door leading to my office.

The door opened and I went in.

Tally?

“What’s happening Lord?” I asked again

I picked my phone and dialed my mum’s number but it was not reachable- she must be at work!

I tried Joe’s number and he picked.

We exchanged pleasantries and his voice was very much better compared to the last time we had left on a not so nice mood.

“So, how about Tally?” I asked and he gave me a long hiss.

“Bros, I have moved on.” He said and I shook my head.

“Thank God for you but have you tried getting across to her at all?”

“Nope! I don’t see any reason to” He said

“What of mum and dad? They didn’t call her too?” I asked

“Nope! The lady is under discipline for now”

“Discipline includes not making calls across to her also?”

“I don’t know bro. Please, let’s forget about that”

“No problem. Just make sure you tell mum to call me when you get home”

“Bro, Eric is presently taking me to the airport. I am going back to Ukraine for my Masters” He said

“What! That’s so sudden! You weren’t planning on telling me?” I asked.

“Sorry bro, I’ve got to go now. Talk to you when I get to Ukraine. Much love” He said and the line dropped.

I was disturbed in my spirit

“What is God telling me? Is the lady troubled or sad or something?” I asked myself and I quickly went on my knees.

I command peace to your spirit, Talitha!

TALITHA

We held each other for a long time before we disengaged and sat in front of each other, staring on with sweet smiles.

I had to break the silence when it was becoming awkward.

“Mum, so, what are you saying about Jesus?” I asked and her smile waned.

“Can I ask you some questions” She asked and I nodded.

“Where does your father live?” She asked and I gasped a bit.

“Abuja. Here in Abuja” I said and she nodded, smiling.

“Why are you in Abuja now instead of being in school and why are you in a stranger’s house instead of your father’s house?” She asked and I knew exactly where she was going. My heart started skipping.

Lord, how do I defend Your Name now?

I wasn't confident that I wouldn't fail God!

"I sinned. My father is a pastor and I had hidden it from him. The church found out and...."

"You were excommunicated from the church and your father disowned you, right?" She asked and I checked those words well.

They were right.

"I wasn't totally excommunicated anyways" I said and she started laughing out loud as she stood up and walked to the bed. She picked my phone and brought it to me.

"Call your father now" She said and I looked at her, very shocked.

"Mum?" I called to be sure.

"You really can't? You see!" She said and I gasped as I didn't know what to say any further.

But I couldn't give up.

"I sinned mum. I needed to be punished" I said and she shook her head as she smiled mockingly.

"Is that how the God you serve is? He deals with you until you don't even know the correct thing to do again? He beats and deals with you and like a banana peel throws you into the bin? Huh?" She asked and I smiled too as if I knew what exactly to say.

"I will be forgiven. I am very sure! When my dad gets over the shock, he will forgive me. To err is human and to forgive divine mum. I have erred and sincerely, I have to go back to Divinity to forgive me and also help me touch my dad to forgive me" I said and her face shone brightly at me.

"Really! You think so? Ok, let's do it then pumpkin. Let's do it" She said as she pulled closer to me and held my hands.

"Do what mum?" I was clueless and she smiled on, grinning from ear to ear.

"I accept the fact that I probably didn't pray the right prayers and then I also accept that Jerry and his pastors and the church must have made a big mistake and then I didn't do things right. Fine!" She smiled and I nodded as I looked into her face attentively.

“Okay mum”

“Then you also have erred and then forgiveness is divine. So, what we will do is this baby girl. Pick up your phone and send what I will say to your dad” She said and I picked up the phone indeed.

“Are you ready?” She asked and I nodded

Dad, I am very sad for my wrongdoing. I have sinned against heaven and before you. But, could you still forgive me dad? I will be fasting for three days, eating at 8 every night to get back on the track with God. Could you reach out to me before that fasting period ends? Can you prove that truly to forgive is divine?”

I sent the message and looked into her face.

“We give him the three days starting from tomorrow to get back to you. If he gets back to you, I will give my life back to Jesus and assume that I met with the wrong set of Christians at first. That all Christians are really not like that” She said and my eyes enlarged in realization of what she said.

“What!” I exclaimed and she smiled beautifully.

My heart started thumping at this.

“And you are really going to fast and pray o. No food till 8pm daily. Ask God to touch his mind and let him reach out. I will give up to Jesus” She said again and my heart started drumming.

I was very scared.

It didn't look as if my dad's stony heart would be dissolved to forgive me in three days.

If after three days, he didn't reach out to me, she would laugh at me! She will laugh at the Lord God!

My phone beeped and she picked it up.

As she pressed it, she shook her head and looked into my eyes sadly.

“Pumpkin, they are the same everywhere” She said, dropped my phone and stood up.

She started walking towards the door and I picked my phone.

It's good you go back to God in prayer girl! Meanwhile, I am not your father. May God forgive your sins.

Tears rushed to my eyes suddenly.

How I wish my dad knew it was a game of soul winning and he would stop joking around!

How I wish he would cooperate and let's save this lost soul together!

“Yasss, give me your phone baby! No phone for the three days!” She said and I looked shocked the more.

I was going to use the phone to constantly pester my dad to come over, if not for me, for Auntie Tessie's soul but she collected it!

She took the phone from me and paused to look into my face.

“You are not supposed to be fasting this season. I forgot” She said as she scratched her head.

“Why?” I asked and then she smiled as she looked at my tummy.

She pulled me up from where I was seated and guided me to the bed where I sat and she sat beside me.

“How many months is it?” She asked.

“What?” I asked, shocked. I traced her eyes and realized she was looking at my tummy.

I started laughing.

“I am not pregnant mum!”

“Really!”

“Yes. Those mummies in the church said because every part of me is getting bigger and fuller that I have become pregnant but ma, in movies and story books, pregnancies are always accompanied by nausea and cold and vomit especially but me, I feel so strong o.”

“Really!” She exclaimed again, looking speechless.

“Yes ma” I said confidently.

“Have you had any pregnancy test conducted?” She asked and I shook my head.

“Oh! But I guess my dad had one conducted on me without my consent anyways. He gave me the result and it said positive” I said and she nodded.

“So, the hospital’s test is wrong? Is that what you are saying?” She asked.

“No mum. Who am I to say that?” I asked, smiling confidently. I held her hands and gave a touch of trust.

“Mum, I only met with him...” I had not landed before she cut in.

“Jeff, right?” She asked expectantly and I nodded, quite shamefully

**“He is the only guy that has ever climbed me. It was just once mum! I can’t be pregnant.”
I said again and she shook her head**

“It takes ten times of intercourse to get pregnant?” She asked and I smiled.

**I was just so confident that I was not pregnant
or if I was mistakenly pregnant, I had lost it that time that I rushed to the bathroom.**

**“The time you ran into the bathroom, what happened to you? Any nausea?” She asked
and that was when my confidence started shaking.**

**“Yes. My throat was irritated and my stomach felt so empty and I felt heavily sticky in
my pants” I said and she came close to me, holding my face in her hands.**

**“How will you feel now if you discover you are pregnant?” She asked and I shook my
head**

“I can’t be pregnant! I can’t!” I exclaimed

“What if you are? I am not saying you are” She said and I tried to think of how it would be.

Pregnant?

“Ah, it’s not possible ni mummy. No!” I exclaimed

“I suspected that something was wrong with you yesterday and I had been asking you but you covered your white face with pretty smiles. Well, I was determined to check it out myself if you are pregnant....” She was saying but I was becoming uneasy.

“It’s obvious on my face that I am pregnant? How is that possible?” I asked and she smiled ruefully as if she could read my despair.

“I have practiced nursing from my youth till now and even if no one has told you before, I am the chief matron at the state hospital. I know what I do” She said and I was aghast.

“I don’t get ma” I still said as I was not just confused. My eyes had started swimming in hot tears.

“You fell in my arms while you were in the bathroom last night and I had my opportunity of running severally tests on you. From the airport yesterday, you will notice I stopped at a hospital. It was then and there I bought a new rapid test kit which I used on you”
She explained on and I started wheezing as my asthma started.

“Wait, don’t say the result ma! Don’t!” I exclaimed as I tried to bring my chest to a calm.

I just didn’t take the whole thing serious.

I was still playing around as if nothing had happened.

How could I have been so clueless?

“Mum, there was something sticky between my legs. What was it? Blood?” I asked and she shook her head.

“It was feces”

“What!”

“You must have dropped some of that as the vomiting took you by surprise. The pressure of your tummy must have...”

“So, it’s really positive? I am pregnant?” I asked and she looked deep into my face

“You should be grateful, pumpkin! I never had a baby. My womb is....” She was saying when I jumped up suddenly and started stamping my feet on the floor.

“It is a lie ooooo! Ah! My Father, this can’t be happening to me! Pregnant?” I asked myself on and on while Aunty Tessie could only watch on, tears rolling down her face as she shook her head in regrets.

TALITHA

“How critical is her condition?” I asked, my heart jumping up in fear

“Are you her family member?”

“I am her daughter. No daddy, none at all, nobody is available here but me. Talk to me doctor.” I was so afraid.

“She can’t survive it!” He suddenly dropped and I jumped up in fear.

“Ah! What happened? Why? Talk to me doc. I am medical personnel myself. I can understand” I said, trying to brace myself up.

“It’s stage 4 glioblastoma”

“What!” I exclaimed with such deep voice as if I was in soup and I really was!

“Doc, brain cancer? Oh my God!” I exclaimed as I swallowed hard.

“She was supposed to have had two surgeries and should have gone through series of radiation and chemo but she had always said no! None of her family members even came when we sent for them.” He said on and on and as much as I wanted to hold in my tears, I couldn’t.

No wonder she was assumed to be a psychiatric patient!

No one could even come close to know how she really felt!

Ah, Lord God!

“We know there is no cure for this and life expectancy is less than 2 years. It has been 23 months now already” He said on and I knew the end was just so near

She couldn’t survive it!

No!

I started crying seriously

“Lord, why are you wicked? Why are you treating me like this Lord? I have offended you and I have said I am sorry. Even in my state, I still fasted and cried and prayed. What exactly do you want from me? Stop taking these dear ones from me to deal with me. Kill me and take my life but leave these innocent ones, Lord! Ehn!”

I couldn’t control my tears anymore!

I had been weak over the days as I had cried and prayed and studied my Bible as if I had a professional exam on it for the past three days but heaven seemed shut against me!

A day had passed

Then the second

And then, the third!

My dad hadn't called, neither had he returned my text!

"I thought You were a real God but it seems You have expired! Yes! I think You are sleeping or fainting or even dead! Yes!" As I spoke on, I shook with the realization of the blasphemous words coming from my mouth but I couldn't caution them at all!

"First it was my mum, then, I strayed and You allowed me stray! Then, You took my dad, my family friends, the church from me but I still would have survived. You suddenly picked up Uncle Jeff and Happie my only friends as a hawk carries a chick with its claws. You are a ruthless God!"

I cried on and as much as the doctor tried to stop me, I couldn't be stopped at all.

“The only one person that has been my Saviour since You stopped saving me, You are taking her away from me again? Ehn?” I cried on as if I was going to win some lottery if I cried harder.

“Sir, Matron Tessie is gasping and calling for Tally.” A nurse came around to tell the doctor and I widened my eyes in shock.

“Gasp ... gini?” I asked as I pulled at the doctor’s robe.

As we ran inside the ward, I heard the voice of Eddie, Aunty Tessy’s driver who had driven me to the hospital calling me from behind.

“Sister, the phone” He called out but I couldn’t stop to answer him.

My mind was already shattered.

Only if I could stop this soul from going to hell!

I still knew with the small piece of heart remaining in me that God exists.

Only if He could prove it now!

You have just these few minutes Lord!

If You fail me now, I will be lost too! I will be lost Lord!

“Sister, phone!” Eric called again and something in his voice made me stop in my tracks suddenly.

I had sent him to go and get the phone from home when the doctor asked me what could have been the cause of her sudden seizure.

I was studying Isaiah 58 earlier in the day and asking for mercy when I suddenly heard her scream from the sitting room.

I ran out suddenly to see her clinging to her phone.

As I tried to take the phone from her, she struggled with me. She threw the phone on the floor and fell on it, probably trying to stop me from seeing whatever was inside.

She then started gasping and then became unresponsive.

In my bid of getting Eddie to help take her to the hospital, I had forgotten about the phone until the doctor interrogated me.

Seeing Eddie screaming about the phone, I was scared.

“What is it?” I called out suddenly, my voice enveloped in fears. He handed the phone over to me as he tried to catch his breath.

I looked at the phone but my eyes had suddenly gone blurry!

“It can’t be!” I muttered as I looked into the phone again.

As the image got clearer, my eyes got blurrier!

“No!” I shouted as I fell on one of my knees suddenly with great trembling

“No!” I screamed again as the image in the phone stared at me.

“No!” I screamed again as it looked so real.

I threw the phone at the wall suddenly and the pieces flew back to me

I rolled on the floor with great trembling as I couldn’t believe what was happening to me just recently

Ah, why? Why? I asked on

“Erm..” I heard the doctor’s voice and I jumped up.

I wanted to be sure that there was still a bit of hope in this case

Even if it is one point of hope, I would be glad.

But...

the doctor's look!

And the nurses' looks!

And the doctor's shaking of head like he was a dangling piece of art!

And my failing heart

And my growing hatred for whoever God was!

I knew it....

-I had lost her!

I fell to the ground, my hands blocking my ears.

I let out a heart-rendering scream that made my bum bang on the floor again and again!

I had lost her!

CHAPTER 5

DOVE

I was running and sweating and panting!

I didn't know exactly what was pursuing me but I knew that I was running really fast!

"My Prince!" I heard someone calling behind me but I couldn't look back. I kept on running, looking sideways with great fear.

Suddenly, there was a great darkness over the earth and lightning too and at the sound of the thunder, I stopped in my track as if a force held me down.

My waist screeched at the suddenness of my stopping and I was shocked at the way I stopped too because if a car had stopped like that on high speed, it wouldn't but somersault.

Suddenly, I watched as the darkness like a blanket was pulled off the bed of the sky and I was awed.

There was brightness again and I could see. I was drained in sweat and was very hot!

Something made me to look down at my feet and I screamed in fear.

I was at the tip of a cliff!

“Any movement will have you rolling down in the deep!” I heard my mum scream and I turned to look at her.

I was panting so heavily as I dripped very thick sweat. My mum had very huge fear on her face and just behind her was dad- he looked quite indifferent as his arms were akimbo.

“Somebody help!” I heard the scream echoing again the walls of the deep and I turned to look into the deep, the small curvy rock holding my large legs.

“Think about me, my prince. Please think about me” My mum cried out loudly and I looked back at her the more, pity enveloping me.

“Somebody help!” I heard again. It was undeniable that someone was trapped in the deep.

Mum was right behind me and I felt as her hands landed gently on my bare back.

“Help me!” I heard again.

“Who are you?” I cried back into the deep and there was silence.

I waited awhile and my mum pulled my arms gently, very careful that I might not slip.

“Talitha!” I eventually heard, very quietly as if the person was already very weak.

I wanted to bend and dive into the deep but it was too late for me as I was already being pulled away gently by my mum.

I felt such void in my heart as she pulled me away.

“You will not fall my son. Ah, my only son!” I heard her say as she pulled me gently off the cliff.

“Talitha” It kept ringing in my heart as I was being dragged away.

DOVE

“Talitha!” I called as I felt a great pain in my heart.

I was sweating so profusely and needed to wipe the tears that had gathered so immensely on my forehead.

I reached for my right side and picked a handkerchief and wiped as I muttered ‘Talitha’ again.

“Mr. Bowen Adameji!”

I paused as I heard my name being called.

The voice sounded so familiar but I could see no one.

“Mr. Bowen Adameji!” He called again and that sounded like my boss’ voice but he couldn’t be.

He wouldn't call me by my full name. He called me 'Dove'

"Someone please, wake him up! What nonsense!" I heard his angry voice and wondered what kind of bad dream it was that I was having as my boss never got angry - not at me!

I felt a hand tugging at my shoulder and shook my head.

"I am not sleeping, please" I said and then paused as I realized I couldn't even see the person trying to wake me up.

I felt a strong kick at my leg just then and I jumped up suddenly, holding my leg in pain.

After being in pain for a while, I stood tall and looked around me.

I was in the middle of a press conference and sincerely I had dozed off really bad! ... oh my!

I looked around me and felt a surge of embarrassment flow through me.

Some of my colleagues laughed but I turned away, my face burning yet my fingers were icy cold. I didn't find it funny at all.

"It is not a funny matter Jelly and Sunny C! A senior colleague of yours was found dozing seriously in the middle of a programme that he was supposedly anchoring and you are laughing!" My Boss reprimanded them, looking very angry.

"We are sorry boss" They said sheepishly.

"Dove!" My boss called out to me and I couldn't look at him out of shame!

"Sir!" I replied

"Do you need to visit a hospital?" He asked and I felt very really bad within me!

"No sir!"

"Who is Talitha?" He asked and I looked up at him suddenly.

Talitha?

“Yes, that has been the theme of your confusion for the past weeks now.” He added when he saw my confusion

“You wanna round off programme, you mistakenly mention Talitha, you wanna call Sade Akinremi, you mention Tali- Sade.” He complained on and I was dazed.

What is happening to me?

Why would I keep on saying the name of the girl that I had not even seen before, Lord God?

“I am very sorry sir!” I said and my boss smiled a bit.

“I understand how when ladies have pressed the jigijigi button in us we become like teletubbies but please try to separate work from love. Okay?” He asked and I nodded

“I am very sorry once again sir” I said and bowed.

“Dove!” He called out again and I looked up at him.

“You have been a 3 times award-winning OAP since you came here two years ago and truth be told, not everyone seated here is happy with the new development. The earlier you get that, the better. When I was young too, I was like you and only wisdom brought me thus far”

“Glory to God sir” I said and he smiled

“So, if it is Jesus you want to hold on to, please hold on to Him wella! If na juju, hold am wella. Okay?” He asked, packing his files.

“Thank you, sir. Jesus will see me through sir” I said and almost of all of them burst out laughing.

“I hereby adjourn the meeting” My boss said

“I second it” Laeto said and everyone except Princess left the room.

She walked over to my side, looking somehow sick.

The proprietor of the media house was the father to Princess. So, invariably, the company was one of their many family businesses.

She had been on my matter since I was employed in the large media house two years before. She had written letters, sent mails, sent my boss, in fact, her father had called to meet me before but I had made it clear that it was not possible.

I couldn't just get married to Princess. Besides the fact that I was engaged, we were two parallel lines that could never meet but I didn't know why she wouldn't let me be.

"Who is Talitha?" She asked me, her voice laced with jealousy as if I owed her an apology

I picked my journals and file, smiled at her and moved to the door.

"Never mind, Princess" I said, turning back to look into her face and she frowned.

"You are in love so much so that you wipe the minutes of meeting on your face as if it was handkerchief?" She asked angrily and I was actually shocked.

"I did?" I asked again to be sure and she shook her head as she came closer to me

“Does she know you are so crazy about her like this?” She asked and I frowned as it got to me really well.

What reputation have I earned myself Lord?

What’s happening to me Lord?

A lot of thoughts ran through my mind but I decided to let it go.

We moved to the elevator and Princess entered but as I wanted to enter, I stepped back again.

“You aren’t going up there?” She asked and I shook my head.

“I want to use the stairs” I said and she frowned a bit once more.

“Why?”

“I need to talk to my Lord” I said and turned towards the staircase.

“You are very weird!” She called back after me and I turned to give her a warm smile if that would suffice but the frown on her face was like thin fish rolls lumped up together.

She pressed the button on the wall and the door to the lift jammed!

DOVE

“Lord, what’s up with this Talitha thing please?”

That was the first question I asked as I sank into the recliner in a corner of my office, holding a plastic cup in my hand

I sipped some coffee and then stared into space for a long while.

It was not the first time I would have dreams about Talitha being in extremely dangerous places and calling for help but having those dreams in strategic places like the office, during meetings, was weird!

At that thought, my body cringed!

“Lord, that was embarrassing!” I exclaimed as I squeezed the plastic cup in between my hands and blinked hard as I wondered what ensued while I was dozing!

I felt really bad!

Have you prayed about it?

That was what came to mind and I sat up.

I hadn’t taken time to talk to God about the many issues I had met myself in.

I placed the cup on the table before me and went on my knees.

“Ah, Lord of my fathers!” I started as I sought the face of the Only One who knew well what I did not even know a little.

Go home!

I heard that but I shook my head and concentrated on praying the more. I must have heard wrongly.

Go home!

I heard again and I was almost mad!

“Lord, calm every evil spirit speaking in me in the name of Jesus!” I commanded but the words rang on in my hearing.

I opened my eyes and looked up at the ceiling.

“Lord, what is happening? What is happening dear Savior?” I asked and instead of hearing anything, I felt that sudden peace in my heart and smiled.

“Thank You Lord” I said and was about standing up when I heard it again.

Go home!

I was very confused as it was just about three weeks that I came back from Abuja and it wouldn't make sense taking some days off again.

I walked to my table and picked my Bible to read so that I would be able to hide my confused heart under the shadow of the Almighty.

As I opened, my eyes became misty.

Go out from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

"Well Lord, what home are You are asking me to go then? My land is Abuja, my relatives are there. I don't seem to understand" I said as I dug my fingers into my thick hair.

I flipped the Bible pages again and got to Proverbs and rushed past those chapters. I knew God might want to hold me by some of those verses so I stiffened up.

I just didn't want to go home- I loved my job dearly!

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding.

“Yes Lord! I trust in You alone. Only You!” I argued

Go home!

“Lord, my boss wouldn’t give me that chance to go home at all. He wouldn’t!”

Try!

“Asides that Lord, traveling by road to Abuja is so killing sir! The pains of driving to and fro the last time lingers Lord!” I argued still.

Go by air!

“Lord, you know the status of my purse for now. I took the building and car loans and the stipend I receive at the end of the month on sees to my upkeep. You know this Lord” I said again.

And there was calmness!

Scary calmness!

HAPPIE

I held on to the embalming document that were handed over to me by the doctors as my mum and I walked down the corridor to the lobby.

There was such a great engulfing silence between us.

Travelling from the United States was an impromptu thing that we had to do and we had to do it as fast as we could.

In fact, mum had to be supported till we got to Nigeria because she kept up on sniffing and burying her head in newspapers and bags because of her grief.

I had to pretend to be strong for mum although with every realization of the reality, tears ran down my face.

“Miss Mandy!” Someone called and we turned back.

It was a doctor!

“Good morning” He said, his face a bit grim.

Mum adjusted her black Nike goggles and pulled the shawl round her neck well round her the more.

“Morning” She replied.

“How are you feeling today?” He asked again.

“For real, I feel blue! I feel so blue!” She exclaimed and I noticed that her nose was going red already. I stepped in between her and the doctor and smiled at the doctor

“Any problem doc?” I asked

“Are you her daughter?” He asked and I nodded

“Then, you must be related to one of our staff members, Miss Tessie?” He asked and I smiled slightly.

“She is my aunt” I said and he nodded

“Have you seen her since you came?” He asked and my mum came close again.

“Is anything the matter?” She asked, her heart obviously thumping hard.

“We just arrived the airport as we conveyed a body here for embalming so we haven’t seen her yet” I said and he looked shocked

“You just lost someone?” He asked and my mum started crying again.

I smiled at the doctor a bit and pulled my mum to one of the many chairs. Our nanny was in one of the chairs. We had called her to meet us at the hospital earlier and she didn’t fail us.

“Aunty Becky, watch over mum. I will be back” I said as I ran back to the doctor, pulled his hands and went to a corner.

“Is anything wrong with my aunt?” I asked and he smiled a bit.

I was becoming a little bit uncomfortable.

“Let’s move to my office” He said and I followed him as we walked briskly to his office.

HAPPIE

I couldn’t control the tears that strolled down my face as I looked at the phone the doctor had just handed over to me.

“This is my uncle! I know him well! It was his body we brought back home” I said after a while.

“Accept my condolence” He said and rubbed his hands together.

“Thanks. This is my aunt’s phone. Why is it with you doc? Is something wrong with her?” I asked, shifting uncomfortably in my seat and he fumbled with his hands a bit before looking at me in the face.

“She had been sick for a while. Did you know about it?” He asked and I shook my head.

Could this man just go straight to the point?

I was very agitated as it felt like my buttocks was being soaked in very hot pepper on the chair where I sat.

“Sometimes her mind remains clear and the next moment, the progression into coma is swift and there is a seizure. Those were the initial symptoms of detecting her brain tumor” He said and I sat up in the chair.

“Brain tumor? Auntie Tessie has brain tumor? Oh Lord! Why is this happening oh Lord? Why?” I was going all emotional.

“I felt you were stronger that is why I am talking to you please try to comport yourself dear” He said and I nodded sheepishly

“When she got this image, the shock was too much for her. She just relapsed and despite our trials, erm, we lost her!” He said and I lost my whole senses for a while.

I hunkered down for a while, my heart pounding so hard it hurt to breathe.

It felt as if I had just been punched in the gut.

“Lost as in dead or what?” I stammered as I asked and he nodded, looking so pained too but I couldn’t believe it.

“She saw me to the airport few weeks ago. She can’t be dead. We’ve never been close. She can’t die yet! She is not married yet. She needs children of her own too! She can’t die doctor! She can’t!” I cried on and on.

I paused for a while but as I felt the knife cut through my heart again, I fell on my knees and wept sore.

I wondered how my mum would take it – that she had not only lost her kid bro but her only sister too had gone!

How would I break this to her?

How would my grandparents even take the news? How Lord?

I felt the doctor’s hand on my shoulder and I tried to sit up again.

“She was a very unhappy person all her life but thank God for her last moments. She had a loved one with her and so, though it was a painful exit, she died protecting love” The doctor said and I froze for a while.

“Aunty had a lover?” I asked and he shook his head.

“Her name is Talitha” He said and that was when I remembered that I had a friend in Nigeria.

Oh my!

The past few weeks had been very hectic for me. We had gone for court proceedings, been really stressed out before losing Uncle Jeff to a car accident on the highway. We had to start travelling back to Nigeria immediately and I really didn’t have much time to communicate with Talitha.

“How is she taking the news?” I asked, sniffing wetly.

“Badly!” He exclaimed

“Oh my!” I exclaimed as I rubbed the throbbing vein at the side of my head

“She was almost killing herself over the helpless state of Miss Tessie’s state of health until she saw this picture and then fainted. We had to rush her to the theatre as she bled severely” He said and my eyes tripled.

“She saw the picture too? Who could have sent it to aunty in the first place? Who sent the bloody thing to her?” I started crying again.

“I wonder who did” He said too

“Where is Tally? Why was she bleeding?” I asked and he smiled

“Good! She is actually two months pregnant and ...” he was saying but I couldn’t swallow that at all.

“Pregnant? She is a virgin sir” I retorted and he frowned.

“She is 8 weeks pregnant and the sad thing now is that she is in serious need of blood and a hysterectomy”

“Blood, no problem but isn’t hysterectomy the removal of the womb?” I asked to be sure and he nodded. I was alarmed.

“Ah sir, why would you have her womb removed? That means no baby for her forever sir. Please you have to have a rethink sir. It can’t happen” I cried and he shook his head.

“She is anemic and yet she has a hemorrhage which is a serious thing. It has to be done to save her life and about having babies later in life, adoption is there” He said and I jumped up and shook my head.

“No sir. She can’t die. She has to keep that baby. That is the seed of my uncle if I am not mistaken. It has to stay ...” I was saying when there was a knock at the door and a nurse came in.

“Attention needed at the ICU 3 sir” She said and he stood up quickly.

“Follow me” He said and I jumped up quickly and followed him to God knows where...

DOVE

As I watched the Al Jazeera news channel so I could garner enough points for an editorial I was working on, my mind kept on banging as if some carpentry works were going on in there.

I stood up and went to the water dispenser.

I picked a new disposable cup, took some cold water and walked back to my chair.

“If it is your will that I go home, without stress, make a way for me. Let my boss suggest it, let the company fund it, let me be at peace about it and I will go Lord! It’s Your Will I want to do dear Lord.” I said and sat down.

My phone rang and it was my mum.

“Maami toh sure” I hailed her and she laughed over the phone.

“My Prince the boy!” She hailed in return.

“How is daddy today?”

“My husband is very fine ooo. How is work too?”

“We thank the Lord mum. You remember me today because your baby prince has travelled back to his Ukraine, right?” I asked and she laughed

“Is my prince jealous?” She teased

“Ah, rara o, my hands are up o” I laughed too

“I really miss Joe jare. Even the church misses him. The choir unit has been singing that in my ears recently” She said and my heart jumped in a way.

“Mum, that reminds me. How is Pastor Bode-Davies? Has he been reinstated?” I asked and she sighed.

“He said he needs more time o. He has even grown lean. I pity the poor man personally. To keep the girl, he did not remarry but see the shame she brought upon him. God should just enter these youths for us” She said and I sighed too.

“Mummy, have you been able to reach her since I said you should?” I asked

“Yes, I called o but she didn’t pick up. Since then, her number has not been reachable” She said.

“What other moves have you made to ensure she is found and brought back to the fold mum?”

“Ah, I tried my best o. I even sent Mrs. Fakunle to her school but according to her she and her roommate have not been found in the school premises at all since the incidence”

My heart missed a beat!

“Mum, can you send me her phone number?” I asked and I heard as my mum made a deep sound.

“What! Her number for what? Didn’t you hear that I said her number has not been going through? Why are you even suddenly interested in this case, huh?” She was obviously angry.

“Mum, it’s no problem at all. I have just been worried about her since the incidence happened”

“Why should you be worried eh? Do you even know her? Better get yourself together and be fine. That was how Joe said you were asking for her number few days back too. Warn yourself, Bow!” She breathed in deeply and I laughed.

“My mama the mama!” I hailed but she wasn’t laughing so I changed it.

“Mum, I had just been having some series of dreams in recent time. I will see her in problems and would want to help”

“Were you able to help in those dreams? Were you? Dreams could be foolish you know” She said and I smiled.

“Hmmm, I just want to be careful that I am not disobedient to the Lord. That’s it!” I said

“My Prince, you are not being disobedient at all. You are doing the right thing, you hear me? Dreams are very foolish and only a few are from the Lord” She said and I shook my head at that.

“Mummy, no! Dreams are from the Lord too, not a few, huh?”

“I know. I am only saying we can have dreams from God, from the devil or even from our thoughts. Yours are as a result of your thoughts. Please let your mind be renewed by the mind of Christ! Please and please my son” She said and I sighed.

“Ok ma. But if it is possible ma, try to look for her and draw her close to you” I said

“How is your treasure?” She asked quickly and I couldn’t but laugh at loud. I knew she intentionally brought that up to remind me that I had a fiancée.

Oh, my mum!

“Mama, my treasure is doing very fine. She is on the Island working her butt out” I said and she smiled.

“Be focused and the Lord will see you through darling” She said and I smiled too.

“Amen mum. Have a nice day and say me well to daddy” I said and she replied too as I dropped the call.

As I looked at the screen of my phone, I couldn’t help but laugh again.

“Thank you for the answers to prayers dear Lord! I was probably only fantasizing” I said and just as that was leaving my mouth, there was a knock at the door and the secretary to the HRM came in.

“The Boss wants to see you sir” She said and I stood up almost immediately and followed her out.

TALITHA

I couldn’t describe how I felt as I felt Happie’s head on my tummy.

Tears ran down my face and I couldn’t even imagine what would become of my life at all. I couldn’t imagine at all.

“When we checked the CCTV, an oncoming car was actually driving above the speed limit and headed for his car.”

