

DEAR  
*future*  
husband

'tomi Adesina

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#### DISCLAIMER

This story is a work of fiction. All incidents and people in This book are fictional. Any resemblance to any persons or situation is simply coincidental.

## Comments on Dear Future Husband...

I tried to resist reading until episode 20, but just couldn't. Read it this morning and now this suspense is too much! Tomi, when you send all of us to hospital, na your name we go dey chant!!! LOL!! Anyway, great job. You are just too much!

- Jumoke SB

This is a fantastic story. The plot is super fantastic. I can go on and on about how much I love this story, but let me just say God bless you, Tomi Adesina, for a beautiful story. May God continue to bless you.

- Lola

*C'est une excellente pièce de travail, je l'aime* (This is an excellent piece of work, I love it). More grease to your elbows.

- AAA

*Ghen Ghen. \*singing\* Omo, see Gobe, Bolu ti bo sinu Gobe.* I'm so loving this eh. Thanks, Morade, for the bonus even though the suspense is killing. Acquisition of Millaroca is a failed one, Bolu. Go and sleep. But wait o, which silent partner did they now kill? I pray Elizabeth will forgive David when they eventually meet.

- Comfort Adedokun

Someone should please wake me up when Tomi decides to put a final full stop to DFH. Can't keep up with the suspense no more. I wonder what will become of Tunji Bankole and Bolu Coker.

- Rukiiy

I am forced 2 say something to Tomi. You are such a writer. You carry your readers along so well...I don't regret reading this at all. Well done....each character has such depth.....I won't stop now if I start hehehehe.... I am so impressed.

- Oyinda

Waoooooo!! What a series! I love this, Tomi! You are good. Got me glued for almost 24hrs from the beginning to the end and giving us two series in a day woooo wooo woooo!! Love you, Tomi am looking forward to the rest of it. Have David and Kim fallen in love? Uhhmm I'm all dreamy. Those fathers, yuck!!! \*angeronmyface\*

- Thonia

I lurvvvv you, Tomi Adesina. DFH should win a Nobel Prize... sincerely! Everything put together is awesome. Good work.

- Foi-bellesignatures

I started reading DFH two days ago, and i have been glued to my system ever since. When colleagues ask "what are you watching so seriously", I would reply "I need to finish this so I could go on with my life". Tomi, thanks for keeping me so interested. I wish most guys are like Wole Briggs; the world would be a better place.

- Querida

Tomi, you are a talent! May God continue to use you for greater exploits! Amen!!! I couldn't wait for the slow episodes dished out to us by "Let's Talk about Relationships with Kemmistry". I stayed up reading all the episodes last night, can I share a secret wt you? I am almost "old" Oo<sup>oo</sup> <sup>ooo</sup>H! But I love your story! May God continue to bless you for us! Amen. How can I get your past stories to read? Kudos dear! See you at the top! You are blessed!

- Anonymous.

OMG!!! It gets more and more interesting.....wish you could bring them all out at once.

- Martha

I would so love to see the movie of this! Loving today's episode! Next week seems like years away! Amazing piece from an extraordinary writer!

- Aj Sarpong

Awww..... #sobs. My Dear Future husband must read this episode because the proposal must be #gangan. Thank you darling, Tomi. God bless you for me.

- Aloeda

In reading, I am seeing truly! Good work from a sweet spirit! You are a gem! The more I read your work, the more I respect your creative ingenuity!

- Isaacola Abiodun

OMG!!! No! Bolu coker No! Tomi, I can't wait till next week to know what happened o. Oya plssssssssssssssssssssss another episode this week \*puppy eye\*

- Lade

Hmmmm. Tomi, I am so glad I stumbled on your blog. I really don't do blogs, but you have gotten my heart...you thrive babe... May God give you more knowledge so as to keep me glued to your blog. \*\*Don't mind my selfishness\*\*winks\*\*

- Toyin

I'm not really the emotional type, but...I've gotta hand it to the writer, this is one sad piece. As a writer, I can only imagine the swelling and crashing of emotions and creativity as the author did this episode. I love this. Awesome! I hope for a brighter, happier episode next time but I can't deny the beauty of this work. So sad for the wives of these mad men, especially Bolu. Ini and Bolu should meet...Lol. On a serious note, I hope Marcus drills through the thick wall Ini has built up around her heart. Fingers crossed.

- Talentsauce

This just keeps getting more interesting, the entire unfolding of events. Nice one there.

- Timayin Folorunsho

Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh Myyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy Godddddddddddd!!!

- Busayo

## 1

The first rule of a Monday morning, especially when you stay in Lagos, is 'DON'T WAKE UP LATE!' Tola Matthews had never fallen short of this rule, except for today. She brushed her leg against the side table as she made for the front door. I giggled. Tola stopped to eyeball me.

She rolled her eyes. "Kimberly, the only reason I am not going to talk back at you is that I feel pity for you" she started. Tola had a knack for showing off her status as a Broker. "You don't have a job. All you do is sit and watch TV, I have no problems with that, but don't you think you should look for a real job that takes you out early?" She said looking at the wall clock. She smiled at me. It had mockery written all over it.

I snickered. "You are not happy. And the money in the Firm isn't yours, you work for Mr. Asolo. One day, they'll take that Range Rover back." I replied, with a grin.

"I bought that with my money!" she hissed and stepped out.

I wasn't done yet. "Kentucky on your way back, please."

"Did I hear you right?" Tola replied, tucking her head back in.

I smiled. "You are a salary earner, aren't you?"

I focused my attention back on the flat screen TV. It is a big deal when you have nothing to do in Lagos. I am Kimberly Bankole, popularly called 'Kim Banks' by my friends, graduated with a First Class from the prestigious University of Lagos with a degree in Economics. So much for my First Class Degree! I had sought to live on my own and when my best friends, Tola and Ini presented the opportunity, I jumped at it.

Tola works in the Real Estate Business and due to her hard work, she was gaining heights every day, and she currently occupies a top position in Asolo Real Estate Firm. Tola paid her way through the university as she lost her father quite early. She indulged in business all through her

stay on the campus, and coupled with the monthly bursaries from the government, she could fend for her academics.

Ini Obong is a model. She recently just got herself a billboard job for a beauty soap. Ini worked when the opportunity arose, and she earned fat for it. Her career was fast-rising and her manager, Marcus, works tirelessly to get her jobs. Ini cherished her beauty sleep and she was still having it. But with Kimberly in the house, who would get a beauty sleep?"

I drew the curtains and let the sun rays in. "Wake up!" Ini rolled over and covered her face with the pillow. "Ini, it's almost 9 in the morning. The roads would be free, why are you still in bed?"

Ini snarled. "I don't have to look for jobs, they hunt me! Now get out of here." She said, punching the pillow.

"Really, Ini? You should be awake." I said, pulling the duvet.

Ini punched her pillow heavily and sat up. "I need my beauty sleep!" she emphasized. "The party lasted late into the night and I am tired. You should be the one on the road, go get a job."

I shot at her. "How many times do I have to tell you that I have a job? I am a freelance writer!"

Ini chuckled. "Ah...yes, I remember, whatever that is, honey." She said, and slumped back in bed.

I rolled my eyes and left for the kitchen. I work as a freelance writer from home, I write articles on the internet and if a column job comes by, my friend, Ben passes it to me. Although, I haven't gotten any yet, I have his promises to cling on to. I am from a popular Lagos family. I am Professor and Professor Mrs. Bankole's only child. Wondering why I am not gainfully employed? I turned down several opportunities to work for my Father and his well-established friends.

Economics had never really been my dream; I lived it for my parents who are successful economists. After my first degree, I hurried out of the house so I could chase my dreams, to be a writer.

"How many successful writers can you find in this country?" Professor Bankole had shouted at me when I stood before him with my bags.

I sighed. "Dad...there is Wole Soyinka and recently, Adichie. Dad, I can do this."

"They are few, scanty and insignificant! I would give credit to Wole Soyinka and a few others, but the field is meaningless, you would be broke!"

I took a deep breath. "Dad, please. I am tired of economics. I don't want to work in that firm." It had never been easy being Professor Bankole's daughter, your life is all typed out like one of his Economics textbooks.

Mother knelt before her husband. "Tunji, please let her go." She begged. She is my silent advocate.

"What are you saying, woman? Kimberly is about to bring shame to our family. She is only 21, what does she know about wanting to live on her own? She even wants to be a writer, this is ridiculous!" he said, tapping his feet.

Wura Bankole nodded. "I know how you feel, Tunji. But, we have to let this girl try, who knows? Please..." she begged. *Men and their egos!* I had to join mother on her knees.

"Listen to me, young woman. I give you a year to make a nuisance of yourself in that field called 'writing' after which, if you fail," he shrugged. "Of course, *when* you fail, you are coming back home and would work in the firm."

I stared at him as he spoke. *He couldn't see any light at the end of my tunnel.*

"And one more thing, I don't have to remind you about not liking any man, you already have David Coker." He said sternly.

I nodded. "Dad, you don't have to remind me. I have heard this all my life! I went through university without any man, so you have nothing to be scared of, I would become David Coker's wife when he chooses." I replied, spitefully.

"Young lady! Show some respect!" he shouted.

I scoffed. "Of course, dad. I am the only one who is not allowed to fall in love freely because David Coker would marry me. Do you even care to know the last time David Coker and I spoke?" Dad sipped his drink. "Two months ago, dad, two months!" I argued.



He placed his glass on the table. "David is a busy man. He is doing all that for you, he has to manage his father's business and it's all over the world. He would be back soon."

I leaned against the sink and waited for the kettle to whistle. I made a hot cup of coffee.

"Please make me a cup too." Ini said, as she took her seat.

I smiled. "You are finally up. Of course, I would make you coffee, I am good for something after all."

Ini scoffed. "Oh...sweetheart, hasn't 'Ben Ten' called you today?" I smiled. "Oh, he hasn't. I think that guy is cute." I stared at her. "Oh...I get it; you are not allowed to love." I handed her the cup of coffee. "Thank you, sweetheart." Ini sipped from her mug carefully. "Kim, really, don't you think the Professor is pushing you too hard?"

"It's for my own good." I replied, taking a seat. "It has always been for my good."

Ini scoffed. "What good? Right from when we were in High School, your old man has always been on your neck with this issue, David Coker this...David Coker that. Wake up, girlfriend, David won't marry you."

"Ini, he will." I replied. "Dad said so." I said softly.

Ini laughed with so much mockery in it. "Honey, I have always liked you since high school, I mean you were my school daughter, so I would tell you this, David won't marry you. You guys barely speak." Seeing my expression she tried cheering me up. "I don't know how things run with you guys from wealthy homes, but maybe because my folks were broke while I was growing, they won't dare betroth me, I mean it's so outdated." She said. "And to think your parents are professors..." She murmured.

I snickered. "You can say that again." I stared at the kitchen sink. "We've got to fix that pipe, the one beneath the sink." Ini nodded and dropped her mug in the sink. "Ini, you are so going to wash that."

Ini stuck her tongue out. "Marcus is waiting." She said, and left for her room. Ini had the habit of leaving the dishes. "Who would marry you?" I shouted.

"Someone who isn't DAVID COKER." she called back, laughing.

I smiled.

That was the daily routine. Since I have nothing real to do, I just sit by my apple laptop all day and write down articles, short stories and poems. I would also get the groceries and stock every corner of the house. If Ben called, I would say hi to him at the office, else I would see mom at home, but I had to call first. Dad didn't want to see me.

"Hi, mom." I said, as I turned on the Television.

Wura Bankole closed the door to her study. "Hey...I told you never to call in the mornings."

She whispered. "Your dad is still home."

"I had no idea I had to sneak around to say hi to my mom because of I am on some sort of probation by the Almighty Professor Bankole. Mom, I just want to say hi." I replied, turning off the TV.

Mrs. Bankole sighed and took her seat. "It's not like that, Kim. You know how your father is. Anyway, how is it out there?"

"Mom, it's rough. Getting a job is hard. But I am coping fine."

Mother sighed "Just come back home, Kim. You can work in the firm and still get jobs as a writer; I would talk to some friends."

I rolled my eyes. "Mother, you know the terms. Dad has to see that I can make it without your help. Thanks, mom."

"Have you heard from David this month?" Wura Bankole asked, changing the topic. *Still not a friendly topic!*

I chuckled. "Not at all. He didn't even reply my mails, he must be really busy." Mom laughed at the other end. "Do you regret being married off to Dad?" There was a moment of deep silence from the other end. "Mom?" I called. *Silence means affirmation!*

"Not at all, Honey. He provides me with everything I want and need. The society loves us, we are happy."

I scoffed. "Mom..."

"Oh...Kim, I have to go now. I have a presentation in about an hour." She replied and hung up.

I nodded as I held my phone to my chest. "Yes mom...'you always have' to go, you are not happy, yet you think it's what best for me. David Coker would provide everything I want and need, I would be happy."

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Tola picked up the receiver. "Yes..."

"You are needed at the Boardroom now, ma'am." Kemi said. Kemi is Tola's secretary.

Tola closed her laptop and wore her blazer. She stepped out elegantly as ever and flashed at Kemi. "Take down any message." She said, as she walked briskly. As a manager, Tola Matthews had a lot on her hand. She had to be up and doing, she had never relented.

She opened the door to the boardroom. "Good morning, ladies and gentlemen." she said as she walked into the empty boardroom. She stared at the empty seats and chairs. *What prank was Kemi playing?* She turned to walk away.

"Not yet, Ms. Matthews."

She turned round to see one of her clients, their biggest client. "How did you get here?" she asked and stopped. "Of course, you are Wole Briggs, where can't you be?"

He nodded. "That's correct. I am Wole Briggs, I can open any door. Please have lunch with me."

"Money isn't everything you know." She started. "It is a shame that some people allow themselves to be bought as to let you into this place." She stopped and stared at him. "Get out before I call security on you."

He scoffed. "Really, Tola? I am just trying to be friends with you."

"Friends? I would say you are stalking me. That thing you did with my tyre the last time I came to your office, I still remember. If only I found out earlier that it was you who had pricked it, I would have had you picked up for acting like a street urchin."

Wole Briggs laughed. "Tola, come on. Did you think the Police would come as close as touching my hands let alone cuffing me?" He smiled, revealing his perfect set of teeth. "I just want to be friends with you."

"The answer is NO! Now get out, Wole." She said, sternly.

He nodded. "Of course, as you wish. But I would be back. I don't give up." He said and walked past her. He stopped and stared at her. "Loosen up a bit, you work too hard." He said as he undid her top button.

She smacked his hand. He smiled and walked out. "Stupid pervert!"

Tola returned to her office. "Who put the call across for me at the boardroom?" she asked.

"It was Mr. Asolo, ma."

Tola smiled. "Of course. Thank you." she replied and walked into her office.

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"It's really competitive out there for the billboard jobs." Marcus said as he gave Ini a massage.

Ini took off her earphones. "Marcus, I am hot and beautiful. It is not competitive for me. See, I just won a billboard job." She flashed a smile.

He smiled. "I admire your confidence, but remember Shola Jones beat you to the last job."

"That's because she slept with all the men in that agency." She replied, with a grimace. "Disgusting."

Marcus smiled. "And you went ahead to put that on twitter. Ini, the men in the agency are not our friends, thanks to that."

"But I have fans. At least they know that some models are modest." She said, flipping her hair over her shoulder.

"And loud-mouthed." He added, quickly. Ini grinned. "But really Ini, you have to take this job really serious, I pulled some strings to get you this billboard and I hope you don't mess it up."

Ini snarled. "What could possibly go wrong, Marcus?" she whined. "You are scared for nothing, just relax. You know I think we should go to the spa, I am tired of your rough hand, and I need a real massage." She said, rising to her feet. "You should also get a massage. You worry too much, Marcus." She said, and left for the bathroom.

Marcus sighed. "Of course, I have to. You are my source of livelihood. As long as you work, I won't be broke. I have a responsibility."

"I heard you, Marcus." Ini shouted from the bathroom.

Marcus smiled. "As always."

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"Thank you for having lunch with me." Ben said, as he stared at me.

Ben fell into deep thoughts. Kimberly, an epitome of beauty, was definitely any man's desire. She was simple, brilliant and beautiful. Ben had admired her from the first day she walked into Millaroca looking for a job. She had greeted everyone respectfully. Ben had faked being the boss and stepped up to her. "Hey, what do you want here?" he asked, staring at her eyes.

"Sir, I would love to apply for a job." She replied.

Ben smiled. "Erm...we are totally occupied here. So many staff and we won't be needing another. But you can drop a copy of your CV behind." He said, pointing to the attendant.

"Ben...Ben..." He turned around swiftly. "The Boss is here." He flashed a smile at Kimberly. "You would meet the Boss soon." He said, and dashed out through the back door.

Millaroca Magazine is about 30 years but is now gradually being edged aside in the country. It was mostly purchased by the 'older generation' as it used to appeal to them, but they soon lost interest. The magazine needed a push to come back to the forefront in the country, but the competition really was stiff.

I raised my head. "So, you said you wanted to see me."

"It's just for lunch." He replied, with a smile. My face fell. "How's the job hunt?" he asked.

I shrugged. "Nothing has changed. They all said they would call back, and no one has. Isn't there any column job at Millaroca? I would take stipends."

He held my hand. "It's not about stipends; there are so many old brains at Millaroca. And to be honest, the boss is not willing to change his ideas, he believes in classic and from our survey it turns out the classic women don't even want classic again." He said.

I smiled. "Maybe they would pass it on to their kids when they stop liking classic."

"Kim, I would keep trying to get you a chance to write. You just have to be patient with me." he said, and sipped his coke.

I nodded. "Of course, Ben. It's not like I have too many options." I replied. *And truthfully, time was also running out!*

"So, I thought I could take you out this Thursday." He asked.

I raised one eyebrow. "Thursday, erm...I think I would be busy...maybe I should..."

"Kim Banks, you are never busy. You don't want me to rub it in that you have no real job." I frowned. "Okay, I am sorry, but it's Valentine's Day. I thought we could hangout when I close from work."

I rolled my eyes. "Really? Ben, you don't think I would fall for you, do you?"

He smiled. "A man must always try. I don't give up."

"Start learning to. Anyway, where are we going?" I asked.

He shrugged. "Let me keep that a secret."

"Secret? I don't like secrets. Maybe you are a serial killer. Are you?" I asked, pointing my fork at him. We laughed.

He raised his hand. "Okay, I meant surprise."

Ben had many qualities that any lady would fall for, but remember, I am *'married to David Coker'*, although Ben doesn't really strike me as that man. I'd rather remain friends. "So, are we gonna have Thursday?" he asked, with a smile.

It wasn't as if I had anything doing, and of course, I didn't want Ini and Tola throwing their day in my face. "Of course." I replied, with a smile. Ini and Tola never spared me of their Valentine

day's gifts throughout our high school and university days. It wasn't as if I didn't get gifts, but they were from 'Anonymous' guys. I didn't bother to keep them.

"It won't be at one of the expensive places that you might be used to." He continued. I stared at him. *Who cared about money? My parents are the wealthy ones, not me!*

I nodded. "Ben, I am penniless. Why would I mind?"

"You are Professor Bankole's daughter, aren't you? Sometimes I wonder why you are job hunting, he could just hook you up."

I stared at him. I had never told him about my family background. "How do you know about my father?"

"I am a huge fan of Professor Bankole. I love his guts and everything about him, so I know everything about him." He straightened in his seat. "That is, of course, as far as Wikipedia would tell me. And the journals too." He said, flashing his teeth at me. "But I won't mind an extra lecture; I would love to meet him."

I blinked. He smiled. "So, would you help me?"

"I would think about it." I replied, and tried to finish up my food.

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Marcus fumbled with his iPad for a while; he stared at Ini who looked rather too calm for their current situation. Well, he hadn't told her the bad news yet. He had to! "Ini, we have a situation." Marcus said, scrolling through his iPad.

She adjusted her bathrobe. "You worry too much, Marcus. What could it be this time?"

He took a deep breath. "I just received a mail from the advert agency. They want to revoke your contract."

Ini nodded. "For the billboard, right?" she asked.

"Yes. My sources tell me that Shola Jones is behind it."

She smiled. "Of course, that skanky little thing has to be. She is trying to take her revenge on me after the twitter saga."

"What are we going to do?" Marcus asked.

Ini scoffed. "I should be asking you that. It turns out; I am even tougher than you are. Shola Jones would walk into our trap; her skin needs a little adjustment." She said, with a grin.

"Ini... we could hurt her career."

She nodded in agreement. "She struck the match; she's bound to feel the flame."

Marcus sighed. This is not the first time Ini had fought Shola Jones back and when they did, it was really messy. Both of them never really got along well. The fashion industry was fast rising and models were out at each other. It was a matter of who would take the lead, and as far as Lagos was represented, the battle line was between Ini Obong and Shola Jones.



## 2

"Ben...you are so gonna love this." I said as I took my seat, excitedly.

He stared at me. "So what's this news that has you leaving my door open?" he said and walked over to shut the door.

I smiled at him. "I am sorry, Ben." I said, feigning seriousness. He shrugged and took his seat. "Okay, I am pregnant!"

"What?" Ben said, staring at my stomach.

I scoffed. "Come off it Ben, I meant pregnant with this huge idea to bring Millaroca up, you are so gonna love my plan." He nodded. "I know it's competitive here and there are old brains, but I have to bring it out."

He sighed. "Kim...This organization abides by lots of traditions; you can't just come in here and change things no matter how impressive the ideas are."

*Yeah yeah...here we go again with Traditions!* "We don't always have to go with traditions; it's like flying around in circles. Millaroca has been down for years, no one is buying anymore." I blurted.

"The articles are not fascinating, no one is impressed." I said, almost raising my voice.

He shook his head. "Kimberly, you know how things are here. Mr. Adeoye believes in classic. You met him some months ago, and you remember what he told you, he doesn't like a change."

I drummed my fingers on the table. "He's got to be flexible. Ben, he believes in you, why not convince him?" Ben blinked. "Or maybe, you are also comfortable with the classic stuffs, right?"

Ben frowned. "Not everyone is Professor Bankole's daughter who has a backup plan even when fired. Some of us have to live by this all our lives." He said, raising his voice. My face fell and I clasped my bag to my arm. He sighed. "I am sorry Kim; I didn't mean it that way."

"It's okay. I have to be somewhere." I said, and walked out.

The streets really aren't fun to walk. The sun was scorching and I had to catch the next bus at the BRT station, lucky me, it was only five minutes away. I sat down thinking about my idea; I

wanted to write a new series for the magazine. It would catch the youths especially the female gender and when you have ladies onto something, the men have no choice, at least, it would tell on their pockets.

The best thing about being on the road around 11am is that you would easily get a seat in the bus, most of the working class people would be at work, and if anyone would be on the bus, they might just be visiting friends or running errands and on a working day, you hardly find them. I leaned against the glass as thoughts floated through my mind; I had just 6 months to go. I left home in September last year after my first degree.

I didn't have enough personal money to publish a novel even if I wanted to, I had to write, edit, and other formalities, a year would have been over and Dad would have had the last laugh. With the way things were going, Dad might still be the winner, if I didn't find a solution to this and make myself relevant, I would be in for economics. I had to use part of my savings when I wanted to move into the apartment with Ini and Tola. We all had our shares to pay for the flat we had bought.

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Mr. Asolo, the founder of Asolo Real Estates drummed his pen on the table. "Ms. Matthew, I would love you to meet with a client today during lunch at this address." He said, scribbling down details into a paper.

Tola straightened up. "Sir, I have a lot to tidy up, can't I send one of the other guys?" She already knew it was Wole Briggs.

He frowned. "This is very important to our firm. We can't afford to lose our much cherished clients. He asked specifically for you." she sighed. "Don't be tired of working hard, it has earned you this position. He needs a new house."

"But Sir, Mr. Briggs has already gotten houses from us, what does he still want?"

Mr. Asolo laughed. "His money never runs out, try to bring them all here." He said, and turned on his laptop. He was directly telling Tola to leave. She got the message. She bowed and walked out.

Tola hurried off to her office. "Kemi, please I would be out for lunch, if I have any messages, kindly take them down."

Kemi nodded. "Ma'am, you had a call when you went to see Mr. Asolo. It came from Mr. Scott."

Tola sighed. "I have told him never to call the office again." She murmured and pushed her door open. She grabbed her phone and immediately dialed Tolu Scott. "Tolu, why did you call the office?"

"You weren't answering your calls, Tola. I had no choice."

She took a deep breath. "What is it? I told you I would see you later after work."

"Tola, I need money."

She snarled. "Of course, Money! Is that all I am good for? You always need Money!"

Tolu raised his voice. "Is it my fault that I am unemployed? If it weren't for my current state, would I call you to ask for money?"

Tola was really a softie. "Okay, how much?"

"Erm...#50,000 would do, it's a bit urgent. So, maybe you should just wire it quickly."

Tola clenched her fist. "I am very busy. I would have someone do it later in the afternoon."

"I want it today." He said, and hung up.

Tola held her head. "He always wants money! Like I am his moneybag or something? Oh...God."

Tola and Tolu Scott had been dating for years. He is handsome, tall, fair-skinned and well-built. A very attractive man, but Tolu had a snag, he saw Tola as his personal purse. Her last boyfriend was a lot like him, he loved money to a fault and Tola was as 'generous' as ever. She had six zeroes every month behind a solid number which increased gradually. He always had the need for money and Tola dished it out until she complained and he ran away. But she really did love Tolu and even when she felt like giving up, she just couldn't quit. She really was unlucky.

Tola pulled up at Soul Lounge and stepped in. She spoke to the attendant and he pointed to where Wole Briggs was seated.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Briggs."

He smiled. "Always on time, I like that." He said, and helped her to a seat. "Thank you for having lunch with me." The waiter came over and took their order. Tola ordered only a drink.

"Don't make me feel bad, Tola. I just want to do business with you."

She nodded. "Business? Then why don't we stick to business, and you deal with appropriate persons, if you had anything to do, you could have seen the other guys in the Firm, why me? And why do you always have to involve Mr. Asolo?"

"He is my father's friend. I figured he could easily help me."

She shrugged. "You have never had to work for anything, have you?"

"Yes. I have always worked to make sure that my life goes on just the way I want it." He replied, with a sly grin.

She hissed. "You are so full of yourself. I may not have all the money in the world but I can't be bought. If it is business you want, then let's deal. I don't like wasting time."

"I admire your guts, Tola." He said and sipped his drink. "You are always throwing my love back in my face; most ladies would kill to have your opportunity."

Tola laughed mockingly. "Really? I had no idea that you knew so much about love. You are proud, stupid and rich, no one can love you. They only want your money, honey." She replied.

He blinked and turned his face away. "Am I stupid?"

She nodded with a smile. "You are, my dear."

"Thanks. We would talk later." He said, dropped some money and walked out.

Tola watched him walk out and smiled.

\*\*\*

I stopped at the grocery store. "Old Rodger!" I called as I walked in. Old Rodger ran the store. He had a smile for everyone and he had read some of my articles, he said he loved my work. I didn't see him at the stand so I walked inside the store. "Old Rodger." I called.

"Eh...where are you going?"

I turned round to see a young man staring at me. "Yeah...where are you going?"

"I want to see Old Rodger." I said, dumbly.

He smiled. "Here's young Rodger." I squeezed my eyeballs. "Dad is not around, he is a bit sick."

"Really?" I stared at him. He was wearing an Apron.

"Come over here." He said, and walked away.

I followed him. "Are you Old Rodger's son?" He turned at me with a grimace. "Of course...I am sorry, you said, 'Dad'."

"Ms., what can I help you with?" he asked. He stood in front of the fruit stand. "They are fresh and I bet you would love them."

I nodded. "I would have some of these and some of those...." I said, pointing at the stand.

"Is that all?" he asked, packing them up.

I shook my head. "No, maybe some potatoes and vegetables too"

"I don't have all day, please try to be brisk." He said, with a frown.

I shot at him. "Hey, I am your customer, you asked a question and I responded. If you are not happy working, you should quit."

"What do you know?" he replied, and walked away to get some potatoes. "Anything else?"

I shook my head. "You are rude! Pack them up." I said.

He murmured as he put them into bags.

"Stop murmuring, will you?" I shouted, angrily.

He stamped his foot. "I am not in the mood, okay?"

"Try not to rub your moods on others." I said, as I grabbed the bag. "How much is my bill?"

He ran his eyes through my body and I had to look at it myself. "#3,500" he said, hastily.

I scoffed. "So you assess people before you bill them? You really have a horrid habit." I said, fumbling with my purse. I handed him four clean #1,000 notes. I would have given Old Rodger the rest as a tip, but for his son, I would gladly collect the balance.

He dashed into the tiny office and returned with the balance. "Here" He said, stretching out a Five Hundred Naira note at me.

I collected the change and bumped into Old Rodger as I attempted to leave. "Old Rodger!" I said, with some joy. "I thought you were sick."

He nodded and moved aside. He puffed his pipe carefully. "I couldn't stay at home anymore, my customers are not pleased with this kid, he's a pain." He said, pointing towards the direction where his son was standing, but he had now disappeared into the tiny office. Old Rodger smiled.

"Henry is really something else." He said, and helped himself to his seat. He stretched his cane out and sighed. "Did he treat you right?"

I wasn't about to answer that and add to Henry's troubles. I smiled in response.

Rodger scoffed. "Kim, I know he has an effect on ladies with his cute face and masculine body and all, but you should report him when he errs."

I stared at Rodger. Now that he mentioned it, I had ignored Henry's gorgeous looks due to his attitude. *A bad attitude really takes you nowhere!* "I would be off now, Old Rodger. Do take care of yourself, you should probably get some more rest and stop smoking that thing." I said, pointing at his pipe.

"I can't stop." He called back laughing.

I smiled and pushed the door open. "See you later."

\*\*\*

Old Rodger coughed. His cough had worsened and the Pipe wasn't going to help, yet he wouldn't budge. "Henry." He called.

Henry came out of the office. "Dad, she provoked me. She won't make up her mind at once."

Old Rodger picked his cane and stroked Henry's arm. "And the same with every other customer?" Henry shrugged. "No lectures today, right? You are in your finals. Try to take things more serious and maturely."

Henry nodded. "Aye Aye, Captain!" he saluted. His father hissed. "Dad, I think you should go home, I am really capable of running this show you know."

"What show? My shop isn't a club. I make money from here to take care of you."

Henry rolled his eyes. "Technically, I didn't mean it is a show, it is a short way of saying things, Dad. You really are out-dated, you won't understand."

Rodger nodded and stroked him harder with the cane. Henry jumped back, rubbing his arm. "Good for me. At least, my generation taught me to have manners. I respect everyone even Ms. Kim, not like you, who can't respect anyone."

Henry scoffed. "Come on, Dad!" he replied, fetching himself a seat. "That lady isn't the reason for this attack, is she?" he asked.

His father sighed. "Are you through with your special project work?"

"No, Dad. I am taking aids from those Kim Banks articles. I wish I could meet the lady someday. I need her to assist me on a lot of things, else I won't be able to import some ideas and it would be a shame because those articles are rich."

Old Rodger burst into a mocking laugh. Henry stared at him. "What, Dad?"