“Oh my God!” I exclaimed as I tried to relive the whole event in my head as Happie told me. My head kept thumping seriously and as much as I wanted to control it, I couldn’t.

“There were uncontrollable collisions before Uncle Jeff was brought out of the car, ruined!” She said and her description made me really cringe as I remembered seeing the bloody remains of the one who I loved on the floor in Auntie Tessie’s phone.

The sight could kill anyone!

“How could he have been so ruined that much? Where did God go to?”; I asked and she looked into my face, looking shocked.

“Happie, it’s true! God isn’t really trustworthy! He isn’t that majestic! We exaggerate Him too much” I said and she blinked so hard.

“I had always believed and taught that but hearing it from you sounds awful. Like, I feel bad hearing you talk that way” Happie said and I smiled, ruefully.

“Well, I feel bad too. But, what to do? See, If truly there is heaven and hell for real, Happie, Auntie Tessie went to hell! And who chased her in there? Church people! And probably God’s unresponsiveness!”

“Really!” She exclaimed and I shook my head.

“Let’s forget about it all Happie. You can’t understand how it feels losing two people who have shown you love when you felt thrown away. I feel useless right now!” I exclaimed, a peppery sensation in my chest. My eyes had become swollen from the tears of few days back. The pains lurking in my bones and marrows were indescribable as well.

“I know how you feel dearie but we have lost them already. I wouldn’t want to lose you too” She said and I looked into her worried face and smiled.

“Awww, I really wish death took me instead of them. They had lots in them to give the world but what do I have?”

“Stop saying those stuffs Talitha! C’mon!”

“Alrighty! Has your mum known about the newest developments?” I asked and she shook her.

“She should know about Auntie Tessie now as she’s been led away by the doctors to tell her. They need to be extra-careful and nice in doing that but about your pregnancy, I haven’t told her” She said and I felt a rush of heat all over me.

“Hmmm. Pregnancy!”

“Why didn’t you tell me that you were pregnant?” She asked and I smiled.

“Because I didn’t know myself! How could I have been so suspicious of that when it was only once Uncle J and I met? How could I?”

“I thought as much! Wow! So, it’s Uncle Jeff’s baby! So sad the way things turned out!” she said and I was taken aback.

“Why? It’s a product of sin, yes but I am happy that I have it and I will keep it! Why are you sad?” I asked and she started rubbing my belly as tears fell her face.

“The doctor said you are in a critical position now and to save you, your womb has to be removed” She told me and I watched as her lips moved and as tears sat on top of her upper lip.

“Which womb?” I asked, finding it very funny to believe what she had just told me. She swallowed and looked into my face again.

“Your womb, Tally. Your womb! I wonder why things keep falling apart for us this way” she cried on and I started laughing seriously.

She was shocked and looked into my face, looking so pale.

“What is so funny?” She asked and I laughed some more before replying.

“See, don’t trouble yourself. The only reason my womb can be removed is if my heart, eyes, lungs, bones and in fact all the blood inside of me can be drained! I am keeping this baby and if I die with it, I die! Who death epp?!” I exclaimed with all firmness.

“Oh Lord!” She exclaimed and burst out crying the more.

“Oh baby, come here, let’s cry together” I said and pulled her to myself.

We had quality time crying really bad, surges of sorrow and thickness of weariness and ill health running through my veins!

DOVE

I was so shocked and had no idea what was happening.

All I could remember was that my feet slipped from the cliff and then I tumbled for what felt like forever, hitting trees and branches along the way.

“Mum!” That was what I could remember shouting as I felt helpless and out of control, like being in a dream.

When will I stop falling?

“Bowen! My Prince!” My mum screamed loudly and her voice echoed so loudly in the deep.

‘My mother!’ My heart bled greatly.

Halfway down the cliff, the trees gave way and I was left falling through the air. Before I knew it, I was hurtling over grasses, earth and rock until the cliff slope became even steeper and I fell farther. A little later, I must have hit a rock and blacked out but I didn’t!

I found myself lying by a small river I’d spotted from the top of the cliff.

I had fallen into the water, which must have saved my life, then I’d been washed ashore by the current. I was incredibly lucky not to have drowned.

“Take the rope and come back up, can you?” My mum screamed and wanted to throw me a rope, but the rope wasn’t long enough.

As I lay on my back, I was amazed that I had survived.

Just then, I heard some sniffs just behind me.

“Any wounds?” I heard a calm voice say and I turned to look back.

I found a very pretty lady with a melancholic face and was alarmed.

“What is a young lady doing in a very lonely place as this?” I asked, confused. She sat beside me, took some handful of water from the river and drank before she continued.

“I live in a village nearby. We were told not to come near the cliff but remain in the village but I was too adventurous.”

“You disobeyed; you mean?” I asked, for clarification

“Yes, I was! And as I was found on the cliff, some village elders saw me and went to tell my dad who is a village chief. He came to see me and was really disappointed in me!”

“Sure, you did badly!” I exclaimed.

“Then my dad pushed me off the cliff”

“What!” I exclaimed with great shock as I couldn’t believe such cruelty.

“But I hung on to the tip of the cliff with the strength of a lion, very afraid of jumping down and breaking my bones until the other village chiefs came and pushed me down totally!” She said and my body cringed.

“That’s sad! You will never be able to forgive them, would you?” I asked and she shook her head.

“They are bunch of liars and an embodiment of evil! Hypocrites and corrupt ones claiming God! I will never go back to that village! Never!”

“But I heard someone shouting for help in this deep. Was it you?” I asked and she nodded.

“Yes. I thought I needed help but now, it is too late. One of my eyes has gone blind, an arm also is broken already. I’ll rather remain this way” She said and I examined her from head to toes.

“Please, let’s go with the canoe over there and sail to the other village close by. Will you?” I asked but in a twinkling of an eye, she was nowhere to be found. I was shaken!

“Girl! Why are you running? Come and let’s go together. Come!” I screamed on but she didn’t look back.

“Sail alone. Leave me!” She replied as she ran.

“Ok, what is your name?” I asked again as I lost power to run after her

“Talitha!” She replied and I paused in my tracks

Talitha?

Again???

DOVE

“I have just asked you a question and instead of answering me, you are muttering Talitha again, Dove!” My Boss’ voice startled me back to reality and I sat up straight, looking very worried.

“Sir, I am so sorry. I didn’t know I had mentioned the name again!”

“What is wrong with you?”

“Sir, I don’t know what is wrong with me. I don’t understand”

Go home!

I heard again and shook my head to shake all thoughts off.

I am going nowhere!

The girl even couldn't be found in school or at home. Who do I go to?

“Would you like to take a break off?” My boss asked and I jumped up and shook my head

“No sir!”

“If my boss should get to know that you are not interested in going out with Princess but you keep singing one Talitha during meetings especially, you might lose your job, dear Dove!” My boss said and he was being factual as the Big boss would get really irritated.

“If I were you, I will take a few days off and settle things before things get worse. What do you think?” He asked again and I looked up at the ceiling

“I know. I am only saying we can have dreams from God, from the devil or even from our thoughts. Yours are as a result of your thoughts. Please let your mind be renewed by the mind of Christ! Please and please my son”

As my mum's words rang in my ears again, I knew my mind was made up.

“I am fine sir. I will be fine” I said adamantly and he smiled calmly.

Go home!

I don't want to go home now! Not now!

Sail alone. Leave me!

“She said I should leave her alone! Why go then?” I muttered to myself.

“You said what?” My boss asked me and I shook my head.

“Never mind sir” I said as I stood up and moved to the door.

“Or is it the airfare that you don't have, Dove?” He asked and I turned to look back at him

“I am broke sir” I said and he smiled.

“You should have told me then. Should I give you my card?” He asked and I thought about it.

Should I go?

Should I not?

GO HOME!

The voice became louder in my ears but I didn’t want to go.

Mum said no!

Even in the dream that must have been a result of my many thoughts, the Talitha said I should sail alone!

Why should I be encumbered so greatly with someone else’s matter, Lord?

“Sir, I really appreciate your gesture of love. I am staying back. God bless you” I said quickly and went out of the office.

I felt a calmness over my spirit almost immediately!

Such scary calmness!

HAPPIE

As the bedside monitor beside her beeped on, I kept running round the ICU corridor just to reach her dad.

The doctor had disqualified me as a blood donor because according to him, I was having serious malaria fever. That would have to be treated before I could donate.

Mum also had a flu and in fact had won herself a bed in one of the wards in the hospital after the shocking news of Aunty Tessie's demise.

The phone started ringing again and I was glad.

"Hello sir. I guess you couldn't hear me well when I was talking the other time sir but Tally is...."

“I don’t know any Tally” He said and I gasped

“Your daughter sir, Talitha Bode-Davies.”

“I heard all you said earlier but you probably didn’t hear me” He said calmly and I was shocked.

The last time I had briefed him about the entirety of the issues on ground, the call ended and I thought he would be on his way and when I didn’t see him, I guessed he didn’t hear my first explanation but he actually heard and yet didn’t come!

What!

“Sir, Talitha is dying! If you listen well, you will hear the beeping on the bedside monitor. She needs blood urgently and we do not know why her blood type has suddenly become scarce, can you...” I was saying when he cut in.

“You are one of the friends teaching her the wrong stuffs in life, right?” He asked and I was almost getting mad.

“Sir, is it because you are a man that you can’t feel the pain sir? Talitha is dying!”

“May God have mercy on you both amen!” He said and the call dropped.

I was so shocked and in my disturbed state of mind, the doctor came beside me hurriedly.

“How far, were you able to get the father?” He asked and I shook my head.

“Oh my! We are losing her really fast!” He said as he entered the ICU again. I followed after him, perspiring really bad!

It felt like a knife was being slowly twisted in my gut!

Like a hammer was being hit on my head!

I held her hand close to my heart and cried silently.

“Her pulse is becoming so weak! I don’t know why we can’t access any blood bank. I don’t know why. Oh my God!” The doctor exclaimed as sweat covered his whole face.

It was the first time I was seeing a doctor being so concerned- I had always thought they had no emotions at all.

“Let me try Lang Laboratory again” He said and pressed his phone.

“Hello Dr. Sanusi on the line. Please do you have the blood type ab rhesus negative?” He asked and a frown covered his face as he dropped the call.

He made few other calls with the same result and I started crying really bad!

The doctor walked out of the ICU and almost immediately the bedside monitor stopped beeping.

I took Tally’s hand and almost immediately, it fell back to the bed.

Suddenly a tide of bleakness washed over my body!

My soul felt as if it had been torn from my chest.

My hand trembled as I slid down to the ground and I whispered like a word but only air escape my lips.

Tears flowed down my face and I grew really weary!

Suddenly...

The door opened as fast as light and the doctor followed by two nurses with trays of blood came inside hurriedly.

He rushed to the bedside, hit Talitha's wrist for a while and the monitor started beeping weakly again and almost immediately, a cannula was set and a pint of blood hung.

I slowly stood up from my defeated position and looked into the doctor's eyes.

"Who donated? Who did?" I asked and he smiled, wiping his sweaty face with some serviette.

"He did!" He pointed at a guy just at the door and his face didn't look familiar at all.

I looked at him from head to toes and ran towards him almost immediately, throwing all my arms round him out of great joy!

“Thanks thanks thanks” I said on as I rained kisses all over his neck.

Only when I realized that he felt embarrassed and the adrenaline in me had normalized did I come down from hanging down his neck.

“God bless you. You prevented another loss of life.” I said again and he smiled beautifully.

“Bless God!” He said and smiled again.

“What is your name?” I asked and he smiled.

“Tell me yours first” He said and I smiled, a bit relieved now.

“I am called Happiness!” I said although I didn’t see the reason for the name with all the issues that I was surrounded with.

“I am called Dove!” He said

“Dove?” I asked to be sure and he nodded.

“Yes, Dove!”

CHAPTER 6

DOVE

For as much as it has pleased the Almighty God to take out of this world the soul of our sister, daughter, friend and mother, Miss. Tessie Hollands, we therefore commit her body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, looking for that blessed hope when the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout...”

The deafening silence was pierced suddenly by the deathly shriek of a blackened crow standing afar off on one of the tombstones.

I looked around me and it felt like I was the only one who could hear the sound as everyone was lost in their own worlds.

Again, it shrieked, and again. I held my chest and muttered ‘Jesus!’ as I hugged my Bible tightly across my chest.

I looked towards Talitha’s side even as the priest continued with his committals and she looked really pitiable!

She was dressed in a black, flowing gown and a very black goggles but I could still see the tears flowing down her face in two or more thin streams.

We had just concluded the burial of Jeff and she was inconsolable at the session. She even asked to be buried with the dead!

I watched as Happie held close to her and they both wept sore!

“...wherefore comfort ye one another with these words” The priest rounded off his committal and it was time for everyone to pour spadefuls of sand in the grave.

When it was time for Happie to move out, the two friends hugged each other tightly, shaking with so much strength that I was afraid that Talitha would wound herself if she continued that way.

‘What Is so special about the woman?’

‘What Is so special about her that she is so mourning her than she had mourned the father of her child?’

She staggered as she was about to fall backwards.

I ran to her side and quickly held her shoulders with all of my might!

It was very painful to see her like that, looking all weak and sorrowful!

All I could do was hold her close and let the torrent of her tears soak through my shirt.

I could feel her clench her fists, not knowing whether to be mad or to give up hope all together. I was so touched.

I could hear her silently screaming, suffocating with each breath she took, holding onto her small strength remaining.

I ran my fingers through her hair, time and time again, in an attempt to calm the silent war within her mind but she wept on and on.

Happie came close afterwards, smiled a bit and took her off me while they continued crying from where they had stopped.

The burial came to an end and everyone was dispersed.

As the men tried to cover up the grave completely, Talitha broke free from Happie suddenly and started running towards the grave.

I couldn't believe my eyes!

"She can't be dead! She can't be dead!" She screamed loudly as she ran towards the grave.

As some men tried to hold her, she kicked them as if she had the stamina and screamed aloud.

"Leave me! Leave me alone!" She cried sore but they overpowered her, carrying her as if she was a piece of art.

She looked into their faces; her mouth twisted in a pitiable way. Her face showed distress as she closed her eyes and tear drops slowly ran down her face. She had so wiped her face that it had become red and swollen.

"Check her pulse again! Just check please" She cried further as the hefty men held her so strongly. She kicked and struggled for a while until Happie went close to those men and they brought her down.

She held Happie's shoulders hurriedly and smiled as tears flowed still.

“I was with her those days. She didn’t tell me she was going to die. She just can’t die! She can’t” She cried the more as she fell to the muddy ground and pulled at her hair sorrowfully.

“Tally, we will miss Aunty definitely and I know how you feel but can you let’s leave this deathly place, please?” She asked, trying to be strong too.

Talitha shook her head and beat the ground.

“Happie, you don’t understand at all. We didn’t agree that she will die. She didn’t tell me about this outrageous decision to leave!” She tried to explain to her friend, tears strolling down.

“I get” Happie said but she shook her head in the negative.

“You don’t! See, I had a mummy who brought me to this world. She left me unannounced and I tried to cope with the vacuum she left behind. There was another mummy that I thought was my mum until problems came and she pushed me away! But this woman took me in! She took a stranger in! I became her child! She gave me a little princess room. The room she had been keeping for her daughter. Her daughter that she never had! The daughter she later found in me. Happie why can’t you understand? Why? Why can’t you get the fact that she can’t die?” She lamented and I started thinking so deeply.

A lot of things must be eating this lady up!

“Please, can we help her to the car, please?” Happie asked me and I nodded in the affirmative as we bent to pull her up but like a snake, she slid off and walked mournfully to the grave, unstopped.

“They said that I should not jump into the grave with you mummy but deep in my heart I know that I would have wanted to go to hell with you” She said and I was alarmed.

What is she talking about?

“I have realized that it looks like heaven is full already and no more candidate is allowed or why were you turned away? Why am I being turned away too? Even God was challenged, yet nothing was done to prove to you that He is alive! Heaven must definitely be filled up. No vacancy!” She exclaimed, her hands raised up high as she laughed hysterically and then stopped abruptly.

My Spirit was troubled within me.

What is she talking about?

What does she know about God?

“I am determined anyways not to waste my time seeking for the God they would never let me meet!” She screamed to the extent that I was scared that her growing fetus might fall off.

“Ta...” I was going to call her to order when Happie signaled me to stop and though I felt otherwise, I gave in.

“They said smoking and drinking and drawing tattoos and sleeping around is bad but I pledge with all strength in me that I won’t only smoke cigar, I will get marijuana! I will learn it, I will love it!” She said and my mouth opened as my shoulders dropped.

What is she saying?

There rose up a sudden heat from the bottom of my tummy and up to my face as if there was a volcanic eruption in there. The flame entered into my face and tears gathered.

“I will start sleeping around too. From young men to old men, to Alhaji. Every bad thing I hear them say we should not do, I will do! That is my pledge!” She said, bowed three times and smiled.

She reached for the pockets of her gown and brought out a small leather pouched Bible.

What is she going to do with it?

My heart started racing.

She wouldn't do anything with the Word of God, would she?

“This is the Bible the man I called daddy gave me when I clocked ten. I had kept it judiciously because he said it contained life! But almost all that is in it, none of those who preach it to me have been able to stand by! Probably the height is just unattainable for them” She continued.

I swallowed but it felt like acid in my mouth!

She was definitely committing a sacrilege!

She looked so hardened.

“How do I come in, in this case Lord?”

“Why have you brought me at a time like this?”

“Forgive, they can’t forgive! Love, they can’t love! Call upon me and I will answer you, He couldn’t stand by it! When you pass through fire, you shall not be burnt, He didn’t fulfil that! This book does not carry an expiry date but I guess it has expired!”

“Ah!” I couldn’t bear the burning sensation in my body anymore. What is she saying?

But she didn’t seem to hear me at all.

She went on her knees.

“I swear never to hold a Bible in my hands again! Never!” She said and in a twinkling of an eye, I saw her fling the Bible into the grave!

Tears rushed to my eyes at that and eventually slid down my face.

“Ah!” I went on my knees as I held my tummy so tightly. The pain I felt inside was eating me up!

“Sacrilege Lord! Abomination!” I cried again.

It was as if a table knife was forcefully inserted in the mid of my chest.

“Forgive her Lord! Ah, Savior, have mercy” I cried still until I felt a hand pull at my shoulder and I looked up to see Happie’s expressionless face.

“She has moved to the car already” She said and it was then I realized that she was not around anymore. She must have left immediately she made her sacrilegious pledge.

“Shall we go?” She asked, obviously very weak.

I nodded as I wiped my face with my sleeves and stood up, following her like Mary’s little lamb.

HAPPIE

I didn’t feel good about all that Talitha said at the graveside but I intentionally didn’t want her to be disturbed because I knew one could definitely say all sort of unbelievable things at such situations.

She must have passed through hell all the time I was not around.

“I wish Uncle Jeff didn’t go with me! He would have still been alive” I said, going all emotional, tears cascading down my face.

“Please stop crying, Happie. Please for God’s sake. God understands” Uncle Dove said and I smiled as I wiped my face again!

I didn’t want my face to show much sign of heaviness and sadness when we get to the hospital where mummy was.

Her heart was not in a very good condition as to take all the shocks it had been receiving all the while.

I knew we had to travel back to the States soon too although I didn’t know when exactly that would be. We couldn’t just leave granny in the States hurriedly like that and expect her not to guess that something terrible had happened.

“I wonder how long we will be able to hide it from her. Two of three children! Ah!” I shook my head again as my eyes burned and my head ached.

I was the only person in the family remaining strong at least and I had to ensure mum was fine and then grandma and grandpa and even Talitha!

I turned to look at the back seat and she was sleeping peacefully as if she was not the one that had just displayed some dramatic roles earlier.

I needed to be strong!

Poor me!

“It is well” Uncle Dove exclaimed again and I smiled.

“What is your real name? I am sure Dove is a nickname” I said and he nodded. He wasn’t looking as cheerful as he was when we met earlier.

“My name is Bowen Adameji” He said and I looked into his face.

“Bowen? Your parents want you to be like that Baptist missionary or what?” I asked and he smiled.

“I have had people ask me that a lot of times and that is it. My parents want me to grow up to become so great a missionary. Hence the name.”

“Wow! Beautiful! I love the way you talk” I said and he smiled.

“Thanks for the compliment, aburo” He said quickly and I got his method of quickly drawing a line. A line I was not intending to cross anyways.

“Do you know Tally?” I asked and he smiled and nodded.

“Her family attends my dad’s church” He said and only then did it click.

“Oh, Pastor Adameji’s son! So good to have you sir!” I said and bowed.

“You must have heard a lot about us, Happie” He said and I chuckled.

“Oh well, yes! But there is no need beating about the bush sir. The summary of all I have heard about the church and the leaders was what Tally displayed at the grave side earlier” I said and looked straight into space.

“And you don’t believe in Jesus too?” He asked

“Seeing is believing! If someone that had always been preaching Christ to me since the day I met her, could suddenly stand up and declare a pledge because she didn’t see what she had believed, who am I to believe?” I asked sincerely as that was how I felt.

His face fell and I saw him struggling to hold the steering as he looked forlorn.

“Blessed are those who haven’t seen Him but yet have believed Him is what the Bible says, Happie. Jesus is alive! We don’t accept Him to make Him feel good or to better His life. We accept Him because we need Him!”

“I seriously am not in the mood to listen to preaching sir. I am very sorry” I said as politely as I could sound and he smiled, regrettably.

“I am sorry” He said and drove on.

“Sir” I called to see if his face would have changed into an angry lion’s after I had rejected his preaching but he was actually still looking ready to listen even though he looked pained like someone that had been deprived of his mother’s love.

“Yes Happie” He replied.

“How did you get to know about our need for blood?” I asked and he scratched his beard as he smiled.

“One Happie which I guess is you now placed it on Facebook and tagged Talitha as an emergency case and I found myself on Talitha’s wall at that time, I saw it and had to come rushing down from Lagos” He said and I looked shocked.

“All the way from Lagos!” I exclaimed and he nodded, smiling.

“That is very touching of you to do. Probably Talitha would see you and still be encouraged again. I really feel sorry for her” I said and I knew he wanted more gist about her.

“Her dad that stays close by was called at a critical point when we needed him but he refused saying God will have mercy on our souls. Imagine! Is that how a so-called child of God should behave?” I asked and he shook his head in the negative.

“No church member, no family, no friend, nobody came round her! What if she had aborted the baby before they got to know and then she ties her scarf again to minister? Would she have been pardoned?” I asked rhetorically and he looked lost in all I was saying.

“No wonder the church has so many pretenders and hypocrites as leaders!” I exclaimed and he shook his head as raised his right hand to cover his face.

“My Father!” He exclaimed, his voice quaking terribly.

“Talitha would love your Christian attributes. Please I leave her to you in case we travel any time soon” I said and he smiled.

“I hope in the Lord even though she had pledged never to hold a Bible in her hands, she will not only hold it but she will preach it in Jesus’ Name” He prayed and I clasped my hands together.

“Me, I don’t know o. Just help me take care of her” I said and, in a flash, Talitha’s face shot forward by my side. She stuck her head between the two chairs in the front and looked at Uncle Dove.

“So, you are the Pastor’s first son abi? You are part of the people deceiving us with Christianity, right?” She asked as she belched as if she was drunk.

“Tali...” Uncle Dove tried to hold her hand when she suddenly pushed him to the door.

The car started screeching on the road, being out of control.

As it swerved from the right to the left, I jumped up in fear as Uncle Dove cried ‘Jesus have mercy’ many times while Tally’s face held no fear! She was as fearless as a lion!

She held on tightly to his collar and looked dangerously into his face.

I tried my best to locate the brake with my leg and thank God he was not speeding earlier; the car swerved a little more and came to a sharp stop!

I turned the key and pulled the gear.

“Talitha!” I screamed out of anger and fear but she wouldn’t even answer me.

“I am not indebted to you or your family or your church! I was not, I am not and never will I be!” She said, belched again and as the poor man wanted to reply her, whoosh inside his mouth and on his shirt did she vomit!

“Talitha!” I screamed, feeling so irritated and embarrassed.

The poor man tried to spit vomitus out as he tried to push her off him but she had suddenly gone to get power and was not moved as she pinned him down the more.

“That was intentional! How did it taste, huh? Bitter? That’s how my stomach feels towards you all. I will never trust any of you even if you donate your eyes to me to save me! I hate all of you and I don’t want to be contaminated by your miserable lives.” She said and there was silence.

As I tried to pull her off, she bent over him suddenly and located his ear.

“Are you going to bite him also? He came to do you good Talitha. It’s not fair!” I screamed as I pulled her to no avail.

“Pastor’s son, leave me alone!” She screamed into his ear and if the ear was not that stable, I was sure it would have gone deaf.

I eventually succeeded in pulling her away and she fell back to the back seat.

I looked into Uncle Dove’s eyes and saw tears gathered in his eyes as he checked out his ex-beautiful turned vomitus-stained shirt.

He stunk from the vomit.

“I am so sorry sir. Let me come and drive so we can get some water and a change of cloth. You can’t go this way” I said but he shook his head.

“It’s fine. I will drive” He said and sniffed quietly.

I looked at Talitha at the back seat hoping to hit her with my purse but she had suddenly slept off again!

“Her case is hopeless, right?” I asked and he shook his head.

He was obviously tired of the whole thing!

Ah, he really tried! Even if a baby had mistakenly vomited on my body, I knew what mess I would be in, talk less of an adult, vomiting in my very mouth!

I quivered.

“She would need a psychiatrist, right?” I asked and he looked at me with eyes filled with tears.

“I don’t know!” He struggled to reply me as I realized that saliva had gathered in his mouth.

He looked extremely sad and I was so sure he was struggling with his emotions.

It looked like he was looking for an opportunity to fall to his bed and cry like a baby.

He stopped the car suddenly.

“I will be back” He said as he went out and slammed the door.

“Oh my God! What could have happened to this Talitha ehn! Chai!” I exclaimed as I eyed her with my heavy eyes and moved out to join him too.

Talitha snored on at the backseat!

DOVE

I felt refreshed to an extent after I had washed my mouth with sufficient water but I couldn't wait to get home to have a thorough teeth cleansing and mouth wash.

I had never been more humiliated in my life!

How God would have brought me so low to have me disgraced was what I couldn't bring myself to understand.

What lesson did He want me want me learn from the humiliation?

I had never been subjected to more casting down at all in my entire life.

"You feel a bit better?" Happie asked and I smiled a bit although I felt a continuous jabbing at my heart.

I felt like going beside River Han and dive inside, burying my head in it for some hours!

"I'll be fine." I said when I remembered I had been asked a question.

I turned the ignition and we were set to go again.

After driving for some minutes, I was looking at the hospital not too far off and the gladness that filled my soul was more than the joy that filled my heart the day I came back from Germany and saw my fiancée again.

I was glad!

I couldn't wait to get home, fall over my mum's shoulder and narrate my most embarrassing moments with her as I cry.

"Tally, you need to say sorry to this nice uncle. He has been of a great help to you. He is God-sent indeed! Ki n ji ko?" She asked but there was no response.

"No problem dear. It was all for God. No need to be sorry about it" I said when the look on Happie's face was unhappy at the misbehavior of her friend.

"But sincerely Tally, if someone had told me that you would turn to be an ingrate this way, I would have disagreed. What happened to you?" She asked, looking sternly at the windscreen as if her face was etched there.

I looked at the rear mirror and my heart jumped into my mouth as I brought the car to an abrupt stop.

“What’s that?” Happie asked, obviously horrified.

“Tally is not at the back seat” I announced and she turned back in a jiffy, obviously terrified.

I came out of the car, opened the back seat and looked at the nooks and crannies of the back seat.

“Sir, please open the boot from that side” Happie said and as if it was the best bet at that time, I pulled the boot lever and we both ransacked the boot to the extent of unbolting the tyre house where extra tyre was kept.

She was nowhere to be found!

I looked up at the skies and it felt as if a stone was dropped on my small heart and being unable to cope, my heart bounced away like a rolling coin. I felt so heavy inside of me.

“What do we do? We can’t find Tally” Happie pulled at my hands, her eyes filled with fear.

But knew I had to behave like a man that I was not sure I was anymore.

“Let’s drive down again. Maybe she left the car when we went to get water” I said as my excitement of going home was again tampered with.

“Oh my God! What sought of a mess is this? Tally can’t be lost oooo” Happie kept on lamenting as we approached the place where we had earlier alighted.

There she was sitting down like a hopeless, rain-drenched bird on one of the electric pillars.

She kept staring at the cars passing by the road that she didn’t even seem to take note of our car.

“See her!” Happie screamed as she pointed at her where she was seated. Her face had broken out into a sweet curve.

What a love!

I watched on as she jumped down and ran to Tally. She hugged her at first and thereafter started to beat her back.

I came down too but could only watch.

I didn't know what I felt towards Talitha at all.

It looked like anger, hatred, bitterness, caution and stuffs like that but I could sincerely not describe it.

And if those were the feelings that I was having really, I knew I was already sinning.

God, help me not to sin against You, please!

I muttered those words silently in my heart as my head thumped.

“There are many fishes in this ocean” Tally said and I was shocked.

The weather was so hot and there didn't seem to be a small puddle of water on the floor talk less of an ocean.

“See Tilapia... see” She pointed at a car speeding away and Happie straightened up as she looked on, dismayed again.

“Sir, what is she saying?” She asked, looking so worried and dejected.

“Let’s help her to the hospital. They will tell us what is wrong exactly there” That was all I could say.

I never studied the sciences at all so I knew nothing about all that was happening.

“Salmon, another Tilapia, whale ... chai, see shark!” She started screaming as we helped her up.

Just as she was standing, she belched and without warning, I let go of her hands out of irritation and fear that she could vomit on me again.

But she fell over the pole then and a bottle rolled from under her then. She yelled in pain but all I could see was the bottle.

“She’s been drinking!” I exclaimed Happie didn’t see that at all.

“She’s bleeding” She exclaimed and that was when I saw the red stream flowing down her legs.

“Ah, Lord Jesus!” I exclaimed as we helped her hurriedly into the car and straight into the emergency ward while Happie kept dancing in fear as I could feel her heart scampering.

“Miss Happiness, thank God you are here. Your attention is needed at the Intensive Care Unit 4” A doctor came over to her side, announced and she looked at me.

“I don’t have anyone in the ICU. What could be wrong?” She asked as if I knew.

“Oh!” That was the only thing I could bring myself to say when it dawned on me that I would have to stay alone with the Talitha for a while again.

“I will be back” She said and ran after the doctor.

I turned to look in front of me and realized that Talitha had been wheeled into the ward very close to me.

DOVE

“Are you her husband?” The doctor asked and I had to bend and look towards the door to be sure he was not talking to me.

“It is you I am talking to. Can’t you father a baby?” He asked, laughing slightly. The nurse too smiled and I could only gasp out of indignation.

“I am not her husband” I said so firmly that the two medical personnel looked into my face and bowed a bit.

“Sorry” The doctor said but the nurse continued.

“Young men of nowadays can only do and do but when it is time to take responsibility, they duck! Ah, men!” She exclaimed and the doctor laughed.

“But he said he is not the husband. Let’s agree” He said sarcastically and I felt hotness rush from my heart to my face.

It felt as if my face was on fire and my eyes couldn’t stay white!

I turned back, found a chair, sat in it and buried my face in my hands for a while.

I wanted my head to cool down a bit before I would find myself doing the unthinkable.

“How is the baby?” I asked when they eventually wheeled her inside from the adjoining room and the nurse winked at me, smiling sheepishly.

What is wrong with this woman?

“See, she is not my wife. The baby is not my baby.” I almost shouted and the doctor looked at me, shocked.

“I thought we had forgotten all about that sir. Why are you bringing it up again? Guilty conscience?” He asked and they laughed again.

It was not getting any funny but I didn’t know why I stayed.

I was so vexed in my spirit that staying would have been a No! But I stayed.

“The baby” I said again and the doctor walked close to me and patted my back.

“We are just catching our fun. Don’t take it to heart, man! You are a man! The baby is doing well although it is attaching to the uterine lining which caused the bleeding but it will be fine. Spotting is a normal thing in some women.” He said and I heaved a sigh of relief as if a heavy burden had been lifted up from my shoulders.

I couldn’t wait to get home.

“So, what of the condition they were talking about that her womb has to be removed?” I asked and the doctor smiled.

“I am just here in case of emergency. This is a specialist hospital and since she had been under observation, she will still have to continue her treatment after a while here. Mine was to ascertain that the bleeding was not anything red light and I have ensured that” He said and I closed my eyes and sighed dejectedly as it dawned on me that I was not ready to go home yet.

DOVE

I felt a slap over my head and it reverberated deep into my brain as I looked up.

Her eyes were filled with fire.

“What are you doing here?” She asked, looking very infuriated.

I panted so heavily as I tried to bring myself under control.

“I don’t think I have done anything to deserve you slapping me across the head, Talitha. As far as I can remember, I am far older than you, excuse me” I said and was walking to the door when her words stopped me in my tracks.

“Yes, go and tell them that she is not only pregnant but she is now drinking alcohol, and that she has renounced their Bible and that she will never worship their God. Tell then she is a lunatic and she even slapped an older brother. In fact, tell your dad that the Sunday sermon be centered round Talitha! Okay” She continued and I looked back at her.

“I don’t do all those things, Tali...”

“You are all the same. You can’t because you donated your blood and served as a day driver act all angelic. You are all evil like that! You are a bunch of disgrace. A flock of hypocrites!” She screamed more and I started walking back to her.

“Don’t come close!” She sat straight and I read pain in her eyes as she tried her best to be all active despite her pain in her body.

“Be calm a bit, Talitha! You are sick!” I exclaimed and she hissed.

“Like you care” She hissed again.

“If I don’t care Talitha, I won’t leave Lagos to see a lady I had never met before. If I didn’t care, I wouldn’t allow a needle enter my hand to save you. If I didn’t care, I would have left you immediately I finished the blood transfusion but I stayed behind because I know you need help. If I didn’t care, I wouldn’t be here after you had almost strangled me and vomited right into my mouth Talitha! I would have gone long ago if I didn’t care but I do care. And Jesus even cares more” I said sincerely as I made her understand.

She looked like she was touched this minute and the next minute, I saw her looking around as if she had lost something.

“Is there something you are looking for?” I asked as I walked near her but the look she shot me stopped me and I looked into her shivering lips.

“I was looking for a gun! If I can lay hold on one, I will kill you, kill my dad, kill all your family members and kill anybody who dares mention care or Jesus beside me! Go!” She screamed and I was downcast.

How else can this soul be saved oh Lord?

“I will go!” I said firmly too and she looked into my eyes to see if I meant it.

But I meant it, really!

“I have done my best” I said and there was a kick at my heart

You have done nothing!

“As far as I am concerned, I have exerted all my strength. I am done! I have tried!” I muttered on in my spirit

She isn't saved yet!

“Send another person. Obviously, I have failed, okay!” I said and walked towards the door again.

The door flung opened and Happie entered the ward. Her eyes were filled with tears again and I pulled her close to know what had gone wrong.

She rested against my chest and cried more deeply.

“My mum” She exclaimed, releasing some hot air from her mouth and nose to my sheer shirt which sent me tingling painfully.

I wondered what had brought me to this crossroad- with these problem-soaked girls!

“What happened again?” I asked and she hugged me tighter.

“Her kidneys are failing! Her heart is weak! All is not working well! I am tired” She continued and I didn’t know what to do again.

I knew she had found solace in me to an extent and she looked so lonely. I grabbed her head and placed mine on it as I closed my eyes.

I shed few drops of tears on her hair as I tried to pray.

God, heal, save and deliver Happie and her mum. Make her happy Lord. Amen

I prayed briefly and after a while, she lifted her head and smiled a bit as she wiped her face.

“I feel better. Your chest is magical! I wish my mum can enter into your chest for a minute. She will be completely fine” She said, smiling gratefully and bowed.

Whatever she said might have been metaphoric but my heart stirred at such words.

They looked deeper than they sounded.

“I have to leave you again and I hope it is for the better, Talitha. I hope no one dies again! Not you, not mom, not granny, not me!” She said as she fell beside Talitha on the bed.

“You are leaving me again?” Talitha asked and I shook my head at her soft voice again.

Is she not the lion that was roaring at me a few minutes ago?

“Mum needs new kidneys and she is to be flown out now. Her name is on the priority list and I hope she gets good, compatible ones.”

“Amen!” Talitha said calmly as if she was not the angry oceanic wave that was almost chasing me off the seashore earlier.

“Please take care of yourself as much as possible. When you are discharged, Auntie’s house will be there for you to stay at. Her driver, Eddie is there for you with her car” She said further and I looked into Talitha’s face. She looked as if her life was coming to an abrupt end as she struggled to breathe.

Happie reached into a bag beside her and got an inhaler.

“Open” She said and she opened her mouth. She pressed some dose into her mouth.

“Exams would be starting soon. If you are able to, please write, if not defer till next session when you are fine. Okay?” She asked as tears ran down Tally’s face.

Happie tried to look away as she blinked severally, obviously trying not to cry again.

“Also, don’t drink alcohol. No matter how bad I am, you won’t see me take hot drinks. Please don’t! Not with Uncle Jeff’s baby inside of you Talitha. Please. It will hurt you both.” She said as she rubbed her tummy while Talitha started wailing.

“Stop crying, Tally. Please be strong for me. Please.” She said as she hugged her so tightly and they both wept again.

I didn’t know what exactly to do at that point!

“Take this. This is my card. I really don’t have much inside but it should take care of your basic needs to an extent. You know my PIN?” She asked and Tally shook her head as she collected the card.

“My PIN is Tally with a single L” She said and Tally looked lost for a while, pulled her by the head and started planting kisses on her forehead.

“I love you too. Ama miss you” She cried on and my eyes started going misty all over.

“My my!” I slapped my chest to cooperate and not go all emotional.

“I will have to go now Tally. They are waiting at the park for me” She said as she disengaged from the embrace.

Talitha looked lost in space as she watched her friend moved to the door.

“Happie” She called suddenly and we both looked towards her place.

“What is that?” She asked as she sniffed wetly.

“Take that thing out of this place as you move out” She said and we looked towards where she was pointing.

Suddenly a bag of saline water fell on my shoe and splashed all over me.

“That thing” She said again and Happie looked alarmed as she eyed her angrily and looked at me in a bid to pacify me.

She had thrown the bag of saline water at me!

“Me?! I am the thing that should be taken out? Ah!” I exclaimed and Happie pulled me by the hands as we left the ward.

I was shaking with anger!

Lord, pacify me please! I am losing it all!

Happie looked into my face and smiled.

I looked into her eyes too and they were all red and teary.

I felt something deep in my heart for her that was indescribable. She looked like my little puppy Emel that died in my arms at two weeks old after an illness even though we tried all we could to save its life.

“Uncle Dove” She called me and I nodded, unable to talk.

“You are a Dove. You can’t be choked!” She said as she straightened my neck as if she could see that it needed straightening because like a squeezed paper, it’d been very perched and almost rendered useless.

“Miss Happie” A male voice called out and she looked into my face again.

“I have a lot of things to say but no time, sir. Please don’t give up on Tally. She is the sweetest person I have met asides you. She is not that bad!” She said as she started running down the corridor.

“It was nice meeting you Uncle Dove” She turned back to say to me and I could only nod.

“I am on my way sir” She replied as she ran while I stood glued to where I was.

I smiled to myself as I touched my neck and remembered how she straightened it out for me.

Focus!

I heard and shook my head to normal as I started walking down the corridor too.

Talitha!

I heard that in my spirit and I shook my head

“She asked me to go and that if she found a gun, she would shoot my head.” I said that to my spirit again in case God didn’t hear that part.

‘Please don’t give up on Tally’

Happie’s enchanting words rang in my head also and I shook my head and saw myself walking back towards the ward.

The door opened by itself and I was shocked.

I looked towards the bed and she was not there.

As I tried to move out, a hand pushed my head to a side and I looked to see what it was, my eyes blinking lawlessly.

“I knew you would come back and I am ready for you!” She said as if she was under the influence of something. She brought out something suddenly and was almost inserting it in my neck when my brain resumed and I caught her hand in a rush.

It was an injection needle and it was a hair’s breadth away from my jugular.

My eyes shone as if they were going to fall off their sockets as slowly. I got out through the door, pushed her hands over and then started running down the corridor.

I was panting like a deer in the desert!

By the time I got to the exit, I nodded to myself and was sure beyond all doubt that I would outrun a cheetah if I could run that fast!

As my heart beat as if it was going to stop in a bit, I looked at my clothes and shoes and indeed, I was very dirty!

“Your handbag, brother” The woman who had a kiosk in front of the gate with whom I had kept my bag while we were going to the cemetery told me as I walked aimlessly around.

“Thank you, ma” I said as she sent her child to bring it to me.

When I realized that people looking at my body were getting too many, I flagged down a taxi.

“Drop?” He asked and I nodded.

“Asokoro” I said and I entered the car.

As I closed my eyes, I buried my face in my hands and like a small child cried, changing from one gear to another.

MUMMY DOVE

“Eric, check who is at the gate please” I said as I checked the time. It was past 8 at night and I wondered who it was.

My husband had gone to Lagos for a convention and he definitely couldn’t be the person at the gate.

Who could it be?

I went to sit down as I wore my nightcap well- I had just had a warm bath, ready to sleep.

“Oga mi sir. Welcome ooo” I heard Eric say and my heart jumped to my mouth.

Wasn't my husband able to make it down to Lagos again?

I jumped towards the door and as I was about to open, the door opened and I saw my prince with a very sad look, looking very dirty at the door.

"Hello mum" He said, stinking as he entered. He dropped his bag and walked straight to the bathroom.

I followed after him straight up

"Oko mi, what is the matter with you? Why are you looking like this? Where are you coming from?" I asked and got no answer.

He picked his toothbrush, laid some paste on the teeth and sanctified with some water at the tap.

"You didn't even say you were coming home" I said again but he was not answering me.

As he started brushing as if he had some kolanut stains on his teeth, I pulled at his shirt and started unbuttoning in the little way I could, my heart thumping as if it was undergoing some hard work.

I dumped the shirt which stunk of some smell that I could not fathom inside the laundry bag and walked up to the bath.

Was he involved in a fight?

Has he been sacked?

Did he drink alcohol?

Was he involved in an accident?

These and many other thoughts ran through my mind as I pressed the tap for some hot water and got his bathing water ready.

He removed his trousers with his mouth twisted in irritation and I knew he would need a warm bath in the jacuzzi so I quickly filled the bath up and scented it up a little bit.

I excused him and went to the dining room, wondering what could be wrong.

As I brought out some a plate of frozen soup from the freezer, I heard him call my name from inside.

“Mum” He called and I went close to the bathroom.

“Where are you coming from this night?” I asked without mincing words, my ears close to the door.

“It’s not easy obeying God, right?” He asked and my head started counting as fast as it could.

What did he mean by that?

What was he expecting me to say?

Obeying God?

“Well, difficult as it may be, our patriarchs of faith who were obedient had their blessings and we have been called to obey God too” I explained, trying to see what he was driving at.

“What if in the process of obeying God, you meet some life-threatening circumstances?” He asked and my legs went all weak.

“Life threatening circumstances as how?” I asked as my hands shook as if they were going to fall off their balls.

“Like being vomited over, being insulted and harassed, being choked and strangled or an attempt of stabbing thereabout” He explained and my bladder lost control as I could feel my panties getting wet all off a sudden.

“Oh my Savior. Ah, Oluwa oooo” I exclaimed with great fear as I ran inside the adjoining toilet.

“How did you come across all those, Bowen. How?” I asked as I released the remaining urine in the toilet. I cleaned myself up thereafter and heard him sigh.

“Tali...” He was saying when I jumped up from the toilet seat.

“I pray this girl does not finish you for me, Bowen! I said you should leave her alone! What is your problem?” I shouted out loud, feeling as if I could pull my son into a cupboard and shield him from any Talitha whatsoever.

The little girl that grew up on the porch of my shop then had become the thorn in my flesh and I couldn't even imagine that.

“Mum, I didn't want to have anything to do with her earlier after you warned me but I know how God speaks to me and I didn't want to be adamant. That's all.” He was still explaining but I couldn't understand it at all.

Why was my only son being deceived this way?

“Were we not the one that raised you up in this faith, Bowen? Do you want to know better than us?” I asked angrily.

“Mum, wait, what am I saying and what...” He was saying but I didn't allow him land as I flushed and went to the front of the bathroom again.

“Proverbs 15 verse 20 says A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish man despises his mother ... continue!” I said again as I didn't know what else to do to stop him from involving himself in her matter again.

“The Bible also makes me to understand that the eye that mocks a father and scorns a mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it” I said again and then, the door opened and he came out, a towel round his waist.

He looked into my eyes and shook his head.

“I will be going back to Lagos tomorrow morning” he said and started mounting up the stairs.

I probably didn’t handle things well at all right?

I should have allowed him to explain himself and not stress him up the more. I needed to tell him sorry...

But by the time I got to the entrance of his room, his door was locked

DOVE

As the cold breeze from the AC blew round the room, I bent a standing fan close to my head and it sent some coolness to my tensed nerves.

“Chai! Women wahala sha! I ran away from World War 1 and still came back to the second part ... huh!” I exclaimed and then smiled as I remembered the look on her face as she said ‘And the young eagle will eat it!’”

“Mummy!” I laughed again and rolled over the bed.

My phone beeped and that was when I remembered I had a phone.

15 missed calls from Princess, my Boss’s daughter and 2 missed calls from Becca, my fiancée. There were some messages too and as I wanted to check them ...

Some noises started in my head as if bees were buzzing continually.

I left the phone and held my head in both hands.

Talitha!

“Ah ah, but LORD, I am tired of this Talitha this, Talitha that which You have been screaming in my ears for a while now. I am very tired!” I said as if He was seated beside me and needed some explanations.

Talitha!

I jumped up from my bed and looked around, very tired as to what else to do.

“Seriously, this has to stop Lord! God, as you could see, I tried my best to show her some love but she sent me away by herself! She humiliated me” I argued

“Any wounds?”

Those were the next words I heard and I knelt beside my bed to weep.

I saw the very pretty lady with a melancholic face who had said those words to me in my dreams- those scary dreams.

“I live in a village nearby. We were told not to come near the cliff but remain in the village but I was too adventurous.”

The dream started to relive again in my head and I started shaking my head.

“Lord, No! Please I don’t want to feel this way. I can’t go through hell again Lord! Please Savior!” I cried out loud.

“And as I was found on the cliff, some village elders saw me and went to tell my dad who is a village chief. He came to see me and was really disappointed in me!”

The words rang on in my ears as if my mine didn’t matter.

“But I hung on to the tip of the cliff with the strength of a lion, very afraid of jumping down and breaking my bones until the other village chiefs came and pushed me down totally!”

As those lines relived in my head, the vomitus that sank into my mouth also relived in my imaginations.

“Then my dad pushed me off the cliff!”

I closed my eyes in exasperation.

“I thought I needed help but now, it is too late. One of my eyes has gone blind, an arm also is broken already. I’ll rather remain that way”

“Oh my God!” I cried out in dire need of help.

“Sail alone. Leave me!”

As her words in that dream rang in my ears, I felt as if I was going to run mad!

“Ah! The humiliation, Lord! I can’t do this anymore! She asked me to leave her in the dream and in even in real life. Why wouldn’t I respect her decision and avoid disgrace Lord?” I wept on.

Then, something flashed in my mind ...

How my feet slipped from the cliff and then I tumbled for what felt like forever, hitting trees and branches along the way.

Remember?

Of course, I could remember those awful dreams. I could!

I watched in my mind television how halfway down the cliff, the trees gave way and I was left falling through the air.

Before I knew it, I was hurtling over grass, earth and rock until the cliff slope became even steeper and I fell farther.

A little later, I must have hit a rock and blacked out but I didn't!

You didn't black out, did you?

"I didn't Lord. I didn't but..." I cried as the meaning of the dream I had been having came to my understanding.

I found myself lying by a small river I'd spotted from the top of the cliff.

“Any wounds?” That melancholic girl asked again and I blocked my ears and opened my eyes wide like my life depended on how widely open it could go.

“Leave me alone! Leave me!” I screamed the more

There was a knock at the door and I knew my mum was still there.

I knew she would stop me before I go all mad.

I ran to the door and hugged it tightly.

“Mum!” I called out.

“My prince” She answered in fear.

“I will be going back to Lagos first thing tomorrow morning.” I said again, my heart thumping.

“Should I book your flight?” She asked, obviously glad.

“Immediately mum” I said even though some kicks had started in my heart.

“That’s my son! The Lord be with you, dearie. Good night” She said and as I fell to the ground, holding my thumping chest in my hands, I looked at the door and smiled faintly.

“Good night mum”

I held my chest and swallowed hard if probably the spittle would go and moisturize the dryness in me as the kicks therein wouldn't let me be.

“I am going to Lagos first thing tomorrow morning. The earlier you get that Lord, the better!” I said and almost immediately after I said that, the kicks subsided and there was calm!

I was scared!

CHAPTER 7

DR. (MRS.) RICHARDS

I was shocked!

I looked at her as she spoke and wondered why till the very moment, she remained so strong!

With all that had happened to her, she was supposed to remain indisposed and weak but she was still able to talk very much- it was shocking!

She was just too strong!

“I want to be discharged!” She repeated again as if I had not heard what she said earlier but I wouldn’t discharge the stubborn girl!

She looked very fine on the outside but her inside was sickly raw! How could I discharge such individual? How?

“You don’t have anyone in here to sign for you Talitha. We have a process to follow in this hospital and you have to adhere by it. If any of your family members can come and sign the document, we shall have you discharged so we have no fault hanging down our

necks if anything happens to you afterwards” I tried to explain in my own simple way but her face looked so determined.

“Doctor, you are a woman just like me. I may be small though but you should understand that I do have my rights as well. I...”

“I am in no way stepping on your rights, Talitha! I only insist that you bring a family mem...”

“I don’t have a family!” She exclaimed as she threw her hands in the air angrily. This made the intravenous line in her vein to fling out and blood popped out but she was undaunted.

I turned to look at the nurse beside me and she looked white, out of fear too.

‘What could be wrong with this girl?’

‘Is there something wrong with her skin?’

“My mum is dead! My dad is very dead and my foster mum is dead too! I have nobody! Can’t you get that? Can’t you let that sink into your head, doc?” She screamed and I was alarmed!

She was not like that the very first day I met her. She was very cool headed and was not insensitive and vulgar. She loved and respected me in her own way.

What could be wrong with this little girl?

I went closer to her and sat on the bed beside her. She was panting heavily and my eyes ran over her tummy.

“You want to be discharged, dearie?” I asked and she looked deep into my face then. She didn’t say anything further. I smiled.

I ran my gloved hands over her leg but she looked deep into my eyes still without blinking.

Then, I pinched her!

I pinched her so much that my fingers turned red and the spot on her leg became rumped as if I had chopped off a sizeable piece of dough from a larger one.

But she didn't move- she was looking so deep into my eyes!

"Give me a half dosage of Ambien please" I said while still smiling into Tally's face.

"Injection?" The nurse asked and I nodded.

"Talitha, you will be fine. Okay?" I asked her and she looked lost.

"Mum?" She asked and I smiled again. She shook her head and bent her head in confusion.

Did I look like her mum in anyway?

I picked her right hand and rubbed it gently but she didn't raise her head still. I collected the injection and took the crook of her elbow, located her median cubital vein and into it, the drug I poured.

She still didn't flinch until I stood up. She raised her head with tears in her eyes.

"Mum?" She asked and my heart melted.

I was right- Some other things were wrong with her!

She held my thigh and wouldn't let me go, looking straight into my still smiling face until I saw the effect of Ambien as her eyes dilated and little by little, she sank back into her bed- asleep!

I covered her with a cover cloth and looked at the nurse.

"She is changing drastically by the day" She said and I nodded as I looked at her observantly, removing the gloves covering my hands.

"Take care of her wound and set another cannula for her please" I said and she nodded as she set to clean her up.

I picked my phone from my pocket and dialed my hubby's phone number.

"Honey, are you in anyway near West Ward? ... Oh, great! Please I am in private ward 4 ... You need to see something" I said and smiled a bit.

The nurse looked into my face and I smiled again.

My brain was calculating!

DOVE'S MUM

Like a rolling pin on an empty board, I moved restlessly on my bed!

I could not find sleep in any quarter! My head was banging and my back ached mercilessly!

What is wrong with me Lord?

Why must my family bear the sin of a poor, helpless girl somewhere?

I command peace into your spirit, Bowen!

I sat up at once and stared into space. I picked my phone and scrolled through, dialed a number and it started ringing.

“Hello ma”

“Becca, how are you doing?”

“I am fine ma”

“Sorry for disturbing your peace this midnight”

“OK ma” She responded and I thought twice about the call.

Are they fighting or in some sort of disagreement?

“How is Lagos?”

“Fine ma”

“Are you hearing from your guy?” I asked and there was a pause.

“Yes” she said after a while

“Becca, tell me. Are you both having issues?” I asked again. I was tensed.

Becca wouldn’t talk curtly to me on phone. She was always cheerful.

Or was it because I woke her from sleep?

“I am not having issues with him. I don’t know if he has any with me” She said and I was alarmed the more.

“Why are you talking this way, dear? Talk to your momma”

“Ma, I don’t know what I have done to Dove. He seems distracted these days and he is not picking my calls”

“Oh!”

“I was in his office day before yesterday shortly after his afternoon programme but he was not around. I called to see him yesterday also and he was nowhere to be found.”

“I will talk to him. My daughter, the world’s best couples will have issues but the joy in it is the ability to quickly resolve matters. Do you understand?”

“Yes ma. Thank you, ma, but ma, why did you call?” She asked and that met me unawares.

I stammered for a while before I could answer

I had called to ask her to continue praying for her fiancé and also make sure he is not making some deadly decisions.

I wanted to tell her that Dove was at home with me just because he said the Holy Spirit led her to one Talitha for what assignment I couldn’t seem to understand. I just wanted her to talk godly sense into him!

But I couldn’t say anything with all I met on ground- it would only make matters worse.

“I was just worried and very bothered deep in my heart and I sought to talk with you” I said

“Did he report me to you?” She asked.

“Ah, not at all! He didn’t”

“Ok ma. Thanks, and goodnight ma”

“Good night my dear” I said and couldn’t remove the phone from my ear for a while.

The way Becca talked with me was not the way she would have talked with me on a normal day!

She was my gist partner and I really loved her for my son but what could the problem be?

I jumped up from the bed and picked up my robe. I quickly wore it and moved towards the door.

I needed to talk to my son immediately! Why would he be in Lagos and his heart be in Abuja because of a girl that had gone promiscuous? He wanted her changed and we all wanted her changed too but why would he be carrying someone else's heavy load on his small head while leaving his personal matter unattended to?

As I was about to turn the doorknob, my phone rang and I turned to look at the wall clock- 3am.

Who could be calling me at this early hour of the day?

I went back to the bed and picked my phone.

It was Ebenezer my brother in law who was working at the NAIA, Abuja.

"Hello brother"

"My sister, there is a flight for 4am. Will Dove be able to make it to the airport before then?" He asked and my heart rejoiced in me greatly. He had earlier told me there was no local flight for the early morning that day.

"Why not, brother?"

“Should I book for him then?” He asked and I smiled happily.

“Please book for him. He will settle you when he gets there. Thank you, brother” I dropped the phone and jumped to the door.

I was at his door in the speed of light. My heart was overexcited.

It was as if his presence in Abuja spelt danger to me earlier! I hated the feeling that my son was being blown here and there like a weightless balloon

I knocked.

“Mum?”

“Yes son. Good morning”

“Morning mum”

“There is a flight for 4 and Uncle Ebenezer has booked for you. Can you get yourself ready?”

“What! That’s interesting mum! I will be ready right away!” He said excitedly as I heard him jump down from his bed. He made a noise.

I smiled as I knew how relieved he was too.

DR. (MRS.) RICHARDS

“Congenital Analgesia!” My husband exclaimed as he looked into Dr. Brown, his colleague’s face.

My husband was the head consultant for the Gynae Section of the hospital and I knew he would be very interested in the very rare case.

“Are you sure?” Dr. Brown asked as he looked into my face and I nodded.

“She threw her hands up in the air and with force, the cannula came off and she bled really bad yet she didn’t seem to feel it. I pinched her really hard, she didn’t feel it, I injected her body, she didn’t seem to feel it. I believe that if further investigations are conducted on her, you will realize that she can’t feel pain anymore!” I said and as much as I didn’t want to believe it, it was just the truth I could see at the moment- the painful truth!

“Give me the torch” My husband said as he walked closer to her. Dr. Brown and I did the same too as the nurse gave him the torch.

He raised her head and forcefully opened her mouth. He switched on the torch and pointed it into her mouth.

Blood!

My husband looked into our faces subsequently, quite shocked.

“Dr. Richards, it could be true! She’s been chewing on her tongue!” Dr. Brown exclaimed and though I was glad that my diagnosis was right, my heart dropped that a young girl was passing through hard times that much!

My husband checked through her body and found some bruises.

“She cut herself?” I asked and he shook his head.

“Looks more like she scratched and dug into mosquito bites” He said and I looked into Dr. Brown’s face in shock.

My husband, Dr. Richards stood straight and looked really flabbergasted.

“Oh my!” He exclaimed and we sighed too.

“That’s quite interesting. It’s just 20 cases of congenital analgesia that has been recorded in recent times and none from Nigeria. This would be the first!” My husband exclaimed and I looked into his eyes. He was excited.

He so much loved researches and if the case really was congenital analgesia, it would be a big plus to our team especially if we could find some solution.

“Mum?” I recalled as she called me and the pitiable look in her face when she did. I also remembered as she held my thigh so I wouldn’t leave her while I was attending to her and my heart rent into pieces.

If my husband should let the case get to the board, she might become a national specimen and experiment!

Is she emotionally fit for such?

Many questions ran through my mind and my head did some calculations as to how to have her saved from further medical probing and dissections.

“I have to inform the board” Dr. Richards said and I was not too surprised! - I knew how ambitious my husband could be.

“I think otherwise” Dr. James said before I could object and I was glad.

“Why?” My husband asked as if his piece of bread had been snatched. I wanted to know why too.

“Is she pregnant?” He asked me and I nodded. My husband gasped in disappointment. Dr. James smiled as he faced him.

“I will advise that we keep her under close observation till she is due for delivery. Her childbirth itself will make history as only a few of these cases have been able to deliver successfully to babies that will live” He proposed and it made sense.

He was the only medical practitioner my husband could listen to and thank God he did before I could say anything further.

“The drugs and antibiotics might even become dangerous to the fetus” My husband agreed and I smiled.

“Will, not might!” Dr. James nodded and I was relieved!

She was saved!

“If you both will agree, I suggest that we move her to the consult!” Dr. James suggested again and we both turned to look into his face at that point.

“The consult!” We said almost together and he nodded.

It made sense!

DOVE

The knock on the door was very loud and I wondered if mum wanted to bring the house down!

The door flung open and my mum must have been very shocked to see me sitting on the floor without getting dressed for my journey.

“You have not had your bath?” She asked, very shocked. I shook my head, my eyes still very much shut.

“Why?” She asked again

“Its 3.30 already. Why are you like this?” She asked and I shook my head.

My head hurt too much. My knees hurt too much and it seemed like every other thing in me hurt greatly.

I kept my eyes closed, not because I didn't want to see my mum but because it felt like if I opened, all the pain in the whole wide world would descend on me.

I felt her hands on my head and I flinched.

“Why are your eyes closed?” She asked but I shook my head slightly again.

“Ah ah, will you answer me?” She slapped my back and I screamed in pain as a dull sciatic ache settled on my head. I opened my eyes and it felt as if the earth was spinning. My mum looked so shocked.

“What happened to you?” She asked again and that was when I found my voice. I spoke slowly feeling a searing pain in my shoulder.

“I fell down. As you called to tell me that the flight was fixed, I jumped with excitement and fell on my knees, almost cracking my skulls” I said and her eyes grew bigger.

“Oh my God!” She made to touch me and the pain sheeted through me with a terrible intensity.

“I need to be on my way mum. Help me wear my clothes. I will make it to Lagos” I said with great determination but she shook her head.

“I am not that desperate, son! Please be fine before leaving” Mum said and I shook my head.

“I am so desperate, mum! I need to get out of here today! I have work to attend to” I said and my mum hissed silently as she slapped my back, obviously forgetting that I was in pains.

I let out a harsh half-stifled yell and she placed her hands on her head in guilt.

“Why did you come in the first place and now desperate to leave, eh? Why don’t you think before making decisions? Why?” She asked with a voice that had gone all emotional.

“Mum, there is no time. Get my clothes and help me” I said and she was reluctant.

“I can’t let you go like this. Stand up and let me see how well you walk then I will be assured that you can go on your own” She said and I made a low growl again, straining to stand up to the pain as I stood up.

My knees creaked and the pain rang like a bell in my brain but I looked into my mum’s face and smiled pretentiously.

In a short while, she helped me with my trousers and I struggled with my shirt as she looked for my passport for me.

“Mum, it shouldn’t take you that long to get it” I said when it felt like ages and mum couldn’t confirm that my passport was in my bag.

“I can’t find it. I have checked the sides to the whole bag. It’s not there” She said.

“Check for yourself” She said as she dropped the bag into my legs and I checked- to no avail!

“Oh my! I kept it in here! Where could the passport be, Lord?” I asked

Don’t travel yet!

I heard clearly again and regretted mentioning Lord in my last question. I was not ready for any further ‘Yes Lord’ matter!

“I will go with the public transport mum. I have to leave today!” I said and my mum sat beside me, looking so troubled.

“Could it be ...” She was saying, then she stopped and walked to the window side. She shook her head numerous times and then stared into space.

“Bowen Adameji!” She called out and I knew she was going to talk from her heart- she did that anytime she called my full name.

“Could it be God stopping you from...” She was saying when I raised my hand in objection.

“Mum, even if it is God, He understands!” I said as I struggled to stand.

“My son ... hmmm...” My mum was saying again when I cut in. I was not ready to listen to anything that supported going back to that girl!

“Mum, even if it was the faithful and most obedient patriarch Abraham that was sent on this cruel assignment, he wouldn’t mind remaining forever barren!” I said and looked into my mum’s face.

She looked as if I had made the most sacrilegious statement ever and she shook her head in disappointment. My eyes welled up and I fell to my knees again.

“I am tired Lord! I can’t do this! Forgive Lord and send someone else! I can’t, I really can’t!” I cried a little more, struggled to stand and picked my bag.

I started walking to the door as my mum watched, obviously confused as to which she should allow me do- force me to stay or help me to go!

DR. (MRS.) RICHARDS

I looked at the curly-haired girl whose head sat on my laps and I smiled painfully as I recounted how the nurse had explained to us that she had had no family member check on her since she had been admitted except a lady who had travelled back to the states with her mum and a guy who only came to donate blood and had gone back.

“Oh my!” I exclaimed as my head suddenly became hot.