Rodger continued laughing. He eventually stopped and poured himself some liquor. "You just met Kim Banks." He replied.

\*\*\*

I emptied the groceries into baskets and stocked them in the kitchen. Ever since we started living together, it had become a point of duty for me; I also had to handle the cooking, except for Saturdays when we cooked together and Sundays when we ate out. I enjoyed helping out, but I really did wish that I had a real job. I am the youngest of us, Tola Matthews is 27, Ini is 24, she would be 25 in a few weeks, and well you know my age, but I would be 22 in July, I was hoping that I would be settled in my field by then.

My phone rang. I stared at the home screen, it was Ben. I ignored the call. As I washed in the sink, water dripped from the broken pipe. "Ah..." I sighed and left for the store. I fetched some plumbing tools and a new pipe, all I had to do was to change the pipe.

The doorbell rang. I checked the wall clock. "It's just past noon. Who could that be?" I thought aloud as I adjusted my gloves. The doorbell chimed again. "Who is it?" I asked as I reached for the door knob.

"Rodger" came the response. 'Old Rodger?' I thought.

I opened it and shook my head upon seeing Henry, Old Rodger's son. "What do you want?" I asked.

"Thanks for not telling on me before my dad." He said.

I nodded. "If that's what you came here for, it's fine." I replied and tried shutting the door, but he stuck his leg. "What?" I asked.

He smiled. "It's not fine. If it was, you won't be trying to get rid of me so easily." He said with a smile and stared at my hand. "What are you doing in those gloves?"

I smiled. "Trying to fix a broken pipe." I replied, showing the wrench.

"Can I help out?" he asked, stretching out his hand.

I shook my head. "Nah...I can do it."

His face fell. "I would feel bad leaving you alone to do it" He said.

"Okay, come in." I said, stepping out of the way. I shut the door gently behind him.

He stared at the apartment. "Nice place you have here." He said. He looked at a picture frame on the wall. It had a picture of Tola, Ini and I in it. "Your sisters?"

I smiled and handed him the wrench. "More like it." I pointed towards the kitchen. "Get to work."

Henry got to work immediately. He started with the wrench while I sat and watched. "You know, I could use some help here." He said, taking out the old pipe. I smiled. I thought he was acting all 'Mr. I can do it'.

"What do you need my help for?" I asked.

He popped his head out. "My Special Research project." He replied.

I stared at him surprisingly. "Plumbing? I had no idea..." I said, with a smile.

He wore a grimace. "Very funny, Ms...." He stretched.



"Kim...Kimberly" I replied, chuckling. "I just knew you needed me for something."

He put in the new pipe and screwed it tightly. "I need Kim Banks. She has this article that I intend to take a cue from."

I nodded. "I suppose you got it from Old Rodger." I said, clasping my hand on my lap. "All you have to do is read it."

"Kim, it's not that easy to decipher why a lady would want to get her heart broken, every lady avoids that. So, tell me how you want me to present that to my faculty."

I smiled. "Oh...well, we might have to look into that on a free day for both of us. What university do you go to?"

He cleared his throat as though he was about to present a speech. Well, he did it in style. "The University of Lagos."

"Really?" I said, getting two glasses. "Do you care for some juice?" I asked, getting the juice from the refrigerator. He nodded in the affirmative. "Here you go."

He smiled. "Thank you. In that case, I would love to request for an interview with you, just to make my work more standard." He took his seat. "So, what do you do?" he asked. "What university?"

"I am a graduate of Economics from UNILAG (*short form for University of Lagos*)"

He almost spilled his drink. "You are out of the university?" I nodded. "Unbelievable. You look so...young!"

"Well, I am young." I replied.

He smiled. "And beautiful too." I stared at him, and he grinned. "Okay, I think you are good for age, but why Economics?" he asked.

I shrugged. "It's Profession, writing is Passion." I lied. '*Economics is profession, Writing is passion!*' had become my favourite response when asked about my course preference. I couldn't tell strangers about my parent's influence. Only close friends knew. Henry took a deep breath and he dropped his empty glass on the kitchen table. "Want another?"

"Nah...I am just wowed by you."

My phone rang again. Ben...again. I ignored it. The call came in for the second time... still I ignored it.

"Boyfriend? You aren't gonna answer?" he asked.

I shook my head. "He's not my boyfriend. He's a friend, but I don't want to talk to him."

He nodded. "I wonder how I would feel if I got that treatment from my girlfriend" he caught my expression. "I mean, my friend."

"Ben isn't my boyfriend." I retorted. "So, tell me Henry, how's UNILAG these days?"

He smiled. "As good as ever, so how's the job market?"

I cleared my throat. "There are really no jobs out there, anyway, when do you think we could meet?" I asked. Henry was getting too comfortable, I had to usher him out.

He took to his feet. "Probably next week, can I get your phone number?" he asked, bringing out his phone. I collected it and punched in the number. "Thank you." he said and walked out.

\*\*\*

Marcus rubbed his hand on his forehead and slid into the backseat of Ini's Murano. "Done! Are you sure about this?" she had parked the car behind the agency.

She laughed out loud. "You just said done, it means that's over. Where's that cream anyway?" she asked, stretching out her hand. Marcus placed Shola's cream on her hand. "She really does go for the best, this is French."

Marcus jumped into the front seat. "Let's get out of here." He suggested.

She scoffed. "Don't be a chicken, Marcus. Let's wait till we hear a loud scream at least, then we are sure that Shola has killed her skin."

He hissed and shot at her. "The only reason why I got as close to the bathroom without being noticed is because I had to dress like a cleaner," he started, throwing his face cap at her. "What if we are caught? Look Ini, we can always hear about this on the news or through friends in the agency, but we can't risk being found out. Just start the car."

Ini hissed. "Marcus, there's this satisfaction that I would get here and now if Shola Jones rubs that cream on her body now, hearing it later would be stale, let's just be patient. She should be out of the bathroom by now." She said, looking at her wristwatch.

Marcus kept looking out of the car. "Ini, this agency is full of security men, we would be finished if we are found out."

Ini grew out of patience and yelled. "That's it Marcus! It's either you get out and run or you stay here and wait, but remember if you run, you are a suspect and I would deny you!"

He fidgeted and took his hand off the car lock. "How did I ever get stuck with you?" he said silently.

She laughed and kissed his cheek. "Be a man, Marcus!"

"There's no way we are going to hear Shola scream. The bathroom is not close to this place. We would find out eventually.

Ini slammed her hand on the steering wheel and drove off.

## 3

"Ini would love to hear this news." I said to Tola as we watched the news.

She nodded in agreement. "She has always hated Shola Jones."

Shola Jones was shown being stretchered out of the National Modelling Agency with an ambulance waiting. There was an oxygen mask attached to her nose.

"In the early hours of today, Top Nigerian Model, Shola Jones suffered a horrible accident to her skin due to a cream. Dermatologists are yet to report the extent of its damage, but due to this, Arab Millionaires, Etilahad have called off their deal with her, reports suggests that, Ini Obong might just be awarded the deal. More reports to follow. I am Moji Ola, reporting for TMV worldwide"

The TV went off. Tola and I turned back. "What did you do that for?" we shouted. Ini must have walked in on the news.

"The news is over, isn't it?" Ini asked, taking her seat. There was a wry smile lurking around her lip. "But I think her accident is exaggerated." She said, placing the remote control beside her. I nodded. "It's true, because I wonder where they came about the oxygen and heavy security in taking her out of the agency. But I am a bit concerned because Shola Jones was said to have been using that cream for ages, so it is a big deal now that it has resulted in adverse effects. The company is definitely going to be sued by her lawyers."

Ini shrugged. "I could care less; all I need now is a phone call from Marcus to say that I have been selected. Who cares if she burns her head?" she added and returned to her room.

"Ini is so cold." Tola said.

I nodded. "She's always been like that. Me, Myself and I." Tola sighed. "Anyway, how are things with you and Tolu?"

Her face fell. "He keeps asking for money, clothes. I don't know what to do."

"Tola, that guy is a jerk. He just wants what you have worked for all your life."

She sighed. "He supported me back in UNILAG. He loves me, things would be better if he had some money."

"YOU ARE A FOOL, TOLA!" Ini shouted from inside the house.

I stared at Tola. The lady was hopelessly in love with Tolu Scott. Sometimes, I wished I was in love too, but for me, I already had a man that I would marry. Other times, I think she's a slave to Tolu and he is taking advantage of the fact that she had a good job.

"You think I am a fool too, right?" she asked. I didn't know what to say. "It's okay. I think I am, but I'd rather be a fool for him."

I sighed and hugged her. "You would be fine, Tola. I just wish he could show you some love."

"He does show me love, he cares for me. It's just the money and material stuffs."

I rolled my eyes. She just lied to me. "He doesn't love you and you know it." I whispered.

She sobbed. "He would still love me. I love him so much." I wiped her face with a tissue paper. "Would he still love me?"

I sighed. "I hope so." I had to switch the topic. "How's Wole Briggs?"

She hissed and sniffled. "Jerk! He keeps flashing his money in my face. He thinks money can buy love. No one loves him, they only love his pocket."

I chuckled. "How ironic! That's 'rich' coming from you."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

I raised my hands up with a smile. "Nothing." She nudged me in the waist. "But seriously, is Wole Briggs that bad?"

She nodded. "He is that bad! He even rubs shoulders with Mr. Asolo and that one helps him to force me on a date." She said, sounding indifferent.

"ROMANTIC!"

She stared at me. "What do you know about being 'romantic'? You are tied to a stranger that doesn't even really know you."

I snarled. "That's my cross, I am carrying it willingly."

She scoffed. "Don't lie!" she replied. "You are so unhappy."

I was raged. "You know if you can put in this effort into knowing if Tolu loves you, things would be better for you!" I shouted. Her face fell and she turned away. *Oh...no, did I say something wrong? But, she just mocked me too...* "I am sorry, Tola. I didn't mean it that way."

We hugged ourselves. My phone rang again. BEN

"You have ignored Ben all day, what happened?" she asked, as she released me from the hug. I stared at my phone as the backlight went off. "Pick it up."

I shook my head. "Ben won't help me at Millaroca because he thinks he can get fired, and also, he thinks that because my father is Prof. Bankole, I won't have to suffer at all." I started. Tola straightened up in her seat. "The truth is this, I know Ben also likes me, and even though I am 'not allowed to love', according to my parents, I don't like him too much."

"Really? I thought you liked him?" she asked.

I shook my head. "I have always seen him as a good man, but not the type that I could fall in love with." I shrugged. "It's not as if I have a preference, but you just know when something isn't there, you know. I just don't see anything more to him."

"Wow! That's deep then. For once I thought someone would be able to whisk you out of Prof. Bankole's cage, turns out it won't be Ben after all."

I smiled. "Maybe someone else would come my way, and even if it doesn't happen, I would try to make my marriage work, at least for the society's sake." I said, wiping a teardrop from my eyes. "My mom is holding up well, so that she's constantly the 'Mom of the Year' and dad too doesn't lose the award."

Tola sighed. "I am so sorry; it must have been hard for you growing up."

I shrugged. "It was full of demands; I had to meet up to standards and fight to surpass them." Tola listened. "Do you know how my father chose David Coker for me? I had never really been able to tell anyone how." Tola nodded and I started...

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*Prof. Bankole adjusted in his chair as Mr. Coker walked into the study. "Sorry for the wait, Tunji." Mr. Coker said apologetically. Tunji Bankole shrugged. "I had to give instructions to my son; he is accompanying my P.A to Istanbul to tie up a deal."*

*"Your son? David is a kid." He replied.*

*Bolu Coker scoffed. "David Coker is not a kid. He is my son, he has my blood and he operates like me. Moreover he is seventeen."*

*"17? Come on...I won't let my daughter out of my sight even when she's 17."*

*Bolu scoffed and called out. "David! David Coker!"*

*"Do you have to call him with your surname?"*

*He smiled. "It reminds him of duty."*

*A handsome young boy walked into the study. He was in a black suit and looked very firm. "Yes, father." He saw Prof. Tunji and bowed courteously. "Good afternoon sir."*

*"Do you remember my friend, Prof. Bankole?" Bolu asked his son. David nodded in the affirmative. "He has a daughter about your age."*

*Prof. Bankole corrected. "No, Kimberly is just 12."*

*"It's a double digit range sir." David said. "Although you are right, she's still a kid, I am a teenager. I think I met her once or twice."*

*Prof. Bankole smiled. He was impressed; he was impressed with David's guts. "What school do you attend now? You should be through with high school."*

*Bolu Coker took over. "It's a school for business men, he had been taking the lessons for a while now. He would merge it with college in the UK after the Istanbul deal is over." He turned towards his son. "Now, go on, you would delay the pilot."*

*David nodded and turned towards Prof. Bankole. "It's a pleasure seeing you again sir, my kind wishes to your wife and daughter." He said and walked out.*

*Prof. Bankole was wowed. He clapped in excitement. "I love that boy! You have raised a fine man, Bolu."*

*Bolu smiled. "Kimberly is a very bright girl. I think if she and David get married, they would make a fantastic couple!" he said, sipping his drink.*

*"Really? Is it possible? I mean how would we still merge children in this generation?"*

*Bolu smiled. "Look at David Coker, he is a fine young man, do you think I would allow him to end up with someone who hasn't been raised with such class too?"*

*Prof. Bankole nodded in agreement. "So, how are you going to convince his mother about this?"*

*Bolu hissed. "That's not a problem, she has never had a say, and she can't have now." Tunji blinked. "Are you scared of Wura?"*

*"Of course not, I just think we should seek their consents."*

*Bolu had never been a man to take to advice. "Look here Tunji; we know what's best for these children, these women only want what's best, we know what's best!"*

*"And that was my life's script played back from some years ago." I said with a smile to my girls.*

*Tola was raged. "That's nonsense. You don't just decide people's future like that." She blurted. I giggled. "It isn't funny. You have to stand up to your dad." She argued.*

*I stared at her as if she were talking in gibberish. "I have been Prof. Bankole's daughter and I have learnt to live with it. David isn't complaining, I see no reason why I should." Tola stared at me. "I know it sounds insane, but I am comfortable with it. At least, my mom is okay."*

*"Really?" she took to her feet. "Good night!" she said, and stormed in.*

\*\*\*

*Marcus tried to avoid glances with the Representatives from Etilahad group. Ini grew uncomfortable. Marcus was almost very transparent. The representatives whispered to themselves. Ini clenched her fists in fear, Marcus would ruin everything.*

*"Marcus! You didn't have to come here, if I knew your diarrhoea was this bad, I would have made you stay back!" she shouted.*

*The Chairman peered. "Excuse me?"*



Ini sighed. "I am so sorry sir, My Manager here has very bad diarrhoea and he's been uncomfortable since, I fear he might even do the business in his pants if he is not allowed out of here." She lied.

The Chairman smiled. "I feared something was weird with him too. He has been acting strange ever since he got here, erm...it's okay Marcus, we would take care of Ini, although it's obvious she's capable."

Marcus nodded in fear and took to his feet. "I would be in the gents." He said and hurried out.

Marcus shut the toilet door and flushed the empty W.C. He sighed and took a deep breath. "I should never have changed Shola's cream; she's in so much pain." He thought. 'What if I just go out there and tell the truth?' he thought. 'Ini would go to jail...I can't let that happen.'

Marcus battled with his conscience and thoughts for minutes as he remained in the Toilet, Ini had saved them with a lie. Who knew how many more evils they would do?

Ini drummed on the toilet door. "Marcus!!!"

He opened it fearfully. "I am sorry, I was so nervous."

She batted her eyelashes. "Done deal now, let's get out!" she said, and pulled him out.

"Marcus! You are gonna have to man up. You are so full of fear." She said, as she drove.

He stared at her. "Did you watch the news? She was taken out with oxygen mask."

Ini laughed wickedly. "Marcus, did you believe any of those charades? It was put up so that she could gain some sympathy at the end of the day, look, it was just a cream change, she should consider this an ultra-toning aid." She said, with a smile. "So, what would it be for you? Kentucky? TFC? We have to celebrate this deal."

"I just want to go home." He said, still very uncomfortable.

She hissed. "Not when you are with me, you sissy!"

\*\*\*

Mr. Asolo cleared his throat. "From now on, you would personally handle Mr. Briggs interests in this Firm. Looks like he would be needing houses regularly"

"But Sir, I have so much work to do already. Why do I have to handle Mr. Briggs affairs too?"

He smiled. "Because you are the best for the job, you know, the Briggs family is very important to this city, and having their son put so much interest in our Firm means we can't let go easily. And I have searched high and low and it is obvious that you are the only one who can help out."

Tola took a deep breath. "Mr. Asolo, this is going to cause a huge distraction to my normal duty."

"I have that all sorted out, you would have an assistant resuming tomorrow. She is very efficient, and you can be sure that your work won't suffer."

She nodded and rose to her feet. "Okay sir." She said and walked out. Her phone rang immediately. TOLU "Hi, Tolu."

"Tola, stop being irresponsible!" he barked. "Tomorrow is Val's day, and I don't have a new Red shirt. I thought you said you bought me that."

She closed her office door. "If you weren't so hasty last night, you would have heard me say that I didn't get a red shirt and I got a pink instead."

"PINK???" Do you think I am gay? I saw the stupid shirt, I burnt it already. I want a red shirt."

Tola slammed her table. "You burnt it? I bought that shirt for 12,000 Naira. Do you know how many people would kill to have a shirt worth that amount?"

He hissed. "How much is #12,000? If things weren't horrible for me, would I need that miserly amount?" he shouted.

Tola sighed out of tiredness. "You want a red shirt, right?"

"Of course. I helped you when you were nothing, never forget that!" he said, and hung up.

Tola rubbed her forehead and dialed her secretary ordering her to get a Red Shirt.

\*\*\*

Henry walked into his supervisor's office. "Sir, I have the killer topic for my special project." He announced.

"Henry, you have two weeks to submit and now you want to change your topic, I hope you know you are doomed to an extra year."

Henry smiled. "Sir, I can assure you that with this, I would rock this campus. Everyone would want to read, they would want to listen and they would want to understand."

Dr Kalu nodded. "Henry, you make me laugh. Everyone is wrapping up their special projects and you are confident of bringing me a 'killer project'." He shook his head despicably. "Henry, I can't stop you, it's your vision."

"Of course, you can't stop me."

He nodded. "But, I can tell you one thing for sure, I regret having you as a student. Forget about bringing whatever rubbish you have to me, go ahead with it." He said and pointed at the door. "Leave, I am a busy man."

Henry scoffed and walked out. He bumped into John, their class guru. "Hey John...how far, how you dey?" He asked as they exchanged pleasantries in *Pidgin* English.

John smiled. "I dey... Just returning from my supervisor, he says he thinks my work is good, so it's just a matter of me putting some finishing touches to it."

"Good for you, man."

John stared at Henry's hand. "What's that in your hand?"

"Oh...this is my project, I was trying to get an approval from Dr. Kalu to work, but he won't even have a look."

John stared at him. "Henry? Approval? Guy, everyone is wrapping up already!"

"I know, but that topic he gave me before is so wacked and no one would be interested in applauding me for it."

John shrugged. "So what? He is a Doctor; he has said you should do it, why would you think you know better?"

Henry smiled. "That's the difference between you and I, I am not a Robot." He said, and walked away.\*\*\*

Wura Bankole sipped her juice. "Tunji, I think I am not too comfortable with this thing with David Coker. To be honest, he hasn't spoken to our daughter in a while; she's worth more than that."

"That's the problem Woman, you only think." Tunji replied, laughing.

Her face fell. Her husband was right. "Tunji, you hardly let me have a say in this house especially when it deals with our daughter. It's not fair."

He smiled. "You don't understand. I am securing Kim's future, happily, she's smart enough to recognize my intentions."

"She doesn't have a choice. The poor girl has always adored you, you making this decision for her is not right."

Tunji stood up. "Where is all this coming from? Our daughter isn't complaining, why are you?"

"I am her mother!" she shouted. "I know she's unhappy."

He nodded. "When you were married off to me, you were unhappy, but see, we are used to each other and moreover, as long as I can provide you with everything you want and need, you should be happy, and that includes Money, Cars, and Trips. What else could you want?"

"Tunji, this is the reason why I didn't want another child with you after Kimberly, and I am glad we didn't have another! A child should be born out of love."

Tunji Bankole slammed his glass against the wall. "What else do you want from me, Wura? It's not my fault that our parents wanted us together, but I have tried to be responsible." He paused and scoffed. "So that's why you never wanted another child." She turned her face away. "How shameful."

"It's not my fault, Tunji. You have never made me happy, I have only been comfortable."

He stared at her angrily. "What's the difference? When you are comfortable, you are happy!" Wura burst into laughter almost falling off the chair. "What's funny, Woman?"

"I can't believe that you don't know that there's a difference in being happy and comfortable. Unfortunately, our daughter would suffer the same fate. She has been unhappy ever since she started to study Economics."

He eyeballed her. "She's a First Class."

"Of course, Kim is just determined to succeed. That's why she got a First Class." She took to her feet. "If you keep pushing her, you would turn her into what you have made me, a woman without confidence." She walked away.

Professor Bankole was left with his thoughts, but fury consumed most of it.

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Tolu wiped some mayonnaise from his mouth. "So where are we going tomorrow?" he asked.

Tola dropped her Fork. "What?"

"Can I survive this dinner first? It's not like you are paying for the outing." She blurted furiously.

He stared at her. "How dare you?" he started as he pushed his chair back. "Are you trying to rub it in that I am without a job? I would have handled that."

She sighed and grabbed her Jacket. "Tolu, I am not ready for this. We would go to Soul Lounge or Harbour's point. You decide." She said, picking her keys.

"Tola, this is not fair! You are treating me like your puppy and I can't stand it."

She nodded. "TOLU!!! Give me a break! You always want this or that! Do I need to kill myself for you to be happy?" "Kilode?" she stressed in Yoruba. (*Kilode-What is it?*)

*Reverse Psychology needed.* He turned away and faced the window. "I was there when you had no one, your uncles kicked you out, I took you in." he said softly, taking his seat. "I am sorry."

She shook her head and stormed out. She sat in the Range Rover and buried her head. Tolu really had been there when she had no one, but now, she really is unhappy. They used to be so happy when she had nothing. They would run across the streets for cheap meals and go to Local Pubs, but ever since she got that mouth-watering Job at Asolo Real Estate, Tolu changed. He wanted more.

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The doorbell chimed. Prof. Bankole was reluctant to get it. It was already 9pm. 'You should stay in your house!' he thought. The bell rang for a second time and then a third. He grunted and forced himself to the door. The security man would pay for allowing anyone in at this time, and of course the visitor would get his own share of the spoils. He pushed the door open and his jaw dropped slightly.

"Sorry I am here unannounced. Good evening, Sir."

He smiled as he admired David Coker's dressing. "Good evening, Son. I didn't know you were in town." He said, stepping out of the way.

David was all suited up. The man just knows how to look good, apart from the obvious fact that he is good looking. He had the height, appearance, and carriage. *Magazine Material!* "I came in few hours ago. Father thought I should visit."

"Ah...Bolu, he should have let you rest. How was your flight?" he asked. David motioned towards a chair. "Please sit."

He adjusted his jacket. "It was okay. Is Kimberly in?" he asked.

Prof. Bankole blinked. How would he tell his in-law that his wife-to-be wasn't in? "Erm...Kimberly is currently staying with her friends. Her work takes her away most times."

"Really? What does she do?"

He poured himself a glass of wine. "She's a writer."

"Writer?" he probed with a form of slight grimace.

David Coker looked a bit disappointed and Prof. Bankole knew he had to up the rhythm. He sipped carefully. "She's not really a writer, but she has this project for my Firm on Economics. She's an Economist...Just like me." He said. David rose to his feet and adjusted his button. "She graduated with a First Class." He cleared his throat. "There's a lot going on these days in the business world." David nodded.

David stared at Tunji Bankole carefully. "Please sir, do tell Kimberly that I would be going out with her tomorrow for the Valentine's Day." He said with a smile. "Do extend my kind greetings to your wife, would have loved to see her. Good night." He said and walked out.

## 4

"Tolu is taking me to Soul Lounge." Tola said, applying her lip stick.

Ini and I stared at her. Who was she trying to fool? *She was taking Tolu to Soul Lounge.* Tolu would show up in a red shirt, grey pants, a bollard hat and dark sunshades that would have been purchased by our dear friend, Tola. The guy is just a leech!

Tola sighed. "Okay! I know what you guys think...but you don't expect me to say I am taking Tolu to Soul Lounge." She said, grabbing her car keys. She turned towards Ini who was still snickering. "Why are you up early, Ini? It's a miracle." She was right, Ini never got up early. Ini smiled.

"I had to see your outfit for the Val's day special. And of course, get to witness you talk about Tolu as if you were having a happy time." Tola was looking hot in her red velvet gown and black heels. The season was really something to savour for her. She 'loved' Tolu way too much. Or maybe 'lust', I mean the guy is a real hunk!

Tola scoffed. "At least, I have a boyfriend of my own." She said, approaching the door. *The Loser's consolation!*

"Of course, he is a boy! He still needs Tola..." Ini replied, sounding like a cartoon character. "Like a baby needs his mommyyyy..." she added with a great deal of sarcasm.

Ini and Tola were fond of taking swipes at each other, I couldn't be bothered. They were the free women. I picked up my phone and sent a text to Ben. 'See you later tonight!' Their banter ended when Tola slammed the front door. "Why do you always have to be so mean, Ini?" I asked, turning to her.

She smiled and jumped at the remote control for the TV. "Fashion TV first!"

"Ini, why would you just switch the topic?"

She grinned. "It's not as if we had a discussion going." She said, sticking her tongue out. I smiled. "Okay love, what are you wearing tonight? I saw your fingers typing to Ben."

I giggled. "I haven't even thought about that. But I would find something as soon as I look, I am certain." Clothes had never been a problem for me, the problem was wearing them often. I had nowhere to go!

"I want to help you with the make-up. You have to look awesome."

Owl-some or Awesome???

Ini won't be tinting my face! At least not tonight. I have always cherished simplicity and thanks to that, it has kept me level-headed. I wouldn't have had a problem with Ini's makeover, but she really could overdo it. "I would be fine. You don't have to." I said, refusing her offer.

She snarled. "I insist. I promise to be back from the agency much earlier today because of you. What time would Ben be here for you?"

I shrugged. "Probably 8pm"

"Fantastic! We would have a *Diva made by Ini* ready for him." She yawned. "You see, I have to return to my rightful place - the bedroom." She said, and walked off.

I laughed at her as she went after her beauty sleep. I reached for my laptop and continued my project. I was bent on showing Ben that my new write-up on '*Dear Future Husband*' would fetch Millaroca a wide audience. The story was targeted at the Nigerian woman with many dreaMs. and wishes in a man. Of course, everyone wants the Prince Charming not the Toad, even the fairy tales taught us well. I had started writing on it. The story featured single women and their needs and wants from men, especially the man to make a perfect husband.

\*\*\*

Tola stared at her phone anxiously. She was expecting at least a 'love message' from him, after all, it's Val's day! 'Please Tolu...' she murmured.

Tolu and Tola really used to be darlings of the institution back then; most people even tipped them to get married. Tolu was selfless then, but now he had grown to be selfish. It was all about him these days and it really broke her heart.

She relaxed in the swivel and got back to work. At least someone had to provide for their relationship. All bills were on Tola for their dinner at Soul Lounge. A number of her friends from



the real estate business and popular clubs would be hanging out there tonight and Tolu too did say that some of his 'boys' would be at Soul Lounge with their babes. The best part of Val's day at Soul Lounge is the Paparazzi and Red Carpet; the press would be there in their numbers to tell the society about 'who loves who'.

Tolu Scott is a real hunk! He has the body that any lady would die for; he has the looks, height and charms too. Ini even tried hooking him up into the modelling agency, but Tola kicked against it then. She attacked Ini for trying to steal her man, who would blame her? Ini hung around with the best guys. At times, Tola felt that Tolu still resented her for not allowing him get into the agency because he would bring it up when they argued, but Tola did her best to make sure he never lacked anything. For his last birthday, she bought him a Mercedes E-class, yet he would constantly ask for money to fuel the car. She really was a slave to this love.

There was a light knock on the door. A large bouquet of red Roses covered Kemi's face as she walked in. "Good morning ma'am." She greeted, dropping the flowers delicately on the table.

Tola smiled. 'Tolu' she thought with a smile. At least, he still had it in him. "Good morning, Kemi." She greeted back and reached for the card on the flowers. *First things first!*

"There's a parcel too." She said, stretching out a gift parcel to Tola. Tola dropped the card and collected it. Kemi turned out briskly.

Tola smiled at the parcel and opened it carefully. "Wow...this is beautiful." She said, taking out the gold necklace. "This is so beautiful." She admired the necklace and then reached for the card she had abandoned.

'I might be stupid, but I won't forget to tell a beautiful woman that she deserves love a Happy Valentine's day. Love, From Wole Briggs.'

She sighed as she dropped the card. "Silly me, here I was thinking Tolu had sent it." She carefully packed the necklace and dialed Kemi. "Please come in."

"Yes ma'am." Kemi said, as she walked in. Kemi could guess why she was being called.

Tola stared at the flowers. "Have you gotten any flowers this morning?" she asked. Kemi smiled. "Come on, don't be shy."

She shook her head in disagreement. "Not yet, but even if I get a branch out of love, I won't dispose of it." Tola's face fell. She had a bouquet, but Kemi would be willing to take a branch from someone who loved her. "I have a man who loves me, he is a cab driver." She started. Tola stared at her probingly. "I don't like him much, but he loves me. That's a part of his heart, I can't take it away from him, even if he gives me a branch of tulip, I would receive it with so much love because I know it's from his heart."

OKAY! Tola had had enough! "You talk too much for a secretary." Tola replied. Kemi's words hit her. Kemi smiled. "It's okay. Please take these flowers down to the reception. Our clients would love to see a large bouquet like this. Money wasted!" she said, tearing the card and dumping it in the thrash. "And when you are done, please send a messenger here to return this to the address where it came from." She said, staring at the parcel.

Kemi nodded and walked out carrying the Bouquet.

\*\*\*

David rolled over on his bed as the rays of sunlight came into his eyes. He slept without his shirt and that's a beauty to behold for Oyinkan. "How many times have I told you to sleep with your shirt?" she asked, throwing a pillow in his face.

"Am I to take the fall for being too gorgeous?" he asked, pulling her on the bed. He stared at her eyes. "Good morning." He said and kissed her forehead.

She smiled. "And being cocky too? Keep flirting with me like that and I would forget that you are my cousin." She replied, as she bit her lips.

He shook his head and shoved her away kindly. "You are really something, Oyinkan. When would you stop turning men on?"

"When I finally get married! I wish I was as lucky as you are, at least, you have a readymade bride. A good one at that!" She said, standing up from the bed. He smiled and wore a shirt. "Do I really turn you on, cousin?" she asked, opening his diary.

David rushed at her and snatched it. "Don't touch!" he snapped. "You couldn't even turn me on when naked." He replied and winked at her. "How's that boyfriend of yours?" he asked, going into the bathroom.