I knew how pitiful it was to be an orphan!

“She is not awake yet?” My husband asked from the front seat and I shook my head.

After a while, I noticed a movement on my laps almost immediately and I looked down at her. She squinted a bit and I reduced the light at the middle seat.

“Water” She said weakly and my husband turned to look at us.

“I want water” She repeated again and my husband got me a bottle of water from the front seat. I opened and gave to her and she downed it in a gulp.

Dr. James’ head popped out from the back seat and my husband looked shocked as well. I knew I was missing out on something.

“What’s that?” I asked and my husband gasped on, obviously amazed.

“That was saltier than a sea!” Dr. James exclaimed and I was shocked.

“Her taste bud is dead as well!” My husband exclaimed and I was shocked the more as I looked at her. She looked so oblivious to everything going on in the car.

She placed her head on my shoulder then and focused on the moving cars in the still dark morning.

“Mum” She called at me and my husband looked at me, looking horrified.

“Mum?” The two men exclaimed and I smiled as I tried to signal to them to keep quiet.

“Where are we going to, mum?” She asked again and I smiled as I rubbed her cheek-how I hoped she would feel it!

“We are going to a better hospital so you can be really fine” I said as if giving explanation to a child. She nodded, squeezed herself into the seat again and made my laps her pillow.

“Memories issues too?” My husband whispered, looking into Dr. James’ eyes who was at the far back seat.

“I think so” Dr. James replied

I sighed as I rubbed her curly hair.

Everything I could do in my power to ensure she would be fine, I vowed to do even if it would take me resignation so I could be beside her and love her like her mum!

DOVE'S MUM

“Lord, I don’t understand all that is happening! What exactly do you want this boy to do? Have I been dead to Your leading all this while? Talk to me Lord! It’s been a while, my Father! I am so sorry for being blind for this long. Have mercy upon me. Have mercy upon my son, Lord!” I cried as I knelt down beside my son’s bed.

The driver had just left the house with Bowen so he could follow the public transport to Lagos and as he left the house, I felt a jab at my chest and a bad sensation covered me up- I knew I had to pray!

Stop being selfish!

“Ah! Selfish! How Lord?” I was so happy that I could hear Him speak again. It had been a long while and I had not really taken to cognizance the fact that I could no longer hear him.

But the Voice was not too pleasing!

It sounded harsh!

Because it concerns your son and his life now, you are much concerned but when the life of Talitha could have been saved by your love and care, you were nowhere to be found!

You even stopped the boy who could have helped! And you are a Pastor's wife!

My heart dropped to my bottom!

“Oh Lord! I am so sorry. I was just confused and irritated at how Bowen went about it! He took it as if he was the Holy Spirit. As if his presence would change the promiscuity of the girl”

The girl was not promiscuous!

“What! Reports got to us that she became promiscuous in school and lived a pretentious life” I argued.

Whose version will you believe? Theirs or mine?

“Yours, Lord! But she is pregnant! She is undeniably pregnant Lord” I continued adamantly. I needed to understand the Lord's viewpoint.

How many pregnancies did you abort before you met me and gave me your life?

That question met me unawares and it felt as if the dirty linen which I had hidden from the world was being presented to everyone!

I gave you a very nice husband despite the promiscuous life you lived!

I nodded in affirmation. I had been very foolish, right? I had no more excuses! Not even one justification!

And miraculously, I gave you a son though the medical personnel believed you would never give birth!

At this juncture, my eyes gave way to tears and I pulled at the bed sheet in anguish! I was undone! How could I have forgotten my dirty past so much as to treat a little child so spitefully?

Have you forgotten as a leader that there is a tendency for the devil to deceive your children at the adolescent stages of their lives? So why were you not carefully on guard that you allowed Talitha to fall off your hands?

Ah, Lord!

Why have you made her despise My Holy Name? Why have you dragged My Name in the mud? Why?

“I am so sorry Lord! I am really so sorry Father! Have mercy Lord!” I cried on and on, my eyes totally shut!

I was so ashamed of myself! I had failed as a leader!

“I repent Lord! I will look for her and do the needful! I will show her love again! Forgive me, Lord!”

Never you call whatever I have sanctified unclean! Never you write anyone off even if it is a bad drunkard you see on your way to church! Never you kill anyone I have made to live! Never take my place! You are not Me!

I cried on as my chest made some whistling sounds. I was crushed!

“Mercy, Lord! Have mercy, Lord! Forgive me, Lord! Forgive Your church, Lord! Forgive me for discouraging my child from doing Your bidding! Forgive me for being blind to what You were saying. I surrender all to You, Lord!” I cried on.

You were saved for such a time as this. You were removed from the miry clay so that you can know how demeaning and humiliating it is to be in there and to help others inside, out of it! Haven being washed, you were never supposed to look back at those in the mire and not only spit into their faces but also hinder others from helping them out!

I nodded as guilt oozed out of me!

Because of your pride and for taking my place and making Christianity tiring to willing souls, I am meant to deal with you - but I won't- in My mercy!

I pulled the blanket to myself and sniffed in the mucus that had gathered in my nose as I cried the more.

“Thank You, Father! I am so sorry dear Lord! Thank You so much loving Savior. Oh my!” I cried on as I opened my eyes.

Just then, right beside me, under the blanket, my eyes greeted a green purse. My head snapped up and then I saw it clearly- Bowen's passport!

Stop him and give it to him!

“Ah Lord! I don't want him to travel again! I am so sorry for my stubborn atti...”

He can now travel!

“Ah Lord! You said you will have mercy on those You will have mercy and compassion on those You will have compassion. Have mercy on Bowen, on Joe, on my husband and on this household Lord! Forgive Lord!” I cried on.

Stop him and give it to him NOW!

The prompting was very urgent and with great reluctance and a broken heart, I picked it up, picked my phone and stood up.

“Hello Eric. Where are you?” I asked softly.

A realization had dawned on me just then that my life was not mine and so even the lives of my children belonged to God!

“Turn back and get his passport for him. I found it” I said and dropped the phone. I sighed there and then as I realized only then that I had been wrong!

“Lord, please don’t always let me go far in the wrong before correcting me and also give me a heart that loves the Lord’s correction and yields to it at all times whether it is easy or not!” I prayed as I walked down the stairs.

DOVE

“Attention please. This is the final call for the rescheduled Overland Air flight 1511 to Lagos. Departing passengers should proceed to gate number 4 immediately”

It was my flight’s announcement!

I was just so excited when mum called that she had found my passport although I doubted that the plane would still be on ground but- it must have waited for me!

But do you really need the passport to travel from Abuja to Lagos when you have your ID?

Just then, my bottom dropped - That was so true!

Why didn’t mummy or I think in that direction?

“Oh my God!” I exclaimed as I covered my eyes in shame. I needed to leave quickly.

As I limped into the departures, the picture of my mum flashed across my face.

“Why did she look that sad? Her eyes were swollen too!” It was only then I realized that I had not looked into her face well.

“I must call her immediately I get to Lagos” I said as I moved to the gate and sat down with the others who were already there.

As I sat down, my knees creaked and I jumped up a bit in pain. The man seated beside me looked into my face from the newspaper he was reading.

“Have your knees checked!” He said and I smiled, nodding. Just then, another man wearing a hat looked at me from beside him. He looked at me keenly.

“He is too young to be battling arthritis” He said and the first man nodded.

I couldn't even tell them that I was so fine and there was no arthritis anywhere because they sounded like doctors and I knew it would be safe not to argue with them especially when I was not in the mood.

As the gate agent called my group number, I picked my bag and was about going to the gate when there was a noise and all eyes were turned at us on the bench.

“I am not going. I am not going. I want to stay” The lady close to them continued crying and I wondered if she was being forced. A woman was holding onto her tightly.

“She is a case study!” The man that told me to have my knees checked said, nodding severally

“It’s obvious” The other man replied as he looked towards the lady keenly.

I looked towards the lady also. The older woman pulled her close with a smile on her face and the screaming lady seemed to be pacified as the old woman hugged her. They started moving towards the gate while the other two men followed, obviously embarrassed.

I smiled to myself.

“Why does that remind me of...” I was asking myself when the words of the crying lady rang on in my ears.

“I am not going. I am not going. I want to stay”

That lady- the voice sounds so familiar!

I racked my brain continuously as we boarded the plane.

CHAPTER 8

DOVE

It'd been two weeks since Becca last picked my calls...

I poured hot water from the jug into my coffee mug and wafted in the aroma for a while if that could calm the small storm rising up in me.

I picked up my phone and dialed her number again- it was ringing but she wouldn't pick up!

"What's up with Becca, Lord?" I exclaimed as I raised the mug to my mouth.

My phone beeped then and I picked it up- it was a message from Becca.

I placed the mug on the table and hurriedly checked my phone.

Bowen, please stop disturbing my phone!

It was as if three bullets were released into my heart!

She called me ‘Bowen’! Then she said my calls were disturbing her!

“Gracious Lord!” I exclaimed as I fought the tears that rose in my eyes.

My phone beeped again and I picked it up.

I have actually lost my testimony as regards my commitment to you. The little love I thought I had for you has greatly diminished so much that I can’t continue with this relationship.

The tears wouldn’t stop flowing!

I guess I have been very selfish all along, Bowen! See, I had actually loved your love for God, your reputation, money and job while you had loved me with the whole of your heart. I thought I would grow to love you even without those things but my heart betrayed me, Bowen.

I dropped my phone, poured more water into my mug, scooped two spoons of coffee in it and gulped the very hot content down my throat. My tongue was sore and tears ran down my face.

“I can’t cry for a lady. No! I can’t! I am a man!” I said to myself and tried to smile but the tears ran down in quick succession still.

“Oh, that coffee was hot! See me crying here. Damn you, coffee!” I exclaimed and cried the more, my head bent so low.

I think your heart too has found succor in your newly found love as my own heart has also done. Enjoy your Talitha while I enjoy my Desmond too. Let’s remain friends, dear. Have a beautiful day.

What!

What did she know about Talitha? Who told her about Talitha? Did she even care to know the hell I was going through because of the Talitha?

Why would someone in whose hands I placed the whole of my heart and trust, decide to not only march it under her feet but also poured heaps of sand all over it?

Why?

Why?

I didn't care that I had already worn my cloth and was set to go to work. I fell to the floor and rested my head on the chair and cried some more.

The heartbreak was real!

I had never felt that way before.

It looked as though I would die!

I checked my wristwatch and looked at the time. I knew I was already late for work and for the first time in my entire life, I hated my job!

I wanted to sleep!

I looked into my phone again and read the message over...

Who is Desmond?

Who is the man who has come to steal the heart I had been courting and cultivating for over 5 years?

I remained distraught!

DOVE

I turned off the ignition key, reached in the pigeon-hole for my spec and wore it.

“My dear lovely Nigerians, it’s another session of Hanging out with Dove and I am most certain that...” I was rehearsing as I looked into the rear mirror but my eyes were sore again.

I smiled faintly and cleared my throat.

“I will overcome! I will!” I unwrapped a piece of minty chewing gum and threw in my mouth. I reached for my bag at the back seat and sighed for the umpteenth time.

“Let’s go” I told my spirit, soul and body, opened the door, closed it and walked towards the office for the day’s work.

DOVE

I could hear the wheezing sound as she spoke to me on phone and I knew that she was having another asthma attack.

“Can you hear me, my prince?” She called at me again and I jolted to reality.

“Mum, you need to use your drugs. I got to Lagos safely so you don’t have to...”

“Bowen, listen to me!” She said firmly and there was silence indeed but for the continual wheezing sound coming from her.

“Whatever God asks you to do from now on, even without telling me, please do!” She said and I frowned slightly.

“What is the matter, mum?” I inquired again

“Bowen, when God says go and I say come, who do you obey from now on?” She asked and my heart started racing as I had heard the stories of mothers who when they were about to die say some funny things to wrap up their lives on earth.

My mum can’t die!

My heart shrank in fear!

“Mum, why are you talking this way? You are scaring me!” I said and I heard her smile.

“Falling into the wrath of God should scare you more, my son. God is merciful, yet He is a consuming fire” She said and I sighed deeply.

“OK mum. I have heard you but kindly go and take your drugs. I don’t like the way you are sounding” I said and she smiled again.

“My son, I don’t like the way God is also sounding as regards this issue. Take shield but only in His hands.” She said. I stood up and walked to the window.

“Ok mum” I could only say silently.

“I want you to take a minute at work now and say this prayer with all sincerity of heart. Are you there?”

“Yes mum. I am here ma”

“Lord, the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, hence the fear of man is the beginning of foolishness! I have been so foolish in recent times when I listened to, feared and became scared of mere man. Forgive my foolishness Lord and take over my life!” She said and the heat that rose from my belly transmitted round my inside and flooded my lower limbs making me fall on my knees, trembling.

“Ok mum” I said in a shaky voice now.

I felt that God was dealing with my mum for my sins right then and it scared me!

As I dropped the call, I trembled more as tears welled up in my eyes.

“God, I was the one that sinned against Your command. Forgive my mum and deal with me, oh Lord! Ah, I can’t bear the guilt if my mum leaves this world because of the sins I had committed my God!” I cried on inconsolably as if a substantial quantity of pepper had been smeared on the raw surface on my heart.

DOVE

“You are fired, Bowen!” The General manager said and my eyes shone in disbelief.

He had told me to meet with him after the board meeting and I was really optimistic as I knew he loved me so much!

The first day I stood before him with my overqualified CV, he had looked into my eyes with great joy.

“You will be a great advantage to my team. Welcome on board!” He had said and I knew that through God’s grace, I was one of the pillars holding his organization and come rain, come sunshine, except I wanted to leave, he would never chase me away.

I was damn wrong!

“Sir, on what basis have I been...” I was asking when he raised his right hand.

“Check the letter given to you. It’s in there! Incompetence, straying mind at work and emotional interference at the place of work. Those three have reduced your productivity and we are done with you, Bowen Adameji!” He said firmly and I smiled a bit.

I really didn’t feel the pain so much!

I needed to sleep earlier and it was just a great opportunity to go home and have a very nice sleep.

“So, you are giving ten hours to vacate the company’s building and hand over every other document belonging to the company. Is that alright?” He asked and I nodded.

I didn’t realize that my house would go too!

And the car!

Gosh!

PRINCESS

I didn't have to knock before barging into my dad's office.

The rumor like a burnt offering had risen up in the offices that Dove had been sacked and I really couldn't hold it anymore.

"Daddy, what's all these that I am hearing?" I asked so impatiently and my dad looked into my face deeply.

"Don't you like it?" He asked and I knew it was true.

"Daddy, I love Dove so much, don't you get it? I asked you to help step into the situation and all you could do is send him far away from me, huh?" I was almost crying.

"I thought he would beg for his position and I would use that opportunity to ask him to look at you for once but he didn't even beg! What do you expect me to do?" He asked and I could read pain in his eyes too.

With the inclusion of Dove on the staff list, the organization had risen into greater limelight really! I knew he wouldn't love to send him off that way.

“Daddy, call him back and tell him you are giving him a second chance” I said desperately.

“My princess, as much as I love you so much, you can’t be pushing me here and there like a fool. I am the boss in this place and I have my name to protect. I can’t drag my reputation in the mud” My dad said and the popping up of his neck vein showed me that he was very mad at me.

“Dad, can you...” I was saying when he walked to my side and held my hands. He gave me a fake smile and pulled me to the door.

After opening the door, he looked into my face and pushed me out gently. He closed the door afterwards and locked it.

“Daddy, please. Think twice about it, dad. Dad!” I banged the door and until I realized that some of the junior staff that passed by were laughing at my foolishness did, I leave the door with my heavy heart.

DOVE

Bello had come to drop me some plastic boxes that I would use to pack some of my things from the office and he was terribly crying as he left my office.

Some of my colleagues had come to commiserate with me and had gone so when I heard the knock at my door, I knew that another ‘commiserator’ was at the door.

“Come in” I said and when I heard the click clack sound of the obviously high-heeled shoes in my office, I knew Princess had entered.

“Hello Dove” She said as she came close to me, her eyes filled with seduction.

“Hi” I said and looked away as I walked to the swivel chair. She sat in one of the recliners.

“You really will want to quit your job?” She asked and I looked at her angrily. I smiled a bit afterwards and nodded.

“That’s not a big deal, Princess. There are other better jobs calling for my touch out there. Watch out for me!” I said and at that point I knew I had just boasted.

The job loss must have shocked me then! I was only trying to hide it so it wouldn’t be obvious.

But I could read the pain in her eyes- my words had gotten to her!

“Bowen Adameji, why are you so full of yourself? What do you have that other men don’t have? Why do you make people’s life miserable with your lackadaisical attitude?” She said and I could further read desperation in her voice.

“Princess, though you and your father have sent me away from your organization and it seems that I am packing my boxes to leave right now, I am better off than you both! I am leaving with my shoulders raised high while you swim on in your dirty river of shamelessness and lack of honor!” I said with a raised voice and she looked so shocked

Bowen!

That was the first time I would hear the Holy Spirit speak in two weeks!

I had intentionally tuned off all spirituality although I knew it was to the detriment of my soul but life indeed made no sense to me anymore.

I loved God and feared Him; hearing from Him gave me joy and my life depended solely on Him but if the spirituality I had so nurtured was depended on how best to get Talitha saved, I was definitely going to suspend spirituality for some time until God got over the Talitha thing!

That was my thought and really, the past two weeks had been so tough for me!

“Bowen, you just spoke those words to me? I had always thought you were a good Christian. How wrong I was! My candid advice is that you stop wasting your time declaring yourself as a child of God. The same hell that a fornicator is going to is the same hell someone with a bad temper is going to. Get it straight!” She said and stood up but those words literally killed me!

They were like little pebbles that rush into the eyes all at once!

The pain rose up in my head.

“My own crime is loving you so greatly! But you are proud, boastful, you have no conscience, you lack courtesy and you are hot-tempered! I wonder why I loved you from the start. I will get over you!” She said and started moving to the door.

I will get over you!

As much as I had never felt any commitment to Princess, I was hurt by those words!

Her confession was actually very true- I had changed overnight! I had become the exact opposite of God's will for me!

“Before I go, Mr. Adameji. A young lady called Becca came here two weeks ago and I told her you were not around and that you had gone to Abuja to look for your Talitha.” She said and my mouth went dry.

Calm down!

I heard that again and I tried to swallow hard. I had to take few more deep breaths to make sure I would be heard over the pounding of my heart.

“Go!” I said with the remaining sanity in me but she wouldn't obey!

She wanted to see me go mad! She wanted to see me tear her into pieces.

“She came with a guy in her car. She was not so shocked when I told her about Talitha. She was simply led back into the car and driven away”

With each word she spoke, my anger grew rapidly.

I didn't know if I was angry at Becca, Princess, myself or God but I was mad nonetheless!

"Go!" I said again as my jaws danced terribly against each other.

"I guess she came with the break up letter. She wanted to drop it with me but the guy that came with her said there was no need. 'You have done the needful. Just leave the rest sweetie' That was what he said and they drove off."

As much as I wanted to hear the details of what had transpired between them that day, I felt so pained at the revelation of the callous method in which she would have broken up with me!

She came to my office with a man!

I shook with contempt!

"You can go now Princess. Thanks for the information" I said, bracing up as if I was that courageous.

“You can go plead with my dad now so you can stay. I guess my love for you will start to diminish from today so there will be no interference again” She said but I was not convinced that I was ready.

“Keep the job and give me my privacy please!” I exclaimed and she shook her head, opened the door and looked back inside my office.

“I love you still, Dove!” She said with so much obsession that when she shut the door, all I could do was place my head on the table and weep!

There was a knock at the door and I lifted my wet face to see who it was!

I knew I must have looked so pitiful as my immediate boss’ face turned red all of a sudden.

He came to my side and hit me severally before he stopped.

When he stopped, I looked into his face, tears running down my face.

“Hit me some more boss. It’s like a bone is stuck in my chest and when I cry hard, it will leave. Hit me more!” I cried and he started crying too.

“How did you find yourself in a one-sided love Dove? How? I wish I could see that Talitha and deal with her some more for not accepting your heart! For destroying your career!” He cried on and I buried my face in his cloth as I cried some more too.

I was not in the mood to explain to anyone that there was no Talitha in my life and if there was, I cursed the day I first heard her name and doubly curse the day I set my eyes on her.

“You should have pretended to love Princess. Ah! See, what they have done to you now! I know you will make it anyways! I know you will succeed, son!” He sniffed wetly and pulled me off the seat. He hugged me then.

I felt a bit relieved at that point!

It was magical but I really needed to sleep badly.

I smiled at him and moved to the cushion and fell on it- my throbbing head needed to calm down real fast!

I could hear the door open and I felt my boss walk to the door.

“He is sleeping please. Let’s give him some more time to clear his head” I heard my boss whisper and I smiled slightly.

The sleep was really needed and I would have prayed never to wake up- just that I was so sure I would not open my eyes to eternal joy if I really did die!

DOVE’S MUM

“Oh my God! That must have been a very hard blow on you son!” I could hear my husband say after Bowen had explained all that had transpired to him. I sighed too from one corner of the dining room where I was seated.

“I just don’t know how to tell mummy. She might not be able to bear the shock” Bowen said and I smiled. Little did he know that I had heard his narration from the beginning to the end.

“It is well, son. Your mum had already seen this in a vision about a few days ago and we had both prayed against it. If this is eventually happening, God understands!” My husband explained and I nodded.

“God be praised in all circumstances!” I sighed as I moved to the freezer and brought out a large bottle of wine which I poured in a goblet and walked to the sitting room with it.

As I placed the goblet on the table, my son stood up and gave me a very warm hug.

“I am so sorry for disappointing you, mum.” He said and I smiled slightly as I held his shoulders.

“I am so sorry for failing to encourage you even when the road was tough, son” I said and he looked confused.

I pushed him to the chair, raised the goblet to his mouth and smiled as I watched him gulp the grape wine down his throat.

“Your baby’s throat must be a desert!” My husband teased and we laughed at the metaphor.

“Thank you mummy” He said as I put the empty goblet down.

“Your mum is still feeding you at this age, Bowen! Shame on you!” My dad said and Bowen laughed hysterically at that!

I wondered when my husband became a clown.

“Leave my son o” I said with a smile and my husband raised his hands in total surrender.

“It’s so good to be back home. It’s so good, seeing my love birds once more” He said and I smiled as I held his hands.

“You are back in Abuja so you can redefine the purpose for your living again, son” I said and my husband nodded while Bowen looked lost.

“We are your parents and we have the responsibility of directing you in the right path so we will be joining you in redefining God’s purpose for your life” Dad said and Bowen sighed.

I rubbed his tender hands softly.

“We will all be going on three days fast for you, my son. The Lord has to find you!” I said and he started crying.

I was touched.

My husband came close, pulled both of his in his arms and looked up.

“No matter how far we as a family have gone on the wrong path, redirect out paths, Lord!” He cried aloud and our prayers started in earnest.

DR. (MRS.) RICHARDS

Talitha had just finished a bowl of pap and evaporated milk although she didn't touch the chicken moinmoin that I had painstakingly made for her.

“Open your mouth” I said and she obeyed as I poured some drugs into her mouth. I waited long before I handed her water.

I wanted to monitor her progress but though her baby seemed to be fine, the Congenital Analgesia seemed to still be dealing with her seriously.

I watched as she crushed the different capsules and bitter pills and swallowed without squeezing her face at the bitterness.

“Lord, restore her feelings! Please have mercy Lord!” I cried out as I placed a kiss on her cheeks and raised a cup of water to her mouth.

I had grown to love Talitha like my own very daughter since she was brought to Lagos and I had to apply for a terminal leave at work to stay with her so she would be under my watch.

The doorbell rang and I picked the land phone.

“Who is there?”

“It’s Jack designs ma”

“Oh! I am coming, please” I said and hurried to the door.

As I collected my delivery, I moved to Talitha with a huge smile on my face. She looked away.

She had not spoken since a month ago! She had been mute!

“Talk to me Talitha. I am your mother. You called me mother” I said as I felt discouraged again. I dropped the paper bag and moved close to her.

“I love you Talitha. I love you as my daughter” I said and she looked into my face and smiled briefly. My face lit up then. Her eyes lingered on my face and she smiled again as she placed a peck on my face. I jumped up excitedly like a new bride that had just missed her period.

She laughed then and wanted to jump up too. I ran to her quickly because I knew that since she couldn’t feel pain any longer, she could wound herself so badly.

“See, a baby is inside this place” I said as I rubbed her already big tummy and she smiled.

“Don’t jump up too much you hear?” I asked and she nodded.

Oh my God! I covered my mouth in awe!

She responded!

I picked the paper bag and turned to look into her face.

“Close your eyes” I said and she shrugged shyly. I felt so glad as I could see that she was becoming responsive.

“It’s a surprise nah. Close your eyes ... Please ... please ... please” I continued saying, tickling her as I did. She started laughing hysterically and this made me to stop.

Thank You Jesus!

I smiled and waited her to come out of her laughter fit. I brought out some very nice gowns and overalls I had ordered to be made for her and her eyes shone in surprise.

“You love them?” I asked as I started showing them to her one after the other and she nodded.

“They are maternity gowns. Your tummy is becoming like a big big big ball everyday” I said as I demonstrated and she covered her face. I could see a smile. I smiled too, so happy inside of me.

“Mum” She called and I jumped on the chair beside her.

“Yes daughter, talk to momma” I said excitedly and she smiled.

“Dad?” She asked and my smile grew dim a bit.

“Dad? You want to see dad?” I asked and she nodded and smiled again. I was confused.

“Dad” she said again and started throwing the gowns on the floor, a little frown forming on her face.

“Let me get daddy for you huh? He is inside” I said and started moving inside to get my husband.

As I opened the door of the library where my husband was, I felt a hot breath on my neck. I turned back slowly and found Talitha right behind me.

“Erm ... see dad!” I said and pointed at my hot-tempered husband.

“What!” He thundered and I sighed as the look on Talitha’s face grew from salty to peppery!

“Dad, no!” She exclaimed and fell flat on the floor- on her face!

My heart jumped into my mouth as tears rushed into my eyes without caution. I bent beside her.

She turned to look into my face then. I shook my head at her as she wiped my tears like a child.

“Talitha, that was dangerous. You are pregnant.” I said and she looked pitiful as I rubbed her tummy again.

“Did I just hear her talk?” My husband asked. He was already at the door.

“Dad, no!” Talitha screamed all of a sudden, broke free from my arms and started running to the sitting room again.

“Dear, just leave me with her. Go inside” I said as I ran to catch my newly found child before she hit herself against the wall and incur wounds that she wouldn’t even be able to feel upon herself.

TALITHA’S DAD

“Where is Talitha sir?” That was the first question Bowen, the pastor’s son asked as soon as the opening prayer was said.

I had gotten the pastor’s message early that morning that my attention was needed at the Pastor’s meeting and had prepared myself even though I was sick inside.

The question he threw at me shocked me as I heard it- I was not prepared!

“Pastor Bode-Davies. Where is the daughter that the Almighty God placed into your custody as your child?” He asked again, he was looking so fierce.

His words sounded heavy too.

Have I failed God?

“God called you, gave you a seed to plant. You moved to the garden to plant it but instead of the plant to grow up straight, it kept bending to the other side and that saddened you! Passersby told you the plant was just not good and deserved to be uprooted and forgetting that it was God who gave you the seed, you uprooted it and threw it away for people to step under foot! Now, I am God’s representative, Mr. Bode Davies! Where is that seed that my God in Heaven gave you as a child?” Bowen asked again and I could not hold my tears.

I had promised God that I wouldn't cry at all so I had been uptight since I sent Talitha packing but I couldn't hold it anymore.

"She erred and..." I was saying when he cut in again.

"No sir! I am a neighbor and I have a baby. I give you my baby everyday as I go out to work. The baby doesn't give you problem at all, she doesn't cry nor does she whine but on this fateful day, she messed her diaper up and you were shocked. Inside of washing and flushing the poo down the toilet, you angrily stuffed the baby into your closet and flushed her off! I am back as the owner of the child. Where is my child?" He asked again and I sniffed wetly as I saw Mrs. Adameji going on her knees too.

"Pastor Bode-Davies, have you ever had a headache before?" He asked again and I nodded

"Speak up sir"

"Yes" I felt so embarrassed

"When you were having the pain, why didn't you chop your head off? Why didn't you cut it off so that the headache will stop?"

“Bowen, it’s not what you are thinking...” I started crying again

“Then, it’s what? Speak up, I want to hear”

“I am hurting too ... I am in so much pain as...”

“Of course, sir! That is what unforgiveness causes! Chronic anger puts you into a fight-or-flight mode, which results into numerous changes in heart rate, blood pressure and immune response. I won’t be shocked if you have all these that I have started sir!” He exclaimed again and I nodded.

My heart had become so weak over the months and I had suddenly started aging!

“I have actually forgiven her but...”

“Stop that sir! Forgiveness is not just about saying the words. According to Swartz, “It is an active process in which you make a conscious decision to let go of negative feelings whether the person deserves it or not,” Have you let go sir? When last did you set your eyes on this daughter of yours? What month?”

“That is about five months now”

“Ah! Why can we Christians so preach forgiveness but we find it hard to forgive? Why? Have we forgotten that when we release the anger, resentment and hostility, we begin to feel empathy, compassion and sometimes even affection for the person who wronged us? Why must we always have ourselves caged?”

I fell on my face as I cried the more.

“I loved Talitha too much! I trusted her so much! I brought her well in the way of the Lord! I wanted her to be a virtuous lady like her mother. I was shocked when I heard what she had done. Mrs. Tade told me of the life she was living in school and it sounded so terrible” I tried to defend myself.

“Sir, all the pastors in this place are very very guilty and that is why I am the one speaking here today! No one here can correct you because it was all of them that came together and unitedly helped in the throwing away of our little poo-stained baby! They have no right to correct you!”

There was perfect silence.

“Pastor (Mrs.) Tade, Pastor and Mrs Fakunle, Pastor and Mrs. Adameji, my very parents and coordinators of this church, you have all sinned! My Bible makes me to understand that If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is

sin for them! So, you have all sinned! I am not left out of the mess anyways. We have all sinned! With our very own hands, we have pushed Talitha out of shelter into the heavy rain and she is now being washed off, at the verge of being drown! The Lord will ask us if we lose her! Her blood will be on our hands if we destroy that one soul!” He preached on and there were various exclamations from the whole office.

“Lord have mercy on us. Ah, Father!” Mrs. Adameji cried out.

“Ah, koye mi bayi ni tele Oluwa!” Mrs. Fakunle cried too saying in Yoruba that she never understood her actions were that bad.

“Pastor Bode Davies is not the first pastor nor would he be the last whose child decides to derail. Eli was a man of God but his children derailed because he never corrected them. Even Samuel’s children were not good children though he shouted at them- he corrected them! They remained bad still!”

“Ah, that is true oooooo Oluwa!” Mrs. Tade rolled on the floor with tears on her face.

“All mighty David is not left out too. Amnon his son was a rapist, Absalom his second born usurped his throne and slept with his wives, Adonijah usurped his brother, Solomon married strange women. Never did we hear that they threw their children out! Never!”

“Lord!” My pastor groaned as he held the pillars in anguish.

I was too weak to cry anymore.

I thought I was only correcting my own daughter and that after a while, I would get over it but I never did! The more I wished to forgive her, the harder it was for me. I felt humiliated.

“You were ashamed of her! You were thinking, what will others say? After preaching to many youths, why would my daughter choose to disgrace me? Why? You kept on thinking right?”

His words were from above as they shot right at my wrongs!

“And some other thought, I need to push her far away from my children. I can’t allow her make them corrupt. How sure are you that yours are not even worse? We have been wrong and the time to arise is now!”

The silence was impenetrable!

“Why are you crucifying her for the sin for which Christ had been crucified?” He asked again and it was with so much authority, the question hung in the air.

“We have done enough damage and it is time to save our church! Correcting the child o, not correcting the child o, those are not the issues, those saints of old did those yet it didn’t work but never for once did I see the Bible tell me those saints prayed for their children! Right? Maybe they were as overconfident as many parents here also that their children are fine and doing just fine!”

“How I wish Christians would learn to talk less, judge lesser and pray more and more! How great this world would be that way!”

“Hmmm” Someone whispered and another.

I sighed deeply with my head bowed so low.

The charge continued and continued until the fire of revival broke out in our hearts and after being humbled, we were led into the Presence of God once more for mercy and forgiveness!

DOVE

“I hope she will like these slippers. Her mum loved to wear flat slippers when she was pregnant too” Pastor Bode-Davies said and I smiled as I examined the very beautiful pink slippers, he was showing me.

“I know flat slippers are the best for heavily pregnant women. She will love it. I have seen pink on her in a number of times.” I said and he smiled as he reached into his bag for more.

“See this shawl too. It was what we used for her and her mum had kept it since we had her. I hope it is not out of vogue yet” He asked again and I smiled.

“Even if it is out of vogue sir, I am sure she will love to use it for her baby” I said and he sighed. I pressed his shoulder then and smiled.

“I know it feels weird that your child is with a child but it is well dad. It is well” I said and he smiled too as he nodded.

“I can’t wait to see her. I can’t wait to see my daughter” He said with excitement.

“She has been through a lot!” I said and he sighed dejectedly.

“Will she ever forgive me?” He asked and I nodded.

“You are her dad!” I said and patted him on the back the more.

I had gone to the hospital to inquire about Talitha and someone had confidentially given me the phone number of Dr. Richards in Lagos. I had made a call directly to her and she was the one who sent her driver to come pick us up from the airport.

“My son” Pastor Bode Davies called out at the driver.

“Sir?” He replied and I was wondering if he needed something.

“Can you give me the address of the house? This traffic is too much for me.”

“Don’t worry sir. We will soon be home” The driver said and I smiled.

“Daddy, don’t be too anxious. We will get home soon” I said and he shook his head.

“My guilt wouldn’t let me sit in the comfort of a car while I don’t know what is happening to my daughter. If it is to get a bike so that I can suffer under the sun for a while, that will take the guilt from my heart a bit. I don’t want a cheap forgiveness. I deserve to be punished!”

“Daddy, please don’t do this! You don’t deserve to be punished!” I said and he looked at me pitifully.

“Don’t stop me son!” He said and I sighed at that.

“My guy, sorry I think we have to alight here. Give us the description, please.” I said and as he described, I jotted down.

“My son, don’t let me be a bother...”

“Don’t stop me, dad!” I replied in his own words and smiled at him. We alighted from the car and flagged down two motorcycles. His was in front, mine followed after.

I just felt the whole idea was crazy!

Pastor Bode-Davies was obviously growing old!

DR. (MRS.) RICHARDS

The last trimester of her pregnancy came with more inconveniences.

At first, her baby wasn't even moving anymore and we had to engage her in more exercises so the baby could come alive- we feared that the baby had contracted the congenital analgesia from her but if that was true, we knew that future problem loomed.

She had some mosquito bites and scratched herself really deep until her flesh was out! She inflicted a whole lot of injuries on herself while I was not watching. I had to cut her nails low.

She fainted a couple of times as well while sweating and emitting heat -her brain was being overworked.

She had not been saying anything to anyone and even her smiles had reduced.

It had not only been tiring for her but I had been at the receiving end too. I wanted her to be very fine and so when I got a call that her dad was looking for her, I made sure I allowed it.

If by seeing her dad, she would stop overworking her brain, then, let the dad come!

"Benjamin" I called out as the light went off.

“Ma!”

“Put on the generator, please” I said and soon, there was light again. Just then, Talitha stirred in bed and I rushed to her.

She had been sleeping for three days! I had been the one changing her positions and raising her up at some points so that she wouldn’t have bed sores.

“My baby!” I exclaimed and pecked her forehead. Her head was so hot it would bring water to the boiling point!

“Dad?” Her question popped up again.

“Dad will soon be here. Let’s wait for daddy. Daddy where are you o, your baby is asking after you o” I said and she looked towards the door too.

My phone beeped and I picked it up.

“Hello Dr Richards” The voice came with so much urgency. I stood up and covered Talitha well in bed.

“Let me go and bring daddy. Be a good girl and stay in bed!” I said firmly and she nodded, tears gathering in her eyes.

She must have missed her dad so much!

I couldn’t just understand everything happening.

“Hello” I said as I moved to the porch

“Dr. Richards, Talitha’s dad won’t be able to come right away. He has been rushed to the hospital”

“What! Why? What happened?”

“He was in a hurry to reach his daughter and we got two bikes so we can get home quickly.”

“Ah, so what happened?”

“While the bike was on a high-speed, he slumped off the bike and an oncoming car ran into him”

“Oh my Savior!” I exclaimed as I covered my mouth with my hands, my heart thumping so hard.

“So, where is he now? Where is he?” I asked as tears started rushing down my face.

“He is in the hospital. Your driver brought us here”

“I will be there right away” I said and turned to go back inside. My husband was at the door, looking perturbed.

“What happened again?” My husband asked and I sobbed some more.

“Talitha’s father got into a terrible accident” I said as I rushed inside.

“Is their family cursed or something?” He asked and I turned back to signal that he reduce his voice.

As I ran outside to my car, he followed me and shook his head

“That girl is a bad omen! I might kill her before you come back” He said and I turned to look into his face. He laughed then.

“I was just joking. I am surprised to see you love a mere patient even more than your own children. I am so jealous” He said and I shook my head as I got into the car.

“Richie, you are growing old! You can still joke in this kind of situation! Oh my!” I exclaimed.

I zoomed out of the compound as if I was being pursued!

DOVE

“It’s a major accident really and there are lots of stitches to be done on him. I just hope his spinal cord wasn’t tampered with” Mrs. Richards said and I nodded too as I placed the cup of cold water that I was drinking down.

“I pray so too doc! The way that car ran into him and it seemed as if his head was twisted to the back and oh my God! It was a gory sight!” I exclaimed and she shook her head.

“Let’s stop talking about it and wait for the doctor’s diagnosis. It’s terrible and quite unfortunate!” She said again and hid her face in her hands.

“Where is Talitha? Can I see her?” I asked and she looked at me sharply with a quite sad face.

“I am not sure if that is the right thing to do, Mr. Bowen. She has fallen asleep now and the question she asks whenever she wakes up is ‘dad’! It makes her overwork her brain” She said dejectedly.

“Has she beaten you before?” I asked, smiling. She was shocked.

“Not at all! She is not mad! She is just sick!”

“She hasn’t vomited all over you; she hasn’t attempted striking you with a syringe, has she?” I asked again and then she sat straight again and shook her head.

“Talitha wouldn’t do that. She is calm. She is very cool. She is not all you are saying” She fought back and I smiled.

“If that is the case, let me see her please. I have faced a much more aggressive Talitha. Just let me see and pray for her” I said and she nodded.

“If you say so” She said and moved inside.

“Please come with me” She said and I stood up.

Lord, of my strength, I can do nothing!

“Are you ready?” Mrs. Richards asked me once more so I could make up my mind about the decision I wanted to make.

Bowen, so you haven’t learnt your lessons, yet right?

Something asked me and I sighed deeply

Go, Bowen, go!

I sighed deeply again and smiled into Mrs. Richards's face.

Lord, if you are the One really sending me, show Yourself strong in this situation! Save the day Lord!

"Let's go ma'am" I said and she opened the door. She signaled for me to come inside with her and clutching my Bible in my hand like a sword which It really is, I muttered some words of prayer.

I looked at the well-lit pink bedroom and all the princess' materials in it and I was awed. As my eyes traveled round the beautiful room, I saw the small Talitha on a side of the bed, folding herself like a fetus.

I wanted to see her tummy badly. It must have grown!

"She is still sleeping" Mrs. Richards said and I nodded. Just then, there was a sneeze from the bed and Mrs. Richards ran to the bed. She raised her head a bit and rubbed her back.

As she turned on the bed, I saw the small mountain that had formed in her and I smiled.

God is great!

Just then, she opened her eyes and looked at Mrs. Richards.

“What do you want to eat?” She asked and then I saw a smile lighten up her face.

My heart stirred then!

Talitha could smile again!

The phone in my pocket beeped and that made her to turn to look at my direction.

As our eyes met, her jaws dropped and my heart started racing.

What plan was she devising in her head again?

How fierce would she be?

She pointed at me and looked at Mrs. Richard's face. The latter smiled faintly and I knew she must be disturbed a bit in her heart too, not knowing what to do.

Move close to her!

I walked close to her and she squinted as she looked at me as I approached her.

I sat on the bed and faced her. She bit her lower lip then and it started bleeding.

“Oh my! She is bleeding!” I exclaimed and Mrs. Richards reached for the box beside her. She got a methylated cotton wool and made to mop her bleeding mouth.

“She can't feel the pain so that is how she has been incurring wounds upon herself. This is an instance you have seen for yourself” Mrs. Richards said sadly as she mopped on.

But Talitha wouldn't stop looking into my face!

When Mrs. Richards was done, Talitha shifted close to me and took my hands. She examined it as if it was an exam paper before proceeding to my face again.

She grabbed my face in between her hands suddenly and tears welled up in her eyes. I was shocked

“What is the matter, Tally?” I asked again and she looked lost in thought again as the tears streamed down her face. I held her shoulders and looked deeply into her face.

She looked like a wet puppy. Her face was filled with expectation.

“You don’t want to talk to me, queen Tally?” I asked and then, she smiled as tears rolled down her face the more.

Mrs. Richard and I exchanged looks.

“Dad!” She exclaimed as she smiled the more.

“My daddy has come!” She faced Mrs. Richards and said with glee. Mrs. Richards looked shocked.

“Talitha is talking! Oh my!” She exclaimed.

Then, I was the only confused person.

“Dad?” I asked as I looked at her and suddenly, she jumped at me and gave me a very tight hug.

“My daddy!” She screamed as she shook the whole bed. I could feel the movement in her tummy as she hugged me so tightly and the more, I tried to take her off me, the more she got glued to me.

“My dad is here finally! I missed you so much” She said and started crying afresh.

I looked towards Mrs. Richard’s side and she was sniffing too as she wiped her teary face.

“Dad?” I asked myself again until finally, she disengaged from me and looked deeply into my face with a teary, smiling face.

“Daddy!” She exclaimed again.

CHAPTER 9

DOVE

“I have been selfish, Bowen.” My big boss said immediately I entered the boardroom and that was when I realized that all eyes was on me.

It was early in the morning, I dropped by at the Richards’ house and my newly found daughter (as she called me dad) insisted that I feed her. While doing that, my phone rang and my big boss asked that I come over to see him at the office.

Until I was able to pat Talitha back to sleep was when I was able to leave the house for the office.

Selfish? How?

“I don’t get you sir” I said as I stood still at the door.

“Please sit down my dear. Sit down” He said again and I found myself a chair to sit in.

My big boss stood up and moved opposite me so he could face me squarely.

I was confused.

I needed to look around for Princess and see the evil look on her face if that could tell me exactly why I had been sent for but she was smiling lightly.

Wow!

“Here is Bowen whose contribution to my organization is inexpressible and my daughter loves him. Why not join both of them together and see my daughter happy and my organization functioning beautifully? That was my thought” He started explaining and I nodded, waiting for more.

“Hmmm” I heard from the back and only then did I realize that my boss was seated right behind me. He was smiling so widely and winked at me. I smiled too as that just told me that something good was in store for me.

“In the past weeks that we did not set our eyes on you, oh boy, it felt like hell for us. Many of your fans have clouded our website with ‘Bring back Dove!...’”

That stopped my heart for a while.

Wow!

“The break really was good for Princess too. She has gotten over you. She has healed. God will give to her the bone of her bone and the flesh of her flesh” He added and everyone uttered ‘Amen’

I looked toward Princess again and she stood up, smiling shortly.

“Forgive my disturbances, boss. The heart tends to disobey but after enough spankings, it’s healed. Treat me gently, sir” She said and bowed before sitting down and I was shocked. There was a round of applause from the staff members and some cheers went into the air.

Boss?

This very lady!

Unbelievable!

Even though by rank, I was four levels higher than her, Princess had never used ‘sir’ meaningfully for me before. What was the act for?!

“So, Bowen, while we return everything, we had collected earlier from you, will you like to come back and work with us in your most indispensable Medium?” He asked and everyone clapped again as some of my colleagues gave me some knowing looks.

I turned back to look at my boss who was clapping too, laughing with glee. As soon as he saw me, he whispered something that I could not understand until he gave me a face. I smiled as I understood perfectly well.

Anytime the marketing department visited my office, it was to come beg me to help them voice a jingle because its client specifically asked for Dove’s voice. At any of those instances, if my boss was around, he would give me a particular face which he later told me meant ‘Shakara’. He told me to carry myself like an expensive egg and then, name my price. If they could pay, fine, if not, au revoir!

Remembering now, I really did laugh out loudly as I faced my big boss again. I laughed till I was sure that the veins at the sides of my head were really obvious.

“Dove?” My big boss called out at me and only then did I realize that I was in the middle of a meeting. How could I have made a fool of myself this way, Lord!

Chai!

Well, I decided not to waste the opportunity and use it to my own advantage as my boss had earlier suggested.

I stood up, looked around and cleared my throat.

“Good morning once again my colleagues.”

“Good morning Dove” They responded and I smiled.

“I am really grateful for the opportunity to be invited to this meeting and for the purpose for which it was called. Thank you, Princess, and thank you, big boss” I bowed and swallowed.

“But regrettably, I have this to say sir...” I said and all eyes turned to look at me. My big boss looked more confused.

“Erm, immediately I was sent off this amiable organization sir, I had started thinking of accepting The Effables’ proposal to come over sir because to me, it is a bigger company with more prospects” I said and my big boss frowned as he readjusted himself in his seat.

I turned to look into my boss’ face and he gave me a thumbs up.

“What betrayal! How on earth could Akande have courted you when he knows you are mine! How on earth!” Big Boss raged on and I was confused as to what method to use to kill the fire.

“Sir, he knew you threw me out, it was until that time that he came to me. Not before then sir”

“I didn’t throw you out Dove. Don’t define it as that! Dove, I love you and I appreciate the way you work. How on earth would I have thrown you out, huh?” He exclaimed and I smiled.

“Sir, I am still Dove and I can make my decisions myself. If I am to remain in this organization, there are some conditions that should be met” I said and there were some murmurings as my big boss nodded.

“Say it. Let me hear” He said interestedly.

“I want a 50% raise in my salary, I want a duplex in Ajah in place of my flat in Ikorodu, I want a 2017 E300 Sedan Mercedes-Benz and I want a new Apple Laptop. When those are done, I am all yours, sir” I said and there was murmuring in the boardroom again.

I turned to look at my boss and his mouth was wide open, the look on his face saying ‘That’s too much, even I don’t have those’

I smiled as I sat down and my big boss stood.

“I can get you the laptop and the Benz but the house in Ajah, ah! Dove! It’s not like it is unaffordable but Ajah is far from the office and coming from there every day means late-coming so I will give you a duplex in Ikeja instead. Okay?” He asked and I smiled.

“It’s okay sir” I said and some colleagues looked at me enviously while some could only wish they were in my shoes.

“And about your salary raise, 50% is damn too much Dove! Let’s make it 30%, please” He said and my heart jumped up.

When I asked for those stuff, I never imagined that my big boss would even consider it talk less of granting my request but almost all those requests were granted.

Wow!

“It’s okay, big boss!” I said and my big boss smiled.

‘Ah!’

‘What!’

‘Oh!’

‘This is serious!’

‘For real!’

‘Are you serious?!’ and so many exclamations rang through the air at that.

“Why are you all envious? You have not worked up to half of what this man here has done. He deserves more than I am giving him so no need for any envy. Okay?” He asked and they murmured again.

“Sir, we have always been doing our best too. It is just that it is only Dove you are interested in” Jelly argued.

“Do something that will make me interested in you too” He said as he started packing his files.

“Sir, even if it is 20% rise for everyone, we will appreciate it sir” Sunny C added too.

“Yes” The others concurred.

My big boss started moving to the door side.

“I will increase your salary by 10%, all of you” He said and everyone clapped happily as the meeting was brought to an end.

Some of them gave me some firm handshakes before moving out through the door.

As I was about moving out, my boss stood before me and hit my chest. I looked into his face and he was laughing.

“What did you just do and who taught you that, huh?” He asked and I laughed hysterically.

“My boss taught me to do shakara” I said and he laughed for a while, shook my hands too afterwards looked into my face, tears in his eyes.

I was dazed

“Sir...” I was saying when he held my shoulders firmly and shook me. I looked deep into his stern face.

“I miss you, son!” He said as he hugged me tightly.

I relaxed and could only smile.

NURSE HANNAH

As I replaced the empty saline bag with a full one, the phone in my pocket rang and I quickly reached for it.

Dr. Mrs. Richards.

“Hello ma”

“Hello Hannah. How is he now?”

I looked over at Mr. Bode-Davies on the bed and he just laid in there like a log of wood.

“He still remains unresponsive ma”

“Oh my God! It is a month already! Have you administered the dosage for today?” She asked.

“Yes ma”

“Check out for him and in case you notice anything, call me or check on my husband in his office. Okay?”

“Okay ma.” I said and dropped the phone as I surveyed the almost lifeless man in on the hospital bed.

As I mopped his cold feet with a hot compress, I prayed in my heart for him. I had heard so much about the patient and I knew that he must have endured some sort of pains for a long while as he looked really old and rugged for a man who was not even fifty years old yet.

I sighed and stood up, straightening my gown. As I bent to pick up his full urine bag, I looked at him again and saw that the little finger on his left hand moved.

I was shocked as I stood up straight. I looked at him closely for some time more and saw that the little finger on his right hand too moved.

“What!” I exclaimed as I covered my mouth. Could it be true that the patient I had been assigned to manage since a month ago; who had been so unconscious and lifeless was coming back to life?

I kept reversing in awe till I reached the door. I opened instantly and started running towards my boss’ office.

“Doctor!” I kept screaming and panting!

I was so excited!

It was so gladdening because I was the first person to see and take the good news to the other medical practitioners who had lost faith in his recovery, really!

PRINCESS

Sincerely, I never knew I could release him out of my heart!

I had not loved any man like I loved Dove so much that I lowered my standard, did stupid stuffs just to make sure he looked at me.

Looking at him behind the mic as he did what he loved doing most gleefully, I could only smile and sigh and surrender that he was not meant for me.

I looked over at his side and the smile on his face was large.

“Darling darling listeners at home, welcome to the radio version of Hard Talk. It’s my delight to be the one riding you to the crest of your morning today. It feels good to back!” He exclaimed into the mic as he pulled up a key on the audio console to put in some music, moving his head rhythmically as he did.

“I am your friend, your brother, your son, your daddy ... oh yeah!” He said and laughed as he pulled up the key again. I laughed too.

Daddy indeed!

“I am actually a small daddy, right? It’s Bowen Adameji your darling D to the O to the V to the E. Dove is my name” He pulled the key again and kept nodding his head to the music.

No wonder my dad loved him!

He did his job from his heart, really!

“Before we go on a short musical break where we will be having Temitope Adara doing ‘A dupe’, Let me be a bit religious right now” I heard him say and I gasped.

When had he ever been less religious?!

He drank some water.

“God is beautiful, do I have a witness in the house?” He asked and looked at my side. I smiled broadly and nodded.

“Oh, my beautiful producer, Princess is smiling in agreement here in the studio. See, If God says pick up a basket and go to the desert to fetch water, my dear people, just jump down from your bed, pick the basket and start running to the desert o. This our God is past finding out! He is someone who says and....” He continued and I could only smile.

He was just my dream man!

A man after God’s heart -even though I might be far from the God.

Maybe I was just too filthy for Bowen and then God couldn’t give a dirty lady like me to his child, right?

When my heart started getting clumsy again, I had to gulp some water and tried to concentrate on the newspaper spread in front of me.

Though my disobedient eyes kept looking at his side!

I was the producer of the programme anyways, my heart lied on to me.

DOVE'S MUM

Talitha was just too slim but for her protruding tummy!

I touched her collarbone as they were so visible. I rubbed her neatly plaited hair too yet she didn't wake up- maybe because she couldn't feel yet!

I woke up the previous night with the urge to visit Lagos again although I had visited earlier when we heard about the accident of Pastor Bode Davies. I informed my husband and he said he felt that we should all go to Lagos to have a prayer session in the hospital with Pastor Bode Davies.

I was so glad as I quickly packed my load and told him that I would love to go ahead of them so I could have a time alone with Talitha. He obliged.

I got to the house in Lagos when Mrs. Richards was about leaving for the airport to pick her son up. She told me Bowen dropped by and had gone to work.

Immediately she took me to the sitting room where I saw the frail body with huge tummy on a little bed placed on the beautiful tiled floor, I was touched as I rushed to her and placed her head on my laps. I could not stop my tears from falling as I pecked her so many times.

I looked into her eyes again and wished she could wake up, wished she could look into her pastor's wife's face, wished she could forgive me.

The last time I went over, Bowen said it would not be wise to see her, so after seeing her dad, we had just left but my heart had not left her at all. I wanted to see her, hold her, plead with her, tell her about Jesus and love her again.

The opportunity was in my hands at the moment.

As I looked up to survey the gigantic building in which I was, a small hand touched my chin and looking down, I saw Talitha's confused face.

"Oh, thank You Jesus!" I exclaimed and she frowned a bit as she closed her eyes and opened again. She repeated that act for a while before she stopped.

"Mrs. Adameji?" She asked and her voice sounded croaky.

"Yes darling" I said and she frowned again as she tried to raise her head.

"What are you doing here?" She asked as she struggled still.

“The Holy Spirit said that I should...” I was saying when she covered her ears with her cupped hands.

“Can’t you say a few words without saying Jesus, God and Holy Spirit? Huh?” She said and hissed. I was taken aback as I watched her lean against the cushion behind her.

“I can’t stop mentioning the Name. It is the name that heals, the name that saves, the name that...” I kept saying with so much awe, not realizing that she was already on her feet.

“Stop!” She screamed suddenly so loudly that I was afraid that the baby in her might just jump out.

“My daddy here and my mummy have been saying Jesus Jesus Jesus to me and the only reason why I don’t get that mad is because they are my parents and they show me so much love but you, who are you? I can’t fix it at all. Yet I can remember this face. I see wickedness and evil as I look at you madam and I...” She was saying but her words cut at my heart deeply. The lady that was having partial amnesia who was calling my son her dad and a good Samaritan woman her mum could still remember my face and decode it as evil!

Oh my God!

“My baby, I am so sorry that I have painted Jesus in a bad light to you. Jesus is actually very...” I said as I stood up too trying to touch her.

She screamed suddenly, covering her ears. She started running around the whole sitting room and my heart jumped into my mouth.

“I am so sorry dear. Please don’t injure yourself. Come, I should be the one running around in shame. Not you...” I kept saying while she kept running.

“Leave me. Leave me! Go away!” She screamed as she kept on running.

I heard a car pull over and peeped through the window. It was Mrs. Richards. I had mixed feelings about her arrival.

Sadness because the whole scene had just painted me irresponsible; happiness because Talitha was still running round the sitting room and they could at least stop her before she would wound herself.

As I walked to the door to tell Mrs. Richards to hasty and come inside, I heard a great bang and I turned back suddenly as fear gripped my heart. She was flat on her tummy.

“Jesus!” I screamed as I ran towards her. I heard footsteps too and the door flung open. Mrs. Richards ran towards me as I helplessly held Talitha closely to my chest, tears running down my face.

“Oh my God! Oh Jesus!” Mrs. Richards screamed too as she saw the situation.

“Geez! She is bleeding” I heard a male voice and looking up, I realized that a young man actually followed Mrs. Richards- her son probably.

Mrs. Richards stretched her hands to pull her off me.

“Oh Lord! This girl has suffered! This pregnancy has suffered! Ah!” She had started crying and I started feeling bad.

“Andrew, help me. Let’s lift her up. She needs to go to the clinic now!” She screamed and I watched as they rushed her out. I picked up my purse and ran after them.

DOVE

“Nice one Dove! Welcome back” Princess said, smiled at me and extended her hand at me.

Her smile looked more real, different from the seductive ones she had always been giving me.

She must be over me really!

“Thanks, so much Princess” I said as I shook her hand. She smiled as she handed me a pack of fruit juice which I declined.

“Trust me. This is just a well-done gift. Nothing more” She said and I smiled

“Thanks” I said as I was about to collect it. Just then, my phone rang and I reached for it.

“Hello ma”

“Talitha is about to be wheeled to the theater” Mrs. Richards said in a very fearful way and I knew whatever would make a doctor sound that way was indeed frightening.

“What! What happ...” I was about asking when the call got ended. I looked into Princess’ face and shook my head.

“I will see you later, dear” I said as I ran as fast as my legs could carry me to the park, my breathing seizing intermittently.

DR.(MRS.) RICHARDS

“Sign it please” I said for like the umpteenth time as Bowen examined the paper over and over again.

He shook his head as he sauntered to the window, lost in thoughts.

“It’s been three days Bowen! You disallowed us from wheeling this girl to the theatre and bring out the baby to save her life. You claim faith but it seems that you have forgotten that I am not just a doctor but a good child of God and I know when to draw a line between divinity and medical situation” I said almost angrily.

I didn’t want to be rash in signing and having her wheeled into the theatre to avoid personal involvement as I had taken Talitha as my daughter.

“I don’t think divinity can be left out of any issue no matter how hard or simple it seems!” He interjected and made me feel bad that I had talked like an unbeliever.

“Fine, I know! But it’s been three days. This girl is in a coma. Her baby needs to be brought out”

“And would the baby live?” He asked

“See, the chances are slim. The child is weak, its lungs lack surfactant. The chances are slim” I said and he shrugged dejectedly.

“We can’t do anything to the baby Mrs. Richards. I am saying that we can’t! I know how much suffering she has gone through carrying this pregnancy. I know how much she stood her ground that nobody should touch her baby no matter what happened to her...”

“Even if she dies? Can you see how life keeps creeping out of her minute by minute? What are you doing and why? Who is more important to you now? The baby or the mother?” I asked, furiously

“Both of them ma. I can’t imagine losing her. Yet if she lives, she might not be able to bear the agony of her dead child, Mrs. Richards” He argued. His eyes were so red and I knew he had cried and prayed and had done everything to no avail but her life was hanging down the rope.

“What would the essence of suffering like this and losing the baby then be, eh?” He asked again as he faced the wall and beat it.

“What is the essence of having the baby and losing the mother, Mr. Bowen?” Dr. Brown who had been quiet asked and I shrugged.

“Are you sure you will be able to bear the thought that you killed its mother when you look into the baby’s eyes in future?” My husband who had been reading her case note over and over at long last spoke. Bowen’s face remained stern still.

“Even if we leave her and keep dwelling on his faith, immediately she dies, the baby dies too. Is it a double loss you want for her father who is sick?” Dr. Brown asked again but Bowen shook his head again.

“Let me go and pray to God again. God has to show Himself strong. He has to! I can’t sign any faithless form!” He exclaimed as he squeezed the form and threw it in the bin.

He walked to the door, opened and walked out almost angrily, yet dejectedly.

“I hope you know that you are not the only one who loves Talitha. I hope you remember that I can sign the form myself. I hope...” I was saying when he jammed the door and left.

My heart sunk!

I could not imagine losing this new daughter of mine!

Tears ran down my eyes as I turned my back at my husband so he would not see it but guess he did as I felt a squeeze on my shoulder.

“Doctors are not weak!” He said as he walked to the door.

“Let us know when you have made your decision” Dr. Brown said also and followed him as they marched out of my office.

“What do I do, Lord?!” I exclaimed as I was in a dilemma.

DOVE’S MUM

I stood up as I saw Bowen coming from the doctor’s office. I started walking to him when I realized he was saying certain things.

“What did the doctor say?” I asked but he didn’t seem to see me standing right in front of him. He kept on walking away towards the exit while I followed, dumbfounded.

“What is happening Lord?” I asked as I followed still.

Stop following him!

“Oh!” I exclaimed and stopped as I watched him leave. Then, I noticed that he was tapping and making clicking sounds as his middle finger and his thumb came together.

That was when I realized that he was praying in the Spirit!

Looking up again, I saw my husband and the other church leaders approaching- I had called them to tell them about the new development and I could see that they had arrived.

“Bowen” I could hear my husband call as Bowen passed beside them all without greeting them. My husband stood and called on, obviously shocked.

“Darling” I waved at them and they started walking to me.

“What happened to Bowen?” That was the first thing he asked after we had hugged briefly and exchanged pleasantries among ourselves.

“I was shocked when I saw him too but on a closer look, he is praying” I said and my husband gasped and shook his head.

“Really! That’s serious” He exclaimed. I shook my head.

“But my people, the case is very serious o. Let’s come together to pray maybe God will hear our cries and have mercy on the poor girl” I said and they nodded as we looked for a suitable place to gather so we could pray.

DOVE

The sun shone brilliantly but I found it offensively bright and cheerful!

I felt that the sun and nature in general had only conspired to show me how the world would go on without her!

But it shouldn't be!

I felt that everything around me should be as grey and foggy as my emotions; everywhere should be cold and damp with silent air.

But no!

The birds still sang and the flowers still bloomed!

As I fell to the ground, forbidding anyone to come close to me, I felt like a silhouette of myself and I sincerely wished I really was as insubstantial as the shadows so that my insides might not feel so mangled.

The long held back tears began to flow!

I loved her!

I never knew that I had fallen in love with the one who called me daddy for some weeks. I never knew that my heart had given way to loving the lady who almost made life unbearable for me.

I never knew until, standing close to her, Dr. Richards made me to watch as built-up gas pressure within her putrefied body pushed the dead fetus from her dead body.

I never believed that God could fail me at the juncture where my faith was the largest!

It felt as if a light had been extinguished forever in my heart!

I sat in my silent grief and listened as the pastor conducted the funeral rites.

“Ah, Talitha! Ah!” Mrs. Richards cried as her husband held her so tightly

Struggling to hold back the grief, tears flow steadily, silently down my immobile face.

I felt bruised inside!

I felt numbness and emptiness as I turned to look at the mahogany coffin

The words from the minister, speeches at the service brought a fresh onslaught of tears on everyone's faces.

"She can't die! She just can't!" I screamed as I dug my hands into the sand and threw it at my face.

"Ah ... My God!" I could hear my mum exclaim and looking into her face, I knew she had never seen me that grieved before.

But I really did feel like dying!

My lungs rummaged for oxygen and my sobbing suddenly had the same force of someone drowning!

"I told Bowen to allow me save her life ooooo" Mrs. Richards fell to the ground too as her son in dark glasses pulled her up to no avail.

As the coffin was about to be lowered into the grave, I jumped up like I was under a spell and ran towards them, panting heavily

"Don't put her in there!" I screamed while some men held me tightly.

“Leave me alone!” I screamed but it felt on deaf ears.

“Just give me some minutes. Leave me alone!” I screamed louder as the wailing increased.

“Leave him” I heard my dad say and I turned to look into his eyes. His eyes were stained with tears and I knew he was filled with regrets.

I went close to the coffin and after hugging and wetting it with my tears, I opened slowly.