"Remi is good. I am spending the night at his place." She replied.

David came out with his toothbrush. "Really? Every time you spend the night in a guy's place, you break up the next day. You are no longer a kid, Oyinkan. We are in Nigeria now; there are traditions and you have to take it easy here."

She smiled. "What's the difference? Men would always be men! You are really protective, big cousin. I like that." She said, smiling. "But really, Remi and I won't last. We met on the plane, remember? And we would definitely have sex tonight and then it's over." She shrugged.

He scoffed. "Not all men are pigs. I don't think he would just sleep with you without knowing you well."

She hissed. "Who cares about Jack? Not all men are like you, my decent cousin." She smiled. "I can promise you that it would happen tonight."

David shook his head. "You can't continue acting like this, Oyinkan. You have got to respect yourself a little more."

She shrugged and lit her cigarette. "Respect is for love. Love doesn't exist."

"Just because Derek broke your heart doesn't mean you have to go from good to bad, you are more than that." He said, taking the cigarette from her mouth. "No smoking in my room."

She groaned. "You are too prim and proper, David. When would you stop this?" she punched the bed.

David finished brushing his teeth and sat beside her. "Can you give room for love again? I miss the old you."

She eyeballed him coldly. "All men are the same."

"Including me?" he asked with an eyebrow raised.

She smiled. "You are the only different one." He hugged him. "Maybe if you could love me, I would try to love again, but I know you can't and I don't think I want to be beside you as your woman, you are too cautious. Kimberly is just your fit."

David rubbed his chin. "Can we make a deal, Oyinkan? I want you to try to see Remi differently. Forget about having sex with him."

She laughed. "Impossible, David! This is the deal. If after everything I do to sleep with him, he resists me, I would try to love."

"Oh...well, that's quite unfair." He said, stroking her hair. "You really are gorgeous; it's hard for a man to resist you."

She stared at him. "How do you do it?"

He shrugged. "You know why."

"Love is not enough. Derek swore that he loved me, yet he slept with my sister."

David sighed. "Let's forget about that loser and focus on Remi, I hope he wins."

"For your sake and the few decent men out there, I hope so too."

He nodded and carefully put away his diary. "So, Happy Val's day." He said, bringing out a bracelet from the drawer. Oyinkan smiled sheepishly as he put it round her wrist. "It's a friendship bracelet." He said, with a smile.

Oyinkan admired the bracelet. "David, are you really comfortable with this? I mean the wedding and all. I know she's a decent lady but I am just concerned."

"Just as you said, Kimberly is a decent lady, and our parents are comfortable, so I just have to marry her." He replied, grabbing a towel. "I am spending this evening with her, I haven't seen her in almost eight years and we barely talk on the phone, I guess we have some bonding to do, for the sakes of our families' businesses."

She smiled. "Try to know her, okay? I have to eat. I think breakfast is set." She said and approached the door. "See you tomorrow morning; we have a deal, remember?"

"Of course, be good." He said, and closed the door gently after her.

\*\*\*

Ben straightened his Blazer. "What do you think, Boye?" he asked.

Boye stared at it. Boye is Ben's best friend. They live together. He nodded. "I think Kimberly would love it, but dude, are you sure about that place you want to take her?"

"Of course, it's going to be a surprise for her. She would never expect it."

Boye took his seat. "Look Ben, I am not saying that taking her to a classy restaurant isn't good, I am only concerned about what you are going to spend." He started. "You have a humble salary, Kim would understand."

Ben smiled. "Boye, when you fall in love, you would understand." Boye shrugged. "How's that babe?"

"Which one?" Boye asked, looking confused. He had been with many ladies of recent. "Bola or Keji?"

Ben laughed. "Do you even know the last girl you slept with?"

Boye smiled. "Maybe Keji, but I am not too sure. She has even been sending me messages since morning." He said, taking out his phone. "Ladies..."

"How do you intend to spend tonight?" Ben asked, taking his seat. He fetched his phone from his jacket. "You know, it was Kimberly who even sent me a text this morning, I think she likes me." he said with a smile.

Boye shrugged. "I hope so. And I hope you are not seeing Kim as your lottery ticket to meet the famous Professor Bankole."

"No! I love her. And although, it would bring some of my dreams to pass, it's love first."

Boye nodded. "I hope so." He grinned as though he was about to say something annoying. "I hope Prof. Bankole likes you. I mean, you live in a humble flat, nothing like the place Kimberly stays with her friends. How much more his home?" He giggled.

Ben wore a grimace. "Very funny, Boye. My apartment is not that bad. We even sleep in separate rooms, and when Kim and I get married, I would provide her something better."

"From which salary? Is it the one that Mr. Adeoye pays us? It's not even enough to pay the full year rent."

"It's because Millaroca is really slumping."

Boye scoffed. "Why won't it? The man is so traditional; he won't even look at our ideas. By the end of the month, I would start looking for another job bro, and I suggest you do the same."

"Mr. Adeoye has been good to us." Ben replied, quietly.

Boye rolled his eyes. "Yes, I know. But even though Millaroca is going down, that man has just bought that 'Evil spirit' ride, he has kids who are well-to-do and can take care of him. But you and I, what do we have? We live in a flat bro, you still use the same Camry. That car is already taking a bow, you know."

"Boye, we have to start from somewhere. Anyway, my desk is full. I think you should go and tidy yours too."

Boye smiled. "Of course, the truth always gets you like this." He said, standing up. "Don't spend all your savings tonight, save some for the wedding." He said, and walked out.

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Marcus sighed as he paced around in the waiting room.

"Keep pacing like that and you would have everyone believe you are a murderer."

He stood and faced Ini. "We are going to jail when we are found out."

She sighed. "Where did I ever find a weakling like you for a manager?"

A doctor came out. "You can go in now. You just have ten minutes." He said.

"Is this a Prison?" Marcus murmured.

The doctor stared at him. "Did you say something?"

She shrugged. "Of course not." She replied and pushed Marcus in.

Shola Jones sprang up as soon as she saw Ini. "What do you want?" she asked.

Ini rolled her eyes and dropped a bouquet of flower near her. "Happy Valentine!" she said with a fake smile.

"I know you wished this was my funeral. I am not dead yet."

Marcus waved.

"I see you brought your puppet along." She said, looking at him. "You didn't come here just to give me roses, did you?"

Ini scoffed. "Of course not, it's only important that we share this moment together." She fetched a box of chocolates. "We should take pictures as we eat this." She said, giving her iPad to Marcus.

"Are you foolish, Ini?" She asked. "Or you do you think I am foolish?" she added. Ini smiled. "Ah...I get your plan, you would take a picture of us sharing chocolates and send it to Instagram and Twitter and then you would look like the perfect model and role model."

Marcus interrupted. "Why are you misjudging Ini's good intentions?"

"He speaks! The puppet speaks! Marcus, you are not invited to this conversation, and thanks for the visit. Leave now, you both." She ordered.

Ini rose to her feet. "Humans are of insatiable wants." She murmured.

"Really? Look here Ini, I would be fine soon, and I would find out however my cream was tampered with, and trust me, I would be back for THE PERSON OR PEOPLE." Marcus blinked.

Ini scoffed. "You are fine. There's nothing wrong with you, that entire charade with the oxygen mask was to earn some sympathy from the society. You should log in to your twitter account; your followers have skyrocketed in the last hours." Ini tinkered with her hair. "I think you have around 600,000 now. That's impressive."

Shola smiled. "It's because I am beautiful." Ini yawned. "Even on a stretcher." She added with a smile. "Now leave!" she said, sternly.

Ini snapped at Marcus who took a snapshot of Shola Jones and walked out after Ini.

\*\*\*

My phone rang tirelessly. 'Can't some callers be patient?' I thought. I hummed to Anne Boskovich's *"Everything is Beautiful"*, it had become my favourite. I turned off the shower. It is my 2<sup>nd</sup> time of having a shower. Ini said I had to look extremely fresh for Ben. Probably it was Ben calling, I was expecting his call. He hadn't called since I sent him a text in the morning.

Oh...well, all my missed calls were from Professor Bankole. What did Dad want? Was he calling to say a happy Valentine to me? *That would be special...*

"I suppose you keep your phone miles away." Dad yelled into the receiver.

He almost made me regret calling back. "I am sorry, father. I was in the shower." I replied, using my right hand to ruffle my hair with the towel. I got a broadcast on my BB where I was told to use my left hand to pick calls. I haven't confirmed that yet, though.

"Whatever. I want you to get ready for 7:30pm; David Coker would be coming to pick you for dinner." He said.

DAVID COKER!!! "David what?" Did I hear this man right? After how many years and he chooses to show up on Valentine's Day! The man sure knows how to pick his moments!

"You heard me! Your fiancé would be coming to pick you by 7:30pm; I already gave him the address."

David Coker? I hadn't seen him in person for many years. We only talked on phone and it was really brief. How could he show up today of all days? "Dad, it won't be possible, I have plans for tonight."

Dad hissed loudly. "Then cancel! Your fiancé comes first! He would be there and that's that." He roared and hung up.

I sank into my bed. This isn't happening...David Coker? I dialed Ben immediately... 'The Number you have dialed is currently switched off, Please try again later...' came the response from the network operator.

I stared at the wall clock "6:30pm!" I dried my hair and had a quick change of clothes into something really light.

The doorbell chimed almost immediately. "No way!" I shouted. Dad had said 6:30pm! I rushed to the door, took a deep breath and opened the door with my best smile. "Hello."

Ini frowned. "Why are you so excited?" she asked. *Oh...well, at least, my own House of Tara had arrived!* I sighed and stepped out of the way. "Come back here Princess, were you expecting Ben?" she asked, laughing.



I sank into the chair. "I am expecting David Coker."

"David what?" she asked, joining me on the chair. "What about Ben?"

I sighed. "Dad just called to tell me that David would be here to pick me up by 7:30pm and Ben hasn't replied my message since morning."

She stared at the wall clock. "It's almost 7." She sighed. "What are you going to do?"

I shrugged. "I have to go. I am engaged to David, remember?"

She nodded in agreement. "In that case, let's get you ready." She said and pulled me inside.

"Ta-da!!!" Ini said turning the chair towards the mirror. "Wow! I should be a makeup artist." She said, revelling in herself.

I smiled. "You are already a model." She brushed my hair back. "Thank you, Ini."

"It's nothing. Now stand and let's behold her royal beauty."

I blushed as Ini walked around me. "You are hot! Why do you hide all these curves in those stupid denims and polos of yours?" I smiled. "It's okay. I think your chariot would soon be here, it's almost 7:30pm, and if he is as principled as your dad says, he should be here in exactly 5 minutes."

I smiled. "What about traffic? This is Lagos, remember?"

She scoffed. "Most couples would be at the cinemas or stuck in Kentucky or somewhere special. The roads won't be busy."

"I have to go and call Ben." I said, and approached the door.

She smiled. "I would find you a clutch."

I smiled back and walked out in my black gown and red heels. "Please pick up Ben..." I said and dialed again. 'No Answer' gladly he had turned on his phone, but he wasn't picking up. I dialed again. I then sent a text. 'I won't be able to make it Ben, something came up.' The doorbell chimed.

'7:30PM'

I took a deep breath and opened the door. "Good evening." I said, with a smile. Okay...truth be told, David Coker is really handsome! Tall, Athletic and Good-looking. David Coker smiled faintly. He stared at me almost provocatively. I tried avoiding his glare. He cleared his throat. "Please come in." I said, and stepped out of the way.

He walked into the apartment. I placed my phone on the side table as I took my seat.

"Kimberly?"

"Yes."

"David Coker." He said, stretching out his hand. I took it confidently. "There's going to be a lot of traffic, we had better head out now." He said.

Ini jumped out. "OMG! David Coker, nice to meet you." she said, taking his hand. She was smiling and almost laughing too. It felt weird. "I am Ini, Kimberly's friend. She's said so much about you."

WHAT??? Ini didn't just do that! David smiled at her. "Funny, but nice to meet you, Ini." He turned towards me. "Shall we?"

"Of course" Ini said, flying towards the door and opening it. She was almost pushing us out. "You guys look good together." She placed the clutch in my hand. "Take care, honeys." She said, closing the door after us.

*Kimberly Bankole had dropped her phone on the side table, Oops!*

\*\*\*

Ben fumed as he called Kimberly's Phone for the umpteenth time. "She's still not picking the call."

Boye sighed. "Man, I think you chose the wrong place. It's very expensive here at Golden Gate, too classy." He said, looking around. He watched the Lagos 'big boys' stroll in with their women. By big boys, these were men who called the shots with their pockets, men like Wole Briggs. "Guy, this place dey off our league o...shey we never overdo am?" he asked in Pidgin English.

Ben hissed. His pessimist of a friend was going to jinx the mood. "Boye, I told you not to bother coming. Go and meet one of your girls, she would soon pick the phone, it's already past 8." His phone buzzed and Kim's text came in. "Oh no!" he said and dropped the phone on the table.

Boye stared at him. "What is it, Man?"

Ben's face fell. "Kimberly won't be able to make it, she said something came up." He said, clenching his fists.

"Don't be too hard on yourself. There would be other occasions, and it's not like Valentine's Day is the only day you can show love. I guess I have to call Keji now, she's the only one that cares so much."

Ben sighed. "That's because you 'do' it well with her, anyway, I just thought it would be special with Kimberly." Boye smiled. "What's funny?"

"I am smiling, not laughing. Anyway, let's get out here man." He said, looking around. "It's not like we fit this place."

Ben nodded and adjusted his blazer. He rose to his feet and Boye quickly sat him down. "Duck, man, I can see Kimberly." He alerted. Ben slid down his chair slightly. They watched Kimberly and David Coker take a seat. "That's your Kimberly, man." Boye said, with a sly grin.

It echoed in Ben's head as he stared at Kimberly and David afar off.

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David stared at me. "You are beautiful, Kimberly."

*Sigh...I thought he would never comment. What a Fiancé!* "Thank you. You are not bad either."

He scoffed. "I have always been good looking." He replied. I smiled. He didn't lie about that. I met him on few occasions when growing up, and he had always looked attractive. The waiter joined us and placed menu booklets before us. "I would have this." He said, and handed his booklet to the waiter.

"Looking good." The Waiter said smiling at me.

I smiled back and handed him my booklet. "Thank you."

David scoffed as soon as the waiter left. "That's a nice compliment; I didn't know it was part of customer service."

I laughed. "How's business?"

He shrugged. "Business is business. Nothing different from the norm, it's ruthless and brutal. I have a major takeover next month."

*And the terms poured in...what did I care about business? Sooner or later, I had to get used to it, it is what my future husband was going to be doing.*

"How's your writing going?" he asked. *Did David just ask about my writing? My eyes lit up in excitement.*

I stared at him. "Writing?"

He nodded and sipped his wine. "Yes...your father said you are a writer." WRITER??? DAD WOULD NEVER BE PROUD OF SAYING THAT. "He said you had a writing job for his firm." I rolled my eyes. *Of course...Dad would pretend. He had David thinking I was in his firm, how untrue!*

"Happy Valentine's day, Kimberly."

I turned round to see Ben.

## 5

I adjusted in my chair as I stared at Ben. "Happy Valentine's Day, Ben."

He smiled. "I saved enough money to bring you here, why him?" he asked, staring at David. David sighed and sipped his drink. His legs were crossed carefully and he appeared indifferent.

"Ben, it's not what you think. Things are a lot more different than it seems and I can explain if you give me the chance."

He nodded. "Of course, you can explain. But you never did. You had all the time in the world, I called you endlessly this evening, you didn't have the decency to pick my call and out of the blues, you send me a text that something came up." He was now raising his voice. "Is this what you are busy with?" he asked, eyeballing David.

I touched my clutch and searched for my phone. *Oh no!* I had dropped it at home while collecting the clutch from Ini. My heart skipped a beat as David rose to his feet. He adjusted his jacket and took a deep breath. "Good evening." He said, stretching out his hand. *Weird man!*

Ben stared at him from head to toe. "Are you trying to throw your \$5,000 suit in my face?" he asked, looking at him. David stared at his jacket and smiled. "You think it's funny, right?"

I stood up. "Benjamin! What's all these for?" I queried. *I didn't know what to do at that time, like it or not, David is my to-be husband.*

He shot at me. "What does it look like? You stood me up just because you felt I couldn't bring you to this kind of place, right?" I hissed. "Go on...I might be nobody today, but I know how to spend all I have on someone I love." He yelled.

"Just hold it right there, Ben! You are embarrassing me!" I stifled through my teeth. Heads were beginning to turn and the murmurings began. *What a nice way to ruin the evening!*

He nodded. "Of course! I am not meant to be in this kind of place, I am not from the top families, I am..."

"Just stop! You are sounding so pathetic." I yelled.

Boye joined us. "Cool it, Ben, let's get out of here." Boye said, holding his hand.

"No, you were right, Boye. Stupid me! Here I am with all I have to show my love and it's been spurned in my face, just because I am not a rich kid." He said pointing at David. David smiled. "Just look at that! Very arrogant bastard." He said and threw a punch at David.

David dodged it and hit him in the face. Ben crashed into the table breaking it in the process. Boye rushed to him and I did too. I never thought that David could hit anyone, he looked so... "Ben, are you alright?" I said, looking at his face. From his face, it was obvious that he was dazed from David's hit.

Security men rushed in and tried to pick Ben up. "Is there a problem?" one of them asked, facing David.

"This nuisance here disrupted my dinner with my fiancée." David replied.

Ben stared at him as Boye helped him up. "Fiancée?" he turned towards me. "Y...You never told me." he struggled to say. I bowed my head; it wasn't something I was proud of.

David took my hand. "We are leaving" he said, pulling me along. He then paused and looked at Ben. "By the way, the suit is \$7,000." He said, and walked out, dragging me along.

"Stop this! Show me some respect!" I shouted as we stepped out of the restaurant.

He laughed scornfully. "Really? I think you are the one who has to show me some respect. Your boyfriend tried to hit me."

"Ben is not my boyfriend."

He nodded. "It didn't seem so to me. You should try to define your friendship, Kimberly Bankole." He said, walking away.

"David Coker! You don't know a thing about me!" I replied, hurrying after him.

He turned back. "Fill me in. You appear to me like some woman who can't wait to be with any man because her fiancé is temporarily unavailable."

I was stunned! I am still a *virgin* because of this man! (PLEASE: Tell no one!) "Temporarily unavailable? You are unbelievable, David Coker. I have been faithful to you ever since our parents hooked us." I yelled.

Some people walking into the restaurant stopped to look at us. "What are you looking at?" I shouted. Those who had stopped to watch quickly walked ahead.

He smiled and grabbed my hand. "The next time you forget that you are Kimberly Bankole, remember that I am David Coker and I have a family name to protect. Now get into the car and stop embarrassing our families." He said and pushed me in.

He didn't say a word as he drove into the night. The gossip channel in Nigeria would already have information on David and I yelling outside the famous Golden Gate Restaurant, and I could bet that dad would blame me for it. He wouldn't see anything wrong with his precious son-in-law to be.

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Tola sighed as she watched Tolu dance with the third girl. He didn't even ask her for a dance, and when she was 'stupid' enough to get on the dance floor with him, he switched dance partners almost immediately. She poured herself another shot of whiskey.

"You have had enough."

Her cup was seized as she tried to drink. She turned to see Wole Briggs. "You again?"

He nodded. "Yes, it's me again."

"Do you keep tabs on me? Or is this a coincidence?" she asked, feeling tipsy.

Wole adjusted his chair and faced her. "I am Wole Briggs, remember?"

She smiled. "And still as arrogant as ever"

He shrugged. "So what are you doing here all by yourself?" he asked, sipping her drink. She didn't respond. Seeing that she wasn't in the mood to say anything, he continued. "Or, who are you here with?"

She turned sharply. "Mr. Briggs! Why are you here?"

"I came to hang out with some friends, and then I spotted you afar off, I thought I should say hi."

She nodded. "There you have it, Hi-Hello." She said hastily and turned in Tolu's direction, he was still on the dance floor. His new dance partner wore a polka-dotted pink gown, she sighed. The last lady was wearing a red gown. Tolu went on and on having fun, while she grew morose.

"Do you want to dance?" Wole asked.

She hissed and tried to lift the bottle to her mouth. Wole seized the bottle this time. "What is it, Wole Briggs? Are you too stupid that you don't know when to stop?"

He smiled. "I just thought you could use some company. I don't think your boyfriend loves you." he said, looking ahead.

"What do you know about me?" she said, and fetched her phone from her purse. "You know nothing, absolutely nothing!"

He shrugged. "Not much, but enough to know that you need to go home and take a shower and sleep. Val's day has not been a good one for you."

"Really?" she laughed mockingly. "How has it been for you?"

He smiled. "I am here with friends; everyone is having a good time."

"Except you!" she interrupted, quickly.

He smiled. "Why?"

She nodded and tried to keep her eyes open. "It is because you are here with me. If you were with your friends right now, you may be happy, but right now, you are having a bad time."

"You are right. Why don't we make it a good time for both of us then? We could take a walk."

She nodded and tried to stand up. "I usually don't drink much." She said. She struggled to gain balance on her heels. She then puked accidentally and crashed into Wole. She felt embarrassed. The alcohol had too much weight on her, normally; she wouldn't have done that in public. "I am sorry." She struggled to say, avoiding his stare. She had stained his shirt.

Wole helped her to a seat. "It's okay." He took out his handkerchief and wiped her face gently, he lifted her chin to his face. "You need to rest. Let me take you home."

"Hey fast guy! What are you doing with my woman?" Tolu said, placing his hat on the table, he rolled his sleeves quickly.

Tola's view was hazy. "He was only helping me out."

"Really? You were all over him." He replied, angrily.



Wole stepped in. "Chill man, she is slightly drunk. She needs to go home."

Tolu clenched his fists. "I didn't ask for your explanation, punk!"

Wole nodded and stepped back. "Take 'your woman' home."

"Of course!" Tolu bent over to pick Tola up. This time she burped slightly and he dropped her carelessly. "My pants!"

Wole pushed him away roughly and helped her up. She groaned in pain. "Are you alright?" he asked, trying to help her to a seat. He turned at Tolu. "You pig! That's no way to treat a woman!"

Tolu manned up. "Who are you to tell me how to treat a woman? My Woman!"

"She didn't do that on purpose."

Tolu nodded. "Listen man, this is none of your business. Just stay away." He dragged Tola's hand up. "Let's get out of here!" he shouted.

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David Coker stretched a cup of ice cream at me. I turned away. "Don't ruin this day for yourself. Very soon, all the gossip channels would be talking about the incident at Golden Gate, don't make it worse. Just have something for your belly."

I scoffed. "So, taking the ice cream would reduce the weight of how bad I feel right now?"

He nodded with a smile. "It promises to reduce it." He replied, leaning against the car. "Since we are going to be getting married, I feel we should try to be friends, to a good level."

"Marriage?" I scoffed. "You are a wild thinker, David."

He hissed dryly. "Look here Kimberly, you are yet to know how this operates, right? Wait till our wedding day." He said, and brought out an envelope from the car. He stretched it at me. "Take."

"What is this?" I asked, looking at the envelope.

He placed it in my hand. "Just see for yourself."

I opened it and brought out some Invitation Cards. "What is this, David?"

"Samples of our Invitation Cards, there are about five of them. Make your pick and we would set a date."

I laughed mockingly. "I am not your acquisition, David. You can't make these choices without me."

He nodded. "Of course not, that's why I am showing you the cards, just pick one."

"It doesn't work this way, Mr. Coker."

He smiled. "However you think it works is your business, I have my methods and I would go by them too." he stretched the ice-cream at me again. "It's melting..."

"No, thanks!" I replied.

He shrugged and dumped it in the bin. "We would leave when you wish." He said, and returned into the car.

I joined him in the car almost immediately. "Now that you have succeeded in ruining my evening, David Coker, tell me why you came back."

He turned off the engine. "Okay, we could sit here and talk. Erm...There's a major takeover for our family next month and I have to be here."

"Takeover? I don't follow...could you enlighten me?"

He nodded. "Of course...there are some settlements that we want to buy and turn into a new franchise, possibly we would look for semi-remote environments."

"Kicking people into the streets?"

He frowned. "No! Most of them are illegal anyways, it's not their place...so we are just taking back what is a mess and re-defining it."

"You are kicking people into the streets. You are making people homeless."

He scoffed. "Why are you making it sound so bad? It's not like your family is not into it."

I shook my head in disagreement. "My father is an economist." I corrected.

He laughed mockingly as though he knew more. "Really? You know so little about your family business, it's a shame you are the only child of Prof. Bankole. You have to inherit what you have no idea about."

I was confused. "What are you saying, David?"

"Your dad is a major stakeholder in our business, he's been into this for almost ten years now, how are you not aware of it?"

I sighed. "I was never told."

He hissed dryly. "You never asked. How is it that you think an Economist like your dad would be able to call the shots if he didn't have a backup plan?"

I ignored him.

"Look Kim, you better get used to it. We don't kick people out of their homes into the streets. We redefine these messed up environments and make them worthy of admiration."

David smiled and started the engine. "It's getting late, should I drop you at your father's?"

"No. I have my own apartment." I bragged in my heart. At least, my savings was good for something. I could boast of a place to rest my head outside Prof. Bankole's house.

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Marcus turned off the gas. "Food is ready." He announced. Ini strode into the kitchen. "I hope you like it."

She stared at the pot and hissed. "Really, Marcus? Rice! My mates are busy having fun on the island or anywhere away from home and I am here confined to rice. Thank you, I am so touched."

"There are plantains too." He said, showing her the pan. He fetched two plates. "It isn't my fault that you have no date tonight, you might as well enjoy being stuck with me."

Ini smiled and poured herself a drink. "If only I had accepted to date that guy from Johannesburg in the agency." She lamented shaking her head. "The new photographer."

"Michael? He's only about a week old in the agency. Has he already made a pass on you?"

She gave a sensual smile. "Why won't he?"

"I am a lucky man!" he replied, dropping the plates on the dining table. "I am able to hang around you without charge." He said, laughing.

Ini frowned. "You were never funny during high school and you still are lacking now." She said and served herself. "I don't like this chicken, Marcus." She said, picking a piece of chicken and raising it to his face with an ugly grimace.

He hissed. "I had to do the cooking all alone!" he grumbled. Ini stared at him, and his face fell. "Really, Ini, I tried. At least I am showing you some love, no one is doing that today."

"I turned down the opportunity of being in a classy restaurant. For what?" she said, looking at the Rice, Plantains and Chicken. "Marcus, this is why you are still single." He swallowed and blinked carefully. "What? Am I wrong? Little wonder Chioma left you."

He dropped his fork. "Chioma wanted more than I could give her and you know it."

Ini scoffed. "I was just kidding, let's eat." He packed his plate. "Really, Marcus? Don't get angry at this rude girl, you know I am teasing."

"I understand. I have to be somewhere."

Ini dropped her fork. "Marcus! I am sorry...really...I know you don't like to hear about Chioma but I was just teasing you." He nodded and turned into the kitchen. Ini chased after him. "Marcus, I am really sorry." She sighed. "But, why do you get upset whenever we talk about Chioma?"

"Chioma is my past living in my present."

Ini nodded with sarcasm. "Whatever that is, Marcus, but I think you should let her go."

"I can't. She's already forced herself into my life." He took a deep breath. "I have to leave now, Ini." He said, approaching the door. "Have a good evening. See you at the photo shoot tomorrow."

"At least, let me drop you off."

He smiled. "You really want to know my place by all means, I won't let you." he said and walked out.

Ini returned to the dining table and dug her fork into the Rice. "He really does cook well." She murmured and ate on. The doorbell chimed and a wry smile lurked around her lips. She immediately wiped her mouth and dropped the fork beside the plate. She didn't want Marcus to know that she touched the food. 'Why did he come back?' she thought as she danced to the door.

"Why did you come backkkk...?" Ini swallowed the rest as she saw Tola in Wole's arm. "Who are you and what are you doing with my friend?" she said. She stared at him carefully. She had seen this face before... 'The Magazine or TV...he had to be a popular face'.

Wole groaned slightly. "Could you let me in at least? She's some weight."

Ini stepped aside and watched Wole place Tola carefully on the couch. She shut the door and faced him. "Who are you?"

"My name is Wole Briggs, I am Tola's friend. I brought her home."

Ini nodded. "That, I can see. Why did you bring her home? She's meant to be with her boyfriend."

"He would visit later. Do take care of her." He said approaching the door.

Ini ran across and blocked his way with a wry smile. "Not so fast. What did you do to her?" her face was stern now. *Sister's love!*

He smiled. "I was only helping out, she would explain when she wakes."

"How about I detain you till she wakes up?" Ini said, sternly. Wole stared at her and sighed. He reached for his inner pocket. "I don't need your card." She said, firmly.

He smiled revealing his teeth, this time with some beauty in it. He fetched his card from his pocket and flashed it at her. "How did you know I was going for that?"

She grinned. "It's not hard to figure. You are Wole Briggs, you probably would want to show me who you are." She stretched her hand towards a seat. "You would just have to wait till she wakes up."

He nodded in agreement and walked over to the dining table. "Wow...so you were having dinner alone on a day like this?"

Ini walked over to the table. "Not exactly." she replied, taking her seat. "A friend just left."

Wole reached for a spoon. "I won't mind sharing with you."

"Be my guest." She said, getting another plate.

He smiled as he took the first spoon. "This is good." He then paused. "I am sorry, what's your name?"

She smiled back. "Ini...Ini Obong."

"Nice to meet you, Ini. So you guys stay here together?"

She nodded. "We have a third flatmate, Kimberly. She's not in at the moment."

"I am sorry, but how is it that you are the only one who didn't go out to catch some fun?" he said, staring at her.

She shrugged and sipped her drink. "I had fun with a friend, we didn't want the traditional Val's day thing, so we just stayed in." she lied. He nodded impressively. "So, are you from the Briggs's family? I mean, Briggs Empire?"

He smiled. "Well, I think I am."

Fortunate Man! He must have had it all while growing up. Ini came from a very humble home, things were hard with them, but they raised a fighter in her, who had become slightly over-ambitious.

"What do you do, Ini?" he asked.

She smiled as she was about to flaunt her profession. "I am a model."

"Really? Wow...that agency is fast-rising these days. I might even need your help soon." He said, biting his chicken. "My sister has a clothing line, so who knows?"

Ini pretended not to be excited about the prospect of modelling for one of the biggest brands in Africa. "Your card may come now." She said. Wole smiled and handed her the card. "So, how is business these days?"

He shrugged. "Business is business. But, I am more into buying properties these days; I am in Lagos for a while though."

"Where does the wind of business take you again?"

He smiled. "You never know."

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Oyinkan dropped her purse at the bar. "Martini please..." she said as she ran her finger through her hair. She watched the bartender pour the glass. It took her mind back to how Remi had poured her glass.

"So, tell me, Oyinkan, what do you do?" Remi had asked. He fixed his gaze on hers. She relaxed in the chair and dropped the glass kindly. "Nothing." She replied, casually. He probed her. "Really? How is that?"

"Like you know, I just returned so, I am still looking around. I probably would settle down soon."

Remi shifted his weight against hers and dropped his glass kindly. Her heart raced faster as he brought his mouth close to her neck. "Nice cologne."

She chuckled slightly and moved away from him. David was right! She shouldn't be hanging around strangers too quick, she just met Remi.

"I want you." he blurted, running his eyes through her female assets.

She stared at him. She didn't have the normal bold stare she normally posed when about to *do the business* with men, fear was written all over her face. David had warned her against jumping into men's beds, but this time, she wasn't even pushing herself at Remi like she usually did, he wanted her.

Remi drew closer again and this time, with more urge. He started to kiss her neck; he ran his hand along her thighs underneath her gown. Oyinkan moaned slightly and broke free from him. "I am sorry." She said, standing up. She pulled her gown down as he had started to pull it roughly.

"I thought you wanted this." He said, picking up his glass.

She sighed. "Of course not. I wanted a man, not a pig." She said, spitefully.

PIG??? Remi sprang to his feet furiously and darted towards her. She was two seconds too quick for him as she dashed out.

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She sighed as she sipped her drink. *Some serenity at last!* She thought.

"Whiskey!" A man bellowed as he slipped into the seat beside her. She sighed. He downed his cup in no time and ordered for the second, and third and fourth and the gulps rolled in. She seized the cup. "Hey! Go home!" she ordered.

He laughed. "You know, you sound just like her, the type of woman who would make you see her as instantly perfect." He said and yanked his glass from her.

A rueful smile endorsed her lips. 'Did someone just see me as perfect?' she asked herself and faced him. "Life doesn't end there."

"Are you sure? Why are you here? You must be devastated too." he said, wiping some perspiration from his face.

Oyinkan smiled. "I am not devastated; I just got what I asked for." She smiled at the Bartender. "Water please." He frowned. "I know you do have water in reserve."

He shrugged and opened a fridge. "Here you go." He said, handing her a bottle of water.

"Thank you." she said and turned towards the man stretching the bottle. "So, I am Oyinkan, and you are?"

He collected it with a smile. "Ben."



## 6

Tola gulped her water. "I want to know what you did to Tolu." She charged angrily. Wole swallowed. "You aren't so macho after all?"

"Tola, can you just stop being a fool for a minute? This man rescued you from that idiot and now you are attacking him, what is it?" Ini replied.

Tola frowned. "Ini, this isn't your business and I suggest you stay out of it." She then turned towards Wole. "I don't know Tolu's whereabouts and he isn't answering his calls, what if this man here had him killed?" she asked eyeballing Wole Briggs coldly.

"I didn't do anything of such to him. I thought you could use some help there." He replied calmly.

She scoffed. "Help? I have never needed anyone's help. When I needed help, the only one who 'helped' me was Tolu. And that's the only man I know, get it into your head." She said, standing up.

Wole took a deep breath. "My work is done here." He said, staring at Ini. "Please take care of her, don't forget to call me." he said, and walked out.

Ini closed the door after Wole and stared at Tola. "Tola Matthews, do you really want to continue living like this? You are Tolu's toy!"

"That's it! What do you know about being a toy? Why won't anyone understand? Where's Kimberly?" she shouted.

Ini hissed. "What is Kim going to tell you differently?"

"I don't know, but at least, she knows how to listen." She said, then grabbed her shoes and walked in.

\*\*\*

David turned off the engine as he pulled up in front of the house. "I would have my secretary call you tomorrow, there's a fundraiser that we have to attend."

I stared at him. "What do you think I am? You can't just arrange my life for me, David." I replied.

He smiled. "I apologize. Okay, we have to be at a fundraiser early next week; I would have my secretary brief you on the details."

"David Coker! You need to seek my consent, not give me orders. I am not about to become my mother!" I said and stormed out of his car, slamming the door hard.

I pressed the doorbell with some venom. After the second hit, Ini opened up. "Hello." I said, and walked in. She poked her head outside, I could guess she was trying to know why David Coker was still outside. She faced me as soon as she shut the door. "No questions!" I immediately said, closing any avenue for queries.

"Well, I guess you are not about to act like Tola tonight." She said, sitting down. "That reminds me, you forgot your phone, and Ben Ten called endlessly."

I stared at the 'evil in her'. "Why didn't you pick up?"

She shrugged. "It's your phone, I shouldn't be answering your calls, you know."

I nodded. "Ini, if I didn't know you well, I would have agreed with you, but I know you didn't answer the call on purpose."

"What difference does it make?" she cut in. "It's not like you didn't have a nice time, I mean, it's almost midnight." She said, staring at the clock. It was fifteen minutes before midnight.

I scoffed. "So you think I enjoyed being out with David? Ben walked in on us."

"OMG! Ben Ten?"

I wore an awful grimace. "Uh-hmm Ten Ben" She sat up. "What happened?" she asked in a calm tone.

I shrugged. "What part do you want to hear first? The bad or the Ugly?"

She looked up as though she was thinking about her answer, we both knew there was nothing for her to think about. She wanted the ugly, it's just like Ini. "The ugly." She affirmed. *Just like Ini!*

"Okay...David punched Ben."

Her jaw dropped in surprise. "Really? Mr. Debonair threw punches at an exquisite restaurant?" I nodded in agreement. "Was it that bad?"

I sighed. "Ini, why would he hit him if it wasn't that bad?" her face fell. "Quit the *good girl* look, I know how excited you are about this."

"Did he hit back?" she asked, coming alive now.

I smiled. *More like Ini!* "Oh...well, Ben tried to hit him first and then he dodged swiftly and sent Ben crashing into the table."

A rueful smile lurked around Ini's lips. "*Perfecto!* That's how a real man should act! It must have been like one of those Mexican soap operas, like when Diego fought for Paloma. What's the name of that guy he beat up?" she asked rubbing her forehead.

I eyeballed her. "See...it didn't take long to bring out the devil in you! One minute to gloat and you are already showing how much hate you have for Ben."

She rose to her feet defensively. "Don't paint me bad! I am only trying to see things from my perspective."

I nodded. "And where does Ben fit in your 'perspective'."

She snapped. "Come off it, Kim." She said. She took her seat beside me and came closer. I shifted from her and she came closer, she grabbed my neck with excitement. "Did you guys kiss?"

I jumped out of her grip. "Ini Obong! Have you lost it? How do you expect me to kiss someone that I don't love?" She whistled and turned on the home theatre system. "Whistle all you want, but you are really sick to think I would even kiss him!" I replied.

She played Drake's '*Find your love*'. "You know I love it when songs preach to you! You need to find your love... '*Eh...eh...eh....and nothing's gonna tear us apart*'"

"You should just stick with modelling, you have no career in music!" I said, and grabbed my phone from the side table. "Ini, the neighbourhood would be resting, turn off that noise!"

She smiled and obliged. "Don't you want to know what happened with Tola and Tolu tonight?" she asked, stopping me in my tracks. I turned. "*Olofofo!* I always knew you had it in you, you just hide behind the fact that you are '*intelligent*' *abi na brilliant?*" she added in Pidgin English.

"I don't blame you. Spill it!" I replied.

She smiled. "Wole Briggs brought Tola home." I took my seat with a questioning look. "Babe, I guess Tolu messed up, but Tola did worse."

"How? By coming home with Wole Briggs?" I asked.

She shook her head in disagreement. "She practically sent Wole away when she woke up. She started saying nonsense about how she was sure that Wole must have had her Tolu killed, since he wasn't picking up."

I hissed. "That guy must have her under a spell." Ini wore a grimace as she stared at me. "Okay...I don't believe in 'juju' but *na wetin?*" I asked in pidgin.

"Kim, you just used pidgin." She replied, laughing.

I frowned. I rarely use Pidgin English. Most times, it came as a last resort when I had nothing else to say. "Ini, just ignore that." I replied. "How are we going to help Tola?" I asked.

Ini shrugged. "I don't see us changing her mind about Tolu, it is something that she has to do on her own, probably learn a really bitter lesson, or find another man."

"Like Wole? She says he is pretty arrogant." I replied.

Ini shook her head. "He didn't seem so to me. We had a decent conversation, and I must say, he is a very nice guy, and he is a free man. He would really make her happy."

I yawned slightly and rose to my feet. "We'll see. Is Tola spending this weekend with Tolu?" I asked.

Ini nodded. "I guess so, more so, now that she couldn't reach him after the party."

"But I thought we were gonna to set up the barbeque this weekend."

Ini smiled. "And invite who? It's not like Ben would come, and I bet David would see it as ridiculous, Marcus is pissed at me, we really won't have people over for it."

"What did you do to that gentle Marcus again? Let me guess, you reminded him of Chioma spitefully?"

Ini shrugged. "He should let go for once and move on. And do you know that he has refused to let me know his new apartment since Chioma left, I might just search for that myself."

"Ini, just stay out of his business, Marcus is a bit private, respect that!"

She hissed. "No way! *I no fit respect that!* He works for me; I must know everything about him. We have been friends since high school, why would he be keeping secrets from me?"

"Maybe because he doesn't have a posh apartment, you know he's still saving up for a car, he may not want you to 'wash' his house." I replied and left for my room.

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Henry passed me an apple from the stand. "For your troubles." He said. I scoffed. "My supervisor won't have a look at my work."

"We'll make it irresistible." I replied.

He smiled. "Kim, how did you spend Val's day?" he asked. I rolled my eyes. "You can tell me." he added.

"Henry, I am busy!" I replied. He sprang to his feet and started laughing. "What?!"

He poked my cheek. "It went bad." He said smiling. I frowned. "Oh yes...that's the syndrome! So who broke your heart? Ben?"

I shot at him. "Enough, Henry!" I ordered. He paused and then took his seat. "I am single!" I added.

"Wow!!! I might just try my luck." He said, rubbing his palms. I smiled. "Is that a yes?"

I hissed. "Dreamer! I think I have this thing sorted out." I said, turning the laptop in his direction. "What do you think?"

He put the laptop aside and drew his chair closer. "I like your eyes." He said.

I batted them and stared back. "I don't like yours!" I replied, and drew my chair back.

"Henry, do you need your 'A'?" I asked, standing up.

"Of course, but above all..." he said, joining me. I stepped backwards. He grinned. "Why are you scared?" he asked.

I stamped my foot. "Okay! That's enough Henry! I won't have you do this again!" I ordered.

Henry came forward with a deep grin; I stepped back in fear and crashed into the apple stand. He let out a horrid laugh.

"What are you looking at? Help her up?" Old Rodger shouted. I flipped my head over my shoulder to see Old Rodger who was leaning against his cane for support. "I am so sorry, my dear. This monster must be at it again."

Henry pulled me up. "I was just messing with you, Kim." I hissed. "I am sorry." He added as he helped me to a seat.

I felt embarrassed. "Henry, this act of yours is sickening!" I shouted. I stared at Old Rodger. "Sir, good afternoon." I said. Old Rodger smiled and helped himself to a seat. I didn't like that smile. '*We weren't doing anything! Or, rather, Henry was acting funny.*' I said to myself silently.

"You guys are kids, it's okay to have fun."

KIDS!!! I am a university graduate, I have a job! (Not exactly a job, but at least I am out of school!) I shot furiously at Henry who was all smiles. It seemed as though his dad was taking his side. "Old Rodger, Henry and I are done here. I will head out now." I turned toward Henry. "Do submit that paper this week and give me the feedback." I grabbed my grocery bag. "Have a great day." I said and walked out.

"Kim, are you pissed at me?" Henry asked, holding my hand back.

I freed my hand from his grip and walked on. "Why should I be?" I asked with a smile. He smiled back. *Did he think the smile was for fun?* "I can't be pissed at a kid." I said, grinning.

"KID? I am not a kid." He stared at himself. "I have all the muscles in the right places and I might possibly be older than you." he added. I stole a glance at his physique and then scoffed. "Still unimpressed?"

I nodded in agreement. "Still as unimpressed as the first day I met you." I replied. He pulled a face and I laughed. "But, Henry, you really are a cool guy, I like your person. Maybe you should meet my *sisters* someday."

"Sisters? Or housemates?"

I shrugged. "I call them sisters."

\*\*\*

Boye sank into the chair. "Ben, who was that girl you left the bar with yesterday?" Ben continued typing on his laptop, ignoring Boye. "Ben, did you guys hit it?" Ben stared at him with some anger in his eyes. "Yes...you did!" he said, laughing.

Ben hit the table. "Boye! I can't tolerate you anymore." He shouted. "I only dropped her at her place."

"Eh! Don't transfer the aggression, I am not Kimberly." He replied. "And if I were you, I would be looking for another lady, because it's obvious from what that girl wore last night that you are still out of her league."

Ben stood up. "I haven't said a thing about that lady, except that I dropped her. Where's Keji? Didn't she come to work today? You guys should be hiding around the toilet as usual."

"I intend to take things serious with Keji soon. After what happened to you yesterday, I don't think I want any lady springing a surprise on me."

Ben nodded. "Kimberly is a cheat!"

"You guys were never dating, Ben. I think she was fairly honest with you."

He hissed. "She knew I loved her. She's just a slimy little cheat! She appears to be this beautiful and principled lady, but she's no different from the others who lie and deceive people."

"Ben, you are full of spite for Kim, did you ever ask her if she was engaged?"

He shrugged. "She didn't look it. She never mentioned anything. She just let me dream."

"You wanted to dream, bro!"

Ben paused and dropped his pen. "Are you on her side? You saw her man humiliate me; He wanted me to know that he has it all." Boye blinked. "What? I am serious! He was very rude."

"Ben, I am not disputing the fact that he might have made you look little, but you already belittled yourself. Ben, you are always thinking mediocre and acting likewise. I am not surprised that you got that kind of treatment."

Ben scoffed. "Boye, are you trying to say that I was at fault? Kimberly never told me that she had a fiancé."

"You are out of context, Ben. I don't want us flogging this issue unnecessarily, but I think you shouldn't judge Kimberly yet, give her the chance to explain."

He nodded. "She hasn't even called since the incident. Isn't that pathetic? She's probably at home with her fiancé now, eating and watching the news."

Boye sighed. "I have to go to my office now. See you later." He said and approached the door. The door flung open with Mr. Adeoye bursting in. "Good afternoon, sir."

Mr. Adeoye looked angry. "What's good about this afternoon?" he asked and walked in. Ben rose to his feet, Boye immediately walked out. "Ben, this month has been horrible for us. Our sales have dropped drastically, didn't the audience like the Val's day special in the magazine?"

Ben rubbed his chin. "Sir, that article was written by Mrs.. Ibe. I don't think it went down well with the youths and they were our primary target for Val's day."

"Yesterday was Val's day, we didn't get a single feedback! It had never been like this!" he shouted.

Ben bowed his head. "I am sorry sir!"

"I don't need your 'sorry', Ben. I need this thing fixed." He shouted angrily and then paused. "Do you remember that lady that came here the other day saying she could write for us?" he asked. "I think the name is Kimberly."

"No." Ben replied, bluntly.

Mr. Adeoye nodded and walked out. Ben sighed and took his seat.

\*\*\*

"Final pose....erm....there you have it!" The photographer said as he closed the photo shoot.

Ini smiled. "Don't forget to send them to my mail, Michael." She said, and walked towards Marcus. He turned away as soon as he saw her coming. "Really, Marcus?"

Marcus ignored her and spoke to the chairman of the Etilahad group. "Sir, my client would love all the things offered and more...she's good and you know it, she's a beauty for your brand."



"Marcus, I know Ini is good. But, I have told you our terms. Shola Jones was satisfied with those terms too."

Marcus sighed. "Ini is on a different level from Shola Jones and you know it. Ini is warm, she brings the beauty to your brand, and she will make people love Etilahad."

Ini stared at Marcus as he spoke with the chairman. She immediately joined them. "Mr. Chairman, I would love to have a moment with Marcus." She said. Marcus stared at her. She held his hand and stepped away from them. "Marcus, are you going to continue ignoring me?" she asked.

He sighed. "I am not ignoring you, I am trying to seal a deal for you. Please let me return to my work."

"I am sorry about yesterday."

"I am not offended."

She hissed. "You didn't wait at the usual spot this morning. Did you join a bus to this place?"

"I had to be here much earlier, I couldn't wait for you." he replied. She wanted to utter another statement but he stopped the predictable next question. "Sorry I didn't call, I was out of airtime."

Ini nodded. "I am not a fool, Marcus. I am really sorry."

He sighed. "Okay fine. What do you want?"

"Can we have lunch?" she asked. He stared at her. "I'll cook."

He scoffed. "I'll pass. I have to be at my mother's."

"Are you afraid of my cooking?"

He stared at her. "Do you cook?"

\*\*\*

I stared at Henry as I clutched my purse to my arm. "This had better be good." I said.

"Of course. Shall we?" he asked leading the way.

I sighed and walked with him. "Henry, next time, setup a meeting." I said.

He smiled. "It's urgent. I didn't get my girlfriend anything for Val's day, and then she's putting up this attitude. I bet it has something to do with her not receiving a thing."

"What makes you think I am a good judge of dresses? I rarely go shopping." I said, flagging down a taxi. "You should meet Ini." I added almost inaudibly.

He helped me hold the door while I got in and then closed it carefully after him. "Kim, you are the only female friend I have apart from my girlfriend." I stared at him with the *'you know you just lied'* look. "Okay, fine. That's a lie, but any other girl that tags along might request I get her a clutch, shoe or even a gown." He leaned forward to tell the taxi driver our destination.

I smiled. "What makes you think I won't?" I asked.

He sat back and smiled. "You are different." I blushed slightly. "You are just close to perfect, Ben is a lucky dude."

I shot at him. "Ben isn't my boyfriend." I replied. He whistled. "I am serious, Henry!"

"That's fine. You don't have to get all defensive. I believe you." he grinned. "So, who is he?"

I sighed. "Can we skip the topic?"

"NO!" he replied sharply.

I took a deep breath. I wasn't about to tell him that I was engaged. I flashed a smile at him and fetched my iPod from my purse. *These things come handy, you know.* I plugged my ears carefully and tilted my head towards the window allowing the city's breeze flow through.

"Bad habit!" Henry said as we got off the cab.

I smiled. "I am sorry, Henry." I dragged with sarcasm. "You won't give up." He pushed the door and I stepped in. "Thank you."

"Where do we go?"

I looked around. "Ini loves this place." I said, leading the way. "How much do you have for shopping though?"

"Who's Ini?"

I smiled at him. "My sister or housemate. Pick one." I walked into the store with a smile. "So how much do you have?"

He smiled. "Don't worry about the money. I need to make my girlfriend happy."

"Here we are then..." I stopped pointing to some gowns. "Be my guest."

He stared at one gown. "This is nice. Would you try it on?" he asked, checking the price tag.

"It's for your girlfriend, I shouldn't be trying it on." I replied.

He frowned. "It doesn't matter." I ignored him. "Fine. I'll just assume this would fit her. She's got good curves like you." he said.

I assessed the gown. "It's beautiful." I said and checked the price tag. "Henry, are you sure about this gown?" #25,000

He nodded in agreement. "Yes, I am." He said, pulling it off the rack. He stared at me. "We have something beautiful, let's go."

"Let's do some window shopping, at least. Check the jewellery sections." I replied.

He smiled and nodded in agreement. "Wow...check this out, Kim." He said, pulling my hand as we stopped before a diamond necklace.

"This is beautiful." I said, staring through the show glass. "This would cost a fortune." I said, staring at it.

He stared at me. "I could steal it for you." he said, sounding serious. He sounded serious to me.

I stared back at him and stepped back. "Now you are beginning to sound like a freak. First, you scare me to death at your father's store, and now you are saying something scary." I replied.

Henry laughed. "You really take everything too seriously, Kim Banks. I was just messing with you." he said.

"Really? Okay, let's pay for the gown and leave." I replied and walked away.

He caught up with me at the counter and pulled my hand back. "I am sorry if I scared you, but I thought you were down with it. I guess I act like a kid, I'll grow up soon."

I chuckled. "How soon is soon?" I asked and he smiled. "I can deal with your jokes, but they sometimes have me worried." I added with a smile. "But, how soon is soon?"

He looked serious. "Soon enough but not soon enough to stop me from what I am about to do." He said and tickled me. I tried to wriggle and bumped into an oncoming customer.

I turned around swiftly. "I am so sor....ry" I said. I raised my head and my jaw fell. "I am sorry, David." I said staring at him.

## 7

David stared at Henry as though he was about to say something rude to him. His stare was very offensive as he helped me up to my feet. "I am sorry, David." I repeated for a second time. He appeared not to have paid any attention to my first apology.

Henry paced around David with a corny smile. "You really know some *fly* guys, Kimberly." He stopped and stared at David. "Dude, your suit is dope!" David remained mute. "Kim, doesn't your friend talk?"

I rushed to Henry and sealed his mouth. "David, I am so sorry." He kept on staring at us. "At least say something." I said, getting sick of his mute game.

He turned to his right as a beautiful lady in a red gown and black smart heels approached him with two shopping bags. "Are you set, Yewande?" he asked. She nodded in agreement and they walked out together.

Henry stared at me. "Who was that guy?"

"Erm...a friend." I replied. I wasn't comfortable with telling him that David is my 'to-be' husband.

Henry scoffed. "That guy must be really *boxed up*, and with a touch of arrogance too." He said. I smiled. "Anyway, let's get out of here" He said, and we walked over to the attendant.

I adjusted my RayBan sunshades as soon as we stepped out of the mall into the sun. "Wow! You look good in it." Henry said.

I smiled in acknowledgement. "Funny thing, Tola hates them. She likens them to a beggar's shades. Might dispose of them soon."

"Who's Tola? Your housemate? Sorry, sister?"

I smiled. "Yes...now we are on the same page." Henry tapped me. "What?" I turned to see David approaching us. I braced up for anything he would say.

He took off his shades. "You want a ride?" he asked.

Henry stared at him. "We are fine." He replied.

David stepped forward and smiled. "I wasn't talking to you, kid." He turned towards me. "Do you want a ride, Kimberly?" he asked.

I stared at Henry. "We are fine, thank you."

David swallowed and walked away. "Who's that guy?!" Henry asked. "He just called me a kid! I can't stand him. Where did you ever meet him?"

"Just stop, Henry! He's a friend." I said, and flagged a cab down.

Henry didn't say a word to me till we got home. "Thank you."

"For what?" I asked.

He shrugged. "For coming along." He replied. I smiled and walked into the house.

\*\*\*

Oyinkan flipped her hair across her shoulder as David flung the office door open. "Hey Couz!" she said. He stared at her. "Your secretary let me in." She added, knowing that David's next question might be on how she got into his office.

David sank into his chair. "Kimberly has issues."

Oyinkan smiled. "David, every girl has issues. What has she done?"

"Apart from her boyfriend crashing our dinner last night, I met another guy she 'kicks it with'."

Oyinkan raised an eyebrow. "David, are you sure you didn't misinterpret the situation?" she asked, standing up. David's gaze followed her as she walked round in his spacious office. "David, how are you sure of what happened?"

"I saw Kimberly and this guy having fun at the mall, he even tickled her till she tripped over me accidentally." He said, angrily. "She is my fiancé, not another man's toy." He complained.

She took her seat. "How did she react?"

He shrugged. "Nothing special in her reaction, except that she turned down my offer to take her home." He drummed on the table. "We will have our introduction next week."

Oyinkan's jaw dropped. "DAVID???" She stared at him. "You won't marry Kimberly because you want to possess her, she's not one of your properties" she argued.

He stared at her. "Whose side are you on? I was going to marry her anyway"

"Yes, but not in this manner."

David stood up. "I have seen her around two guys now, and the situations have never been palatable. Anyway, business is involved."

Oyinkan shook her head. "David, I think you should get to know Kimberly better. You guys don't need to suffer because of business."

"I don't know if I have the time to know her. Do you know that Kimberly doesn't know about their business?" he asked. He smiled as Oyinkan wore a surprised look. "That lady is going to be my wife; she has to know things about us. She even thinks that buying houses is pure evil."

Oyinkan smiled. "Buying people's homes" She corrected. "I kind of agree with her. You never used to like it, I wonder how Mr. Coker made you like this."

He hissed. "I'll talk to father and have the introduction plans started." He replied.

"David, I don't want to believe that Kimberly would want the marriage so soon. I think you should get to know her better. Hangout and try to make things work if you guys will be together. David, you only get one chance to love."

He stared at her and scoffed. "Where did you get that lie from?" she smiled. "I'll tell Yewande to drop the stuffs I bought for her at the mall at her place; I hope that's good enough."

"I suggest you take it to her after work. You guys could probably take a walk or something, just try to create a decent atmosphere for yourselves."

David stared at her. "What if she can't love me?"

She smiled. "You guys don't need love, you only need mutual understanding."

\*\*\*

The doorbell rang for a second time. I stared at the wall clock. "7:30pm". Tola would be at Tolu's for the weekend, and Ini had a late photo shoot. The bell rang again. I groaned in discomfort as I rose from the sofa and had to forfeit the tension-soaked scene of *Tinsel*, my favourite soap

opera. I opened the door with some venom as I expected Henry; he would be the only nuisance at the door.

"Good evening." David said, as he stepped back.

I took a deep breath. "Good evening, David." I replied. "Please come in." I offered. He nodded and walked in after me. "Please sit."

I left for the kitchen and returned with a can of Fayrouz. "You care?" I asked. He smiled and I passed it to him. "I usually don't entertain visitors without notice." I lied, trying to sound professional. Not that any unannounced visitor is welcome, but I could use the tone of a working class woman.

"What do you do?" he asked. "That is, apart from writing for your Dad?"

I hissed. "I don't work for him. I am unemployed." He stared at me as he opened his drink. "That's what my dad wants you to believe."

"Really? I thought you work for him."

I sighed. "I don't! I am unemployed and needing a job."

He looked to his right and handed me a gift bag. "I got these for you." He said. I collected the bag. "You should try them on, maybe you can wear the black for the fundraiser." I took a deep breath. "What is it?" he asked, calmly.

"Have you ever been in love? Or have you had any girlfriend in the past?"

He stared at me. "That's none of your business." He replied, firmly.

"Oh yeah? I think it is...David, you need to seek my opinion before throwing anything at me. I don't like the fact that you are imposing a fundraiser on me. You should seek my permission first."

He nodded. "Kimberly, we are going to be married sooner than later."

"Still doesn't give you the right to impose your will on me."

He shrugged. "I am sorry if you feel that way, but I am just trying to help us get along, at least, let's be happy if we are not in love." I turned away shaking my head. "Or are you in love with someone?" he asked.



I looked at his cold eyes. "If I was, would you let me go?" I asked.

An awkward silence filled the room. At that moment, I wished I was in love with someone, anyone. David's eyes blinked. "Kimberly, I don't want to marry you." He replied. A tiny smile formed around my lips. "But I have to." The smile faded as soon as he dropped the bomb. "And I know that you don't want to either, but you have to. It's what we have to do."

"Have you ever been in love?" I asked.

He smiled lightly. "I don't know. I only love my business."

I cursed. "And you want to go on with that feeling until your dying day?"

"It doesn't matter, as long as we are good companions, have mutual understanding, and we are very comfortable, we don't need love."

I nodded with some sarcasm. "I need love." He stared at me. "I have watched my mom live in comfort without love, I don't want it."

"Is there someone else?"

I blinked. "If there is, would you let me go?"

He rose to his feet. "Kimberly, you know better." He took a deep breath. "Do you want to take a walk?"

"Okay, I'll just get my jacket." I replied, and left for my room.

We walked down into the streets. We listened to the dogs howling and barking and we finally took our seats on the side chairs in the estate. These things have a reason for which they are made, you know.

"Erm..." we both said and laughed. "You go first." He said, playing the gentleman script.

I smiled. "Dad said you have been into business since you were a little boy." He nodded in agreement. "How did you find it?"

"I felt lost initially, I was 14 then when I started going with dad to tie up deals." He paused. "I met older men, they really despised me, didn't like the fact that I was learning the ropes that early." He stopped to stare at me. "I had a tough life."

I burst into a cynical laugh. "Try another joke. Your dad has forever been rich!"

He shrugged. "Never mattered. I never really liked his business, but now, I have grown to love it and fight for it."

"What do you mean by tough life? I know the business is hard, but you are comfortable, you have everything you want."

He nodded. "But not all I need. I can't even buy myself a conscience or a heart."

I stared at him carefully. His words were wise, not that I expected anything less, but they were starting to hit me. "You are a good man, David."

"You think?" he sighed and rose to his feet. "I couldn't even save the only woman I have ever loved from depression." He said and walked away.

\*\*\*

"It's a bright and sunny Saturday morning in Lagos city. What are you doing today? Someone's birthday? Someone's wedding? A barbeque party? Chelsea against Manchester United? Or attending a funeral? Tune in to Lagos city 94.8FM. It's your boy, Magic, on the radio..."

Ini turned off the side radio as the rays of light shined into her eyes. "Mumu, you no dey sleep?" she shouted at me in Pidgin English. I smiled arrogantly as I turned on the radio again. She hissed dryly and pulled herself up from the bed. "You know how important it is that I..."

"Get my beauty sleep..." I yawned along with her. "It's 9am, Ini. Time to clean up!"

She scoffed. "Why you no go call Tola from Tolu bed?"

"Tola is with her man, they are definitely busy with some sanitation." I replied and Ini grinned. "I will be waiting for you in the kitchen, we start off from there today." I announced and walked out.

The doorbell chimed. "Ahn! Who could that be?" I said aloud and strode over to the door.

"TA-DA!!!" Henry shouted as I opened the door.

I stared at him with a grimace. "Why are you here so early?"

"I thought you could use some help with the sanitation today." He said, trying to come in but I stood firmly in front of the door. "What?"

I took a deep breath. "You should help your dad with the store."

"All done! We did that last night!" he replied, grinning.

I rolled my eyes. "And your project?"

He scoffed. "Kim, stop treating me like a kid. I came to visit you, and that's that, you must allow me in." he said with a rueful smile

"Na wa o! Where did you find this kid?"

I turned around to see Ini. "How long have you been standing there?" I asked.

Henry tried stretching his hand across. "I am Henry."

She nodded and pulled me aside. "Let him in." Henry stepped in confidently. He still looked juvenile to me. He was wearing a Ralph polo shirt, faded blue jeans and LV snickers. "How old are you?" Ini asked, with a smile.

He stared at us. "23."

"Really?! You look 18." She replied. "Better start getting some white collars and pants." She said. "Sanitation starts from the kitchen, but I'll gladly have you start in my bathroom, if you know what I mean." She said as she bit her lip gently staring provocatively at Henry's lower.

I smiled. Ini is a slut! Henry stared at me and I shrugged. "This way please." I said, leading him to the dining area. "What will you have? Fruit and Fibre? Oats?"

"Nah...I am okay." He replied.

Ini poked her head in from the kitchen. "You better eat! You'll help us with the barbeque." She said and poked her head back.

"I thought we cancelled the barbeque this weekend."

She poked her head out again. "On a second thought, Marcus and I have reconciled, so it won't be boring, and since Henry's here, we might as well just have some proper refreshment."

"Leaving Tola out?"