I wanted to see her face again!

I wanted to see her injection bruised body one more time- the body that had been invaded by different antibiotics, drugs and injections!

“Talitha!” I quivered as I opened still, her frail body in view.

“Noooooooo!” I screamed again, as I let the coffin lid fall so, I could look into her face well.

As I picked her cold hands, my sweat fell on her body and an idea came to my mind.

“God, I won’t give up now. I won’t say You have failed me now. I will give you one more chance. One more chance to show everyone present that You are Lord indeed!” I cried on as the flesh under my ribcage throbbed and my cheeks burned. My mind created memories and scenarios that made the tears continue.

The graveyard was silent.

“The shadow of Peter healed the sick. I am sweating now profusely and you have anointed me as your servant, that you told me. Hence, let the sweat become power! As it falls on her, let it raise her!” I prayed aloud and pulled the cold, dead body close to myself.

“The Bible says the Lord remains the same yesterday, today and forever. Won’t you come and show that as you supported Elijah, you can support me? Won’t you come and back Your Name up?” I cried out again but nothing happened to the lady I was holding. She remained stark dead!

“Her mum died and left her behind. She was forsaken and thrown out moving around in search of pasture. Then, Jeff died! Then, the only woman who had shown her love died too! Then, she became seriously sick and then she didn’t believe that You are! And yet, You took her away?” I asked rhetorically, my chest rising and falling in a way that made goosebumps to fill my head.

“Don’t You have some chills, Lord? Aren’t You supposed to at least save her so that she would believe? Must you break our hearts like that because...” I kept on lamenting when some men surrounded me, my dad leading the team.

“Let her go and rest son. God gives and He takes away” He said, his eyes very red too. I shook my head on and on as my lips slapped against each other. I watched on as they returned her back to the coffin and some men pulled me away from the grave.

As they closed it, tears started rushing out of my eyes again.

She just couldn’t be dead.

“See, God is God o! No matter what I say with this filthy mouth of mine, God is God o. Can you give me one more chance? Let me ask God one more time. No one can question His authority. He gives and He takes. I was supposed to go to Him as a son. He is not my mate. He deserves to be honored. Let me try again” I said loudly as I struggled with the macho men handling me.

“Bowen, it’s about to rain. We all have to leave here” The officiating minister said but I shook my head at him.

“Even if it is one-minute sir? You mean you don’t have faith, pastor?” I asked and it worked like magic as he looked dejectedly at me and shrugged.

“Let’s give him one minute” He said and they dropped me.

“But if nothing happens, no matter what else you do, no more chance”

“My God can never be late! He is always on time” I said as I sniffed wetly, going to the coffin again.

People had started murmuring at this point as fresh tears flowed down their faces.

I ran to the coffin and opened one more time. I looked at her face as rain started falling.

“Bowen, please allow the pastor to finish the rites. It’s raining please” My mum said weakly but I couldn’t be stopped.

I carried her out of the coffin and lifted her high.

“This was not our plan Lord and she can’t die! She just can’t! Save Talitha Lord! Save her” I said weakly. My strength gauge read empty!

I started crying when I realized that no matter how much I did, God had determined that Talitha should die. There was silence as I fell on my knees with Talitha in his arms.

Looking up above as water entered into my eyes and mixed with the salty pool that had formed in them already, there was a urge from inside as if I wanted to defecate and the poo wouldn’t come out easily.

“Talitha Cumi!” I screamed out loud as I fell on my face and, Talitha fell off my hands and rolled away.

There was thunder and lightning as the rain poured out more. Talitha stopped rolling and....

She sneezed!

MRS. TADE

Talitha Cumi!

Talitha Cumi!

Talitha Cumi!

That was what he kept on screaming on the chair in which he had fallen asleep.

With each call of authority came a different level of fart!

We all closed our noses as Mrs. Adameji walked close to him. She shook him vigorously till he woke up from whatever trance he had fallen into.

“Bowen, wake up!” His mum pulled at him for a long time before he stabilized and suddenly turned to face the chair as if he was sleeping.

“Talitha Cumi?” Pastor Adameji asked as he was obviously lost in thought.

“It sounds familiar really” I said too as I started to think about it.

“I think it is in the Bible” Mrs. Fakunle said and her husband nodded.

“Darling, please pass my electronic Bible, please” Pastor said and his wife reached into his bag and passed it to him.

“Oh my Father! Oh Jesus! Oh wow! God is real!” Pastor kept on exclaiming and I had to stand up to pick the electronic Bible up as he had dropped it on the table.

“Mrs. Tade, please read it aloud please” Pastor Fakunle said and I nodded.

“Matthew chapter 5 verse 41 says ‘And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi! which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.’

“Wow! He spoke in the language with which Jesus spoke!” Mrs. Fakunle said as she looked up in awe.

“Let’s call the hospital. Something tells me that a miracle has happened” Pastor said anxiously as he moved closer to us again.

“You can use the landline” Dr. Richards said from a corner. We didn’t even know that he was around. As I moved to the telephone, it started ringing.

“Sir, I think you have a call sir” I said and he nodded as he had started coming.

“Hello, the Richards’ courtyard ... oh dear ... Pardon? ... That can’t be true ... Hello ... Hello...” He said and looked round the room as he replaced the phone.

“Sir, what is the matter?” We all seemed to ask at the same time but he just remained dazed.

Bowen shifted from the chair where he was and stood up, looking so weak.

“Tell me sir. Tell us” He said anxiously and to think that he was hearing all we had been saying when we thought he had drifted back to sleep was funny.

“I need to make some confirmations right now. I will be back” Dr. Richards said as he started to wear his shoes.

“Kindly tell us what it is doc. Please do” Pastor Adameji said and Dr. Richards stood up, gazed at Bowen for a while and shook his head.

“My wife called now that she is ... erm ...” He paused and looked into our anxious, tensed faces.

“Say it doc” Bowen said and Dr. Richards shook his head again.

“Dear, the baby moved and then she sneezed and then she has opened her eyes. That was how my wife put it when ...” He was saying when we saw Bowen already at the door, panting heavily.

“Oh God! Oh, thank You Savior! Oh!” He kept on exclaiming as he ran out.

Dr. Richards followed after him.

“Bowen, come and follow this car. Come and...” He said, his voice fading as he went after Bowen.

“I guess we have to follow them, right?” Mrs. Adameji asked the obvious as we all marched excitedly out of the house to see if we had not been left behind.

DOVE

“Let me see you outside Bowen” My mum said as I peeped through the glassy windows to see Talitha being attended to by some medical personnel.

I turned to look into my mum’s face but she had moved to the end of the corridor. I knew there was a serious talk.

“Sweet mum, is anything the matter?” I asked and she paused as she looked into my face for a long time. She sighed and turned her back at me for a while.

“Mum, is anything the matter?” I asked as I held her shoulders. She turned to look at me then.

“It’s good seeing you smile after so many days of tears” She said and I smiled

“Yeah, it was weird seeing your prince cry helplessly. I know mum” I said and hugged her tightly.

“When did you start keeping secrets from me?” She asked and I disengaged from the hug to look at her.

“Secrets?”

“You and Becca aren’t together anymore. You didn’t tell me” She said and only then did I realize that I hadn’t told her. I smiled and rubbed her forehead

“Momma, it’s not palatable for a guy to tell his mum that a lady broke up with him. Is it?” I said and she shook her head.

“That’s sad. I like Becca” She said and I smiled as I held her again.

“Mum, Becca has a new sweetheart” I said, smiling widely. She paused a while as she swallowed. I knew she wanted to say something else.

“But, do you love Talitha?” She asked and like in a bomb blast attack; my heart fell down flat.

I was never expecting that kind of question at all.

“Mum why would you say that? What makes you think that...” I was saying when she shook her head and frowned slightly.

“You seem to be free around her. Look at today as I held you to myself when you woke up from your dream, you drew away until that doctor said she was awake” She said and I laughed.

“My momma is jealous of my daughter ooo” I laughed on but her face remained sad still.

“Okay mum, let me explain to you.” I said and she looked up at me intently. I smiled.

“Talitha sees me as her dad and dad I am. More so, she is a very young girl that I can’t take advantage of. Don’t see pity and call it love, mum” I said and her face lit up a bit.

“Are you sure?” She asked and I stared into space after which I smiled.

“Well, maybe I can develop that kind of feelings for her in the nearest future anyways”

“What kind of feelings?” Her eyes shone so widely.

“The kind of the kind in the heart mum” I said and she shot me a dangerous look. I laughed hysterically as I hugged her tight.

“I was just joking mum! Fear fear mummy”

“Hmmm... toor!” She exclaimed and I smiled on and on.

DR. (MRS.) RICHARDS

“Is that how they cut carrot in the UK where you are coming from? Bush boy” I said as I hit Andrew playfully behind his neck.

“Oh mum! That hurts!” He said, frowning. He looked at me childishly and I started laughing.

“Why did you spoil your mouth like a child whose biscuit was seized?” I laughed again and he joined me.

“Am I not a child mum? I am your last-born o. Your baby” He said and I shook my head as I washed the chicken under the flowing tap.

“Keep deceiving yourself o. You are a man! A twenty-seven-year-old is a man! Your mates already have two to three kids” I said and he started laughing.

“You are kidding, right!” He exclaimed again as he laughed the more.

“Hold the meat for me, let me cut joor” I said and he held for me as we cut. There was silence before he cleared his throat again.

“Mum”

“Son”

“Can I discuss an issue of the heart with you?” He said with a serious face and I blushed.

“Please do” I nodded. He covered his face with the back of his hand and backed me for a while.

“I think I am in love” He said and I smiled as I winked at him.

“Hmmm, tell me something” I said and he smiled too, shyly.

“Who is that princess who has stolen my baby’s heart, please?” I asked, smiling broadly.

“I hope you will like her” He said shyly again.

“Do I know her?” I asked as I added curry to the meat on fire.

“Like the back of your palm, mum” He said as he licked his lips.

“Really! Tell me something” I was excited. I had no problem with any of the choices of my children provided they had prayed and they loved the individual.

“Let me whisper it in your ears” He said and he really did.

My eyes shone in delight as I jumped up like an antelope.

“Are you serious? Oh my! You love her?” I asked excitedly, my heart, throbbing hard. He smiled as he saw the delight on my face.

“Yes, I do. Every moment we have spent together have been so wonderful. I am so in love” He said and I shook my body in delight.

“Anytime I held her in my arms, I see something more than a daughter. I had always wanted her for one of my sons but as I Christian, I could not match-make. See what God has done now” I exclaimed as I danced excitedly.

“I never knew you would love her so well mum” He said and I gasped.

“There is more to that girl my son. She is a star. She is a crown in the Hand of the Lord. I love her so much. But you can’t tell her you love her yet o” I said and he smiled as he rubbed his hands together. I knew deep down that he was in love.

DOVE

“Oh no, mum! At least I will give her a few months after childbirth” I could hear Andrew say and my heart dropped.

I had instant headache!

I had wished that it was not the same person I was thinking about but hearing the childbirth thing, it was just so certain that it was Talitha!

“So mum, I have been thinking. The engineering company I want to start, how about I use the name Talidrew?” He asked and Mrs. Richards laughed out loudly.

“Talitha and Andrew merged together ... hahahaha ... But what about Andritha?” She laughed on and on while my heart sank deeper and deeper.

I had just come back from work and I felt that before going to my house, I should check on heavily pregnant Talitha. Passing through the kitchen, the discussion that gave me such constipation was what greeted my ears. I couldn't reconcile the issue.

The air I breathed in felt like I was holding a hot compress over my nose. I felt hot inside of me as I glided back to the main door.

I had to go before my heart got broken the more.

As I entered my car, Paul, the driver ran to me and I looked at him faintly.

“Oga mi sir, where are you going to?” He asked as he had seen me entering barely a minute earlier.

“Erm, Paul, I will be back. I need to attend to certain things. I will be back afterwards.” I said as I tried to smile. I turned the ignition key as he nodded.

“But you are very sure that everything is fine with you?” He asked again and I nodded as I waved at him.

I knew he was not convinced but I needed to just get out.

As I drove out, it felt like confusion, sadness and great sorrow had infiltrated my bones.

My heart was scorched and spasming.

“Ah God!” I exclaimed as I drove down the street.

There were thunders in my head. Despair coursed through my blood; numbness clouded my eyes.

I brought the car to an abrupt end and placed my head on the steering.

I wept like a baby!

It was as if I was going through death helplessly.

I unknotted my tie as tears soaked my shirt. I could feel my chest wet against my cloth too.

It felt like my heart was wrung out of its contents like a cloth about to be spread on the line.

I looked into the rear mirror and saw my very blood shot eyes. I smiled regretfully at my image and shook my head.

“Bowen, why are you crying? Are you okay? Why would you cry? Why?” I asked again and cried the more.

I never knew I had fallen in love with Talitha until I had that dream and I could feel in my heart that what was happening in the dream really defined what was going on in my heart.

“Why am I feeling this way, Lord?” I asked but the Lord didn’t seem available for a chat with me.

I felt so cold. I felt like going down to a swimming pool and burying my head in the blue water for like an hour.

“Andrew deserves her anyways... he does” I cried further again and shrugged.

I remembered different scenes in which the duo had really been having very great time together.

I remembered on one occasion that Andrew got her a bar of chocolate. Talitha had kept laughing shyly.

“But I can’t eat that now” She said and Andrew frowned a bit.

“Why not? I had you in mind as I paid for this. I bought it for you” He had said like a lover to his love and I felt my heart stir in a weird way.

“I am heavily pregnant. I can’t eat that because it’s fattening...” She was saying when I nodded.

“True. You can’t eat it. Your EDD is close” I said and Andrew looked at me disappointedly. I felt bad inside of me.

“But I don’t want him to feel bad. I have to eat even if it’s small” Talitha said and my heart did some few skipping forward and backwards before it stopped.

As she bit at the bar, she had smiled at Andrew who I felt was looking at her with some affection in his eyes.

“Thanks for thinking about me Andy” She had said lovingly and I had to excuse myself so I could get some fresh air down my throat.

That evening, I made a resolve to find a way of keeping both of them far apart from each other but it kept failing.

I started inviting him over to my house every evening so I could hold him hostage and little by little they could get far away from each other.

One evening, I stopped at the mart to get some chocolate and ice-cream for Talitha.

She collected them from me, smiled respectfully like a daughter would do to her father.

“Thanks dad”

“I was thinking about you while buying for you my daughter” I said and she rubbed her forehead. She then laughed.

“Daddy daddy. I will keep them so that first thing after delivery, I will devour everything. That’s my daddy.” She said and I shrugged painfully.

“Dad”

“Yes Talitha”

“Where is Andrew? It’s been a while since he checked on me in the evenings” She said and I couldn’t even explain to her that I was having him in my house getting our dinner ready.

“Oh! Don’t worry dear. He must have some other important things doing” I said and she looked hurt.

“Oh, I might not be important after all” She said silently and it felt like I was distorting the feelings the two were building for each other.

That day, I got to my car and cried as I confessed my action as a sin.

I had prayed concerning how I was feeling in my heart but God had just not said anything to me about Talitha even though my heart had been filled with the thoughts of her.

I went home and found innocent Andrew playing a game on my TV. He stood to greet me but I felt very bad to look into his eyes.

“Bro, welcome. I made some very nice fries for us. But I was a gentleman enough to wait for you” He smiled and I smiled too.

“You haven’t seen Talitha recently?” I asked. He smiled as he scratched his head.

“I get home late when she would be sleeping so, I sometimes just peep through, pray for her and go to bed. In the morning, she would still be sleeping while I leave for the office. We have been missing each other that way” He said.

I nodded as I removed my suit and my shirt.

“You love her?” I asked and he frowned while he smiled a bit.

“Big bros, I am trying to sort out my feelings. After that, I can decide if it is love or something else” He said and I nodded many times.

“Please tell me when you sort your feelings. I want to know as a father would want to know. You get?” I asked and he laughed hysterically.

“Daddy indeed! Thanks bro. I will definitely let you know when I am very sure like the sun.” He said and I nodded as I smiled faintly.

“She asked after you today. Seems she is missing you” I said, trying to make my ways right.

As he ran out of my house that day without even devouring the many fries he had made, I sank in my cushion and calmed my stormy heart down.

“If you love a thing Bowen, let it go. If it comes to you, it is yours but if it does not come back, it was never yours from the beginning” I said as I tried to look for sleep.

But it seemed that the lover boy had settled and unknotted his clumsy feelings.

“Bowen, don’t be selfish at all! He loves her, she loves him, the mum loves her, they are fine together. C’mon!” I tried to spank my stubborn heart.

I needed to go and pray harder so I could get the bone of my bones too.

As I was about to turn the car key, my phone beeped and I checked it.

Hello Bros. I have good news to share with you. I am not going to be able to wait till tomorrow. I am very sure you will be happy with me. Should I come over for dinner?

I didn’t know if it was anger my heart-felt or disgust.

I started typing the reply too

There is no need to come over. I already get. You love her and she loves you and few months after her delivery, you will propose to her. You told your mum too and she likes the idea. I know. Thank you. Kindy enjoy your dinner.

I read and re-read the message and shook my head.

I sounded full of anger, bitterness, envy and resentment.

I deleted it and threw my phone away.

“Oh Lord, why am I feeling this way, Lord? Why am I displaying some fruits of the flesh this way Lord?”

I tried to pray as I shook my head numerously so my head could get some sense but tears poured down my eyes.

“God, I can’t believe that I am this bruised because of a lady. A lady that does not even know that I am in existence in her love world” I said and tried to smile, muttering ‘It is well’ for a number of times.

But my eyes kept raining!

CHAPTER 10

DR. (MRS.) RICHARDS

Someone was sobbing.

I was so sure that I heard someone sniffing wetly from inside when I entered the house but I met my husband working on his computer system, Andrew was having a nap and Talitha was knitting a baby cap.

“Are you sure that you were not crying, my baby?” I asked Talitha as I felt her body temperature.

“I am fine ma” She said but I was not convinced. Her body temperature was high and she had a running nose.

“When did the catarrh start” I asked and she smiled.

“This morning” She said, her blocked nose being made obvious.

I felt the sides of her head and they were throbbing heavily.

“You were obviously crying” I said and there was silence.

“You don’t want to talk to me?” I asked and she shook her head.

“I just want to be left alone.” She said and I was shocked

“You love people being around you baby girl. You love me being with you, why chase me away now?” I asked and she shook her head.

“I have some weird, funny, unimaginable things in my mouth that I can’t say. They are crazy. I just want to be alone. I need to think” She said and I nodded.

“Let me get you some juice. You look dehydrated” I said as I moved to the door.

What could be on her mind?

What could she be thinking?

DOVE

“Is that Panam Percy Paul?” Andrew asked as he bit at the chocolate bar, I bought him as I started the car.

“Yeah. That’s his latest album” I replied. I looked at the side mirror and slid into the road as the journey to my office started.

“Oh, I love that man like anything!” He said and I smiled.

“Yeah...” I replied and he stopped to look into my face as I drove on.

“Yeah, bros, what’s up?” He asked and I looked into his face, my brows curved.

“The sky’s up” I said and he broke out into a loud laughter as he hit my shoulder playfully.

“Bro, you are bad, man! C’mom” He laughed on

“You are badder!” I decided to play along and he laughed the more.

“You should be a comedian bro. You are the king of sarcasm, bruh!” He said again and I smiled faintly again.

I wondered what it was that he wanted to discuss with me so badly.

I hadn’t stopped by at their house for a full week although I had been talking to Talitha on the phone. I just wanted to get over her and concentrate on my job.

I was at the shopping mall, getting some beverages to fill my office cupboard when his text came in.

Bro, can I come with you to your office today?

I replaced the pack of tea bags I had picked earlier and looked at the message all over again.

I started typing.

I don’t get, Bowen. Is my office a sort of recreation center? What about your office? Aren’t you going to work? Get serious bro!

I read and re-read and shook my head

“Dove, you shouldn’t be doing this. C’mon!” I said to myself and started typing again

You aren’t going to work?

I started moving to the cashier. My phone beeped.

I resigned bro

I saw that and I paused a bit. Why would he resign?

I am at the Ikeja Shopping Mall, come over

And in less than thirty minutes he was already at the park, waiting for me.

“Why did you resign?” I asked and he smiled.

“I am going to settle down in Scotland” He said and I nodded severally, many thoughts running through my head.

“I told you that I wanted to share good news over dinner last week but you didn’t bother replying, now see. The engineering company I told you about has called me to resume” He said and I blinked severally.

So, he wasn’t trying to tell me about his affection for Tally?

“Congrats bro” I said then

“Thanks bro. Let me make some Euros first and come back gallantly like daddy. Chai, my daddy! The man raked the US dollars for twenty years, came back to set up a gallant hospital in Lagos and He is reaping his cool cash now... He is the real guy, man” He said and smiled broadly. I smiled too.

“When are you going?” I asked and he smiled.

“You are missing me already?” He asked, tickling my side and I smiled faintly.

“You should be a masseur, not an engineer” I said and he started laughing again.

“What! Why bro?” He asked and I looked into his very innocent, milky eyes. I sighed and faced the road.

“Your hands don’t feel like it has held a spanner before” I said and he started laughing again.

“Oh my God! Tally said exactly the same thing. Geez!” He laughed on but my heart skipped a beat at the mention of her name.

Andrew shouldn’t please stab my wound any further.

More so, how did Talitha know?

Has he tickled her before, or have they held hands?

I shook my head and concluded that it was not my business though my tummy had some peppery sensations, an indication that I was very worried.

“When are you going to Scotland?” I asked again and he changed the song playing. He started nodding to the blues.

“In the next five weeks. I need to put finishing touches to some things and by then, your daughter should have given birth” He said and I looked into his face once more. He looked lost in thoughts as he smiled to himself.

“Yeah, so you can take her along?” I asked and he shook his head.

“Not exactly, bro” He said and I frowned a little bit as I didn’t get what he was saying.

“That reminds me. Andrew, have you sorted out your feelings for my daughter?” I asked and he laughed as he covered his face. I was distraught.

“You go fear daddy nah” He laughed again.

“Talk joor” I said, raising my nose at him. He maintained a serious face and held my hand.

“Join me in prayers, bro. I plan to propose to Talitha immediately after child birth” He said and my heart finally sat.

“But I need to be sure that I am doing the right thing” He added and I smiled faintly

“God’s will shall be done bro”

“Can we have some prayer sessions together? I probably sleep over at your place?” He asked and I sighed severally before I could even nod affirmatively

“Yes, we can” I said as I brought the car to an end and tried to calm my heart down for my presentation in some minutes time.

“Wow! What a very nice, beautiful, gigantic building your organization has! Wow!” He exclaimed again as I opened the door and stepped out.

DR. (MRS.) RICHARDS

“I just believe that I am seeing men like trees, mum” My son said and I smiled.

I could feel deep in my heart what turmoil was rumbling through his mind.

Few decades back, I was drowning in the river of confusion too. At first, I thought it was Daniel and oh, I loved him deeply. Then, I realized that I could not go into any relationship with him because though he seemed to be a child of God, he was very violent. On one occasion, he had raised his hand to slap me simply because I said I didn't like green on him.

Then came Philemon. Oh, the vision I had! It looked so heavenly that I was convinced he was the man for me. I was so wrong! He was already engaged to a lady in Kano before coming to propose to me in Lagos. He never mentioned it. Thanks to divine providence, a friend was around on our second date and she had to provide me with the information. I was very heart broken.

I had dreaded having a very bad home and had prayed hard so that I would never miss it in marriage.

Right from babyhood, I had had memories of my dad beating my mum so badly; I could remember the shouts and the abuses. The worst gory memory I would never forget was when my mum threw a knife at my dad's leg and my dad regrettably threw a stone at her chest- the stone throw that killed her.

Since then, I had determined that my marriage would not be my coffin!

I had made up my mind that come what may, I would wait till I find the one that will love me as his mother, his wife, his sister, his lover, his teacher, his everything!

I prayed and prayed and many other fakes came before my husband came right before me. He was an angel until after about ten years he became withdrawn and not so caring. I was consoled anyways by the fact that I was in the center of God's will and come what may, he would get it right with God again and be the man I fell in love with once more.

My prayer for my children had been that they get it right in marriage so I was determined to help them get it right no matter what.

Seeing my confused baby before me now, I knew that it was not time to relax and allow him miss it but I must awaken my spiritual sensitivity once more.

"Seeing men as trees at first is not something new my dear. The blind man that Jesus applied his saliva-mixed clay on his blind eyes said he was seeing men as trees. Then Jesus went further to give him the clearest vision and he could see well. My son, you will see!" I prayed and he hugged my pillow tightly.

"Amen mum. Amen" He said emphatically.

"So, you don't think its Talitha again?" I asked and he bowed his head for a while.

"Mum, see, I love Talitha so madly! I pray for her; she makes me laugh a lot of time and I really pity her. Seeing Angelina in the office, I love the way she prays, she talks about sport so much, she is intelligent too, she is conversant with Scotland where I am envisaging for my future home, I am completely confused. I compared what I have for

Talitha with what I have for Angelina and I see pity or better still, friendship” He said and I sighed.

I had hoped that he would get married to Talitha really!

We would need to pray so that all confusion would be gone, that I knew assuredly.

“Andrew”

“Yes momma”

“We will need to pray the more, okay?”

“Okay mum.”

“We will be giving God some crazy ultimatum here” I said with glee and his eyes widened as his mouth broke into some curves.

“Wow! That sounds scary now, mum” He said and I smiled

“We will declare a fast and ask that your brothers also join in the whole prayers. At the end of seven days, all confusion must be gone. We declare peace in our spirits and our decisions. Amen”

“Amen!” He said firmly as he hit my bed.

“Wow, that’s my momma. She is one in a millionth million” He said as he hugged me tightly. I patted him and smiled wholeheartedly.

My soul blessed him greatly too.

ANDREW

“I studied Engineering” She replied and I gasped

“Wow! I studied Engineering too. I love it when ladies study Engineering. I see them as very strong ladies” I said and she smiled

“Yeah, ladies are awesome, you know?” She said and I smiled.

“Yea, Godly ladies though” I said and she smiled.

“I probably ain’t awesome then” She said as she flipped through some magazine pages.

“Why? You ain’t Godly?” I asked and she smiled

“Maybe” She said again and I smiled.

“It’s not too late anyways. I can easily teach you how to be godly since you are now my friend. I love to keep godly friends” I said and she smiled

“You are Bowen’s brother?” she asked and I nodded

“Yeah, from another mother anyways” I added

“Oh, okay.” She said and she stared into space for a while, tickling her nose with her ball pen.

“He was my crush for two years” She said and I smiled broadly.

“He actually would be anybody’s crush. I love him so greatly too. If I were to be a woman, I would look no further” I laughed and she smiled.

“What if you look no further and he doesn’t even care to look at your side?” She asked and looking into her face, I saw hurt.

Chai, bros must have hurt her!

“Well, if he doesn’t look at me, I look somewhere else then. He is not the only man alive anyways” I said and she smiled ruefully again.

“What if you are too hurt to ever ever open the door of your heart to someone else?” She asked again.

“That is where Jesus comes in, my sister. He said, ‘Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest’ He is ever ready to cure our broken hearts” I said and she nodded as she smiled vaguely again

“Do you believe those words just like that? Just because they are written in the Bible, you believe? I can as well write a book and publish you know?” She said and I knew I had to tell her more.

“These are not just words. They are Words! They are living! I have seen them at work in my life and family, I have seen them at work in my academics, they have been tried and tested. They are inspired Words! I believe in them so greatly!” I said and she nodded severally.

“Hmmm” She nodded. Seeing she nodded, I continued.

“One day, my dad asked my mum to pack her load and leave the house. My mum locked herself in a room, called us immediately and told us to repeat severally with faith and not fear “Peace be still”. My dear sister, we were on that joint international call repeating “Peace be still” for like an hour, speaking in tongues, prophesying and by the time we were done, my mum went back the sitting room where my dad knelt before her saying he didn’t know what he was doing”

“Hmmm, wow! Wow!” She exclaimed excitedly.

“Peace be still was what Jesus used to calm the raging storm while he was travelling with his disciples on a stormy sea. Using it in our stormy family, the storms died down!”

“Wow! Guess I need to get a Bible once again”

“Look at Bros Bowen too. He has a sick sister who calls him daddy. At some point, she was approaching death and Bros had to start praying deeply. In his dream one day, he saw her dead, about to be buried and there was nothing more to do. Just looking up in faith with the dead body in his hands, he screamed in the Spirit, ‘Talitha Cumi!’ The dead body came back to life in the dream and it was effected in real life”

“Wow! Talitha cumi?”

“Yes. It means, ‘Young Lady, rise up! It was Jesus’ Word which he used on a dead child in the Bible. Bros used it too and the whole situation received life”

“Ah, wow! I have never heard it this way before. Wow! I am so happy”

“Yes, sis, I am so happy too. God exalts His Word more than even His Name” I said and she nodded.

“See, I need some Word of God too. I have some aspects that I want to use the Word to remove” She said innocently and I smiled.

“See, its just like in Nigeria. You are not in the army but you want to wear their camouflage. They might arrest you”

“Identity impersonation, right? Those proud soldiers tho” She laughed and I smiled too.

“Well, that is how the Kingdom of God is too. If you are not the member of that kingdom and you don’t have your salvation ID card to prove that you belong, you might not be able to use the Name of Jesus and the Word of God!”

“Oh! Really?”

“Yes my sister. You have to simply confess your sins as sins really, promise to do away with them, accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior and continue to live in His power. Then, you can shoot at the devil, using God’s Word” I said and she gave me a genuine smile too as I led her to Christ right in the studio as Bowen continued with his programme.

“Congrats sis, you are now a child of God” I said as I shook her hands. She looked dazed

“What, just like that?”

“Yes sis, just make sure that you keep to the promise of staying from those things you promised Him never to do again. If you find yourself doing them, just say the prayers of salvation once more and you are fine. In this kingdom, faith is the currency we use daily” I said and she smiled.

“So, I am now a good Christian? Wow!” She exclaimed excitedly.

“Yes, you are. But wait, if you plant a bean seed in a tin and hide it under the bed for two weeks, what will happen to the seed?”

“It will die away nah. I don’t need an angel to tell me that” She said with a rich humorous voice and I smiled.

“You have that seed of righteousness in you already. Continually water it with the Word of God and let the Sun of prayer shower it daily”

“I am so excited. After doing that, if I say, Peace be still to my parents’ scattered relationship, it will be normalized?” She asked and I smiled.

“Yes, when you say it by faith, without doubting” I said and she smiled.

“I will come and share the testimony with you very soon. Oh, thank You Jesus” She said as she handed her phone to me.

“Please put your number in my phone abeg. Ah, God will bless you for me o” She said on as I typed my phone number.

“I don’t want to save your name with Aburo, so tell me your name” She said and I looked up at her and smiled.

“What makes you think that you are older than me? No be by body mass o” I said and she laughed out.

“I am 27, you?” She asked and I smiled
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“I am 27 too.” I said and she looked shocked.

“February 14...” She said and it was my turn to be shocked

“February 14th too” I said excitedly and she frowned a bit.

“Stop playing around joor” She laughed on and I shrugged

“For real. Or, did someone steal my twin sister at birth?” I asked, trying to be funny. She laughed hysterically and slapped my shoulder playfully.

“My name is Andrew” I said and she smiled.

“Let me save your number with Twinny Andy then. Thanks for coming with Dove to work. I was and am greatly blessed” She said and bowed. I smiled heartily and pointed up. She looked up.

“He is happier. Glory to the biggest Daddy” I said and she nodded as she stood up.