She nodded. "We'll have other days." She replied and returned to the kitchen.

I turned to Henry. "Are you okay with it?"

He nodded excitedly. "Sweet!" I nodded. "I'll have breakfast then."

"Okay then. What would it be?"

He drummed his fingers on the table. "Whatever you'll have"

I laughed. "You better make your choice. I'll have potatoes and scrambled eggs."

He shot at me. "Why then did you offer me *Cereal*?" he asked, feigning seriousness.

"I am sorry, you may turn on the TV and catch some fun." I said and disappeared into the kitchen.

Ini pulled me aside as soon as I entered the kitchen. "Are you sleeping with that kid?"

I hissed and pushed her kindly. "Everyone can't be like you."

"I was just messing with you."

I scoffed. "Well don't! I think he likes me and he's not a kid, he's just a baby at heart."

Ini laughed hard. "What's the difference?"

"There is a difference." I replied.

She smiled. "Marcus is no longer mad at me, we talked things out yesterday." She announced as she washed the potatoes. "Do you want me to chop them into bits?" she asked, getting a chopping board.

"It's already your intention to chop them or why are you with a board?"

She shrugged and rinsed the knife. "I think we have to sit Tola down and talk with her about Tolu, that guy is milking her dry and I think it's time we tell her the truth, however she might find it."

I sighed. "I really don't understand the whole situation myself. I wish she could just realize it, Tola is deaf to anything we say about Tolu. She practically worships him. He is her life, her everything, I guess. It's just unfortunate."

"Listen Kim, Tola likes to talk to you as she thinks my advice is filthy. You saw her reaction when I suggested Tolu join the agency." I stopped to eyeball her. She hissed and continued. "I wouldn't have slept with him. Tola is like my sister; at least if he was earning some cash for himself no matter how irregular, he wouldn't have to live off her."



Ini widened her eyes. "You are Shola's cousin?"

"Yes."

Ini sank into a chair. "Oh...well"

"Are you also a fan of my cousin?" he asked.

I hissed. "They are rivals. Ever heard of Ini Obong?" I asked. Henry looked at Ini. It was the 'you are the Ini'? type of look.

"Wow! I can't believe I am under the same roof with the talked about Ini Obong. I am sorry I don't know your face, I am not so conversant with the Fashion TV and all, I only know my cousin. Nice to meet you." He said, stretching out his hand. Ini took the handshake calmly. "You are so different from what SJ says about you."

"Oh well...I am gravely misunderstood." She replied. I grinned.

Ini rose to her feet. "I think we can continue with breakfast now." She said, leaving for the kitchen.

"What's up, Ini?" I asked, walking into the kitchen. "You seem not to like the fact that Shola Jones is out of the hospital."

She hissed. "What do I care?" I held her hand. "I am not scared."

"Why should you be? She can't take your contract from you, you are working hard for it." I replied.

\*Buzz\* Ini's iPhone vibrated. "I have to take this." She said and stepped out through the backdoor into the yard. I stared at her, she seemed to be yelling into the phone. I could guess she was speaking with Marcus.

"I am hungry." Henry said, as he walked into the kitchen.

I turned towards him. "Give me about ten minutes." I said, dismissing him. I was more concerned about my *sister* now. She might be feeling intimidated with Shola's return.

Ini returned into the house almost immediately. For the first time in a long time, Ini didn't seem calm and in control of the situation. She appeared distraught. "I may have to leave soon." She said, fetching a can of Coke. She downed it in almost one gulp.

"Ini! Get a hold of yourself. You are good at what you do, why are you so scared?"

She wriggled out of my grip and left for her room. I joined Henry in the living room. "Food is almost ready." I said.

"Excellent news! So, I never knew that one of your *sisters* is the famous Ini Obong. That's a delight."

I nodded. "There you have it. Did your girlfriend like the gown?"

"She did. I think she's happier now."

I shook my head. The doorbell chimed. '*Who could that be?*' I thought as I approached the door. Thoughts of David streamed through my mind and I, for the first time, was scared. I turned the door knob gently and Tola stood before me in RayBan sunshades and her bag dangling loosely from her shoulder.

"Tola!" I squealed, as I tried to hug her. "You came home for barbeque" I guffawed as I shut the door.

She snubbed me and walked past. She stopped to stare at Henry. "Who are you?"

"Hey Tola, that's no way to treat my guest." I interrupted before she continued her query.

Henry stood up. "My name is Henry."

Ini ran downstairs, now dressed to go out with her car key dangling from her finger.

"Heading out?" Tola asked.

She stared at Tola. "Yes, and what's the RayBan for? I thought you said Kim wore beggar shades?" she asked, laughing. I grinned. "I thought you could do better, like Gucci or something else?"

"Why don't you spend more time on minding your business, Ini Obong? Shola Jones is out of the hospital, I hope you aren't scared."

I turned towards Tola. "Why are you so annoying this morning? You are not supposed to be back till tomorrow evening. You never return on Saturdays."

"There's always a first." She said, almost pushing me out of the way.

I pulled her back, accidentally yanking off her RayBan shades. I covered my mouth in surprise, Henry's jaw dropped and Ini screamed.



## 8

Ini dropped her key on the side table. "What the f\*\*k is this?" she asked angrily.

"I had an accident." Tola replied casually.

Henry nodded. "Wow...the kind of accident that happens when a fist lands on a face several times."

"Who is this tramp?" Tola charged angrily at Henry.

I stared at her unable to believe what had happened. *Tolu had assaulted our friend!*

"Did Tolu do this to you?" Ini asked, lifting her chin. Tears streamed down Ini's eyes.

"Look at what you have reduced yourself to, a punching bag!"

Tola scoffed and stepped aside. "Why are you crying, Ini? I am the one who should cry, but I am not. So why cry on my behalf?" she left for the kitchen and returned with an icepack "No one understands." She murmured, nursing her face with the icepack.

"Just shut up, Tola! Shut up!" I screamed. "Look at you. You are beautiful, young and powerful and you allow one guy to dictate your life? How dare you?"

Henry stared at her. "No man should treat a woman like this."

Tola scoffed. "Who owns this kid?"

"He is not a kid! At least, he knows how to treat a woman, not like that pig." I retorted.

Ini's eyes burned with fury. "Tola, stand up and let us go to that house, now!" she ordered. Tola laughed. "Do you think it is funny?"

"What are you going there to do? Demand an explanation? Beat him up?" she hissed and fetched her phone from her bag. "It won't work." She said, dialling a number.

I shook my head. "Ini, let's call the police." She nodded in agreement. "We need to help this girl."

"I am going to deny everything." She said bluntly. "I won't cooperate."

I sighed. *"Tola wake up and smell the coffee! This guy is a beast! Look at you, he has you damaged."*

*"He hasn't done anything wrong. He only corrected me."* She said.

Ini slammed the table furiously. *"She's playing a script. Is this what he told you to say? Did you rehearse this? Did he molest you sexually too? Did he drug you?"* Ini screamed.

*"He loves me!"* she shouted and broke down in tears.

I slid into the sofa beside her. *"Tola, this isn't love."*

*"What do you know? You have never been in love."* She replied.

Henry took a deep breath. *"Well, I have. And I would never do this to the woman I claim to love. Never!"*

Ini hissed. *"You all are sick! We need to go and kill that bastard. What is all the discussion for? Look at Tola! She is a shadow of herself. Are you coming with me, Henry?"* she shouted.

He nodded and stood beside her. *"Kimberly?"*

Tola held my hand. *"Don't go, please. Kim, he didn't mean it."* She said, holding my hand tightly.

*"Kim???"* Ini shouted.

I sighed and joined Ini and Henry as we walked out. Thankfully, Ini knew the address. She drummed on the door as soon as we got there. *"Open up you bastard!"* she shouted aggressively. The curtain blinds went up slightly and a thin lady poked her head through the door.

*"Are you a rabid dog?"* The thin lady asked, flipping her hair backwards.

Ini hissed and pulled her out. *"Who are you, skanky little b\*tch?"* she muscled the lady to the floor sending her crashing with two hits. Henry quickly pulled Ini away from her as I rescued the lady from Ini's grip.

*"What's going on here?"* Tolu shouted, coming out in a towel. *"Are you guys crazy?"* he shouted as he walked close to us.

I walked up to him and slapped him hot. *"Bastard!!!"* I shouted. Henry restrained me from hitting him a second time. *"Leave me alone, Henry."*

"He is not worth it." Henry whispered.

Tolu stepped forward and tried to grab Henry by the shirt. "Who are you?" Tolu shouted. "Are you all insane???" he yelled at the top of his voice.

Ini picked up a metal from the surrounding and charged at Tolu. Seeing the impending danger if the metal should hit Tolu, Henry and I rushed to salvage the situation. "Let me go!" Ini shouted.

Tolu ran into the house and shut the door after him leaving the thin lady outside. "Witch!!!" Ini shouted and rushed to hit the lady. The lady took to her heels in only the t-shirt and left the house.

\*\*\*

Oyinkan stepped out of the car. "But what if your Dad finds out about this?" she asked, staring at David.

"Who is going to tell him? You?" David asked. She smiled. "I didn't think so" he said and closed the door gently. "This is the home, right?" he asked, staring at a sign post.

She stared at him. "It is. I wrote down the address from your dad's diary." She said, adjusting her blouse.

He nodded and walked up to the entrance and pressed the bell. The door creaked slightly as an elderly woman opened up. "Good morning." He bowed courteously.

"Good morning, son. How may I help you?" she asked, staring at him and Oyinkan. Oyinkan immediately stepped forward with a smile.

"Hello, daughter."

David took a deep breath. "I would love to see Mrs.. Coker" he said.

The nun shook her head. "There's no one here by that name." she replied. David stared at Oyinkan.

Oyinkan crosschecked the address from her phone. "This is it. She has to be here." She replied, peering above David's shoulder to see the name of the old parents' home. "Hearts Alone." She read and nodded confidently. "I am very sure."

David cleared his throat. "Her first name is Elizabeth."

The nun stared at them. "What is your relationship with her?"

David stared at Oyinkan. His mother would never want to see him. She had cursed him the day she was brought to the home. "I am a cousin." He replied.

"I am afraid, you can't see her." She replied.

Oyinkan blinked. "But it's important we see her."

The nun smiled. "I am sorry. Have a good day." She replied and returned into the home. David drummed on the door again. "Calm down, son!" the nun shouted as she flung the door open.

"I want to see her!" he shouted.

Oyinkan held his shoulder. "Let's go, David. We'll have other days."

He wiped a tear drop from his left eye and walked back to the car. "I should have never let her go."

"You were young, David. You were 15; you couldn't have fought your dad."

He kicked the tyre furiously. "But I let him. She cried so hard, she looked into my eyes and begged me to say something." He started. Oyinkan watched him as he spoke passionately. "I stood there and did nothing until she told me that she cursed the day she had me." He continued in tears. Tears streamed down his cheek as he stared at the old parents' home where his father had kept his mom. It had been 12 years since he last saw her.

Oyinkan hugged him. "I am sorry, love." She kissed his forehead. "You can still make things right, talk to your dad."

"He won't listen...you know him."

She sighed. "David, you have been sorrowful since the day your mother left. Talk to your Dad.

\*\*\*

"Ouch!" Tola screamed as Ini cleaned her face. "Please be gentle." She begged.

Ini hissed. "You should have told Tolu to hit you softly." She replied as she massaged Tola's face.

I dropped a bowl of water beside them and took my seat. "Tola, you need to leave that man." I said, looking at her face.

"He is not a man." Henry chipped in. I stared at him. "I am sorry." He murmured, but loud enough for me to hear. He excused us and left for the backyard.

Tears streamed down Tola's cheeks. "I think I provoked him." She started. Ini shook her head in dismay and forced the towel into her face. "AHAN!!!!!" Tola shouted, staring at Ini. "Take it easy."

"Ini, let me take over." I suggested. The Ini I know would force the towel on Tola's wounds again if she said anything to defend Tolu. Ini dropped the towel angrily. I mopped Tola's left eye carefully.

Ini left for the kitchen and returned with a drink. "Tola, I love and respect you so much. You have been a fighter all your life, and even though Tolu was supportive in the past, it doesn't give him any right over you" she started. She sipped her drink. "Tola, you need to stop now!"

I stared at Tola's beautiful eyes. I took a deep breath and pushed the towel into her face. She managed a squeal in pain. "It's okay." I said, mopping tear drops from her eyes. "You have to end this façade with Tolu. It's turning into an assault." I pleaded.

"How do you want me to live without him? I love Tolu."

Ini slammed her glass on the table. "That's it! You will live without him! Kimberly has never had a boyfriend except her husband-to-be, and I have been single for 3 years."

"You have never been single, Ini." I replied with a light smile. "You have sex partners."

She scoffed. "I HAD sex partners. I am celibate now." Tola laughed in spite of herself. "What is funny?" Ini smiled when she saw that Tola had a smile around her face. "We will always be there for you. Someone better would definitely come your way."

I nodded. "All good things will come..."

Tola smiled. "That sounds like poetry or novel." I nodded. "Thank you, I love you really much."

Ini sighed. "Wole Briggs is also a very cool guy, and I think he loves you." Tola hissed. "I thought as much." She continued. "We promise to be here for you."

"Group hug???" I asked. And with the typical mushy act among girls, we hugged lovingly. "Okay, when do we go to pack whatever you have left from Tolu's?" I asked. Ini hissed. "More like when would we kick Tolu and his slut out of Tola's house?"

"I got him that place. I am not taking it back." She said, standing up.

Ini eyeballed her coldly. "What about the car?"

"A gift too." She replied.

I watched Tola and Ini continue their tirades. I watched them smile too, and that made me happy. I left for the backyard. "Hey..." I said. Henry turned around with a smile. "Hope you weren't too bored?" I asked, joining him on the porch.

He shrugged. "Nah...How's Tola?" he asked.

"She'll be better. She needs a form of distraction." I replied.

Henry smiled. "Are we still having barbeque? At least, the family is here, we are complete!"

"Family? We?" I asked, with a questioning look. Henry was slowly rubbing himself in on us. I didn't mind, *but what about the others?*

\*\*\*

Mr. Coker stretched out in his chair as he stared at David. "What do you want from me?" he asked for the umpteenth time. David took a deep breath and opened his mouth to speak but immediately paused.

"What is it, son?" he asked. "I can't help you if you don't say a word and continue acting dumb."

David blinked his eyes as memories played back to the day his mom was forced out of the house to the old parents' home. It all happened in the study, the same room where they were seated and his dad had decided to have his wife put away. Hot tears rolled down his eyes. He shut his eyes and opened them, staring at his father with so much anger. "I want to see my mother!"

"Elizabeth, you mean?" he asked.

David scoffed. "I asked for my mother."

His father sighed. "What has come over you, David Coker? You never asked about her all this time, why now? About 12 years now..."

"Dad, I need my mom."

He smiled. "You needed her when you were a boy, now, you are a man...what you feel is want, not a need."

David slammed the table. "Father! Stop punishing me! I want my mother, let me see her."

Mr. Coker shrugged as he lit his marijuana stick. "I have not stopped you from seeing her, have I?"

David panted in anger. "Where did you keep her?"

"David, it's been 12 years, forget her." He sighed as he puffed his smoke. "We have business to take care of."

David scoffed. "You don't get it dad, do you? I won't work again! I won't do anything until I see my mother."

Mr. Coker nodded in agreement. "That's fine son, I have never been threatened, and I can't feel threatened now." He paused and supported himself with his cane. "Look here David Coker, as from this moment, you are suspended. You need a break from work."

David sighed. "Dad, the last time you suspended me was when you got rid of Bola, do you want to kill my mom too?"

"Never let pleasure get in the way of business, Kimberly Bankole is our goldmine and your business, if you lose that girl, it's over! Mind that!"

David smiled. "Father, you are forgetting one thing here." His father raised an eyebrow expecting him to continue the statement. "Dad, we are different. I have my money." He paused. "You married my mom for her money."

Mr. Coker scoffed. "David, I won't dispute the fact that I loved Elizabeth for her money." David swallowed. "But I have managed her finances well for you."

"And you want Kimberly and I to suffer the same fate as you?"

He smiled. "David, sometimes, love never matters."

\*\*\*

Tola 'killed' the music as soon as her Range Rover pulled up in Asolo Real Estate Firm's garage. She took a deep breath and applied a puff to her face. She dusted some specks from her tightly-fitted black skirt and adjusted her blazers, slipped into her red heels and pushed the door open. She had been listening to Daughtry's 'Call my name', the slow rock music seemed to have all the answers to her questions. Tolu was in her head and his mark on her face. She adjusted her RayBan dark shades and walked into the office.

"Smashing hot, Ms. Matthews" A colleague called as he whistled.

She smiled at him. "Good morning!" She said to her colleague.

"Good morning ma'am...never seen you in those, I swear you look good." He said, pushing his office door open. "But you do know that you are one hour late."

Tola smiled and walked ahead. Her office was on the next floor. Kemi smiled as she approached. "Good morning, Kemi." She said.

"Good morning ma'am." She said as she rose to her feet. "Mr. Asolo wants to see you as soon as you settle."

Tola nodded and walked into her office. She came out almost immediately. "Does it have anything to do with my being late?" she asked.

Kemi shook her head in disagreement. "Mr. Asolo looked pretty excited. Maybe you have another promotion." She said with a smile.

Tola managed a smile. "I will be right back." She left for the last floor and pushed the boardroom door open. "Good morning, sir!" she said as she closed the door after her.

"Good morning, Ms. Matthews. Beautiful morning, isn't it?" he asked, standing up. *Mind you, Mondays are never beautiful.*

Tola motioned to a seat and took off her shades before Mr. Asolo could pay attention to them. "Kemi said you wanted to see me."



He nodded in agreement. "That's true. Erm...there's a revolutionary policy for staffing in the firm now." Tola sat upright as she listened. "It's now a case of fresh employees, retrenchments for some older ones, and tutoring for new staffs."

"Sir, how do I come in? Are you disappointed with my work?"

He smiled. "Tola Matthews, I wish you were my daughter. You are the driving force of Asolo Real Estate." She managed a straight face as the praises poured in. "But now, I need more brilliant people like you in this firm to keep it at number one."

"I am always willing to help." She replied.

He nodded and opened a file. "Ms. Matthews, I am taking in a new staff, and I would love you to be in charge of the tutoring." Tola nodded. "That won't be a big deal, right?"

"Not at all, I am glad to assist in any way I can."

"In that case, work would start today." He announced, closing the file. "I appreciate your efforts." He said, and rose to his feet. He paused and stared at her eyes. "What happened to your eyes?"

She cleared her throat. "Just a tiny accident."

"Doesn't look so tiny." He replied, approaching the door.

Tola joined him as he approached the door. "Sir, when would I meet the new staff?"

"Today, I copied the files to Kemi, as a matter of fact, all should be set right now." He replied. Tola bowed courteously. "I'll see you." He said, and returned into his office.

Tola ran her fingers through her swollen face. The makeup had covered some of it, but the real scar was the fear in her eyes as Tolu landed two hefty blows on her as they argued. She had challenged him about the thin lady and he resorted to hitting her upon further probing. It hurt, not only the hit, but the fact that Tolu showed her no mercy.

A young man was in the waiting room. His hair was properly trimmed and he had his white shirt tucked in. She squinted her eyes as she looked at him from afar off. Her vision wasn't failing her, but she was seeing Wole Briggs, and this couldn't be Wole Briggs.

She hastened her steps to see him properly and as she drew closer she only saw Wole. This Wole appeared different, he usually had his full hair and flashy suits on, but this man was on a low haircut and a tucked-in shirt and trouser. "Wole Briggs?"

"Yes ma'am. I am your new understudy."

## 9

Tola sat upright in her chair and tapped her left hand on the table with the right hand firmly pursed into her face. "What do you think you are doing, Wole Briggs?" she asked.

He smiled as his baby dimple danced round his left cheek. "Getting a job." He replied, unnerved.

"Have you ever worked for anything all your life?"

He adjusted his tie. "I want to work for something."

"Love or a Pay Slip?"

He nodded with a reassuring smile. "Both."

She hissed. "Wole, I am not tripped by this." She started, staring at him from his head to his chest. The table had intercepted any view to the legs which she would have done comfortably.

"This is an act. And I suggest you throw it away."

"I just want to work." he replied, keeping a smile on his face.

She scoffed angrily. "Wole Briggs, you know that if you need a job, the Briggs conglomerate is ever-welcoming, you could have simply walked in there. Why here?"

"I want to learn something different. Please give me a chance." He paused, took a deep breath and added. "Ma'am."

Tola shook her head with a wry smile. "I don't need that from you, Wole. I am Tola, and I think it should stay that way." She ran her fingers through her hair. "Since you have chosen to come here and make my life a living hell, we can start by giving you an office downstairs." She said, standing up.

"Mr. Asolo said I could use the one next to yours." he replied quickly. She raised an eyebrow. He cleared his throat and added. "Proximity."

She nodded and shrugged. "Of course, Mr. Asolo is the boss!" she took her seat. "Well, I don't know why you are here without your jacket, it doesn't make you any less proud." She said, staring at his shirt.

He smiled. "I'll put it on tomorrow, seems you like it." He winked.

"And your hair, I remember it wasn't this low the last time I saw you." she said, turning on her laptop.

He nodded. "It's a new job, appearing tidy seemed ideal to me." he adjusted in his chair. "How come you know so much about the last time you saw me, does this mean that you 'like' me?" he asked smiling.

She took a deep breath and smiled. "Wole, you are in my face. How can I not remember everything about the last time we met?" she asked, starting to type. "Clearly you don't remember much about me..." she murmured quite inaudibly.

"Excuse me?"

She shrugged with a smile. "Never mind." She cleared her throat. "We are going to start from Banana Island, we have about fifteen properties up for sale. I would love us to help some clients out this week and all..." She rattled on about other properties up for sale.

"Did he hit you?" Wole asked.

Tola raised her head and feigned a smile. "Excuse me?"

"Did that bastard touch you?"

She blinked. "I don't know what you are talking about." She replied.

He swallowed painfully. "Tola, why did you let him?" he asked, with his voice breaking slightly. Tola sighed and rolled her eyes. "You are worth more than that."

She sighed. "OKAY! I get it, I know I am, but I don't mind. Why are you concerned?" she asked.

"I love you, Tola."

She hissed. "Save it, Wole!"

He nodded. "Tola, please... I can't take it, that guy has no right to do this to you."

"SO WHAT???" She screamed. "You are upsetting me, Wole! He hit me, FINE! We have passed that now." She shouted as tears rolled down her eyes. "Many women get hit, SO???" Who cares???" No one! What do I care, Nothing!" she shouted, slamming the table.

Wole rushed to her and hugged her tightly. "I am sorry. Please calm down." She tried resisting him by hitting him, but in the end his power and warmth subdued her fears and pain and she let him cuddle her tenderly. For the first time in a long time, she felt loved by a man.

\*\*\*

I held my bag firmly in my lap as I watched another hour pass. '1:00pm' I stared at the cute secretary as she struck her fingers with so much finesse against her laptop's keyboard. She smiled at me with her silver braces and blue contact lenses. "He'll be available shortly." She said. She had been saying the same thing for the past two hours.

I nodded and fixed my gaze on my MacBook and went through my article again. The hunt for a job continues...

My phone rang and I stepped away from the waiting room to take my call. "How may I help you, Henry?" I asked.

"It's a new day, be nice..." he cooed into the phone. "How's your job hunt going?"

I sighed. "I have been waiting for 'shortly' for the past two hours." I replied, staring at my watch. "Ya...two hours!" I affirmed on positive confirmation.

"Shortly? Who is shortly?"

I scoffed. "Are you that 'not intelligent', Henry? The secretary has had me waiting forever." I replied, calmly.

"You are the brilliant one. Anyway, my talk show is going to start in 30 minutes."

I smiled. "How's the crowd over there?"

"Erm...this hall sits five hundred and I can say I have about a hundred people registered at the moment." He replied.

I smiled. "I wish you the best. I hope they love you."

"They have to!" he replied, sounding stern. "It's about my project." He replied, laughing. "The topic is dragging people into this place. I am yet to see my supervisor though; I think that man is against my progress."

I nodded with a smile. "He'll come around." I replied and flipped my head over my shoulder. The secretary had disappeared from her seat. I guessed she must have gone in to see the boss. "I have to go now, Henry." I said hurriedly and ended the call. I returned to my seat and waited.

She returned to the waiting room with a smile. "A cookie for your trouble?" she asked handing me a plate of cookies and a cup of tea to go with.

"Thank you." I replied, placing the tray gently on the side table. I took a bite of the cookie to ease the hunger and the tea replenished my thirst. Not that I am a huge fan of tea, but in this situation, I would gladly have it.

I watched the time with some more patience this time, after all, I had some cookies to comfort me. My patience was soon rewarded as the door opened and Mr. Adeoye stepped out of his office. He smiled at me. "Kimberly?"

I smiled. *How did he ever remember me?* I thought. "Good day, sir!" I replied.

"I am so sorry for the delay. Please I would love you to join me for lunch."

I stared at my plate of cookies. "I just had some refreshments." I replied.

"I insist! We'll talk about your employment then."

Oh well... I smiled and nodded. "Okay, sir."

"This way, please..." he said, motioning to the elevator.

We took our seats in a restaurant. "Thank you for coming here with me."

"It's not a bother, sir." I replied.

He smiled as he signalled the waiter. "So what would you have?" he asked.

"I just had cookies at the office, I won't need anything." I replied, honestly.

The waiter greeted courteously and handed us menu booklets. Mr. Adeoye ticked his and returned it almost immediately. "Would you at least have a drink?" he asked.

I smiled and ticked a Chapman. "Thank you." I replied, and handed the book to the waiter who took his leave immediately. "Thank you, sir." I said to Mr. Adeoye.

"Kimberly, I never thought that you would show up at Millaroca again...I mean, we had already said we didn't need you back then."

I smiled. "I decided to try again."

"I am glad you did. I was out of options to reach you. I asked everyone in the office, but no one remembered you." he replied.

I stared at him and tried to absorb his last statement, I thought Ben knew me.

\*\*\*

Marcus charged furiously at Michael. "What are you doing, rookie?"

Michael took off his hat. "I am not a rookie. I am a professional photographer from South Africa."

"*Ogbeni!*" he addressed in Yoruba, a typical Nigerian language which meant *male*. "This is Nigeria, this is the Nigerian Modelling Agency and this is my stage."

Michael laughed. "You have no stage! You are not a photographer. I am the photographer, I own this stage." He said, pointing at the stage. "You are just a manager, Ini's puppet. Stay where you belong, Rookie!"

Marcus scoffed. "Just because Ini has you take her pictures, you think you are Mr. Worldwide."

"Look here, Marcus. I am not sleeping with Ini!" he said. Marcus's shoulder appeared to relax. "But I would soon." He added, spitefully.

Marcus sent him crashing to the floor. Both men tossed and rolled as they battled for supremacy on who would get the first decent punch. Marcus did as he smacked Michael's face with so much venom. "NEVER- EVER- TALK - ABOUT - INI - LIKE- THAT- IN- YOUR-LIFE!" He shouted punching Michael's face with every word.

Security men rushed to the scene and pulled Marcus away from Michael. "Let me go!!!" he shouted. "He disrespected Ini." He shouted at the top of his voice as he was being pulled away.

"RACIST!!!" Michael shouted as he was helped up to his feet. He was bleeding profusely from his nose and his eye now had the traditional red swell.

Ini stopped the security men as she saw them pulling Marcus. "What's going on?" she asked.

"Ini, Marcus was going to kill Michael."

She hissed. "Why are you exaggerating the matter? This fellow can't even hit anyone."

The Security men all burst out in a horrid laugh. "You should see Michael. For now, we have to keep this man away." They said and took him away.

She left for the photo shoot centre. "Where's Michael?" she asked.

"Michael has been taken to the clinic for a first-aid clean-up." An attendant replied.

She hurried for the clinic which was not too far from the photo shoot centre. "Oh my..." she exclaimed as soon as she saw Michael's face. "Really?" she squealed with a smile. "Marcus is a real man!"

Michael turned his face away from her. Ini wore a mean smile and walked out of the room. She bumped into Shola Jones. "Oh no!"

Shola smiled. "I know you don't want to see me, but here I am, my dear."

"Shola, how are you?" Ini asked, smiling.

Shola hissed. "Quit the act! I heard you got my Etilahad deal." She sneered.

Ini shrugged. "It was mine before you sold your body to them, apparently after your accident; they deemed it logical to have me back on the team."

"I slept with only one person, not all of them." She replied, fetching a cigarette.

Ini smiled. "What difference does that make?" she asked. She picked the cigarette from Shola's mouth. "You shouldn't be smoking." She said and threw it in the nearest bin. Shola smiled. "Ah...yes, I care about you."

"Ini Obong, you know what this business entails, right?" Shola asked. Ini nodded confidently. "I feel something spooky about my cream and all, and I don't need a soothsayer to tell me that you are behind it. You are naturally evil, Ini."



Ini nodded in the affirmative. "Think what you want, Shola. I think I have tried to show my care for you during your low times, but if you have decided in your heart to blame your unfortunate incident on me, then so be it. We'll see how it goes." She said, turning away.

"Ini Obong, do you really think I would buy that ploy of you coming to see me in the hospital as genuine?"

Ini turned backward with a smile. "That was the best of me."

"Ya...right! If that was the best of you then I am sure that you are capable of many more evils." She replied. Ini faced her. "I would be recuperating for the next one month and during that period, I know you might have won the whole of Nigeria with that skanky body of yours, but I promise to be back and better." She said, eyeballing Ini.

Ini scoffed. "It was just a change of cream, why do you need a month?"

Shola's jaw dropped. "How did you know that my cream was changed?"

\*\*\*

Tola ate her burger as Wole watched. "When last did you have somebody 'baby' you?" he asked. She didn't respond, she stared at him and ate on. "It's fine. Here's some ice cream." He added, passing a cup of ice cream to her.

"Why are you being so nice to me?" she asked.

He took a deep breath. "Tola, I love you."

"Why?"

He shrugged. "I don't know, but I feel I won't be complete without you." he replied.

'If only Tolu could love me' she thought. "Thank you." she replied. He smiled. "But I don't need you working at Asolo to prove that to me."

He nodded. "I just want to learn and of course be closer to you, I can't deny that."

Tola took a deep breath. "Wole, I love someone else."

He nodded. "I know, I'll wait and see if you can learn to love me, if not, I'll move on."

"Easier said than done... Would you really leave me alone?"

He smiled. "Why not?! But not for Tolu! If it's Tolu, I'll keep fighting for you. That jerk doesn't deserve an ounce of your love."

She smiled. "There are no reasons that explain love, Wole."

"Well said! That's how much my heart beats for you, every time I see you, I feel different, Tola."

She shook her head and dipped her spoon in the ice cream. "I don't know what to do with your heart." She said, as she took a scoop.

"Sadly, I have no control over my emotions for you, neither do you, I just want to be with you and I pray that God grants my request."

Tola stared at him and wore a faint smile. 'Amen!' she said, in her heart.

Wole took a scoop of his ice cream. "I love this spot a lot. I come here with my sister often for ice cream."