“What is your own....” I was trying to ask for her name when someone called from afar.

“Princess!”

She then looked at me and pouted.

“That’s my name. Guess I am being sought after. See you some other time my twinnee. God bless you” We shook hands and she left.

The smile that remained on my face wouldn't go away.

I had won a soul for the Lord!

What other joy is worth having?

DR. (MRS.) RICHARDS

As I raised the tea cup to my mouth, Andrew walked into the kitchen, looking sullen. He took water from the water dispenser and gulped it down his throat. He walked lackadaisically towards me afterwards.

“I thought you went with Bowen again today. Didn't know you were inside” I said as I washed my cup with soapy water in the sink.

“I've been indoor. But there's something strange”

“Oh, what is that?”

“On my way, I decided to check on Tally and met her deeply crying. She is deeply soaked in tears. I pestered her to tell me what is happening to her but she wouldn’t tell me. We’ve been on that for over an hour now. I am exhausted” He said as he rubbed his forehead

“Oh wow! I knew it. Last week, I heard someone sobbing but she denied. I wonder what the matter is. I will talk to her. You can go and meet Bowen now” I said and he nodded as he walked out.

I walked to the fridge and paused a while as I stared in space.

Holy Spirit, please help this girl to trust me. Let her open up to me and tell me what is happening? Give me the wisdom to help her too if need be, Lord!

I picked a pack of juice and poured in a tall glass.

Please comfort her Lord!

I spooned some ice cubes into it and placed on a tray and started strolling prayerfully to her room.

She was snugly fitted into her duvet and she didn’t move as I entered.

I dropped the tray on a stool and helped her to sit up- her face looked swollen.

“Come and have a cup of juice my baby girl” I said as I placed it close to her mouth. Though she struggled with me not to drink it, I won as soon, she was gulping the fruit pulp down her throat.

I rubbed her very big tummy afterwards and kissed it lovingly while she smiled faintly.

“What’s on your mind?” I asked as I sat beside her and placed my arm round her neck.

“Nothing much mum” She said and I smiled

“Tell me small nah, please” I said as I nudged at her earlobes with my lips. She shook at that and started laughing excitedly.

I paused and looked into her face.

“You felt that?” I asked and she kept laughing still.

“The air from your nose was hot against my neck. It was ticklish” She said and my eyes must have tripled in size.

“You felt my warm breath? Isn’t that wonderful?” I asked and pinched her thigh but she obviously couldn’t feel that.

I hugged her.

“You will be well. You will be fine. I can see the changed being effected. My God will do it.” I said and she smiled faintly.

“What is your fear? What is the cause of your heart’s sorrows? Trust me and please talk to me my love” I said and she smiled.

“This baby...” She said as she rubbed her tummy.

“What about it?” I asked and she sighed.

“What if he doesn’t survive? I am afraid that carrying this pregnancy is a futile exercise, really” She said and blinked severally so that her tears wouldn’t fall.

“Your baby will be fine my love. I am so sure that he will be fine. When the time is ripe, we will help with bringing it out” I said and she smiled.

“Wow, thank you ma” She said and I smiled too.

Ask further! Dig deep!

“But the Holy Spirit is making me to understand that you are hiding some things from me. The major cause of your tears, you haven’t told me yet” I said and she looked into my eyes calculatedly for a while.

“The Holy Spirit told you that?” She asked again and I nodded.

“Hmmm ... I actually have a big problem. I don’t know what to do and who to turn to. If I tell you now, I don’t know in what light you will be looking at me hence forth. I don’t trust anybody, any Christian anymore! They could be so judgmental” She said and I smiled.

“Since over six months that you have been here, have I judged you my dear? I can’t judge you because God is not judging you yet, He is loving you, that’s all. I love you too. That’s it” I said and she raised her eyes as if to say I should not go further.

“Mummy, don’t preach to me ma” She said and smiled faintly. I smiled too.

“It is well my daughter. I am praying for you. Please trust me and let me know” I said and she held her chest tight as she started crying anew.

“The problem is right here. It is really painning me” she said and I reached for her chest.

“Oh my God! I pray you don’t have ulcer in there yet” I said as I hurriedly unbuttoned her shirt to have access to her chest.

“Not that, mum” She said and I looked into her face.

“What then?” I asked

“I am in love with an impossible person. How could I ever be in love again? Do I deserve it? If I were to love, why would it be that person? Oh my!” She started crying all over again.

I was confused but I held her hands close to my heart as I prayerfully asked God for what to say next.

“First darling, I will say that loving someone is not something we have power over. We love someone because God placed such on our hearts. The Bible says Jonathan loved David like his own soul” I explained as she sniffed the more.

“Also, you are talking about you deserving it. What are you saying child? You are beautiful, you are very young, you are a shining star, why would you say you don’t deserve to love? Why? You are more than able to love. Forget that you will be having a child soon, when you get to that bridge, you will cross it”

“It’s because you don’t understand what I am saying mum. I am in love with an impossible person. Don’t you get that side? The person doesn’t even love me in returns. The person doesn’t care” She said further and I started thinking.

An impossible person!

It definitely wouldn’t be my Andrew as all and sundry knew that he did care for her.

And Bowen, oh no! He could talk to her on phone from morning to night, telling his daughter what and what went on with him during the day.

Who then could it be?

Or my husband?

I shook my head at that thought and rubbed her cheek.

“Nobody is impossible dear. If it is a genuine love, God will bring you both together.”

“Even if the person is married?” She asked and I stopped there at once.

Married?

“What? Who is that? Tell me” I said like hot yam was in my mouth.

“Your husband. Daddy” She said and my heart hit the rock a number of time before it started strolling down the river bank. As it was about jumping into the river, I picked it and stuck it in its cage again.

“Daddy? Our daddy?” I asked and she nodded again.

“It’s impossible, you see” She said and I was confused.

My husband even hardly visited her room, he didn’t talk much with her, he probably didn’t even know her name, how on earth could she have feelings for him?

I stood up and went to the table. I picked his frame and took it back to her.

“You mean this daddy?” I asked and she covered her mouth as she laughed briefly.

“That’s grandpa. I mean daddy, your husband” She argued and she brought out her phone and gave me.

“That daddy. He’s not been coming here for a while. Are you both quarreling? He even hardly calls anymore. Well, it’s good, so that I will stop building some fantasy up in my head” She said and I smiled.

“You love Bowen?” I asked and she nodded.

“It’s right in here. When he prays for me, even though I find it very difficult to say amen, it comes to pass. When he tells me ‘You’ll be fine’, then my heart jumps up as it believes. I don’t really understand how I feel about him. It is stronger than what I had for Uncle

Jeff. It is strong ... it is such a blissful feeling, but for my dad? Oh God!" She started crying again and I smiled.

"You will be fine my lovely daughter. You will be very fine. Just believe." I said as I rubbed her chest.

I wanted her to calm down.

I wanted to tell her that Bowen was not her dad and it was okay to fall in love with him.

I wanted to tell her that she would be fine and she needed not cry.

But how do I tell her? How? I dreaded another relapse in her health. I dreaded it greatly.

Hospital!

"Hospital?" I muttered to myself again to weigh it. I didn't get at first but when I got what innovative idea the Holy Spirit had dropped on my mind, I jumped up and slithered like a snake to her wardrobe. I picked a nice, flowery maternity gown for her and threw it at her.

**“Put that on and wear a nice slip on. Let me go and get dressed too. Let’s go out together”
I said and I saw as she tried to stand up from her bed, very excited.**

**“Wow! Yes, I need to clear my head. It’s been a while I stepped out of this house. Good!”
I heard her say to herself as I closed the door behind me. I smiled as I pressed my phone**

“Hello Mama the doctor!”

“Hello Bowen the star!”

“Ah, mummy oooo” He screamed

“Are you done for the day?”

“No ma. I have a two-hour break before my next programme. Any problem?”

“Can you join me at the hospital?” I asked

“What? Is Talitha okay ma?” He asked and I smiled

“She is very fine. Just come over. See you soon” I dropped the call and checked for a nice evening gown too.

I felt so excited!

TALITHA

It was as if bees were buzzing in my head!

I looked from the image on the bed to the image standing close to my mum- there was no semblance at all!

The face of the man on the bed looked so familiar that it hurt my heart that I could not place the face.

He smiled at me and I winced.

“You look very familiar grandpa. Do you know me?” I asked, smiling as I touched his shoulder. Tears ran down his face.

“Mum, your patient is crying” I called out and she smiled.

“I am sure that he will be fine. Don’t worry. Maybe your face looks familiar to him too” Mum said and I nodded.

“I said it!” I racked my brain as I bent my head to look at the face again.

“Princess Tally” The man said slowly and my eyes widened.

My eyes got blurred for a while and I had to swallow for a while as a 6D television got opened at the back of my eyes.

“I regret the day you were born to this world. I regret! Oh Lord, I regret!”

My heart resumed pumping again as I looked further into the face.

“I hate you!”

The horrible scenes relived in my face once again.

Oh mercy!

“You suck!” I remembered him say as he pulled at my neck and spat into my face

“Out of my house!” I remembered how he kicked me out though I had hit my buttocks against a nail in the wall.

I blocked my ears immediately as my heart started beating as if it would fall out in a jiffy. I looked at mummy as I swallowed deeply.

“Get into the car. We have to go somewhere tonight”

I pointed at him then and afterwards covered my suspended mouth with my shaky hands.

“No!” I screamed as my lips started shaking vehemently.

I was almost falling backwards but for my mum that held my back immediately.

I broke free from her embrace and staggered to the man on the bed. I rolled up his right sleeve and saw that round, black birthmark. The birthmark I had always played with as a child.

“Is it the mark of the devil?” I asked one day and he laughed broadly as he explained.

“It is from birth, so it is called birth mark. It is not from the devil. It is from birth” He had explained with love then.

I looked at the other man standing and staggered to him like a drunk man. I took his right hand and kept rolling the sleeve. I could find no birth mark.

I looked into the face that sent my heart jumping a little deeper and my mouth opened up in shock as I struggled for words.

“So, you are the Pastor’s first son abi? You are part of the people deceiving us with Christianity, right?”

I moved backwards and covered my mouth at that point.

“I am not indebted to you or your family or your church! I was not, I am not and never will I be!”

I could see at the back of my mind how I vomited inside his mouth.

“My God!” I exclaimed as I staggered backwards inside mum’s arms once more.

“That was intentional! How did it taste, huh? Bitter? That’s how my stomach feels towards you all. I will never trust any of you even if you donate your eyes to save me! I hate all of you and I don’t want to be contaminated by your miserable lives.”

“Seriously?” I asked myself

“Pastor’s son, leave me alone!”

I shook my head vehemently as the events of those days relived in my head.

“I don’t think I have done anything to deserve you slapping me across the head Talitha. As far as I can remember, I am far older than you, excuse me”

“Ah!” I exclaimed as I surveyed the hands, I must have used to slap him.

“Yes, go and tell them that she is not only pregnant but she is now drinking alcohol, and that she had renounced their Bible and that she will never worship their God. Tell then she is a lunatic and she even slapped an older brother. In fact, tell your dad that the Sunday sermon be centered round Talitha! Okay”

I fell on my knees at that point and he tried to bring me up but I wouldn’t let him do so.

“You are all the same. You can’t because you donated your blood and served as a day driver act all angelic. You are all evil like that! You are a bunch of disgrace. A flock of hypocrites!”

“Forgive me” I started crying.

“I was looking for a gun! If I can lay hold on one, I will kill you, kill my dad, kill all your family members and kill anybody who dares mention care or Jesus beside me! Go!”

“I was wrong! I was so wrong sir. Forgive me” I cried further as I held his shoes with so great a firmness. I watched as my tears designed his well-polished shoes but I was inconsolable.

“Take that thing out of this place as you move out”

“Me?! I am the thing that should be taken out? Ah!”

“Ah, it was not intentional sir. I didn’t mean all that I said ... Ah!” I cried the more

“Tally, please stand up dear. I have forgiven you a long time ago my daughter” He said again as he helped me up from my knees.

“I want to accept Jesus as my Lord and Personal Savior” I cried out and his eyes and his mouth widened in shock.

“Ah, Oluwa ese oooo.” Mummy started jumping in awe.

“You want to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Is that what you are saying?” He asked me and looking into his handsome, shocked face, I was sure of what I was saying.

“Oh my God! Ah, glory to Your Name my Lord” I heard mum exclaim behind me again.

“I’ve got my mind made up once and for all. If everyone that had been bad to me could come back and show me overwhelming love again, it means that Jesus is Lord!” I said as my heart quivered.

“Yes, He is!” Mum exclaimed.

“It means that I have all it takes to worship the Lord Almighty.” I said again as I nodded with assurance.

“Yes princess. You have all it takes as long as you have life” My dad must have said from the bed.

“I am more intrigued by Uncle Bowen. I can remember now how I had screamed at him to leave me alone! I had told him I didn’t want to have anything to do with him anymore. I had attempted to stab him, I hated him so much even though he gave me his blood when I needed life” I said on as I was about kneeling again but he didn’t allow me. He held my shoulders firmly and smiled graciously at me.

“I want that Jesus that would make a man throw himself away that way because of an ungrateful child! A child that deserves to be treated as shit was treated as a queen- that

means a lot! I want that Jesus” I said with my eyes closed so firmly, my hands raised up high.

“Oh God! ... Halleluyah!” I heard him shout

“Oh, what a wonderful, wonderful day, day I will never forget....” I heard my dad sing while mummy joined in the chorus.

It was indeed a day I will never forget!

The day I met Jesus.

DOVE

“Till next week, when I will be coming your way with another edition of this programme, remember that God’s love over you will never ever cease. It’s your one and only Bowen Adameji. D to the O to the V to the E is my name. Have a wonderful day” I switched off the mic and dropped the head set. I looked around for a while, yawned and gulped down some cold water from my water bottle.

“Thank You Jesus!” I exclaimed as I opened the door.

Just outside the studio was Princess. She was smiling with glee.

I wondered what she was up to again.

But that smile looked different. I smiled and walked towards her.

“Hello Princess”

“Hi Dove. Nice presentation. God bless you” She said and I gasped as I looked at her from head to toes.

“Thanks, my producer. By the way, you look so beautiful and decent in your lovely attire. You look changed” I said as she really did look different.

Asides the fact that her clothes were not revealing, her make-over was completely moderate.

She smiled as she stood before me.

“Love makes anew. Love changes things. Love is beautiful”

“Ehn ehn, tell me something. What is the love poem about?” I asked as she beat her hands together rhythmically.

“I have found my love too Dove and it’s not one sided this time around. It’s a full blown, godly love” She said and I couldn’t but gasp.

“Godly love? Hmmm ... tell me something!” I looked into her very bright face interestedly.

“You decided not to tell me about Jesus but instead kept on binding and casting the jezebellic spirit in me, right? Well, I met Andy, Andy met me. He came into my life and led me to Christ. Now, I am born again! He loves me, I love him and my dad loves him too! ... Ho la la!” She swung her car key round her finger. I didn’t know if I was to be happy or not.

Andy?

Who is Andy for God’ sake?

I thought it would be Andrew. I would have been the happiest on earth.

I had realized the burning chemistry between Princess and Andrew for some weeks. He always loved to go to the office with me but would instead spend his time in Princess' office. He spent long hours with her on phone and rarely had time for Talitha.

I was hoping they would end up together so I could have my Tally to myself and now it was so sure that Andrew still loved Talitha or if not, why would he allow someone else snatch Princess from him?

Why?

I saw the surprise on Princess' face and I smiled

"Aren't you happy for me?" She asked and I laughed softly then.

"Not happy? God forbid. That's like the best news I have heard in like three weeks but I was just wondering why it is Andy and not Andrew? See, more than any Andy, Andrew loves you with everything that..." I was saying when she started walking away as she swung her car key on her finger.

"Andy, Andrew ... Andy, Andrew!" She kept singing as she went.

“Oh my!” I started laughing gladly as it dawned on me.

“So, Andy is Andrew?” I asked and I saw her raised hand curved to give me a thumbs-up

“Wow, congratulations Princess. You will enjoy that guy, he is a good cook, a child of God, very caring, very loving, very...” I kept on saying as I watched her turn at a corner.

“Yes, I know!” She screamed happily and I started smiling so heartily.

“Lord, this is unbelievable! This is unbelievable! Oh my!” I exclaimed as I reached for my pocket.

I needed to make an important decision right there!

DOVE’S MUM

I stepped down from the treadmill, dripping with sweat.

“So, that’s all for today. I have tried” I said as I wiped my face with a face towel and afterwards wrapped it round my neck.

My phone rang and I picked it up. I smiled.

“Hello my prince”

“Hello mum”

“How are you darling?”

“I am very fine mum. I want to find out something quickly mum”

“Go on”

“You will be fifty-seven next month, I will be thirty-one in two months also”

“Yes, so what? What is the matter?”

“Mum, are you ready to be a mother-in-law?”

I gasped as I looked at the phone as if to smack him from over the phone

“Of course, see, is that even supposed to be a question?” I grinned

“Mum, what if ...erm....”

“What’s that? Talk to me” I said impatiently.

“What if God is saying that it is Talitha?”

I sighed heavily.

I knew that the day when I would be faced with the bitter truth that my boy had fallen in love with Talitha would come. I knew it!

“Whatever God asks you to do from now on, even without telling me, please do! ... Was that not what I told you a few months ago? Why are you telling me this then?” I shouted into the phone and I heard a gleeful scream from the other side.

“You love her that...” I was saying when the call dropped.

“Oh my God!” I exclaimed again as I remembered all that God had told me about the issue and what people would say.

I had always wanted a chaste, very sexually chaste lady for my children. Someone I could be proud of and tell youths in church that “You see my beautiful daughter-in-law; she was a virgin on her wedding night”

My dream was dashed against the stone.

I looked at the treadmill then and nodded.

“I am actually not done yet” I said as I climbed again and made it run very fast.

I needed God to come take charge of my life.

I wanted all my children to submit to God's Will no matter how difficult.

"God, give me a heart like Yours. A heart that totally yields though everything looks very difficult. What You want to do with me, do not mind my frowning face and do it, Lord! Your will oh Lord! I'll say yes!"

I nodded severally and swallowed.

"I'll say yes or yes to Your Will and to Your way, I'll say yes or yes, I will trust You and obey, when Your Spirit speaks to me, with my whole heart I'd agree, and my heart will be yes or yes" I sang on, running fast, panting, sweating...

... tears strolling down my face!

DOVE

"Oh dad, you finally succeeded in making me finish the whole bowl of Ice-cream! C'mon!" she exclaimed as I helped her to sit in a comfortable recliner.

“Yeah, but we played football a little so you must have sent out the sugar through the sweat nah” I said and she laughed excitedly.

“Ok, Doctor Dove. I hear you” She laughed again and I joined her too.

“So, you are making jest of me, huh?”

“Who am I?” She asked sarcastically again and I smiled.

“You are supposed to do some frog jumps you know” I said and her eyes widened.

“Oh, that can’t be today anymore, dad. I need to rest now. Please” She said and I pretended to think about it after which I nodded.

“That’s okay then.” I said and sat on a small mat beside her.

The silence between us was as thick as darkness.

“Talitha, can I ask you a question?” I asked calmly after a while and I saw her go tensed as sweat appeared underneath her nose.

“The blood I donated while you were sick in Abuja, I want it back from you” I said and looked deeply into her face. All her facial holes became enlarged as she swallowed.

“I don’t get that sir” She managed to say after a while.

My heart had started jogging then. I scratched my head and blinked several times, trying to calm my disobedient heart down.

“If you can’t give me the blood then, I want you to be the blood of my blood” I said and I couldn’t believe I was the one talking. Everything sounded like gibberish.

No one would even believe I had been doing some hours of proposal rehearsal before my dressing mirror every day.

“What?” She asked, her face curved in a question mark. I felt dehydrated all of a suddenly. I loosened the first button holding my designer shirt. It didn’t matter anymore if it was a designer or not.

“See, Talitha, I want us to share all together. Our sweat, blood, bone, flesh, spirit, soul, everything!” I said and she sighed as if I was offering her some hard-mathematical equations to solve.

“I still don’t get” She said and I gasped too. I went on my knees before her and held her warm, beautiful legs. She shook her head and was about talking when I cut in.

“Talitha Bode-Davies...” I called as I looked into her eyes deeply.

It was the first time I was looking intently at her and though I was on the hot seat, I realized that she had really grown lean. She looked really fresh and beautiful but underneath her eyes were some bags. She must have gone through a lot.

I realized that she was also breathing at a rapid rate and that was when I realized what burden the pregnancy must have been.

It felt as if I should carry her into my hands and sooth her. I couldn’t wait to pet her and call her sweet names.

I couldn’t wait also to show her that the God-way is just the best way to tread as it is full of love.

I was impatient, my hands trembled, my lips shook, my head ached, my heart throbbed, I needed to do it quickly.

I needed to make her know how I felt.

“I want you to marry me, Talitha. Please be my wife” I said, my eyes boring into hers searchingly.

In a second, a tear dropped down her face, and another and another. I blinked severally as I saw her shake her head in the negative.

I fell to the grasses behind me as her jaws clenched against each other and when she was about saying the answer, I couldn't bear it.

I covered my ears with my two hands and looked into her red, teary face as she said the No!

And though my ears were blocked, I could hear as if ten microphones were placed in all the different parts of my body to witness to me that I was refused!

My proposal was turned down!

Talitha wasn't going to marry me!

"I am sorry" I heard her say again. I watched helplessly as she stood up from the recliner and started running away barefooted. I buried my head into my hands and wept.

I had not wept for thirty seconds when I remembered that the lady running away was pregnant.

"Oh my!" I exclaimed as I picked her slippers, packed the mat and recliner and started running after her.

As I ran after her, the ground seemed to be fading; my heart seemed to be failing; my voice wouldn't even call out to stop her.

It felt as if my world was crashing!

I never ever saw the 'No' coming!

CHAPTER 11

DR.(MRS.) RICHARDS

I knocked for the umpteenth time!

“Bowen, please come have your food. It’s 6pm already and you have not eaten for two days” I called out again anxiously.

“Don’t worry ma. I will be fine. I am fine” He replied from inside the guest room.

Since her birth was approaching and I had resumed work plus Andrew was busy making preparations for his travelling, I had asked Bowen to come in from his office daily so that he could be of help anytime.

He came in three days before, looking saltless. I was very shocked as I had never seen him that way before.

“Is everything alright?” I asked again.

I tried to rack my brain but I could not find anything.

The other day Bowen came to take her for a walk, Talitha walked in silently when she came back and all efforts to make her eat breakfast the next day proved abortive.

Or was there a problem between them?

Did Talitha tell him about her feelings?

“Oh my!” I covered my mouth in shock at that thought.

“That’s impossible! Ehn, so impossible” I exclaimed silently once more. I knocked again and waited.

“Is there a problem between your daughter and you?” I asked again

“She is not my daughter ma. She has seen her father already” He said and I thought that sounded too hot.

Something must be wrong.

“You haven’t even seen her since you came here. And I invited you here majorly because of her” I said again since I knew he was heating up. He might talk, I thought.

“I don’t want to see her” He said and I was troubled.

What could be wrong?

Is he having feelings for her already and couldn’t tell her?

He probably didn’t even know that Talitha loved him already.

“What can I do?” I asked myself as I bit my thumb. I was anxious to know if he loved her too or if the whole thing was just one-sided.

I looked round the passage and thought deeply. Suddenly, I banged my legs on the floor

“Oh my God!” I shouted as I banged the legs again.

“Talitha. Oh Jesus!” I exclaimed and banged my legs on the floor as if I was running.

Magically, the door opened and looking towards it, I saw a very shocked, swollen, scared face. He literally jumped out of his bed like a plane crash survivor landing with his parachute.

“Where’s she? What happened mum? Where is she?” He asked as he looked around. I looked at him from head to toes and only then did I recognize the two different types of slippers he was wearing.

I couldn’t stop the laughter.

I laughed so much that I had to wipe the tears from my face and rub the sides of my head as they were aching already.

“Mum, you lied to me?” He asked and I sniffed wetly as I recovered from the laughter fit.

“This kain love o, na serious love nwantintin” I sang and started laughing again. He rested against the door post and rubbed his forehead.

“You scared me, mum” He said and I walked close to him, placing my hand on his chest.

It was beating so fast.

“I know you love her so much. It’s so obvious. Why are you pretending?” I asked again softly.

The cunning smile on my face must have made his stomach flicker as he frowned a bit.

He rubbed his forehead again.

“Of what use is the love that is thrown down to the ground and trampled under feet?” He said and I looked into his hurt face.

“Thrown and tramp....” I was saying when I heard the shattering of glass from inside.

Both of us exchanged looks immediately.

“Talitha...” He screamed and we started running towards her room.

“Mummmmmmmmmmyyyyyyy” Talitha screamed all of a sudden from inside

“Oh my God” I exclaimed as we literally jumped down the stairs to her room.

DOVE

“What kind of dangerous posture is this, Talitha, eh?” Mrs. Richards asked as we ran towards the bed.

Talitha kept hitting her head on the floor while her body remained on the bed, her protruding tummy, really obvious.

She was wriggling in pain. Mrs. Richards tried helping her up and I went near too, packing the bedspread so we could help her sit up.

“Mummy, did she bed-wet?” I asked anxiously as the bedsheet was a bit wet. Mrs. Richards collected the bedspread and felt it too. Talitha was moaning, sweat running down her face.

“It’s her water. Her water has broken. Oh my God!” Mrs. Richards exclaimed and I kept wondering what that was.

“Oh Lord! ... yeeeeeh” Talitha cried harder as she pulled at my trouser.

Just then, there was a kind of heavy slap on my shoulder. I never knew I was lost in thoughts. It was Mrs. Richards.

“What are you thinking about just now? Let’s carry the girl to the hospital...” She said anxiously and I nodded as I tried holding her up.

“But...” I stopped and shook my head for a while.

“Can’t you see she is in pain Bowen, let’s...” Mrs. Richards was saying when I looked into her face excitedly.

“Wait ma ... she is in what?” I asked again, to be very sure.

“Bowen, why are you like this? She is in pain for goodness sake...oh my God, Bowen why are you..” She was saying dejectedly, probably wondering why I was behaving weird. I held her shoulder then as I pointed to Talitha with a wide smile on my face.

“She can feel! She can feel” I started screaming and Mrs. Richards shook her head in disbelief.

“Feel. That’s not true” She said interestedly too. She slapped her thigh just then and Talitha screamed in shock.

“What have I done?” She cried louder.

“It is a lie oooo” Mrs. Richards screamed as we gladly rushed her out of the house.

Glory!

DR. RICHARDS

“Hello doc, let’s meet at the consult now. The girl has been rushed out of the house just now. She felt pain. We need to work on her immediately to monitor and make documentations” I said and dropped the call.

I picked my briefcase then and moved to Talitha’s room.

“My wife must have forgotten that the head of the obstetrician is still in here” I said as I rolled my sleeves.

It would definitely be a busy time for the team as we bring her child out.

I paused as I surveyed the room again.

“Unbelievable! You mean to tell me that her dead system accepted the invasion of antibiotics in her body? ... Unbelievable” I exclaimed again as I closed the door behind me and walked to the door.

“Like, it was a very chronic disorder, yes, very sure ... Hmmm ... this is nothing but a miracle” I kept talking to myself.

While I knew that the chances of having a record-breaking research had been defeated to an extent, I was amazed at the way all happened.

I had had countless sleepless nights trying to procure different sides to the strange ailment; I had consulted personalities in and outside Nigeria to no avail and here was the girl feeling pain again.

“That their Jesus must really be great right? ... Guess I need to find out what His terms and conditions are like once again” I said as my phone rang.

I turned the ignition key and using handsfree, picked my call.

“Hello Doc Richards. You must have forgotten your husband at home. Anyways, I am on my way” I said and zoomed off.

DOVE

My hands were trembling!

My stomach tightening!

My bladder seemed to be failing too!

I imagined how the knife would be used on Talitha to bring out the baby. The nurses had hinted me that she wouldn't be able to deliver herself. I couldn't help but walk to and fro the theatre porch, praying in the Spirit.

I held my chest as I saw Dr. Richards move to the door, he was holding some gloves. Just then, his wife came running after him. She had changed into the garb too.

Dr. Richards turned to look at his wife.

“Hey wifey, I have enough surgeons in there. I don’t need any emotional interference whatever so step aside” He said and Mrs. Richards smiled, nodding reluctantly.

“Ok dearie. The Lord will go with you then. He will help you and use your very hands to...” She started praying.

The husband turned towards her and frowned slightly.

“Tag along, Mrs. Prayer. Guess we will need more of that in there” He said and his shocked wife smiled as she moved towards him. He turned to look at my side and I smiled.

“Lover boy, pray fire more! Talitha must cumi!” He said to me and I saw him smiling for the very first time since I had met him.

I managed to smile a bit too as my head started pounding.

What if she died?

What if the much-expected baby died?

What if the situation got more complicated?

I slapped my chest over and over again as I trained it to think good thoughts!

DOVE

I sighed again as I counted the many divisions of the ceiling.

My legs wouldn't stop shaking as I smiled again.

“Thank You Jesus” I exclaimed again. Just then, the door leading to the private ward opened and Mrs. Richards came out. I smiled as I stood up.

“Bowen, why have you not entered?” She asked, her brows knitting into a frown. I smiled

“I am happy that she is fine and the baby is fine too. I don’t want to enter ma. How is she?” I asked and Mrs. Richards smiled as she moved closer to me.

“We entered the theatre o. After we had bombarded her system with enough analgesics, my husband asked me to pray before the operation would start and I prayed. Just as my husband was about dipping the knife into her, out of fear, she screamed ‘stop’ and started speaking in tongues o...” She said and my eyes widened in shock.

“Tell me something” I exclaimed interestedly and she smiled graciously.

“My husband just stood there, amazed. We were very shocked. She then screamed ‘Dove told me that it is written in the Bible and that I should always declare it. I believe and declare as it is in the Book of Isaiah 66:8 that as soon as Zion travails, she brings forth her child ... hence, as I have travailed now, I bring forth my child in Jesus’ Name!’ She explained on, demonstrating as she did. My heart started pounding at the mention of my name and the way the whole thing turned out to be.

“What!” I was trembling with excitement.

“Instantly, Bowen” Mrs. Richards started picking her words. Impatiently, I kept nodding for more

“HMMMM ... Tell me more” I said agitatedly

“Instantly, we saw the head coming out of her ooooo” She danced, shaking her whole body as she did

“Oh God! Incredible God doing incredible things! Oh God!” I threw my fists in the air joyously.

“That’s not all o” She said and I stopped in my tracks.

“What else....”

“She screamed, ‘Something is coming out again oh my God! Yeh, eh...’ We were shocked and looked o. Bowen, lo and behold, it was another baby! Making two wonderful and healthy boys!” She said at last and there was a real festival in my head.

“Ma! What ... But the scan didn’t say that earlier...” I said and she nodded as she walked in front of me majestically.

“I tell you my brother! God is wonderful o ... Chai! You are marvelous iye, You are marvelous iye, you are marvelous iye...” She started dancing and singing.

“You are marvelous iye...You are marvelous iye!” Dr. Richards joined us and I was intrigued by the rich baritone. He was wearing a very sweet smile

After a while, we were all laughing and congratulating one another.

“But sir, your voice earlier ... you will do well in the choir sir” I said and his wife raised her nose and smiled.

“I will think about it, son. It’s a very good idea” He said and his wife looked shocked and then smiled.

“Won’t you go inside and see her?” He asked me

“I will go when I am ready sir” I replied and smiled softly. He came close to me and put his arm round my shoulder.

“Well, see my son, you will have to go and see her right away ... erm, you see, I might not be so active in the house but I know all that is going on in there. I know about your heartbreak too because she said no ... you see, erm...” He was saying and really, I had determined to put that behind me. It was like opening up an already healing wound.

“Sir, no problem at...” I was saying when he cut in.

“Oh! I have started seeing you as a prophet fa ... no need to lie o, my pastor ... hehehe ... I know this thing called love can be very funny ...” He said and laughed. His wife smiled as she looked at me and I was left with no option but to smile too.

“At the early stage of her pregnancy, we realized that if she was allowed to give birth herself, she might lose her womb” He started explaining

“Oh really!” I exclaimed too, looking deeply into his face. He nodded.

“Yes, but surprising, her womb is still intact” He said excitedly and his wife nodded with a huge smile too.

“Miracle worker the Mighty King!” She exclaimed. I looked into their faces and gasped.

“Oh, was that why she said ‘no’ to me? Because of an ordinary womb? What is womb when we have two executively miraculous boys waiting for our marital consumption?” I asked as my heart started throbbing again.

“Consumption? Is that how excited you are?” Dr. Richards asked as they both laughed at me. I laughed briefly and looked into his face.

“Please show me where she is” I said with so much readiness.

“Who?” Mrs. Richards teased. I held her hands suddenly and squeezed them with all firmness my quivering hands could gather.

“What ward is my wife?” I screamed excitedly as we followed Dr. Richards as he led us into the ward.

TALITHA

“Daddy” I teased him as he entered, beaming with smiles

“Eh eh, come here o, don’t dad-zone me again ... never ever!” He said and we all burst into laughter.

He went down on his knees close to the door and looked serious.

“Will you marry me Talitha, wombful or wombless?”

We all burst into another round of laughter.

“Even if I wanted to say yes before, I won’t o” I said, raising my nose at him.

“Ah, why?” The Richards asked in unison and Bowen nodded at them.

“Please help me ask o” He said

“Because you are coming with so much authority nah!” I said and he ran to my side then, buried his face in the bed sheet and then looked into my eyes squarely.

“Errrm ... Talitha, I have fallen in love with you so uncontrollably and I can’t help myself anymore. I want you to be my wife in sickness, need and forever, wombful or wombless” He said again and I shook my head as I smiled.

“Naughty boy!” Dr. Richards laughed.

“Please have mercy on him o, my baby girl. At least, because of the two different slippers on his legs” Mrs. Richards said as she started laughing with her husband. I bent to look at his legs and I couldn’t control myself. I laughed till I had no more laughter inside while he stood, covering his face shyly.

“With these kinds of shoes sef, I won’t say yes o” I said again and he stood up and jumped at me in a sweet, warm hug.

“It’s love. It’s love’s confusion that did that to me” He said into my ears

“Hey, we shouldn’t be doing this. We are supposed to be in a Christian courtship, c’mon!” I exclaimed as I tried pushing him away.

“She said yes!” Mrs. Richards started jumping up while Bowen, raised his hands up in the sky. I couldn’t but laugh.

Just then, one of the babies started crying.

“Daddy, can you please pass the baby from the cot?” I said to Bowen but he shrugged.

“I am not daddy o. Lilai!” He exclaimed and there was another round of laughter in the ward.

“Daddy, pity our baby nah” I teased further but he pouted and kept shrugging

“No. Until you change that name” He said with a playful frown. I was enjoying myself so I smiled.

“Oh, ok ... Papa, please help me...” I was saying when everyone burst out laughing again

“I am not playing with you again” Bowen said and my soul stirred within me. I had found a very good man for myself. I could never have imagined that it would be Bowen. Never!

I never knew he would reciprocate that love- not in my wildest dream!

As he handed the baby to me, he gave me a very sweet smile that sent my heart strolling and back!

“Henceforth, when I want to feed my baby, you turn your back or go out of the room. We are not married yet. Is that taken?” I said like a mummy that I had become. He nodded with a funny smile.

“Oh, yes! That is very true! Hmmm ... yes ma” He said and I frowned slightly.

“Ma?” I asked with another frown. He laughed

“Oh, so, it’s paining you now, right? When you were calling me daddy nko?” He said and he eyed me.

“Please don’t let me grow old quickly o” I said as I pecked my baby’s cheeks

“And you want my head to turn grey?” He asked and I smiled.

“OK, call me something sweet first. I will think about what to call you then” I said and seemed to think for a while

“Hmmmmm...Queen Tally?”

“That sounds daddyish” I said as I shook my head

“Ok ... Tallie-love” He said and I laughed

“Ok ... I can manage that” I said shyly.

“Mine nko?”

“Hmmm ... Dovey?” I asked and he smiled

“I like that. Can you use it in a sentence now, I want it to sink in my being” He said and I smiled.

He was being childish and I wanted to deal with him ... hehehe

“Ok ... Dovey, please can you kindly turn your back? I wanna feed my baby, please” I said and everyone in the room laughed so hysterically.

“Aish! That’s harsh” He said as he turned his back at me while instead of feeding my baby, I only admired on and on, the loving man that my soul had found.

“What!”

I heard that and turned to look towards the door. Dr. Richards was on his knees before his wife who covered her mouth in surprise

“Another proposal?” Bowen asked

“Wifey, will you lead me to Christ who has been the only source of joy in the lives of these ones?” He asked and oh what joy that filled my soul as I saw mummy pull him up and hug him with tears on her face.

“I knew this day would come. I just knew you will be changed one day. Thank you, Jesus!” She cried on while I could only smile as tears had gathered in my eyes too.

“Thank You Savior” My husband-to-be muttered too, smiling and waving heartily.

I was so joyful!

CHAPTER 12

HAPPIE

“Mum, are you sure that taking my Fifteen and ten years old children to a Christian summer camp all alone will be fine?” I asked again as I shut the travelling box.

“Well, you and your husband are going for a business trip in Dubai, right? And he wants you to drop the children at the summer camp, right? Go drop them then. They will be fine” My mum said as she helped buckle the shoes of Brenda, my second child.

“Brenda, would you love to go?” I asked and she nodded, frowning a bit.

“Why are you frowning then?” I asked and she pouted.

“Mohana, what’s up with your sister?” I asked and the latter smiled with her mouth cornflakes-ful.

“Mum, we all know you are spontaneous but please. It would be hell if you cancel this trip. We’ve looked forward to it, really!” She said and my mum nodded in agreement.

“Even Sonia and Serena will be coming too” Brenda said eventually.

“Who are those?” I asked as I started wheeling their bags outside while they came from behind me.

“Sonia Richards is my new friend. Serena Richards is her sister and Brenda’s friend. They are our classmates too” Mohana explained.

“They just came back from Scotland” Brenda added.

“It’s alright” I said as I locked the car trunk.

“I told them we just came back from Ukraine too so they shouldn’t be proud” Mohana said and I gasped.

“Well, I am from Nigeria and I am proud of that fact. Why should I be proud of someone else’s country?” My mum asked from behind and I smiled as I looked towards the house.

“Honey, we are ready. Let’s go please” I announced.

“Learn to be humble, my girls. Even if your classmates have visited Russia, Jamaica, Brazil, Italy, Dubai and the likes, that does not define them. That does not mean they are better than you. This is our home. This is Nigeria. Don’t compete or go around showing off anymore, my dear children. You hear me?” My mum said again and I smiled.

“Yes granny” They replied gently as they retired at the back seat.

“Mum, we will be back soon. Or would you like to go with us?” My husband asked and I looked at her.

“Let me stay at home. Come safely. But please let’s pray before you go” She said and we closed our eyes.

“Dear Jesus our Lord, thank You for this very day and all you have done for us...” She started praying and I opened my eyes to look at my beautiful mum.

Meeting Jesus and growing daily in His power after living a riotous and extravagant life was what I couldn’t fathom! Only Jesus could have done it!

Fifteen years ago, if anyone told me my model-turned-prayer-warrior mother would believe on Jesus talk less of calling on Him so fervently, I would have said a big, loud ‘Impossible!’

Thank God for the words of that man.

The man at Talitha's bed.

How could I have forgotten his name!

"Will you be chanced to make the announcement for me at the nearest radio station again?" My mum asked and I gasped as my husband smiled.

"I will try mum. Be calm. Jeff's child shall be found" He said assuredly and mum said a resounding 'Amen' as we drove out of the compound.

"Why aren't you making the announcement as mum has been demanding? Jeff's child is her niece or nephew. She owes the child a whole lot of responsibilities" I said as I looked at my husband's face but he didn't reply.

"Is there any problem? Why have you been avoiding this question?" I asked and my husband shot me a dangerous look.

"That lady is my past. I want sleeping dogs to lie please, woman" He said and I was alarmed.

“Me, Happiness, woman?” I asked as I beat my chest.

“Which woman? Answer me Joe, which woman?” I asked, almost getting angry

“Which other woman are we talking about?” He asked and as I was about replying, I heard some sobs at the back seat. I turned back to find Brenda crying and Mohana looking pitiful.

“What’s the matter?” I asked

“Mum and daddy, please stop shouting at each other” Mohana cried and my heart got pierced

“Pleeeeeeasssseee” My Brenda cried out too and tears rushed into my eyes as I looked at my husband whose face smelt guilt too.

It was actually the first time they had seen us quarrel.

I wondered always why Talitha’s name sparked fire between us when mentioned.

Joe wouldn't tell me why!

He wouldn't!

OMONI

“How many times has the jingle been relayed on air?” The Head of Programmes asked from the entrance of the door.

“Thirty times, ma” I replied and she entered just then.

“Omoni, kindly air it more. The camp starts today and oga wants the news to be all over Nigeria. I am sure that he is monitoring everything going on right now. Make it almost ten times every hour from now. Okay?” She asked and I nodded, searching for the advert again. I clicked on it and placed it on the playlist.

“Let it go now” She said and I double-clicked.

PRINCESS

“You are really sweating, dear. Wind up and let’s put on the A/C please” I said as I held my baby close to my chest.

“I was only thinking of Baby Ann” He said and I shook my head.

“We will control the A/C. Sonia and Serena are even sweating too, please” I pleaded and he wound up the windows and switched the A/C on.

“Let’s even listen to the news” He said and switched on the radio.

“Have you heard! It’s the first of its kind as the Taliwen International storms the city of Port Harcourt, hurray! Oh yes! 28th July to 25th August has a lot in store for your wonderful children. Ranging from ages ten to eighteen, your children can enjoy an unforgettable overhauling period of fun, learning and the manifestation of the power of God. With seasoned and experienced personnel and facilitators....”

“...No child will be left unchanged. Bring them here!” My children completed the advert and my husband and I couldn’t but laugh.

“My babies deserve awards o” My husband exclaimed and I started laughing too.

“I am sure they will show them the stuff they are made of when they get there” I said and started laughing too.

“Mum, in the good or the bad?” I knew it was Sonia’s voice.

“Do you do bad stuff?” My husband asked.

“Yes, Serena drools when she sleeps.” Sonia said and I looked at my husband who shook his head.

“You also don’t sleep well. My body is usually your bed. You like rolling in your bed as if you are in a palace” Safiya replied too, a frown on her face.

“Have you seen yourselves?” My husband said and they kept quiet.

“Well, I was not talking about those childish things you do. When I said the stuff you are made of, I was talking about your talents. Sonia’s violin and Serena’s voice. I wonder why you are both fighting” I said.

“Now, say sorry to each other with a smile and hug now!” Andrew ordered and I smiled as I watched them hug.

“Sorry sis” They said almost together.

“Dad, Sonia’s smile is not real” Serena said

“It’s real” Sonia retorted.

“Smile smile smile” Serena tickled Sonia till the whole car shook with their laughter.

“I am so happy that Talitha and Big bros are taking this camping serious. I learnt children from other countries even registered” My husband said after a while and I smiled.

“Is that the only thing? I was so shocked when Talitha told me it was solely sponsored by the United Nations”

“I was shocked too honey. Well, I can’t wait to see this wonderful couple. It’s been a really really great while” He said and smiled. I smiled too as I squeezed his hands.

“Thank God for God. It never looked as if I would get over Dove. But see me here darling, I am enjoying my marriage. I am enjoying God, I am enjoying you, Andrew” I said with a very grateful heart and he smiled lovingly, looking into my face.

He was stretching his neck to kiss my lips when Sonia shouted.

“Trailer! Daddy trailer”

We looked up and the trailer was actually still far away.

“You need to be spanked, Sonia” My husband said.

“Sorry dad. I thought you forgot you had minors in the car with you. Poor Baby Ann too” She said and pouted. My husband looked into my face and gasped. I laughed uncontrollably.

“This what-my-eyes-see-my-mouth-must-say girl, if I catch you ehn” My husband said as he pulled at her leg from behind while Sonia screamed.

“My husband cannot show me love again because of some naughty children. My dear, peck me jare” I said and just as he was about reaching my cheeks, I screamed.

“What was that?” My husband asked, obviously scared.

“Baby Ann bit me” I said lowly and my husband sighed as my children laughed silently at the back seat.

“When next she does that, beat her dear. She should know that what she is doing is bad. Ann! What kind of children are these for crying out loud!” My husband exclaimed again and I could only laugh out loud.

HAPPIE

“Talitha! Oh my God! Oh, good Lord! Am I seeing double?” I exclaimed as we both hugged tightly.

“I really can’t believe that I am seeing Happie once again. Wow!” Talitha said too.

She was looking all posh and beautiful that I couldn’t take my eyes of her.

“Do you know how we have looked all around for you Tally? We went round Abuja, announced on the radio and TV, what haven’t we done? Right dear?” I asked my husband who was beside me but he was no more there.

“Dear..” I looked around me but I couldn’t find him.

“My husband too was standing behind me just now. Where is he?” Talitha asked and looked round her.

“Where are our husbands o” I started laughing as we held hands and looked behind us.

“Oh, see my husband running with those children. What is he looking for...” Talitha said.

“Those are my children too, what’s up?” I asked as we hasted towards them.

DOVE

I knelt on the legs still left outside so he wouldn't drag himself and run off again.

"Daddy, come out from under the car" One of the girls cried and I patted her on the back as I rubbed the other's head.

"Is he your father?" I asked and they nodded.

"What is his name?" I asked.

"His name is Dr. Joe Adameji" The elder one said and I shook my head.

I was right!

For fifteen years, we, especially mum had worried and prayed and looked everywhere for Joe to no avail. Mum couldn't even be comforted.

Just while my wife and I strolled round the camp for supervision and a friend that seemed to know her came running from afar, I smelt Joe!

From secondary school, he had loved using ‘Jelly Body Spray’ with ‘Happenings Perfume’ together. I perceived it immediately and felt it was him. I looked around at that point and saw that he was the one walking behind the woman running towards my wife.

“Joe” I muttered to myself. He must have read my lips as he started running right backwards while his children followed. I immediately took after him and just about time I laid my hand on him and sound him a hot blow, he did the unbelievable as he slid under the car.

Before he could go any further, I knelt on his legs and gave him some resounding blows to relieve my stress.

“Leave me ... ah ... what is it? ... Leave me alone” He continued screaming as I held his legs intact.

“Dovey, what’s the problem? Who are you struggling with there? You need the security?” My wife asked and I shook my head as I panted.

The other woman came closer and charged at me.

“Leave my husband. What wrong has he done?” She asked, very shocked.

“If he has done no wrong, why is your husband seeking refuge under his own car? Why?” I asked and looked at the woman’s face.

Her face brightened.

“I know you. I know you from somewhere” She screamed and I shook my head.

“I don’t know you ma” I said as I continued to drag Joe out of his hiding place. Being bigger than him, I succeeded in dragging him out from under the car and he looked so ashamed of himself as dust filled him from head to toes.

“Joe!” My wife and I called him almost together.

“You know my husband too?” The lady asked my wife and Talitha looked really shocked as she covered her mouth.

“I know him well, my friend. Joe, we were supposed to see and hug one another. Why did you make matters this pathetic?” Talitha asked and the wife looked on cluelessly as she dusted her husband’s body.

“Joe, why did you stay away from home? You know how worried we all were? Why did you treat us that way? We loved you so much. Mummy has been so devastated” I said again and Joe started crying.

“How could I have come home after the issues I left behind?”

“Issues?” My wife asked, confused. His wife looked more out of place.

“I don’t understand” I said too.

“I left like a coward, like a wicked, heartless fellow and within few months, I had fallen in love again. It felt as if I was so bad. I couldn’t come back home” He cried

“What’s happening? I don’t seem to understand” His wife said.

“I couldn’t come to face Talitha. I left her devastated and condemned her when she needed me most. I wasn’t even there as a friend was supposed to” He said again and I was so shocked at his excuses.

“Joe, I thought you were very intelligent but I was wrong! If despite the many mathematics and calculus you can destroy, you could still think this cheaply, you aren’t intelligent at all” I said, dumbfoundedly.

“Was that why you didn’t want to look for Talitha? You had something with her, left her, found me, took me and was afraid of coming back home, right?” His wife asked and he started crying again

“I am so sorry. I couldn’t even bear to stay before mummy and daddy and tell them that I married in their absence. I actually don’t know what came over me” He cried and I hugged him tightly.

“We miss you so much Joe! You have to go home and get married proper before mummy and daddy. You have to go and show yourself to them and receive their blessings.” I explained and he nodded like an agama lizard while I helped him up.

I looked into his face and smiled.

“Joe my brother ... haha, the wicked runneth when no man pursueth! Haha” I laughed on and he laughed too, wiping his tears.

“I am so sorry, bro. I lacked confidence. I really just couldn’t face all of you” He said, sniffing wetly.

“For clueless me, I need a really full explanation of what just happened. For you Joe, I need a deep, sincere apology” His wife said and started walking away.

“Darling, wait... Oh,.... Sweet... You don’t understand... Let me tell you something ... I am so sorry.. Wait” Joe kept saying as he ran after his wife, dusting his clothes as he went.

“Do you understand what just happened?” The elder child said.

“Strange things keep happening today. First, they were shouting at each other, next dad went under the car and now they are running after each other” The little ones said, looking thoughtful.

Leaving the little children to crack the hard nuts, I looked at Talitha who was smiling.

“I bet you are happy” She said and I smiled

“I bet you are happier” I said and her jaws dropped.

“Happier?” She asked and I smiled.

“Your first love is here now. You can see him again” I teased and watched her fists form into balls. She started pursuing me.

“He wasn’t my first love. I didn’t even know he had those thoughts about me, c’mon... Jealous guy” She said when she eventually caught me.

I pulled her close to my chest and pecked her forehead.

“Thank God it was not Jeff that came back to life. The jealousy would have been greater o, iyawo mi” I said and she started laughing.

“As far as I am concerned, he is my lover, my teacher, my father, my husband, my brother, my everything!” She said and I didn’t understand.

“Who?” I asked, trying to calmly loose the knotty thread.

“Hehehe ... Jealous Bobo. Bowen Adameji, my Dovey, is my lover, my teacher, my father, my husband, my brother, my everything!” She said and I smiled.

The past fifteen years with her had been heaven on earth!

I had played with her

I had cried with her,

I had cooked with her,

I had loved her,

I had argued with her,

I had had another set of wonderful identical twins with her,

I had been her husband indeed!

I always had a reason at all time to say ‘thank You’ to God for making our paths crossed.

TALITHA

“Good afternoon fellow campers. I am Jeffery Adameji” One of my twins said.

“And I am Japheth Adameji” The other said and I looked into Happie’s face. She was deeply engrossed in watching her very young cousins.

“They bear your husband’s name. So nice of him” She whispered into my ears and I smiled.

“You like that?” I asked. I had always thought that when any of their family members came around, they would want to claim their children as I had watched in Indian movies but I was wrong.

When Happie called her mum to tell her she found the boys and I, Happie’s mum had gladly volunteered to come over to see the twins and seeing Happie’s glad face, I was convinced that my children were really mine then and would be left to me totally.

“I ‘over-like’ it o my sister. See how the children look just like my uncle. See how you immortalized his and grandpa’s name too. Jeffery and Japheth ... Awwn” She smiled as she hugged me tightly

“The title of our presentation today is.... I will give my brother the chance to tell us the title of our presentation today. Let’s give him a round of applause.” Jeffery said and I smiled as we clapped.

They had come to tell me they would like to have a rehearsal of one of the speeches they would be presenting during the camp before the two Adameji’s families and I accepted.

“The title is Talitha Cumi. Kindly follow patiently” Japheth said and the adults, especially my husband laughed.

I looked into his face and shook my head.

“Sweetie, that’s your handiwork most definitely” I said and he squeezed my hands as he smiled lovingly.

As they were about to start their speech, Joe’s children suddenly screamed as they pointed at a car that had just parked.

“What’s the matter?” Happie asked them sharply.

“That’s Serena” Brenda screamed excitedly.

“And Sonia too” Mohana said too with a large smile on her face.

To our amazement, the two children also started running towards us and instantly jumped at their friends.

“You made it. Oh!” They seemed to have exclaimed together.

I looked towards the car and saw the parents looking so confused. As they walked towards us, it was my turn to jump up.

“It’s a lie! Andrew!” I exclaimed as I covered my mouth. I was more than excited.

“Ehhh ... Who is it I am seeing o? Talithaaaaa” He exclaimed too as he ran towards me and hugged me tightly.

“Hmmm.. Mr. Dove... The boss!” His wife exclaimed too as Bowen embraced her and took the baby.

“The Princess herself... Hehehe... Longest time. See how you are looking born again and mummyish ... Hahaha” My husband laughed so loudly. We all joined too.

When I saw Joe and Happie’s confused faces, I turned to face them and smiled.

“Andrew and Princess, meet my brother in law and his wife, Joe and Happie. They just came back from Ukraine” I said and they excitedly greeted one another.

“The Adameji’s too right? My children have told us about you. So glad meeting you” Andrew said as he shook their hands.

“Oh... You must be the Richards then” Happie said and Princess laughed.

“Your children must have told you so much about us too” She said and smiled. We laughed as we exchanged pleasantries.

It was a real great time as we felt nostalgic, talking about some fifteen years ago.

I saw Angela coming and quickly checked the time.

Four thirty.

“Ma’am, 80% of the campers are around and have been lodged. It’s thirty minutes before you address them so their parents can go” She said and I nodded.

“Thanks, dear. We will be in the hall soon. Tell the camp commandant to ensure protocol in the camp” I whispered. She nodded and left.

“I have just thirty minutes to spend with us before I go. The camping is about kicking off”

“The organizer mama!” Joe hailed and I smiled.

“Hahaha... Thank God Joe didn’t find out that you are the organizer before coming here. He might not have allowed us come” Happie joked and we laughed.

“Chai! That’s true o, my wife. I thank God that running is over now... Hehehe... Erm, I was thinking... since mummy is coming here to see her nephews, we can as well go to Abuja to see my foster parents who have really been parents to me, right?” Joe said and his wife nodded with a great smile.

“No one is listening to us” Jeffery called angrily from before the table. I covered my mouth in shock.

“Oh my! We forgot our boys’ speech” My husband exclaimed too.

“Oh my! So sorry darling cousins.” Happie said too.

“Should we start?” Japheth asked.

“Please do. Thank God we haven’t missed much” Andrew said and sat down.

“As we said earlier, the title of our speech is Talitha Cumi” Jeffery said

“Wow! Nice!” Andrew exclaimed again as he winked at his wife who smiled too.

“Boys and girls present here today, we have come with a charge this morning, arise!” Japheth said with so much gusto.

“My dad told us a story of a Talitha who was down, forsaken, rejected and who eventually died” Jeffery said and I had goosebumps.

“Hmmm” Princess exclaimed.

“But the story didn’t end there as the Talitha died, rose again, is still living and doing great exploits for the Lord” Japheth dropped in again.

“Glory!” My husband exclaimed and I smiled as I pinched him.

“Well, we are here to present life and motivation to whatever is dead in your lives too” Jeffery said and I was amazed.

“As Jesus said, we are saying too with so great authority, Talitha Cumi! That means, ‘Young lady, arise!’” Japheth threw his hands up in the sky.

“Amen!” Mohana said and there was smile on people’s faces.

“No matter what has pushed you down, arise!” Japheth demonstrated as he spoke and my heart stirred.

Whatever my husband had told them to make them talk this way was definitely great. I could see God Himself at work.

“Hmmm...Oh yes!” Joe exclaimed too

“As a Christian, nothing happens to us, it happens for us” Jeffery said again.

“Wow! Yes...true!” I found myself exclaiming too.

“No man can determine your destination except you allow him. People can walk you to hell but can’t walk you out of it, beware!” Japheth said again, tears already gathering in his eyes.

“Hmmm... True talk! ... My God ooo” Happie exclaimed, shaking her legs with enthusiasm.

“A man that cannot be shaken is one who is holding onto what cannot be shaken. Hold unto God and you will stand out in adversity” Jeffery said, nodding with so much authority.

But my boys were just fifteen!

They were really ministering to my soul, wow!

“Also, God gives you what you are ready for and not what you are asking for. When next you ask God for something and it doesn’t seem to be coming forth, remember that God only gives you what you are ready for and not necessarily what you are asking for. Then, relax, again I said what...?” Japheth dropped it again, fresh and hot.

“Relax!” Everyone exclaimed too and I really nodded as the words sunk into my very being.

“Another thing to learn is this ... every day, ask the One who prayed for Peter to pray for you” Jeffery said and I smiled.

God is great!

God is real!

I had experienced Him in so many ways and assuredly He is good!

“You know, it amazes me when I read about Jesus walking on water, feeding a multitude with a small amount of food, calming a storm, healing a sickness and so on but, nothing showcases His divine power like Him raising someone from the dead!” I heard my husband’s voice and I startled back to reality as I realized that the whole scenario had turned to a revival session.

He moved forward and stayed between the two boys, wrapping his arms round them.

“I have seen Him raise the dead before. The person was dead psychologically, physically, spiritually, emotionally, all ramifications I tell you, she was dead! It was a hopeless situation, very hopeless!” He continued and then, tears had gathered in my eyes.

“If Jesus could do this, there is nothing impossible with Him! That lost spouse or family member can be saved! That impossible situation in your life can be handled! That incredible need that you think is so great, it can be met! He can do everything, just everything! He’s never late. He is always on time!” He said again, facing the small crowd of parents and youngsters that had surrounded our small family reunion.

“Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, it is true! I am a witness of the manifest grace of the Almighty God!” Andrew started as he moved out to join my husband and the boys.

“The whole issue taught me that when sickness comes – Believe Jesus! When death comes – Believe Jesus! When the bottom falls out of life – Believe Jesus! When the answers to your prayers are delayed – Believe Jesus! When you are ridiculed for your faith – Believe Jesus! When you are looking at a hopeless situation – Believe Jesus. Just do what?” Andrew asked

“Believe Jesus!” They people echoed but I was too overwhelmed to speak.

Who am I that the Lord of all the earth would care to know my name?

Who am I?

“When I place my problem beside the Lord, it suddenly grows very small. No matter how great it looks in my eyes, it is nothing compared to Him! After all, a God who can create a universe from nothing can do anything! A God who can part a sea, rain down manna from heaven, heal a sick body, raise a dead body, and save a lost soul can do anything! The Lord is big!” Bowen exclaimed and I fell on my knees as tears strolled down my face.

“It may be that you are looking at such a situation right now. You may be here lost and you know that if you die, you will go to Hell. Your story does not have to end that way! Come to Jesus and trust Him to save you. Believe Jesus, He will not fail!” Jeffery said and I remembered those times.

Those times of going to church without really believing or knowing the essence.

No wonder I fell away very fast!

I wanted to just go to school and become the ‘big happening girl’ on campus but it really was not worth it!

“You might be out of God’s will, with a heart that is cold and far away from God. You can come home today and He will restore you to a place of closeness and usefulness. He does these kinds of things! Only Him!” Princess said too as she placed her baby on her back and held her with a wrapper.

Hmmm ... even Princess had become a preacher! Incredible!

“You might have a problem that you cannot handle. It is bigger than you are and out of control. He can handle it! He can cut it down to size! Bring it to Jesus and trust Him to take care of it for His glory! Believe Jesus, He will not fail” Happie said too as she walked close to me and patted my shoulder as I raised my hands up high, tears strolling down my face.

“Yes... He ventures in that business. He can cut it down to size! Oh, my Father!” I raised my hands up high and started crying in worship.

I had to stand up!

People had to see the Talitha!- The proof of the power of God.

“I am a testimony” I said as I sniffed wetly. My nostrils were blocked and my head ached.

“Halleluyah!” Some said and I continued

“In the course of this camp meeting, I tell you that your children will not come back the same. It is a catch them young strategy. Enough is enough that the devil catches our youngsters before we wake up spiritually!”

“Oh yes!”

“Enough is enough that we don’t know how to counsel and advise but only judge and judge!”

“Oh yees!”

“Enough is enough that we push our young ones out of the kingdom instead of pulling them in!”

“The time is now! The time to repent is now! Its high time our children looked us in the face and say “Daddy, thus saith the Lord..” and we listen with rapt attention” I said again, my voice rising up and up. My husband had started prophesying.

“Before I end this talk, let me tell you something” I said and there was a pin drop silence.

“Let me just remind you that tragedy doesn’t care who you are!” I said and I meant it because I had experienced it and had seen it in the Bible too.

“It doesn’t, my sister!” Joe said too, his face filled with tears.

“The trials of life are not going to pass you by... see, tragedy doesn’t care that you go to church and pay your tithes. Sickness and death care less about your achievements and assets” I said and there were some prayers from different angles.

“But, when the trials of life come, you need a resource outside of yourself ... when death, sickness, sorrow, marital trouble, financial trouble and so on come, you need more than some religion or the stuff of this world!” I exclaimed with great power.

“You need a faith that rests in Jesus and in His power alone. What do you really trust today?” I asked rhetorically and several ‘hmmm’s ran through the crowd.

“Only Jesus! Only Jesus! Merciful Jesus!” Joe cried as he rolled on the ground.

“Have you lost your family members and friends and helpers simultaneously? ... or have you lost your feelings that no pain can be felt? ... Have you experienced fire burning in your body severally as antibiotics invade your system? ... Have you looked for death and it isn't just forthcoming?” I asked as tears rolled down my face.

“I bet you haven't! But I have!” I said and shook my head.

“Or even if you have experienced that? You think it's an excuse to give up? You think it's an avenue to question Him? See, He is unquestionable!”

“He is!” Princess exclaimed.

I heard the sound of violin being played and saw that it was Sonia, Andrew's daughter. Her sister Serena was singing with so much glee as tears rolled down her face.

I was touched!

That was exactly my dream, my aim, my goal!

I wanted children to get it right really from a very tender age!

If Josiah could be king at 8, no child is small, I believed!

“For the God of the mountain, is still God in the valley, when things go wrong, He makes them right. And the God of the good times, is the God in the bad time. The God of the day...is still God in the night!” My husband started singing sonorously, joining the beautiful girls. I smiled as the song held so much power for me.

“You talk of faith, what you’re up on the mountain, but talks come so easy, when life’s at its best. But things change, when you’re down in the valley, that’s when your faith, is really put to test” I sang as the silence thickened.

My heart yearned for God the more!

My soul yearned for souls more abundantly.

As they sang the chorus over and over again, I fell on my knees and raised my hands up high the more.

My body was shaking with real anointing current.

“As we round off so we can do other things, say this prayer with me” I said and moved slowly to the solemn rhythms coming from the violin, Serena’s voice and my husband’s bass.

“Lord, like some useful raw material, make something glorious out of me that will make people glorify You, believe in You and turn to You!” I said and the voices that melted together and ascended the heavenlies in one accord must have made Jesus laugh.

Glory to God in the highest!

THE END

TALITHA CUMI!