"Well, my 'sisters' are fun too."

He stared at her. "Sisters?"

"They are my housemates, Ini and Kimberly. I don't know if you have met Kim, but you certainly know Ini." She replied. He nodded with a smile. "She's a bundle of trouble, but she's also very sweet."

He nodded. "Maybe we could all hang out sometime, just to know one another better." He said.

She nodded. "That would be fine. Erm...Wole, what if I am unable to love you?"

He shrugged. "I'll still be your friend then. I admire you a lot, I would want to keep you forever." He replied. Tola's face was like it was going to crack out of joy. Wole had said the kindest words to her on this day. She smiled and dug her spoon into the Ice cream, this time she didn't eat it, she smeared it on his face laughing.

Wole smiled happily. "You are happy, right?" he asked. She nodded excitedly. "Then that's all that counts." He replied and threw his cup at her.

\*\*\*

Mr. Adeoye acted the gentleman and opened the car door for me. "Please go in." he said.

*Older men and etiquettes!*

"Thank you, sir." I replied as I took my seat on the comfy leather seats. He turned on the ignition. "Thank you for giving me a chance at Millaroca." I said.

He shrugged. "You deserve it, and I think you might just be the change that we need over there. So many stoic people like me and I guess it's time for flexibility."

I nodded with some ecstasy. "You are right, sir." I replied.

"You know, I have some really young brains at Millaroca, but I think they have been overshadowed by the older ones and so we have remained on the same page for a while. Millaroca is drowning right now."

I stared at him as he continued talking about a magazine press that once shook the continent but now was in oblivion. My phone buzzed as a message came in from David. "Hi Kimberly, Please could you find time out of your *busy* schedule to accompany me to a fundraiser this weekend?"

I smiled and typed back. "Most definitely!"

"So, are you in any relationship?" Mr. Adeoye asked.

My ear itched. I pretended not to have heard him. "Sorry?"

He smiled. "You are as young as my baby, I just want to know if any man has your tender heart yet?" he honked as he took the next turn. "I am only looking out for a kid, I have a son that's single."

"I am engaged." I replied, proudly.

He nodded. "Really? That's impressive. Don't you look too young to be engaged?"

I smiled. "Not at all, my fiancé is a loving man, that's all that counts."

"Do you love him, Kimberly?"

*I have never liked that question. Now, I felt like I had to tell a lie to get out of Mr. Adeoye's questions.* "We love each other."

"That's beautiful! Love is beautiful with the right person. I am still in love with my wife."

I nodded as he rattled on about their love which had been on for several decades. He paused. "I don't really understand your last name, why is it Banks?"

I smiled. "I like to be called Kim Banks, it would even help us with our audience, they can relate to me better, even on social network."

"But what's your full name then?" he asked, as he pulled up at the office.

I cleared my throat. I had never enjoyed telling people that I am Professor Bankole's daughter, anyway, I didn't think he would ask. I hadn't appeared as flashy as an elite's daughter might to anyone. "I am Kimberly Bankole."

"Nice one. Are you related to Professor Bankole?"

I smiled. "There are several Bankoles."

"Of course, there are. Erm...please go ahead, I'll meet you upstairs, I have to see some friends around here." He replied.

I nodded and stepped out of the car and immediately left for the office.

"Kim?"

I turned round to see Boye. "Hi Boye." I said with a smile.

"How are you? What are you doing here?" he asked leaning against the door.

I smiled. "I came to see Mr. Adeoye and it seems like you would be seeing my face around here more often."

"Really?" he asked with a smile. "He hired you?"

I nodded with a smile. "Yes, he did!"

"Did Ben help you speak with him?"

I shrugged. "I don't know, but I figured that I should try to see Mr. Adeoye in person if I really wanted to work."

"I am so happy for you, I have gone through your stuffs and I must say you are fantastic. It's going to be a revolution with you here."

I smiled. "Thanks for believing in me."

"Nah...I have to! Millaroca is definitely coming up again, we must takeover."

I blushed faintly and tried to bow my head.

"Boye, have you seen those papers?" Ben asked, coming out of his office. I stared at him as I saw him. "Hi Kimberly."

I firmed my lips. "Been a while, Ben."

"Of course it has." He replied.

Boye smiled at me. "Nice to have you around here." He said, shaking my hand. He turned towards Ben. "The papers are on my desk, will finish up right now." He said and tapped him, excusing us.

Ben stepped forward. "What do you want?"

"Ben, why are you making me look like the villain here?" I asked.

He scoffed. "Apart from the fact that your millionaire 'fiancé' hit me and threw his money in my face, you never told me about him. How do you want me to regard you?"

I took a deep breath. "We were never dating, Ben. And you probably never asked me about him."

"LIES! You never said a thing about him, because you wanted to lead me on. Is that how all you wealthy people behave?"

I snarled. "Stop it, Ben! You have to kill this complex you have. What is it about you and wealthy people? You embarrassed me before David, and even if I was going to have any ounce of affection for you, you killed it that day when you made yourself look little."

"Made myself look little? You belittled me!"

I rose an eyebrow. "You did that to yourself, Ben. I didn't!" I replied. He bit his lip. "Ben, I am sorry for not saying earlier and we need to sit and talk about all these. There are many things about me you still don't know."

"You never let me in really much." He replied, much calmer now.

"Really, Ben? I thought you didn't know Kimberly?" a voice howled behind us.

We turned round to see Mr. Adeoye

## 10

Mr. Adeoye stared at us expecting Ben to say something. Ben blinked and clenched his fists tightly. I stared at Mr. Adeoye. "Ben told me that he has never met you before and that he doesn't remember knowing you at all, but I am surprised to see you acting all close. Enlighten me, Ben!" he said, firmly.

Ben stuttered. "I am sorry..."

"I was the one who said hi to him." I said, cutting in. "We just met, sir." I added quickly.

Mr. Adeoye stared at us. "Really?"

"Yes, sir. I met him here and he was putting me through a few things since we would be working together, and he looked to me like the young brain you referred to earlier."

Mr. Adeoye nodded in agreement. "He is a very smart man, anyway, you guys appeared too comfortable for a first meeting." He said, looking at Ben. "Kimberly, let's leave for the office, we have to set you up quickly."

I nodded. "Yes, sir." and followed him quickly.

"This will be your office." He said, opening a door down the hallway. "It is very spacious and I bet you would have fun working here." He said, closing the door after me. "I'll have a roster sent to you for office hours and all, but bear in mind that we resume duties at 8am, and officially, work ends at 5pm. Overtime hours are subject to your duty."

We ascended the stairs and left for the top floor. "As you know, we have a boardroom here. But we haven't had a logical board meeting in almost five years, that's how epileptic Millaroca has become, all our stakeholders are pulling out and intend to sell their shares."

"Really? How do you intend to combat that?" I asked, wiping dust off the table in the boardroom.

He sighed. "I am hoping that with the injection of a young and brilliant mind like yours, we can make a rapid sale within the next month, before this place collapses." He started, as he helped himself to a chair. "The stakeholders have all decided to sell their shares, and that's a 50% pull. If the next buyer wishes, he could turn Millaroca into a Casino. I heard that's his wish, he said this place is a strategic location."

I nodded. "Let's say every staff here is temporary in that case...as the next one month is concerned."

"Correct!"

I shook my head. "That's unfair."

"Nothing is unfair in business, my dear. That's why I need an epic story. I am willing to invest all I have in its production and see how much sale I can pull throughout the country and possibly the continent."

I took a deep breath. "It's a lot of work here then." He nodded in agreement. "I am ready for the task ahead, sir."

He smiled confidently. "Thank you, my dear. The proposed buyer for Millaroca is still anonymous and I am doing my best to find out the person or group, I want to save this place and give back to the society what they once loved in us."

I nodded in agreement. "I am glad to be part of this short-term project, even if it's only for a month."

He shrugged. "I hope we can restore it to what it used to be."

"I know we can."

He smiled. "Please resume duty tomorrow, I want a story that would shake Africa. Your office would be set by then, and I can't boast about giving you the best salary ever for this one-month affair, but I promise that it would be decent. Millaroca is banking on you."

\*\*\*

Ini flipped her hair backwards. "I just took a wild guess, moron. I mean reports have it that you have been using that cream for ages. What could have possibly gone wrong with your cream?"

"I don't know. I'll leave you to answer that. You were the one who suggested that a cream change occurred, so what did you do to the cream, Ini Obong?"

Ini sighed. "Shola, I understand the fact that you are obsessed with my success and you see every statement or action of mine as an attack on you, but I can confidently tell you that I know 'nada' about your unfortunate accident. I mean, I have more things to do."

"Like jumping in and out of Michael's bed?"

Ini burst into a sarcastic laugh. She had swayed Shola off-course. "You fool! Michael is too skinny for a man, he has lots of tats and I don't like that in a man, and to cap it, he got beat by my Marcus. How much weaker can a man be?"

"Oh really? Just wait till Michael files a complaint against that tout of yours."

Ini smiled confidently. *It looked as though Shola won't be revisiting the issue on the cream.* "I like your cousin, he looks young, but he's a real hunk!"

"Which of my cousins have your slutty eyes laid themselves on? Henry?"

Ini smiled. "That has to be the cutest of your ape generic group. Yes, it's Henry I like."

"How ever did you meet him?"

Ini shrugged. "It's a small world, sweetheart; your cousin is totally into me. You should ask him, the last time we were together; he said he thinks I am the only model in this country."

"What did he say about me?"

Ini rolled her eyes. "He only said *'Thank God she's fine, I think she's sh\*t for a model'* Yes, that's how he put it."

"You lie! Henry adores me!"

Ini smiled. "Shola Jones, you are too self-absorbed. I think you should concentrate on how you can get yourself out there again, because, this time, the spotlight is on me. Ciao!" she said and walked away, very relieved that she was able to put Shola away from the thought of the cream.

Ini bumped into Marcus as soon as she exited the clinic. "Marcus....." she shouted with some excitement and kissed his forehead. "You are the real deal! The Amir Khan!!! You rock! Michael really looks awful." She shouted dancing around him.



Marcus smiled. He felt proud inside. "I never meant to hit him."

"Hmmm.... What did he do to provoke my sweet little Marcus?" she asked, pulling his cheek.

He sighed. "He spoke badly about a person I love."

"Awww....that's so sweet! So you went all knockers at him, right?" she asked. He shrugged. "I think that's special. She must be really lucky, can't believe you still regard Chioma that high."

He grinned. "Who said anything about Chioma?" he asked, and started to walk away.

"Oh my...! Marcus, you found someone else!!!" she shouted and chased after him.

\*\*\*

Wole punched the elevator buttons and allowed Tola in.

"I had a nice time." She confessed as the door closed. He smiled. "Thank you, Wole."

He stared at his shirt. "I did too, except for the fact that you smeared ice cream on my shirt."

She rolled her eyes. "But you retaliated. I also have it at the tip of my jacket." She replied, smiling.

"Tip versus the whole shirt? Look at me, I look like some little kid." He said, trying to tuck in his shirt.

She smiled. "But you are..." she said and stepped closer to him. He tried to avoid her stare. "Or not...?" she asked, starting to sound sensual as she bit her lip.

He clenched his fists and stepped back. "We are in the elevator, Tola." He struggled to say.

She burst into a mocking laugh. "I was just messing with you." she said, laughing. "You are such a chicken!" she said as they got to her floor and the door opened.

Wole rubbed his hands against his trouser as he stepped out after her.

"Tola, I am sorry." Tolu said standing up as soon as Tola and Wole approached.

Wole took a deep breath and turned his face away.

Kemi bowed apologetically. "I told him not to stay, ma, but he refused."

"Couldn't you have called security?" Tola asked, staring at her. "I mean this is a top firm, no intruder should be allowed."

Tolu went on his knees. "Tola, I am sorry, my love. I know I hurt you, I know I made you cry, but I acted stupidly and I am sorry. I can't live without you."

Tola nodded. "Of course, Tolu, you can't live without me, because you are out of money and you are in need of some money."

He shook his head and tears rolled out. "Take everything from me, life is not the same without you, I want you, I want your love, I want the old us. I want the Tola who never cared about roadside cafeterias, I want the Tola who would run across the streets for roasted plantains and corns. I want my life back."

She took a deep breath and blinked. Wole stared at her as he felt her heart break. "Tolu..." she struggled to say.

He prostrated all out for her. "Just take me back. I'll never hurt you again, I swear to love you with everything I have and I am. I am begging for one last chance, Tola Matthews. I want to be your man, I want to defend you." he said. He spoke calmly and in a very remorseful fashion.

Wole tapped Kemi and walked away with her.

\*\*\*

David held Oyinkan's hand as they crossed the ever busy Broad Road. She yanked her hand away as soon as they reached the other side. "Stop babying me!" she said, adjusting her dangling blouse. She had a knack for wearing tops that dropped slightly down her shoulder. David smiled as he looked down and ruffled her hair. "And stop that, David!" she said, stamping her foot.

He smiled widely revealing his perfect set of teeth. "I love hanging out with you." he said, cynically. She hissed. "And I like the fact that you are short."

"I am not short! I am close to 6ft."

He scoffed. "5ft 5."

"It's close to 6." She replied, and walked ahead. He followed her. "Stop embarrassing me." she forced between her teeth.

He smiled and shoved her ahead. "I hate the fact that you have to be everywhere around me...why are you always showing your face in the office?" he asked, as they approached the office. "Thanks to you, I didn't enjoy lunch." He hissed.

"Really, David? I didn't ask you to order what I like."

He shrugged and walked in. She chased after him. "Back to the initial matter we discussed over lunch, how do we make a way to see your mom?"

He took a deep breath. "I have no idea, Oyinkan. Dad won't let me, we have to come up with something, although I feel she won't forgive me."

"Nah...she will. She's a mother, a mother's heart always forgives."

He hissed. "Where did you pick that stupid line from?"

She scoffed. "Dude, give me some credit, I am brilliant."

"Hmmm...and you dropped out of college midway."

She shrugged. "So? Does that make me any less smart than you? I mean, look at me, I have helped you in this company even without the degree." She said as she opened the door to his office.

"And that's why you lack the necessary manners to know that I should be the one to open the door." She rolled her eyes and swayed into the office.

"Oyinkan, taking David away from his office won't help us in the business world." Mr. Coker said, rising to his feet. David opened his mouth to speak but Mr. Coker quickly continued. "I have a spare key."

David took a deep breath. "Dad, this is my office. Do I have to change the locks like I did in London?"

Mr. Coker balanced on his left leg with the aid of his cane. "You have become too casual, son. I don't like that." He started, ignoring David's question. "Running across the streets for lunch, whose son are you?" he asked, raising his voice.

Oyinkan slid behind David. *Whenever Mr. Coker got into 'those moods', the next person had better take heed!*

"I apologize Father, but I think I should be able to decide what I want to eat and wherever I wish."

Mr. Coker clenched his teeth furiously. "Stupid boy!" he turned swiftly to Oyinkan. "I suggest you visit your family more often, we have business to do here."

"Dad! I won't have you threaten Oyinkan. She has no fault here; you don't want me to eat out, fine!"

His father nodded and smiled. "To the second matter, I suspended you. You have no right to be here." David hissed. "Oh yes, you are suspended. Get out of here."

"For how long?"

Mr. Coker shrugged. "Return next week Monday."

David nodded. "By then my mother...oh, I meant Elizabeth as you love to call her, would have been dead, right?" he asked with a cynical grin. "It took you three days of suspending me to kill Bola."

"Watch your tongue, young man. Bola died due to the hospital's carelessness."

David fumed. "I loved that woman!"

"Love? The only person you have a right to love is Kimberly, and that is if you think you can love her, else, no one else." He shouted. "There would be no one else!!!" he shouted.

David shrugged. "Bola was a good girl, Dad. She didn't deserve it."

Mr. Coker hissed. "She was going to die anyways."

"She had cancer, she was fighting well. I was going to help her get through it." David replied.

He nodded. "Of course! And throw away everything we have built!" he shouted. "Look here son, that lady died because they were careless in the hospital."

David shook his head in disagreement. "Dad, you know that's a lie. You cut the oxygen supply."

"Think whatever you want, it wasn't proved that I was responsible for her death 7 years ago, and it won't be proved now." He concluded and stamped his cane furiously. "Both of you get out here now!"

\*\*\*

"How are you, Professor Mrs. Bankole?" I asked, taking my seat.

Mom smiled as she stretched her legs out on the chaise lounge and sipped her fruit juice. "You can still call me 'Mom', you know." She said with a weary smile. Her smile had faded in reality; I wondered how she looked stunning on magazine covers with Dad. They both wore the smile that made the whole world marvel and say... 'Aren't they the perfect parents?'

I smiled back. "How are you, Mom?"

She stretched out her hand and hugged me dearly. "Your mother is hanging on fine."

We stared at ourselves and chorused with mixed feeling of laughter and tears. "Until her dying day." I stared at her as tears rolled down her weary eyes. I wiped them off with my fingers and she rubbed mine off too. Mom had cultivated the habit of saying... 'Your mother is hanging on fine until her dying day' whenever I enquired about her welfare.

"Kimberly..." she started. Her voice trembled. Her hand was equally trembling as she ran it through my face. "My baby, I am sorry." She said. I smiled as tears rolled down my eyes. "I wish I was as tough as you are, I would have fought for a better life."

I nodded as I stared at her. "Mom, you are stronger than you know. You've worn a smile that has made people believe in a better life."

"I have lied to people, Kim. I am not who they think I am. Look at me, I only have a Professor's tag, I am worse than a stark illiterate." She blurted.

I hugged her. "It's okay, mom. Don't beat yourself, you'll fight back. I know you will, very soon."

She took a deep breath and stared at her wristband. "It would soon pass." She read with a smile. I nodded and nudged her in the waist. She smiled. I then tickled her so hard till she went for the laugh and then the *awkward fart* and then the silence followed and we laughed again. "It's been a while since I laughed with a loved one."

"I am always here." I replied. She kissed my forehead. "Mom, I bring you good news."

Her face lit up with excitement. "Okay, are you in love?" I wore a grimace. "Okay, sorry, love. I hope I didn't jinx your news." I flashed my teeth at her and she closed her eyes awaiting the news.

"I AM PREGNANT!" She widened her eyes in shock. They bulged so large that I thought they wouldn't shut so I immediately quit the drama. "Just joking, mom." I squealed and laughed so hard. Her tensed shoulders dropped. "I got a job."

She smiled and hugged me tight. "That's my go-getter!" she said and kissed my forehead. "So, where's the new place."

"Millaroca." I said, excitedly. Her smile faded slightly. "Adeoye's magazine, right?"

I stared at her. "Erm...Yes...Is there a problem?"

She rolled her eyes and sipped her drink. "I don't think there is, but isn't that place pretty finished? I mean it's been long since any civilized person paid much attention to their mag."

"But mom, you used to love it." I teased.

She nodded. "Until I started reading about chastity week-in-week-out."

"MOM! What are you preaching to me?!" I asked, laughing.

She snapped. "Quit the sarcasm, the place is so out of it...but I believe in you." she said, with a smile.

"Thank you, mom."

The sound of corporate shoes approached. I turned to see dad. "Good evening, dad." I greeted.

"How are you?" he asked.

Mom and I stole a quick glance at ourselves and replied at once. "Fine." Mom knew better than to expect another 'How are you, dear?' "Why are you here, Kim? Do you need daddy's great help now?"

I smiled with so much pride. "I came to tell 'daddy' that I now have a job."

He took a deep breath. "Really? Who employed you?"

"Millaroca Magazine."

He nodded with a smile. "Good for you."

I smiled back. "Thank you, sir." I replied. He nodded and walked away.

"Do you want a driver to drop you?" Mom asked.

I shook my head in disagreement. "I'll take a walk after dinner."

\*\*\*

Wole leaned against Tola's door. "Hey." He called softly.

She raised her head and smiled. "Hi..."

He took a deep breath and walked in, closing the door gently. "So, how are you?"

"I am okay." She replied, firmly glued to her laptop.

He cleared his throat slightly. "And how are things with your boyfriend?"

She stared at him and rolled her eyes. "Tolu is fine."

He nodded. "Of course..." he muttered underneath his breath. He stared at her again as she had returned her gaze to the laptop. "Did you guys...erm...did you guys get back together?"

She rolled her eyes and smiled. "We never broke up."

Wole swallowed heavily and let out some air from his mouth. "Okay." He said, standing up. "Erm...it's late, I think I should be going home." He said and clenched his fists. "Good night, Tola."

"Good night, Wole."

He smiled and approached the door. "Tola, you need a ride?" he asked, wiping some perspiration from his forehead.

"I have a car, Wole."

He nodded in agreement. "Erm...yeah....I know." He stuttered.

Tola stood up and walked over to him. "Wole, I am fine." She said, staring at him.

"I know..."

She smiled and walked around him. "But clearly, you are not fine. And I think you should take a seat." She said gesturing to a chair.

He nodded. "Of course..." he said.

Tola poured him a glass of juice. He collected it and sipped. "Wole, I understand that you are concerned about me."

"Hey..." he said, cutting in. "I love you, Tola." He said, reassuringly with a smile.

She smiled back. "Thank you."

He drank up. "Tola, I don't know about your heart and I can't judge your heart for its feelings, but I can tell you about my feelings, and how my heart feels and clearly I don't know how long my heart can beat for you, but as long as it beats for you, I'll always be there." He said, and kissed her forehead.

She closed her eyes and held his shirt. "Don't wait for me, Wole."

He freed himself from her grip gently. "I'll wait." He said and walked out.

\*\*\*

The breeze blew gently and the birds chirped delightfully as the evening fell. I swayed from left to right as I enjoyed the delightful evening, perfect condition to walk. I could have taken a bus home but I knew several routes to walk home and even though it might take me an enduring 30-minute trek, I won't pass on the beautiful evening.

I plugged my iPod into my ears and let Dido's music stream through my head as I nodded to her hit track *'Life for rent'...* "Always thought that I would love to live by the sea..." I sang out as I walked the street...

"I have no idea what's happening to that dream..." a voice replied.

Urgh!!! I hate it when people join me when I am singing except if we had it planned. I turned round to see my 'duet partner'. Oh well...it is a woman

She laughed. "I am sorry, I think I even missed that line...I think it's 'to travel the world...blah blah blah..." she said, laughing. "I just love Dido...just like my soldier."

Okay... this is getting freaky... I mean, who stops you in the middle of nowhere and starts to talk about music with you. I smiled and turned to walk on.

"Hey!" she called, stopping me in my tracks. "Don't run away so fast."



I stared at her from her head to toe. She was wearing a grey mackintosh and black jeans with black sneakers. I reached into my wallet and fetched a thousand naira; she looked like she needed help. "Please take this."

She laughed hysterically. "Do I need money?!"

I nodded in agreement. "I think so..."

She snarled. "Nah...I have never needed money, sweetheart, the only thing I have ever been in need of is my soldier."

"Your soldier?" I asked, returning my money into the wallet.

She nodded and sat on the 'love seat' nearest to us. "Please join me..." she said

I took a deep breath as I took the first step forward. *'Could she be a killer?' There was no one to call for help...Or is she a witch?!* *'Enough of the weird feelings!'* I said in my heart and braved up, taking my seat beside her.

She reached for a cigarette and a lighter from her jacket. "Smoke?" I shook my head in disagreement. "Okay, sweetheart. Erm...about my soldier..." she started.

I nodded as I listened to her...an idea struck me that I might just be getting an inspiration for a new story. "Yes, your soldier..."

She nodded as she continued. "I have been looking for him for over 30 years now..." I stared at her as she continued. "He said to me, 'My little angel, I'll be back to marry you.' but he never came back." She paused.

I stared at her as she smiled, looking ahead. "I love hiding in this street because it reminds me of him..." she continued. "You see these sunflowers..." she said, looking ahead. I stared at the flowers dancing in their buds making show-stopping statements of beauty and admiration. I nodded in agreement. "He loved them." She said with a huge smile. "But he never came back for them, or me..." she said, as a tear rolled down her eyes.

Her words sent shudders down my spine and I felt my heart break for a woman's hurt. I wiped the tear drop off her face. "It's okay."

"Yes, it is... I got my soldier's villain, but I still want my soldier. I am waiting for him."

I nodded and drew closer to her. I hugged her. "You'll be fine... I promise..."

"Where have you been?!"

I turned to see an elderly woman approaching us. She stared at my 'duet partner' and seized her hand. "We have been looking all over for you, you shouldn't wander off without permission."

She laughed. "It's depressing there...and I am already depressed. We are a bad combination."

"We'll plant more sunflowers at home. Let's go." She said.

My duet partner stood up and curtsied in a French manner. "Thank you..." she said, smiling at me.

I smiled back. "What's your name, ma'am?"

"Elizabeth..." she said.

I smiled. "Nice to meet you, Mrs. Elizabeth?"

She paused and laughed. "Just call me Liz."

## 11

Elizabeth's companion looked impatient. "Young lady, we have to go now."

"Let me visit sometime." I begged her.

Elizabeth smiled at her. "Mother, please..."

"You know we don't give those privileges at the home."

I urged her. "Please make an exception for me. I want to be her friend."

She shook her head in disagreement. "I am sorry." She said, and held Elizabeth's hand firmly.

"It's getting dark." Elizabeth groaned.

I frowned. "You are holding her against her wish."

She smiled and released her slightly. "Ms...."

"Kimberly. Kim Banks."

She adjusted her glasses as she continued. "Ms. Banks, we do not allow visitors into our homes..."

"But Mrs. Olugbile has her grand-children over every weekend. I feel *old* there!"

Elizabeth cut in abruptly.

I stared at the *Mother*. She snorted gently and continued. "...unless there is appropriate permission to visit." She stressed with a smile as though Mrs. Elizabeth had failed in '*falling her hand*'. "So, Ms. Banks, we are sorry." She said, holding Elizabeth's hand. "Mrs. Olugbile's family granted them permission."

I blinked and took a deep breath. "Could I come and register to be her guest?" I asked. "You have to be from Victoria's Parents' Home, right?" I asked. It was the nearest home to this environment.

"Yes." She replied, taking a deep breath. "Ask for Mother Francesca when you come."

I grinned with so much delight. "Thank you Mother. I'll see you tomorrow..." I said smiling at Elizabeth.

She firmed her lips together for a smile and then a tear dropped. "Thank you for being my friend, Kimberly."

"Thank you too..." I replied as she walked away with Mother Francesca.

\*\*\*

Henry poured himself some juice. "And that was how my supervisor walked in and was like... 'That's my boy...we had a good rehearsal'"

"Stupid man..." Ini scoffed. "Who won't identify with success?"

Henry grinned. "Want some juice?" he asked, downing another cup.

She hissed. "I have always known that you lack manners...is it now that you are offering me the juice?" she asked, lifting the juice pack.

He scoffed. "I thought you wouldn't be interested." He said, pouring her what was left of the drink. He drummed on the pack effortlessly as he poured its remaining contents. "See...I emptied it." He said, hurling the pack into the bin.

Ini picked her cup and turned on the gas cooker. "It's really funny that Kim hasn't called to say anything about her day." She started, as she cleaned the pan. "Do you want some pancakes?"

He nodded excitedly. "Yes, thank you." The doorbell chimed. "I'll get it." He said, dashing out of the kitchen. He took a peek through the door hole and opened the door. "Welcome, man, did you get the booze?"

Marcus waved the bag proudly. "Of course...liquors aren't a big deal to get."

"Oh...well, my father is against me taking alcohol, but he loves to take it. What kind of man is that?"

Marcus closed the door. "In that case, you won't be having any of these."

"Really? No way, Marcus, you can't do that to me."

Marcus joined Ini in the kitchen. "Hey, Babes! Limited stock here and the minority..." he stressed eyeballing Henry "...is likely to sit out."

Ini sighed and placed the drinks in the fridge. "Cut it, Marcus, you know he would need to help us. At least, we have to finish the drinks before our 'mothers' return, so we may just use his help."

Henry nodded with a smile. "Ah-ah...so you need me because you don't want Kim or Tola to know that you have had some booze in the house." He shrugged. "It smells, you know."

"Of course..." she replied, shoving him out of the way.

Henry took his seat. "Doesn't Kimberly take alcohol?"

Ini rolled her eyes. "Do you need a soothsayer to confirm everything we have said?"

Marcus opened a can and started to sip. "Ini, Shola wants to meet with us tomorrow. She sent me a mail."

She scoffed. "Why?"

He shrugged. "I really don't know, but I think she wants us to have a discussion." He said, looking at Henry with an acute eye. Ini rose her eyebrow as she 'got' the message.

Henry sighed. "So, how's my cousin doing?"

"I am not her bloody Manager. You could ask her." Marcus replied.

Ini laughed as she served the pancakes. "Marcus chill..."

Henry nodded and took a bite. "He needs to chill."

The doorbell chimed. Ini stared at Marcus. "Keep the drinks." She said, hastily.

Henry scoffed. "They'll still find out." He said and danced off to open the door.

"Heyyyyyyyyy..." he slurred as he paused. "Why are you here, Shola?"

Shola eyeballed him and stepped in. "Ini!!!"

Ini poked her head through the kitchen and stepped into the living room. "Shola Jones? I see you have no respect."

"You boast a very fine apartment."

Ini hissed. "Paid for and furnished by three."

Shola scoffed and took a seat. "Oh..." she exclaimed staring at a framed picture on the wall.

"I want to see you and Marcus now."

Marcus hissed. "Shola, whatever you have to say can wait till tomorrow as stated in your mail, please leave."

"Marcus...*you don get liver o...*" she replied, in pidgin English. "I hear say you batter Michael."

Marcus nodded with a smile. "And I'll do it again..." he replied.

Shola Jones hissed. "Is there somewhere private where we can talk?" she asked, looking at Henry. "How's your father?"

Henry wore a faint smile. "As fit as fiddle."

"And the shop?" she probed.

He nodded. "It's running well. We have new customers every time and we are making more money."

She shook her head in disdain. "Petty trade!"

Henry scoffed. "But our money is legit!" he replied, with some scorn in it.

"Let's keep our dirty linens away from here. If you know what I mean..." she replied.

Ini stepped in. "Shola, this is private property, not the agency, and you are clearly not welcome here." She said, approaching the door. "Please leave, we'll have our meeting tomorrow."

"By then, I would be involving the Police and every armed force in this country for your attempt on my life."

\*\*\*

David threw a pin on the dartboard with so much venom. "Atta boy!" Oyinkan exclaimed as she turned in the swivel chair. "You know, if you channel your anger into breaking off from your dad, you may have your own life." She said.

He stared at her and removed the darts from the bull's eye. "I have my own life."

"No offence, cousin, but Mr. Coker still rules you." she replied, and jumped on his bed.

"When are you going to pack out of this house, for a start?"

He resumed his position and struck the bull's eye again. "Soon..."

"How 'soon' is 'soon', David?"

He took a deep breath, "Stop bugging me, Oyinkan. I need to think!" he replied.

"And throwing darts helps you think? You are angry, David."

He yelled. "FINE!!! I'll leave tomorrow!"

She smiled. "I am not forcing you out of your dad's house; I only think you should move into your own place."

"I'll get that sorted out tomorrow, and before the week is over, you'll know my house. Is that fine?" he shouted.

She nodded with a smile. "That's a positive start."

He sank into the bed. "This is all tiring!" he started. "I am not comfortable with this suspension; I would never forgive dad for Bola's death."

"David, to be honest, you have no proof."

He hissed. "He suspended me and sent me off to Jamaica, when I returned; I heard that she died because the oxygen supply failed. Who else could have done that?" he asked, angrily. He took off his jacket and slammed it on the floor.

"Bola had relapsed completely." Oyinkan said softly.

He shot at her angrily. "I could have helped her! Dad said she was making me too soft, so I am sure that he had to kill her."

"You are labelling your dad a murderer, can you live with that?"

He nodded. "I am sure he did. If he could throw my mom away, he is capable of any sort of evil."

Oyinkan stared at her wristwatch. "I am meeting some friends for drinks in about thirty minutes, wanna come?"

David shook his head in disagreement. "Nah...you go along. I want to be alone."

"You are always alone, David." She said, standing up. "Erm...I think you should take advantage of your suspension and try to know Kimberly better."

He scoffed. "She's a writer and unemployed. She had no idea of her family business and she thinks we are rotten. What else is there to know about my dear future wife?"

"But you used to have a crush on her when we were kids."

He shrugged. "So? We were kids. I thought she was really smart then, it was easy to like her."

Oyinkan wore a sensual smile. "Is that all? Your diary is all about my crush from back then whom we both know to be Kim..."

He grinned. "And she was and is still very beautiful."

"Beautiful girl with big brains, you are in luck!" she said, tapping his shoulder. "I'll say you should go out with her, at least try to make your own marriage better than your parents'."

He nodded. "We have a fundraiser this weekend. I'll see how we fare there."

Oyinkan winked and walked away.

\*\*\*

I walked in as Henry closed the door after me. "Hi...where's everyone?"

"My cousin appeared and it seems that she, Ini and Marcus have a lot to talk about, so they left. Tola is upstairs." He briefed.

I stared at him. "And you? It's getting late."

"I wanted to wait for you to give you the good news."

I nodded with a smile. "What's that?"

"My presentation was a success. Everyone loved 'Please Break My Heart'" he squealed excitedly and jumped at me.

We locked in a hug and danced round. "Seriously? And your supervisor?"

He started to laugh. "He is my biggest fan." He said with a mocking smile. "Ladies were all over me today, I thought you deserved a gift." He said, bringing out a pack.

I smiled. "So, because you had a smashing presentation and ladies flocked you, you think it's necessary that I get a gift?" I asked, collecting the gift bag. He raised an eyebrow as I brought out his gift. My smile soon faded as I brought it out. "Henry..." I stressed. "Isn't this gown meant to be for your girlfriend?"

He scoffed. "What girlfriend?"



I hissed. "Game up, Henry! Are you trying to ask me out?"

He frowned. "Why should I? And what if I was?"

I shook my head with a smile. "NO!"

He grinned. "But I like you."

I nodded. "Yeah right! It's so obvious, but with me, it's a NO!"

"Why are you being so firm? It's not like you are in any relationship and you should give us a try, you know." He said, smiling.

I hissed. "US? You are a joke!"

"Whatever! There'll be other girls." He said and took his seat.

I smiled. "What were you ever thinking, Henry?" I asked. "Joker..." I added.

"Is it a big deal that I like you?"

I shook my head in disagreement. "Of course not, everyone is entitled to their own feelings, but I just didn't see it coming and I am not even going to see it as a probability, let alone of a possibility"

He smiled. "Anyway, I bought the gown for you the other day, so you might as well try it on."

I hissed. "Henry, you are full of it. Anyway, thank you." I said, with a smile.

"Do I get a kiss?"

I scoffed. "You won't even get a peck." I replied. Henry motioned towards me. "Really, Henry?"

He shrugged. "I want the kiss."

"Henry, are you out of your mind?" I asked, unnerved.

He nodded. "I enjoy messing with you." he said, leaning over me. "Just a kiss, and I'll leave you alone."

I hissed and slid away from him. "Forget it." I stood up and stared at him. "Get your own girlfriend."

"Uhm..."

I turned to see Tola. "Hey...thought you were asleep."

She looked at the clock. "Get out, Henry. It's past your bed time." She ordered. I laughed mockingly.

"It's just 8." He replied.

She nodded. "Leave!" she said.

He took a bow and smiled. "Good night, my lady." He said and tried coming close to me but I ran to Tola. "See ya!" he said and shut the door after him.

"So, what were you guys trying to do?" Tola asked, as she strode into the kitchen and returned with an apple.

I grinned. "Tola, nothing!"

She nodded. "Na so..." she jibed in pidgin. "How was your day? Unlike you to return late."

I smiled and then screamed. "I got a job!!!!"

"Oh My!!!!" she screamed and hugged me. "I am so happy for you. What's the pay like?"

I frowned. "Madam, do you know if I work as a KFC attendant?"

She smiled. "I am sorry, it's all about money. Anyway, where do you work?"

"Millaroca Magazine."

She raised an eyebrow. "With Ben Ten, right?"

I hissed. "He didn't help me get the job." I replied.

\*\*\*

Shola Jones leaned against the Murano. "It's your call, Ini." She said, with an evil grin. She stared at the CD in her hand. "You are pure evil, Ini."

Marcus took a deep breath. "This is just blackmail."

She nodded. "You have a choice, I am not forcing you guys. I have fine evidence. Sleeping around does pay, you know."

"How am I sure that's the only copy?" Ini asked.

She smiled. "I don't intend to mess you up; this is the only footage from the day of my accident. I stole it from Koba, he was called to review the footage from the *Ladies* which is usually

private as you know." She started. "I overheard the information and I got there first and picked it out. He must be searching for it."

Marcus hissed. "I don't believe you; you must have a copy of this!"

She nodded. "Of course, I have my copy! But the agency has no copy and won't have if you cooperate with me. All I need is for you to give me 70% on every deal of yours; at least, the agency prefers you and I won't be getting any deals with you around." She concluded.

"You slept with Koba, right?" Ini asked.

Shola smiled. "Eewww!!! No, the Manager! That's when I knew the footage was going to be reviewed."

Marcus spat. "You disgust me."

She smiled. "You guys are more disgusting! Reducing yourselves to changing my cream to get me off a job is really cheap, you know..."

Ini nodded. "50%"

Shola laughed hysterically. "You think say na Yaba market we dey? No pricing for here." She rolled in *Pidgin* English.

"But 70% is pure robbery! You might as well put a gun to her head and collect all her salaries." Marcus replied, angrily.

Shola looked over her shoulder. "I think you should lower your voice." She said, smiling at the passers-by. "You are gaining interest from the people passing and of course, the folks in the restaurant."

Ini placed a hand on Marcus' shoulder, indicating he calmed down. "55%"

"Ini Obong! NO!" She replied.

Marcus was livid and he charged towards her. "This b\*tch!"

Ini swiftly held him back. "Your Adrenaline these days is serious." She said with a smile.

"Did you want to hit me, puppet?" Shola asked. Ini eyeballed her coldly. "That's really cowardly and you shouldn't use such foul words on females."

Ini stared at her. "Listen, Shola, if you don't want to end up looking like Michael, I advise you keep your running mouth in check. 60% and that's all, you can go to hell!"

Shola smiled. "I love the way you bargain. Fine!" she handed the CD to Ini.

"I'll need your other evidence!" Marcus ordered.

Ini stared at Marcus admirably. "Yes, we need your evidence!"

She sighed. "It's for my own protection. When I receive my first 60%, you'll have it, I promise. However, you have in your hands that of the agency."

"When they discover that this is missing, how would you sort it out?"

She rolled her eyes. "That's true...Erm.. Marcus, since you are good at replacing, I think we should do that before tomorrow morning. You surely can edit the footage with you, right?"

Marcus took a deep breath. He had a vast knowledge in software engineering. He collected the CD from Ini. "I better get going." He said. "You would have to return the new one yourself." He shot at Shola.

"With all pleasure..." she replied.

Ini opened the door to the Murano. "I'll drop you off." She offered.

"Never mind." He said and walked away.

Shola smiled. "I won't mind a ride you know." She said, smiling at her.

Ini hissed and drove off.

\*\*\*

I shut my laptop and placed it in my bag. Ini jeered. "*You sef don become 'working class' for your mind, abi?*" she rattled in Pidgin. I smiled at her. She smiled back and continued. "I am happy for you, what I don't know is how you are going to avoid Ben Ten."

"I don't intend to avoid him." I replied, adjusting my blouse. "I have a mission at Millaroca and I have to make sure it's done regardless of who I have to work with."

She smiled. "That's why I love you; you have some really great principles."

I rolled my eyes and downed my cup of tea. "I hope I have a good day."

"You will. Get ready for the days of joining early BRTs." She replied, staring at the wall clock.

I smiled. "Do you know that I sent a text to David telling him that I now have a job?"

"Really? Why would you do that?" she asked, handing me a bus ticket.

I collected it. "Thanks. I just thought he should know, at least, he's my *to-be* husband." I replied, cynically.

"Did he reply?"

I shook my head. "I was about coming to that part. He didn't even reply or call." I said, adjusting my jacket.

"Do you need the jacket? It's not a bank job."

I looked at myself. "I think I want it." I replied and took a deep breath. "Why didn't he reply?"

She shrugged. "I really can't say. You guys are practically strangers, and he may just think you are pressurizing him to know more about you."

I hissed dryly. "So it's okay that he springs charity events on me and I have to attend them and you think I am pressurizing him by telling him that I now have a job."

"Kimberly, you can look at it in any direction you think, but what has the text fetched you? He didn't even reply with a 'K'" she replied.

I stared at her and we laughed. "I'd kill him if he sent a 'K'." The doorbell chimed. "Who could that be?" I asked, staring at the wall clock. "6:50am"

Ini smiled as she approached the door. "I am expecting Marcus." She said and opened the door. "Whaooo!" she exclaimed and stepped aside with a smile. "David Coker, did you miss your way?" she asked.

David smiled as he stepped in. "Nervy first day?" he asked in a rather calm fashion for 'David Coker'. I raised an eyebrow. "Wow! That's cool..."

I frowned. "This is not you. What do you want? Is there any function after Friday at the charity place?" I asked.

He smiled, revealing his slightly broken canine. He must have chewed too much as a kid or maybe still chewing. "I am not that bad." He started. "Is it a crime if I want to drop my fiancée at work on her first day?"

I took a deep breath. "And that's all?"

He nodded confidently. There wasn't much of a smile on his face this time. "Definitely."

I rolled my eyes. "Do you want breakfast?" I asked. He had his eyes all over my Toast Bread. He laughed sarcastically, in a way I've never seen him do before. "What's funny, Mr. Coker?" I asked.

"You!"

I stared at him. "Me?"

He nodded. "Yes, you! You are trying to return the favour by offering me bread. Don't worry, I don't charge." He replied.

I smiled. "Why are you not going to work?" I asked, staring at him. He was in a Lacrosse Polo and black Denim. "That's not David Coker-like." I said, adjusting my laptop bag.

"Let me take that." He offered. I smiled and passed the bag to him. "You shouldn't smile too much. I am not being friendly for no reason."

I nodded in agreement. "I thought as much. There has to be something attached to your extra niceness." I said as I approached the door.

The doorbell chimed. Ini jumped up. "Finally Marcus! That dude is just a loafer! Lazy man..." she stressed.

David smiled and pushed the door open. His smile faded. "Good morning." He said, firmly.

"Morning." Ben replied.

## 12

Ben leaned against the door as he stared at David. "Good morning, fighter!"

David smiled. "I clearly don't regret that punch." He replied.

I cleared my throat. "Why are you here, Ben?"

He mumbled over a few inaudible words. "Erm...I came to take you to work."

"Clearly..." David replied.

I pursed my lips. "I would be going with my fiancé." I said, looking at David.

Ben nodded and stepped back. "Okay."

David cut in. "No...you can take her." He said. I stared at him. "Of course, I mean...there's no problem."

"But David..." I stressed.

He shrugged with a smile and handed the laptop bag to Ben who didn't hesitate to collect it. "It's okay, Kim. We'll see some other time." He replied.

"David?" I called. I couldn't understand the reason for his action and it scared me. David was acting too easy.

He came closer to me showing the dashing height difference between us. He tilted his head forward and kissed my forehead. "Take care, Kimberly." He said and walked off to his car.

I was mute, speechless, and confused. For a minute I was blank. I kept staring at him and eventually at the direction in which his car went. At that moment, I wished Ben didn't show up. I felt different. Something was different with me.

Ben cleared his throat. "Can we go?"

I nodded and followed like a stooge into his car. Memories of David kissing my forehead flowed through my mind as Ben drove. I pushed my weight against the arm rest as my thoughts and heart strayed. *'Could David be in love with me?'* I thought. A rueful smile rocked my lips as the

thought of being in love was almost evident. I had never had anyone kiss my forehead except my mom, and David just did. I felt another person apart from my mom genuinely loved me.

"Ouch!" I screamed as my head hit the mirror. I shot a glance at Ben.

"I am sorry. There was a pot hole." He replied.

I nodded. "Yeah right! The kind of pothole that a man engineers himself to gain attention!" I replied angrily.

He cleared his throat. "I didn't do that on purpose even though I had been calling your name for the last five minutes and you didn't respond."

I felt embarrassed. "I am sorry."

"You must love David." He said. I stared at him. He blinked his eyes and continued. "Clearly he doesn't love you."

I felt irritated. "What do you know?"

"A man who loves you would never release you to another man."

I scoffed. "That's a lame theory." I replied. *'Why was I acting all defensive? It's not as if David and I were in love. It was just a kiss, just a kiss! Simple!'* I reprimanded myself in my heart and snapped out of my fantasies.

Ben pulled up at the office. "Kimberly, I am sorry about not telling Mr. Adeoye about you." he started. I rolled my eyes. "I get it, I was stupid, angry and disappointed."

"So, you decided to get back at me?" I asked. "Look Ben, I really like you, you are a good guy, but you lying to your boss because you want to hurt me just shows how low you are." I replied. "It's just unbelievable that a man like you, with so much character would do such."

He nodded. "I get it! But what was I to do? I am in love with you, Kimberly! Right from the day you stepped into Millaroca. You left an effect on me and you are everything I want, I couldn't come to terms with it that you are engaged."

"You hurt me, Ben. That's not love." I replied and left the car.

\*\*\*

Wole raised his head as soon as Tola stepped into his office. "Good morning." He said.



"Morning, Wole." She replied and walked over to the coffee pot and poured herself some coffee. "Aren't you overdoing it for wanting to be around me?"

He took off his glasses. "Overdoing what?"

She scoffed. "You...working all hard, trying to impress...I mean, you got this job because of me. You don't need it."

He smiled. "Tola, I am not a foolish man. I agree to have come here because of you, but I am also willing to learn new things every day. *We may not always get what we want but it doesn't mean we throw everything we can get away.*" He replied. "And stop feeling too important, I am not working hard because of you, I am working hard for my future, either with you or someone else."

Tola swallowed hard. His last word hurt her deeply. "Erm...we'll have to be on the Mainland soon...Chief Ajose wants a house." She said.

Wole nodded. "Of course, ma'am." He replied.

She dropped the cup and walked out. As she approached the office, she met Tolu. "Why are you here, Tolu?"

"Tola, I want you to move back into the house. It's not the same without you." he said.

Tola stared around. "What are you saying? It's not like I 'live there."

He nodded. "I know. But I want to make it our home."

"Our home?" she asked.

He nodded and got down on one knee bringing out a ring from his jacket. "Please marry me, Tola."

She smiled and then laughed. "A joke, right?"

"No. I want you in my life. I can't go on without you."

Wole approached without the notice of Tola or Tolu. He saw Tolu on one knee with a ring stretched out and he stepped back behind the nearest door. He stared at them as a hot tear rolled down his left cheek. He immediately wiped it and watched on as Tola stretched her hand and collected the ring. He immediately disappeared into the toilet.

Tola smiled. "This is expensive. How much did you get it?"

"What does it matter, my love?" Tolu asked, with a smile. "You are worth every treasure."

She nodded with a smile. "Tolu, do you know what's more hurting than you hitting me?"

"I don't understand." He replied.

She took a deep breath. "The fact that you think I am foolish sucks a lot!"

"What are you saying? I love you, Tola."

She nodded. "You love my bank account!" she replied. "So, you wanna marry me so I can legally start paying for everything as your wife, playing your role?"

"What are you saying???" he replied, standing up.

She hissed. "You bought this ring with my money! What have you got on your own? All you want is me, my money and that's all. Before you marry, get a job and get a life!" she replied hurling the ring at him.

"Tola! This is unfair! Why are you doing this? Are you breaking up with me? We only just made up." He replied, panting heavily.

She scoffed. "Why are you tensed? You are afraid your money bag is all gone, right. Just chill, chill till I take everything I got you and burn it right in your face then you can die." She replied and walked away.

He dragged her hand back. "You can't do this to me." he said.

"You do realize this is a top firm and you are manhandling a top executive here, I might have you locked up."

He held her face. "What is all this??? WHERE IS THIS COMING FROM???" he yelled.

"I just realized a real man loves me and you are always in my face, just leave me alone, and let me be with this man! Get away from my life!" she said and forced herself out of his grip. "Now get out!" she shouted.

\*\*\*

Marcus sipped his malt gently. "So, where do we go from here?" he asked.

Ini took a deep breath. "I don't know, Marcus. 60% to Shola Jones from next week's job is crazy."

He nodded. "That's a whopping 1.2million Naira."

"And we'll just be left with #800,000. We should kill that girl." She replied laughing. Marcus' face was stone. Ini laughed. "Just kidding, baby. I already regret what we did."

He sighed. "We'll be broke soon."

"Don't worry; I won't hurt your manager fee. You'll get ten percent of that balance." She said, laughing.

He frowned. "That's #80,000...too small. My fee used to be 20%"

"Hello *sweetheart*, you see *wetin dey happen or not?*" she asked in pidgin. "*Abeg o...babe don broke too.*"

He nodded. "Of course. Make it 100,000. I have bills to pay, Ini."

"Fine." She replied. "You better find a way to get us out of this mess, else, we'll be cash-strapped with that b\*tch around."

He sighed. "I don't know what we'll do."

"Helloooooo....." Shola said, joining them in the cafeteria. "So, I hear there's a job next week. When were you going to tell me?" she asked, taking a seat.

Ini hissed. "What don't you know? Sooner or later, you would have found out. After all, you sleep with everyone here."

"Ini Obong, I don't like people playing smart with me. Keep to your end of the deal. *Naija prison no dey smile o...*" she replied. "Here's my account number. I expect my 1.2million as soon as the money lands." She said, passing the paper to Marcus. "Cheer up, Marcus, you would be broke forever."

Marcus smiled. "Don't be so sure, Shola Jones. This will stop sooner than you think." He replied.

"Talking tough, Marcus? *You don chop lion heart o...anyway, we'll see about that.*" She replied and walked away.

He frowned. "Ini, you didn't say anything when she attacked me."

Ini smiled. "You were the one who went tearing at her."

"Really?! I am doing this for us, we need to destabilize her."

She nodded. "I have a plan."

\*\*\*

I pressed the doorbell of Victoria's Homes firmly. There was no response, so I pressed the bell a second time.

The door opened up and a young 'sister' opened it. *'No offence. But is she allowed to fall in love, or feel at least a little of what I felt this morning when David kissed my forehead?'* I thought as soon as I saw her. "Peace be unto you." she said, with a smile.

"Good afternoon, I want to see Mother Francesca." I said, with a smile.

She smiled. "Kim Banks, right?"

I nodded. "Yes."

She led the way into Victoria's Homes. It was my first time in her vicinity. The facility was really large and 'mothers' and 'sisters' flocked the compound helping elderly people in scrubs to the garden for relaxation. I smiled as I saw a few of the parents gather together.

She stopped in front of Mother Francesca's office and let me in. I stepped in and stood before Mother Francesca. "Good afternoon, Mother."

"Kimberly...you are true to your words, I love that. Welcome, please take a seat."

I took my seat. "Thank you, ma. How's Mrs. Elizabeth?"

She smiled. "She's okay. Just a little sad, she's been asking about you all day."

"I had to go to work."

Mother Francesca nodded. "I understand. Before I let you run off to her, I have to talk to you about something."

I nodded. "I am all ears."

"Elizabeth was brought here under special circumstances, and as you might have noticed, she's not in the same age range as the other women or people here." She started. "She is a

special patient and she's never been visited in the past 12 years. She was literally dumped here and receives allowance every month which we have saved up for her." She continued. "She is a woman who needs love and I don't want you coming into her life if you are going to run away soon. I don't want her to be hurt."

I nodded. "I'd never hurt her. I want to help her." I replied.

Mother Francesca smiled. "Okay then, please drop your details in this book." She said, passing a register to me. "I am signing you in as her only family." She announced. "Prepare to meet her soon. You can visit as you wish, you will have a visitor's card made for you before you leave."

I filled the register quickly and with so much joy. I proceeded to have my picture taken for my visitor's card and then we left for Elizabeth's room. "Hello Elizabeth." Mother Francesca said as she opened the door.

"Kim!!!" she said, excitedly and rushed towards to me. She then stopped. "Can I hug you? I haven't had a bath since my last exercise."

I smiled and hugged her with so much gusto. "I love you already." I said, as we took a seat.

"Liz, don't forget your drugs by 4..." Mother Francesca started.

"...and don't forget to sleep..." Elizabeth completed with enthusiasm. "Don't worry Mother, I know the routine, I have been hearing this for 12 years." She replied.

Mother Francesca smiled. "Before I leave you both, what relationship status do you want me to fill in your booklet?"

Elizabeth stared at me and smiled. "Daughter." She said. I felt a sharp sting in my heart and I wiped the tear that rolled from her eyes. Mother Francesca nodded and left. "How are you, dear?" she asked.

"I am doing fine, and you?"

She shrugged. "I am okay." She said, with a smile. "I have always been okay."

I reached for my bag. "I got you something." I said, as I handed her a bunch of sunflowers.

She smiled as she collected it. "Thank you, Kimberly." She said, and kissed my forehead. "I love you."

My smile didn't fade and I blushed carelessly thinking that David had kissed my forehead.

*Today had to be my best day!*

She kept the sunflower in a vase. "I'll keep it forever...at least, till I die."

"Do you have any child?" Her face fell. *Oops! I must have upset her!* "I am sorry, mom."

Her face lit up. "You are a charmer. I would have loved you to marry my son, but he died 12 years ago. My son, my baby died 12 years ago."

"I am so sorry." I said, as I hugged her. "I would be here for you."

She nodded. "So, tell me what do you do?"

"I am a writer." I replied.

She smiled. "Wow! That's beautiful. I used to paint, so I am in natural awe of creative people."

"Why did you stop?"

She sighed. "I have been through a lot, one question at a time, dear." She replied. "My spirit was broken so I lost the talent."

I smiled. "Okay, let's do the positive thoughts now!!!" I said, excitedly. "Do they let you go out at all?"

"No, but others are allowed to visit places with their loved ones. But to me, I don't think they love them at all. I mean the so-called 'loved ones'. If you love your parents at all, why lock them up here?" she started. "This place is depressing. If you love your parents, even if they are old, rugged and smelly, you should hug them." She said with a smile. "Before my son died, my husband never let him hug me when I hadn't showered. My baby used to cry so much until he got used to not hugging me when I hadn't showered. He even used to yell at me." she said, with a tear.

I felt my heart break. *How could a child not love his mother? This kind of a mother? I thought.*

"Do you want to dance?" I asked, as tears rolled down my eyes.

"What are we dancing to?" she asked, standing up.

I fetched my phone and scrolled to 'Dance the pain away by John Legend'. "Dance the pain away by John Legend." I replied. "You just have to dance, roll your head and laugh. I do that a lot when I am sad." I replied, playing the music.

We danced and laughed as the song played. We nodded our heads in excitement and danced to the music. Elizabeth smiled a lot as she danced and she eventually started to cry and then we cried and laughed and danced again and laughed again and on and on we went until she had to take her drugs and sleep and I left.

\*\*\*

David picked out a gown. "Do you think she'll like this?" he asked, Oyinkan.

"Kimberly is too simple, she'll appreciate it, but will never wear it after the fundraiser."

He scoffed and picked out another. "What about this?" he asked.

"I think it's too bright." She replied. "Anyway, why are you so interested in her now?"

He smiled. "You told me to try, and I am doing just that. She's smart and I think I should make her happy. Every time I remember how mom's life was, I just don't want to hurt another woman."

"So, you don't love her?"

He scoffed. "Love? What are you saying? I can't love anyone. I am a beast; I should at least make her happy."

"David, you have to forgive yourself about your mom."

He shook his head. "I never will, I am a wicked man."

"You were a boy."

He scoffed. "If I was like that as a boy, it means I never had a heart, if I try to love Kim, I might hurt her and she doesn't need it."

Oyinkan rubbed his head. "It's okay. It's a gradual process, you would learn to love again." She said and took a deep breath. "I think I like that dress over there." She said and they walked over to the second section.

David bumped into Henry. "Hey...watch it."

Henry laughed. "Fly guy! How are you, man?" he asked, stretching out his hand. David stared at the hand. Henry forcefully shook him. "Try to make new friends, son!"

"Whoa! That's some nerve!" Oyinkan said, with a smile.

Henry stared at her. "You are rolling with some really fine girls."

"Beat it, Kid!" David replied, harshly. "Learn some refined terms."

Henry nodded. "Aye Aye!!! Hi, madam." He said, stretching out his hand at Oyinkan. She took it graciously.

"Hi...I am Oyinkan, are you friends with David?" she asked.

David cut in. "Of course, not!"

"But, we'll soon be..." Henry added.

David sighed. "Let's go, Oyinkan."

Henry sighed. "Won't you introduce me?"

Oyinkan smiled. "I am Oyinkan, and this is my cousin, David." She said excitedly.

"Oyinkan, can we go??? You are already familiarizing with this lad."

Henry smiled. "You guys would give me a ride, right?"

"OMG!!! I LOVE THIS BOY!" Oyinkan exclaimed.

David rolled his eyes. "Let's get the gown now."

"That gown is cool, Kimberly would love it."

David paused and snarled. "Henry, are you really like this??? You won't get a wife being this troublesome."

"Love doctor...teach me. What's your relationship with my Kimberly?" Henry asked.

David stared at him. "Her fiancé."

\*\*\*

Wole Briggs walked downstairs. "Sir, as you've seen, there's a state-of-the-art living room, the master bedroom is exquisite and there's also a conference room. You can bring your meetings home." He started.



"What's your name, son?" Chief Ajose asked. "Tola, you are about to be shaved out of business." He said, smiling at Tola who just stood by the door and watched Wole have his show.

Wole smiled. "Wole Briggs."

He nodded his head. "Good boy." He then paused. "Are you related to Niran Briggs?"

Wole tried to hide his face. "He is my father."

"Wow! Nice to meet you, boy! I have always asked Niran about you, but that sly man won't tell me that his boy is doing well in the business world for himself. I will have the house." He said and stared at Tola. "Don't be scared, Tola. You are good at what you do, but this man is pretty convincing too..." he said and opened his briefcase. "I'll tie up this deal tomorrow over lunch. Please see me, you both, in my hotel." He said, handing his business card to Wole.

Wole collected it. "Thank you, sir."

"Very much welcome." He replied, and they all shook hands, Tola inclusive.

Wole closed the door after him. "So how did I cope?" he asked.

"Is that a question?" Tola replied, indifferently.

Wole smiled. "I think they'll love me in this business."

She scoffed. "They'll love your surname. I brought you here as an understudy and I guess you are a pro already." She said, walking around.

"I am my own man, Tola."

She nodded. "I know."

He smiled. "Congratulations on your engagement."

"What are you saying?" she asked.

He shrugged. "It's okay if you play dumb, but I saw you getting engaged today."

She smiled and then laughed sarcastically. "For the first time ever I am happy to get you in the wrong."

"What do you mean?"

She stopped laughing. "Tolu came to engage me, but I couldn't."

Wole stared at her and came closer, he lifted her hand for confirmation. "And why didn't you??" he asked.

She rolled her eyes. "Apart from the fact that I think Tolu is a loser..." she said, clenching her teeth. "I didn't know if I would be..." she paused and stared at his eyes. "If I could be without you..."

## 13

Wole took a deep breath and stepped away from Tola. "Why are you doing this?"

"I don't know." She replied, quite dumbly.

He shook his head. "Tola, I don't need this right now." He started. "I don't want you building my hopes and then dashing them the next second because you are undecided."

She clasped her hands in her laps and took a seat. "Wole, I don't know why I am saying all these, but I am scared of losing you."

He took his seat beside her. "Tola, how true is that? I fear you still care about Tolu and even if he is a douchebag, I want to respect that." He replied. "I'll always be here for you till I can't wait anymore."

She held his tie. "Wole, I want you now."

He shook his head in disagreement. "You don't know what you want. I don't want to cry over you anymore, so I want you to make a real decision."

"Wole, I am doing that." She replied quietly.

He lifted her chin to his face. "Tola, I love you, but I don't know if you love me, or if you just want me as a consolation prize till you can straighten Tolu into the man you want him to be." He said. "I don't know why I am crazy about you, but I am scared that this isn't real."

She sighed. "I don't know why I am saying this now, but Wole, just take this part of me, I may never be able to do this again."

"I'll wait till you can be really sure of what you want and of course, let me know that it's real."

She nodded. "I understand." She replied, standing up.

He pulled her back towards him. "Tola, I am not pushing you away. I just want a woman that is mine and that sees me as hers." He said as he stroked her hair. "I just want you to really want

me, and then we would be happy. I want to know that I can be your man anytime, any day and that we are going to love each other."

"I don't know about love for now." She said, turning away. "Tolu is in my head, I need to get him out, and it's been years."

He nodded. "I understand and that's why I don't want you to jump based on the impulse of what you feel right now, especially when he hurts you. You need to really decide."

"Wole, can we try?"

His eyes blinked. "Are you serious about it?"

She nodded. "I want to start with you, I want to see where we can go from here, together." He took a deep breath and rubbed his forehead. "Wole, I want to love you just as you love me and maybe do better. I want to be there for you."

"Can you do it?"

She nodded. "Wole, I want to. And I want to love you with everything I am and I have." She paused and then looked into his eyes. "But Wole, please don't hurt me."

He pulled her close and hugged her. "I won't let you down."

\*\*\*

Oyinkan stepped out of the car. "I think you shocked Henry when you said you are Kim's fiancé."

David carried the gift bags out of the trunk. "I think so too, but I can't care less. I hope for his sake that he doesn't like Kimberly a little too much, else, I'll kill him."

"Whoa... talking like Kim's man already. What has gotten into you?" she asked, laughing as they stepped into the house.

He shrugged. "I am not acting like her man, I am only wondering why she has so many men around her. Can you believe that one of her numerous 'suitors' showed up this morning when I was meant to take her to work?"

"Really?" Oyinkan probed as she sank into his bed.

He nodded. "That's right and when I told the idiot that he could take her to work; he had the effrontery to jump at it, knowing I am her fiancé."

"Why did you give him the opportunity?"

He shrugged. "I didn't know what else to do. But I don't think he and Kimberly are on good terms."

She smiled. "And that must gladden your heart, right?"

"Not exactly, but in a way, yes."

She nodded. "Of course, you are happy, cousin."

He brought out his diary and started to write. "Erm...Oyinkan, I have a question to ask you?"

"Okay..." she said, trying to see what he was writing.

He shoved it in her face. "It's personal!" he said, keeping the diary away. "Do you think Kimberly could love me?"

She nodded. "I think so. You are adorable, even with all your irritable nature, ladies really adore you."

"Kimberly is not just any lady."

She smiled. "I know that, but I feel that she's a very thoughtful woman who would find a reason to adapt or cope with you when you guys eventually get married."

"So, she may not love me?"

She snapped. "David! What is it with the 'love' question? You guys are not in love; I think you'll cope maturely, at least better than your parents."

He mumbled over a few words and hissed. "How's the dude you have been seeing of recent?"

"He is doing fine. He's really heartbroken, so I have been talking him through it; he stands taller than a lot of guys I have met in the past few years."

David hissed. "A guy only gets heartbroken if he wants to. No girl can hurt me."

"How would you feel if the woman you love had another man that she loved and was to marry and hid it from you?" She shot back. "I think the girl was being unfair and she played on his love and that has made him a sad man."

He nodded. "Yes, ma. I won't pretend that I feel sorry for your friend. He is a fool! Only a fool would let a girl do that to him, and I suggest you stop hanging around his shallow brain before it infiltrates your knowledge."

Oyinkan screamed. "David!!! Where is all this coming from? You are sounding so harsh."

He shrugged. "That's typical of me, isn't it?" he asked. "And of course, how would you say Kim would never love me?" he murmured.

She covered her mouth with her hand and jumped on David. "OMG!!! You love Kimberly!"

\*\*\*

Prof Bankole adjusted his cap as he picked his golf ball from the hole. "I still hit better than you, Bolu." He said, returning to the seat.

Bolu Coker sneered. "That's because I always let things slide."

"You dirty liar! What have you ever let slide?" Prof. Bankole retorted.

Bolu shrugged. "How's the bride-to-be? I think those guys are stalling too much, we should make swift interference." He suggested, puffing his cigar.

Tunji Bankole nodded. "You know, my problem is that Kimberly is really bull-headed, she looks soft but she has this stupid arrogance on the inside and a strong resolve. I think she's even trying to edge out of the marriage."

"SHE CAN'T! There's no way back for them." He barked angrily.

Tunji laughed. "Bolu, you should calm down. You are taking this too seriously."

"You think we shouldn't? Don't be too soft on Kimberly; remember she's your daughter, not your mother! And even your mother couldn't make decisions for you."

Tunji nodded. "Relax Bolu, I have other pending issues on Kimberly to worry about than the marriage. It's certain she'll marry your son, I won't betray you, my friend. You've been helpful in times past and it's time I return the favour."

Bolu Coker nodded. "So what are the other issues?"

"You know Kimberly loves to write. She has decided to chase that dream and she just got headway."

Bolu scoffed. "What sort of lame thing is that? You do know that Elizabeth was into painting. The stupid woman littered my house and son's life with paints and papers. Fool!"

Tunji nodded. "That reminds me, where's Elizabeth? The society has forgotten about her since you started going around with different models."

Bolu smiled. "I change the models when I want. Younger ladies are actually a lot more interesting." He replied. "I have Elizabeth in a facility far away. I haven't even been there since I kept her away from David. She was softening my boy."

"But, don't you think that's too harsh?"

Bolu scoffed. "Tunji, I would have suggested you did the same with Wura, but you are just being a jelly, anyway it's been 12 years since I kept her away, thankfully, she isn't missed."

"Not even by David?" Tunji asked, concerned.

Bolu nodded. "He doesn't even want to know about her."

Tunji blinked. "Bolu, you have created a decent monster in that boy." He replied. "I don't know if I want my Kimberly with him."

Bolu hissed. "Stop being a sissy, Tunji Bankole! It's not as if you and Wura are living happily, yet you win Mom and Dad of the year awards constantly. There's always a way around things."

Tunji helped himself to a seat. "Anyway, when is the next takeover?"

"In the next two months. How about your personal project? How is it going?"

Tunji smiled. "It should be next month, but some situations have pushed my adrenaline, I think I'll start tomorrow."

"Tunji, you sly devil! You are not so innocent, are you?"

Tunji laughed. "I hope you are preparing for Niran Briggs charity event on Friday?"

"I have some money arranged for it. David would be representing the family. I have other important issues to attend to. David has been instigating me on that his friend that died and so I have to know where the mess is coming from?"

Tunji nodded. "Bola, right? The girl that had cancer?"

Bolu nodded in agreement. "David has been all over me and I want to contain the situation quickly." He said, standing up.

"You should do that immediately. It's your mess to clean up."

He smiled. "Tunji, get a grip on your daughter, we can't have anyone of those kids spoiling our plans at this stage. I'll talk to David about hastening the wedding preparations."

\*\*\*\*

I poured Ini a glass of wine. "So, what's new in your life?!" she asked.

"Nothing."

Ini smiled. "Kim, David sent you a gift just a while before you came in."

"Really? Let me see it." I replied.

She dashed into the house and returned with a gift bag. "Here you go." She said.

I opened the gift bag and brought out a gown and smiled. "What kind of a guy is David?" I asked.

Ini snatched the bag and brought out two pairs of shoes and a tiffany box. "It's not over, sweetheart." She said, passing the shoes and the other accessories. There's a note here for you." she said and gave it to me.

'Kimberly Bankole, I'd love if you could wear this to the charity event on Friday. David'

I smiled. "He's asked politely." Ini hissed. "What?!"

"What if he didn't ask politely? Did he have to beg you to whisk you away on Valentine's Day?"

I nodded. "Whatever, Ini Obong! How's Marcus?"

"He's doing fine. We have a job for next week."

I smiled. "You are one lucky lady, earning so much for your laziness."

"Durr...I am not lazy, I work hard for my money." The clouds clattered and thunder struck. "Weather for three..." Ini said, as she stood up. "I can't wait for Tola to return. We'll snuggle up together, the three of us. I'll make coffee when she comes." Ini said, delightfully.



I hissed as the rain poured. "You meant to say, I'll make the coffee, 'coz you know you don't know how to do anything."

She smiled. "I actually do try, you know. What do you think is going on with Tola and Tolu?" "I thought they had broken up." I replied.

She nodded. "I thought so too, but when she returned yesterday or so, she spoke with him on the phone."

"Maybe she wants to get her stuffs from him."

Ini shook her head in disagreement. "I don't think so. She took almost everything when we went to pack."

I took a deep breath. "It would be a disgrace if she got back with that man." I replied and left for the kitchen. "I'll make prawn crackers, are you in?"

"Most definitely." Ini replied.

I turned on the gas and in no time, we had something to munch on while we waited up for Tola.

"Why is she taking so long?" Ini asked as she ate the last cracker.

I rolled my eyes. "The rain is really heavy. You don't expect her to make it through the storm, there may be one and it's not really safe for her." I replied as I sipped my cup of chocolate.

She nodded in agreement. "You are right." She replied and wriggled in her puffy pyjamas. "It's really cold tonight. I need a new boyfriend."

"What happened to your ex? You walked him out, remember?"

She smiled. "That dude had nothing to offer, and I would have jumped at Michael from the agency, but with the way Marcus beat him up, I now see him as a weakling."

I laughed. "Have you thought about Marcus? I think he likes you."

"Eewww!"

I popped my eyes out. "What??? Marcus is a fine man, he's caring, he can cook and that suits your lazy self. You should be grateful for him in your life."

"I don't like men like him, he lacks wits. I like someone else."

I frowned. "But he's been doing better these past few days. So who do you have your sights on?" I asked, downing the rest of my drink.

"Wole Briggs!"

I spilled the drink from my mouth. "Ini! He likes Tola!"

"So? She's into Tolu, and that says more than enough, doesn't it?"

I shook my head in disagreement. "That's just stupid of you, Ini. Don't do this to Tola."

"Chill...it's not like I am going to jump into his bed without his notice."

I slammed the table. "Just stop! So you have it in mind to date Wole Briggs?"

She nodded with a smile. "He is an eligible bachelor and he meets my requirements, so if he comes around, I most definitely won't decline."

I wore a frown. "Don't let Tola even know that you have these stupid thoughts in you."

"What would she do? Wole is a free man."

The door knob turned and Tola came in laughing. "Hello ladies..." she said excitedly.

"Hi sweetheart." I replied. "How did you make it through the rain?" I asked, standing up.

She stood in front of the door. "I am okay, and I'd like to introduce someone to you guys." She said, as she stepped aside. "Ta-da!!! Meet my new boyfriend!"

Wole Briggs smiled as he waved at us. I flashed a grin at Ini who grinned back.

"Really??? Boyfriend?" Ini asked with a smile that I could bet a fortune on wasn't genuine.

Tola nodded as they came in all soaked from the rain. "I'll be right back." She said, and left for the room.

Wole stood shyly at the door and tried to avoid our stare. Ini and I kept on looking at him. I knew he was uncomfortable so I stopped. "Okay, I am sorry." I said as I helped him to a seat.

"I'd rather stand. I am all soaked." He replied.

Ini hissed. "Why bother? A chair is to be sat on, there are no rules." She said and forced him into the chair. I watched Ini as she delicately forced him into a chair. *My God! Ini is so full of it!*

Tola returned with a towel. "So, Wole, the bathroom is down the hallway, I'll just lead you there and get you a bathrobe while I dry yours." She said.

He collected the towel and followed her to the guest room.

"Damn, that boy has got good packs! They were all revealing from his wet shirt." Ini said.

I shot at Ini. "Ini, I beg you not to try anything foolish. You are beginning to show the side of you that Tola feared when she first introduced Tolu to you."

"Babe, relax. I won't jump at Wole, more so, now that they might have something serious. I love my girlfriend, won't hurt her." She replied.

I took a deep breath and took my seat. "Ini, I hope this is true." I replied.

She nodded. "It is true, be not afraid." She said, laughing.

\*\*\*

"I'd love to welcome us all to tonight's Charity Ball and Events. I am your host, Niran Briggs and this year, we the elite families in Nigeria, have decided to raise the sum of 5million dollars for the African children living in penury." Niran Briggs started.

David Coker looked sharp in his black tuxedo and bow tie and I could spot Wole and Tola afar off, she was chatting with Mrs. Briggs. I wore the gown David had bought me and tried to keep my positioning and light smile as the cameras came flashing in our faces.

"I'd love to recognize the presence of our distinguished guests here. From the families of Bolu Coker and Professor Tunji Bankole, we have their children David Coker and Kimberly Bankole who are also an engaged couple." Mr. Briggs said.

The crowd clapped as the camera came over to David and I. David took my hand and we rose up for acknowledgement.

"Thank you very much, David and Kimberly." Mr. Briggs continued. "We expect the date for your wedding soonest, and probably we'll be using the finest resorts home and abroad for the function. On behalf of my family, I promise to be actively involved in the wedding."

The crowd cheered as the cameras came over us again. David smiled at me and whispered into my ears. "Show-off." I smiled back. "Have I told you that you are beautiful?" David asked, staring at me.

"You said that when we left the house, and then in the car and when we stepped in and now, so, you have said several times today." I replied, with a smile.

He smiled. "You are beautiful, Kimberly." He said, staring at me.

I felt really uneasy as heat flushed across my face. "Thank you." I replied. "You are also admirable, you have ladies turning heads." I added, trying to shift the uneasy feeling from me.

He smiled as he looked around flashing a 'playboy' smile to some ladies at a table. "I am already taken." He whispered to me.

"Ah...I see...so who's she?" I asked.

He raised an eyebrow and pursed his lips, revealing his dimple. "She's beautiful, smart, and she's you." he replied.

"Whaaaa..." I said, quietly. "That's flattering, David." I replied.

He nodded. "One of my many qualities." I smiled.

Niran Briggs continued. "I presume the donation baskets are going round now, so I'll take this opportunity to introduce my son and his beautiful girlfriend. Ladies and gentleman, I present to you Wole Briggs and Tola Matthews."

I smiled as I watched Wole and Tola stand up to take their acknowledgements.

"Never knew Tola was dating Wole Briggs." David said.

I smiled. "Now you know."

"Maybe they can pick us our home. I want to get a house next week." He said with a smile. I smiled faintly. "Don't worry; it's just for me to move away from my father's house. Our wedding would be on your terms. You have to be ready."

I stared at him. "My terms?"

He nodded. "What do I have to lose?" he asked. I smiled and looked away. *I liked him more.*

The donation basket was dropped on our table and David dropped his father's cheque and I dropped my dad's. He then brought out his own cheque and enveloped it. 'David & Kim'

"Very thoughtful of you. I'll pay you back from my first salary."

He smiled. "I don't need your money."

I nodded. "I know. But I'll pay you."

"Now, we may have the couples dance." Niran Briggs announced.

Katharine McPhee's 'beautiful stranger' played and David stood up, stretching his hand out at me. "May I?"

"David, I don't dance..." I whispered.

He smiled at me; he had maintained that smile and same stare. He must have been too used to functions like this. "I'll cover you." he said and led to the dance floor.

"Stay glued to me, and your head close to my shoulder, I'll take the lead and you'll follow. Try not to step on my suede." He said, with a smile.

"I'll try."

The dance appeared successful but his shoe took a lot of pain which he pretended not to feel. We stepped outside after the dance and hurried over to the car as the rain started.

"It's been raining these days." He said as he opened the door for me.

I nodded. "You are right."

He opened the door to the driver's side and took his seat as he rubbed his hands for warmth. He turned on the heater. "I am sorry, I don't do well under these conditions." He said as his teeth clattered.

I laughed. "Oh well, at least, you are not so macho after all, you took all the pain from the shoe, but the rain is bullying you." I said as I laughed.

"Maybe you could return the favour by hugging me, I am really cold." He said, with a sensual smile.

I rolled my eyes. "You are a pervert."

"Really?" he said as he struggled to keep his eyes open, they fell together carelessly. He tilted over towards me and kept on staring at me. For the first time, I felt the impulse to draw closer to him, and I didn't hesitate as he firmed his lips against mine and we kissed.

## 14

I was the first to break away from the kiss, it all felt awkward. Not that David wasn't a 'good kisser', but it just didn't feel right. A wry smile lurked around David's lips. "I am sorry." He said. I raised an eyebrow. "Oh well...technically, I don't regret it." He said and laughed. I threw a punch at him in his waist. "Oh-ho! Is that your best?" he asked, laughing.

"Why did you kiss me?"

He stopped and stared at me. "I don't know...I just knew that I wanted to, and I did."

I rubbed my hand against my forehead. "David, what are we doing?"

He shrugged. "We are trying to connect."

I cleared my throat. "Connect? How's that going for you? Kissing me doesn't show any connection."

He smiled. "Kimberly, you kissed back. That's a good sign. We'll do fine, better than our parents." He said and started the engine.

I felt foolish as the car moved. To David, this was more of a connection, trying to make our marriage better than our parents, but I was slowly starting to like him more. I turned my face towards the mirror and drowned in my thoughts.

David stopped the car. "What?" I asked. "Why are we stopping?" I probed.

"Kim, do you love me?" he asked.

I was lost for words as I stared at him. "I don't understand."

He nodded. "Kimberly, I am sorry I kissed you, but all I wanted was to make us a little closer, so we could tolerate one another." He started. I opened my mouth to talk but he continued. "You don't need to feel anything towards me, and if this kiss is making it weird between us, I am sorry." He reiterated.

"David. I haven't complained, have I?"

He sighed. "But you haven't said anything since I started driving. Are you mad at me?" I shook my head in disagreement. "Kim, I am sorry." He added.

I rolled my eyes. "Stop it, David.

He nodded. "At least accept my apologies, it is obvious you didn't like the fact that I kissed you and I regret that. I just thought we could have something special."

"David, stop apologizing, it's making me sick. And moreover, it doesn't fit you." I replied.

He grinned. "Kimberly, did you think I was serious about the apologies?" he scoffed. "Why should I be sorry for kissing any lady, not to talk of my fiancée?" he started the car's engine and drove on. "What are you doing tomorrow?" he asked.

"Nothing. It's a Saturday. I'll rest."

He nodded. "You deserve it." I stared at him. "Of course, you do. How does it feel to be a working class lady?"

"Good. I don't have to stay at home all day."

"And how's work?" I asked.

He smiled. "Busy as ever. I am currently on suspension." He added.

I stared at him. "Come on...how could you be on suspension?"

"My father did. Apparently, I am not doing so well."

I scoffed. "That's really serious. I guess you spend more time working then."

He laughed and pulled up in front of the house. "It's still raining, and I don't have an umbrella."

"It's okay, I'll just run along." I said, trying to open the door. The lock didn't open. "The locks, David?"

He smiled. "I can't let you go." I stared at him. "Not in this rain, we'll stay here till it's over."

"Come on, David. I can't seem to understand you. What do you want?"

He shrugged. "I am only protecting you from the rain."

"I won't shiver like you." I replied, and pushed the locks again.



He smiled and released them. "Okay." He got down from the car and joined me at my door. "I'll take you in." he said, and shielded me into the house. He knocked on the door and Ini opened almost immediately.

"Lovely sight." She said, as she stepped out of the way. "Last night it was Wole bringing Tola in, now David is doing the same, isn't this romantic?" she said, closing the door.

I shot at her. "Hi!" I said, and disappeared into the house, returning with an umbrella. "Please let me make you a cup of tea." I offered.

"Nah...I am okay." He said, standing up. "Thank you." he said, collecting the umbrella. "You ladies have yourselves a nice weekend. We'll talk about the house on Sunday." He said as he headed for the door.

I walked him to the door. "Thank you, David." I said.

He stared at me. "Why are you thanking me?"

"For everything."

He raised an eyebrow. "Everything?"

I smiled as I bit my lips. "Yes, everything."

"Ah...good night, then." He said, and walked out.

Ini jumped at me. "What did you guys do? Give me the full gist, spare no detail. Was it good? I mean it's your first sex, right?"

"SHUT UP!" I replied and left for my room.

\*\*\*

Ini sang as she mopped the kitchen floor. Tola hissed. "You are still in the business of singing? I have told you that you croak most of the time."

"Most!" Ini affirmed. "That means it's possible I am singing correctly right now, isn't it?"

Tola shook her head in disagreement. "You are still singing horribly, and I am afraid there's no future for you, my dear." She said, as she poured herself a drink.

"Tola, you are not any better. Only Kim has the right to condemn my voice." Ini shot back. I stared at them as I washed some cabbages. "Only her royal Kimberly can judge me." she then swung into Chris Brown's music note. "Please don't judge me, and I won't judge you..."

Tola hissed and picked her vibrating phone. "Excuse me." she said, and left through the back door for the yard.

"That must be Wole calling." Ini said.

I smiled. "I am happy for them. You needed to see her chat with Mrs. Briggs at the charity event last night. I think they'll have a good relationship." Ini smiled. "I hope that's genuine, Ini" I said.

"Of course, it is. When is Henry coming?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. I have to see Old Rodger today, so maybe I'll send your greetings to him."

"I haven't asked anything of you. I only asked a question."

I smiled. "Maybe you like him. How's Marcus?"

"Marcus should be fine." She replied.

The doorbell chimed. "I'll get it." I said and left for the door. I took a peek through the peephole and took a deep breath as I opened the door. "Morning, Ben."

"Good morning, Kimberly."

I stood firmly in front of the door. "What's up?"

"Nothing. I thought you won't mind taking a stroll. The weather is really good today and I thought we needed to just talk."

I took a deep breath and let him in. "Ben, I honestly don't know what you want us to talk about." I said, ushering him to a seat.

"Kimberly, there could have been a relationship between us."

I nodded. "Maybe...but you have ruined any opportunity for that to happen, and I have a fiancé."

"Kimberly, you guys aren't in love. If you were, you'd have mentioned him at least once. You always feigned being single."

I shook my head in disagreement. "You assumed that."

He nodded. "I agree, but you would have said something. You never did."

"I apologize if you think I led you on, but I need you to understand that David is the only man in my life."

He shrugged. "That's what you think, but I'll never let you go."

I rubbed some perspiration off my forehead. "Ben, I appreciate your friendship and it would be in our best interests if you don't ruin what's left of it." Ini whistled as she walked past us taking out the trash. I took a deep breath. "So, Ben, let's leave it this way."

"Can we still take the walk? At least, as friends? I'll try living with being your friend; I have to start from somewhere even if I have to start again."

I was confused. "I don't understand."

"I want to re-write my story in your book. Can we be friends?"

I smiled. "Ben...you are my friend."

He smiled and rose to his feet. "Maybe we'll take that walk some other time. Boye sends his greetings."

"Please extend mine to him." I said, walking him off to the door. "Later..." I said as he left.

"Hey!" Henry said, as he approached. I took a deep breath. "So, that jackass is your fiancé? How could he be?"

I smiled as I returned into the house. Henry slammed the door after me. "JESUS!"

"What has the son of God done this time?" he shouted.

I rolled my eyes and sank into a chair. "Is there any time we don't call on God?"

He sat on the edge of my seat. "You didn't tell me that you had a thing with that jerk."

I swung my head around and stared at him. "Jerk? That's my fiancé we are talking about, go easy." I replied, standing up.

"But he treated you like trash in the supermall that day, and you even refused to go with him in his car."

I hissed. "Henry, every couple has issues. Why are we flogging this? I can't even date you."

"Why?"

I smiled. "Come on, Henry. I can't and you know it."

He nodded. "Am I not good enough?"

I paused as I stared at him. "Henry...what's all these? I thought you have been joking all these while."

He nodded and took his seat. "I am still joking!!!" he screamed and pushed me into a seat. "I am happy for you." he said, smiling.

I was feeling uncomfortable. "Henry, your knee is hurting my stomach." I said, and he released me.

"Seriously, so you are with that guy?"

I nodded with a smile. "Cute, right?"

He nodded. "Yes, I like him. Very much..." he stressed with a smile.

"Are you gay?" I asked. Henry's face was stone. "You don't have a girlfriend, Henry. Are you gay? You just stressed liking David."

He smiled. "There's love in sharing, right? We could share him."

I snarled. "Be serious, Henry!"

"Of course, I am gay!"

\*\*\*

Mother Francesca sat beside Elizabeth's bed. "I heard you have been crying. What is this about?"

Elizabeth sobbed as she used her towel to clean her face. "My daughter is gone."

Mother Francesca hugged her. "She was here two days ago."

"She didn't come here yesterday."

She nodded. "Do you want me to call her, Elizabeth?"

Elizabeth's face lit up. "Would you?"

"If it would make you happy, I would be willing to."

Elizabeth smiled. "Please do."

"I'll be right back."

\*\*\*

Wura Bankole fell into the chair from the hit Tunji had thrown at her. "Is this your best, you bastard?"

Tunji raised his hand. "Don't make me hit you, woman!"

"You fool! You just did! You wretched fellow!"

He kicked her chair angrily. "Don't provoke me, woman."

"What sort of a father are you? You only want to see Kimberly destroyed!"

He hissed. "Why would I want to destroy my own daughter? I am doing what's best for her."

"Really, Tunji? Why then do you want to buy Millaroca?"

He shrugged. "I have always wanted to buy it, you idiot."

"Of course, but why did you speed up the plans. It was meant to be in a month's time, why next week?"

He struck his cigarette. "I won't let Kimberly ruin herself."

"You are the one who wants to ruin her. You struck a deal with her, and she's on the brink of actualizing it, yet you want to mess it all up. How far would you go to hurt her?"

He pulled her up by her sleeve. "This is not only about Kimberly and you know it."

"So what? Let Adeoye be! You and Bolu are two despicable men."

He threw her to the floor angrily. "Clean up, we have a press conference in the evening."

"I SWEAR TO LET THE WHOLE WORLD KNOW THAT YOU STILL BEAT YOUR WIFE!"

He smiled. "You know, that's exactly the same threat that Elizabeth made and she disappeared afterwards."

"I can bet my life that Bolu killed his wife, you can do the same to me, I won't mind."

He nodded. "It would be soon. Pending that time, if you don't want me to kill your daughter and everything she stands for, don't say a word to her about Millaroca!" he said, holding her neck.

She wrestled away from him. "Tunji, please don't touch Kimberly!"

"Stick to your end of the deal!" he said, and walked out.

\*\*\*

Henry smiled. "I discovered that when I was a boy."

"Henry?" I said, really disturbed. Not that I hadn't seen gays at all, but it felt different.

He popped his eyes and laughed out. "Come on, Kim, how could you even buy that for a second?"

"I'd appreciate some seriousness you know." I said, standing up.

Ini returned into the living room with my phone. "Your phone has been ringing forever." She said, handing it to me. She was all dressed.

"Where are you off to?" I asked.

She smiled. "To take care of my business." She replied and smiled. "I am not going far, I just want to get some drinks from the store." She said and walked out.

I fixed my gaze on Henry. "Don't you have other girls that you are attracted to?" I asked, returning into the kitchen. I dropped my phone on the table.

"Not at all." He said, taking a seat. "There's this girl though...but she's too good for me."

I smiled. "I don't think that's true, you probably haven't tried at all."

"I won't bother trying."

I smiled and reached for my phone which was ringing. "Hi, mom!"

"Kim...." Her voice dragged. "Are you fine?"

I took a seat. "I am okay. Why are you sounding like this?"

"I am fine. I just miss you."

My eyes blinked and I stepped out into the backyard. "Mom, what is it? Did he hit you again?"

"Of course not, honey. Your father has never raised his hand against me."

I screamed. "MOM!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Just stop! I have heard you cry, I know he beats you. Did he touch you again?" I shouted. The line went dead. "Mom! MOM!!!" I dialed her number but it was switched off. I raced back into the house and changed into a shirt.

Tola came running after me. "Calm down, Kim." She said, holding my hand.

"She's right. You should calm down." Henry said, standing in front of the door.

I stared at Tola. "I need your keys."

"Kimberly, what's going on? You can't just go out like this."

Henry held my hand. "I'll take you anywhere you want to go, but you must tell us what's going on." He said. I broke down in tears. "It's okay." He said, and hugged me. "Let's talk about it."

The door opened and Ini came in with David. "Look who I found." She announced, smiling. I raised my head and saw them. David's eye was all over Henry and me.

"Kimberly?" he called.

Henry stood up from the chair. "Maybe you can get her to tell us what's going on. She received a call."

David took his seat. "Hey...don't cry..." he said as he stroked my hair tenderly. "You are stronger than whatever it is." He whispered into my ears.

I didn't know how to say what was going on, so I cried harder. "My mom..." I struggled to say. He hugged me tenderly. "It's okay, Kim. Don't say anything." The others excused us. "Kimberly, don't cry. She'll be fine."

"My dad hit her." I confessed.

I could feel David's hands more firmly against my back. "Too much association with Bolu Coker is filth." He murmured.

"Excuse me?" I asked. I heard it the first time, but I wanted to be sure of what I heard.

He shrugged. "It's nothing." He wiped my tears with his hand. "Kim, your mom would be fine."

"I want to see her now."

He nodded. "I'll take you there." He said, as he helped me up. "But, I want you to stop crying, Kimberly."

I held on to him. "Would she be fine?"

"Of course, Kim."

\*\*\*

"So, close your eyes and think of everything that makes you happy."

Ben scoffed. "Oyinkan, your therapy isn't working. I still see her and that guy."

She smiled. "It probably makes you happy, Ben." She giggled.

"Oyinkan, it's too hard for me. I have tried your first option; I went to her today and said I want to start again as friends with her."

She nodded. "That's beautiful. It would give you a chance to redeem yourself with her, and since you said her fiancé isn't so crazy about her, you are going to be that man that she can't go on without."

He smiled. "Thanks a lot, Oyinkan." He said, as he poured himself a drink. "How about you, how is it going?"

She shrugged. "Love for me doesn't exist anymore, but I can at least try to help others." She replied, sipping her malt.

"What about your cousin?"

She rolled her eyes. "I love him. But I am not in love with him. Those are two different things, Ben."

"But, it's not totally absurd, I feel he might be nursing some feelings for you."

She scoffed. "I know him so well. He has only loved one girl since we were kids and even though I know he may never admit it because he thinks he will feel weak, he is madly in love with his fiancée."

Ben laughed. "At least, he's taking a bold step by marrying her. The good thing is that she'll be his, even though she may never know that he loves her more than she does love him."



"I think it's a beautiful feeling in his heart, but he should be able to express it. You men have a lot of issues."

He nodded. "But why haven't you tried getting back with your ex?"

She smiled. "EX? That's a real story that I have left behind in the past."

"But you should try again, love is all around."

She nodded. "Yes, I know."

He smiled and rubbed her cheek. "Thanks for helping me, you don't know how much this means to me."

"I understand."

He nodded. "So, when am I going to know your place? I mean, you have never shown me where you live. I'd love to meet that cousin of yours too. "

"Soon..."

\*\*\*

"Mom!" I called as I raced upstairs. I pushed her room's door open. "Mom!!!" I could hear the shower trickle so I rushed into the bathroom, but there was no one there. The shower just ran. "Mom!!!" I called.

I met David downstairs. "Any luck?" he asked.

"No." she isn't upstairs. A maid approached. "You! Where's my mother?"

She looked blank. "The Professor should be upstairs."

"Well, she isn't!"

She trembled. "She hasn't gone out today. She has been in all day."

"And where's Father?" I asked.

"He just left the house."

David stared at me. "Have you tried her phone?"

"It's dead." I replied.

He stared at the maid. "Call the other workers and comb the entire house for her." He ordered. "Let's check outside." He said and led the way. "I'll check the pool. You could check the garden." he said.

"Let's go together." I said, holding his hand. I was getting scared. As we approached the pool, we saw bubbles. "MOM!!" I screamed.

David restrained me. "Calm down. It's just bubbles."

"Nooooooooooooooooo!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! That's my mom!!! She can't swim." I shouted.

He immediately jumped into the pool. I screamed as I didn't see any of them. I slowly couldn't hear myself anymore, it all became white in my head and face.

\*\*\*

"I am sorry, Elizabeth. I couldn't get a hold on her, but I dropped her dozens of messages."

Elizabeth sobbed and held her sunflower. "My baby's gone from me."

"No, Elizabeth. She'll come. Maybe traffic, maybe she got held up."

She shook her head in disagreement. "They have taken her too away from me."

Mother Francesca took a deep breath. "I'll send someone to find her."

"You won't. She's gone." She said as she lay on her bed in tears. "My baby is gone."

Mother Francesca wiped her tears. "I'll find her." She said.

"I want to sleep. Let me sleep." She said, and shut her eyes.

\*\*\*

I forced my eyelids open as some light came into my eyes. My eyes were wide open, but I had a blurred vision, everything looked blurry.

"Kim....." David's voice echoed in my head, until he faintly faded.

I ran my eyes through the white room, everything looked white or was I imagining things?

"You are awake." I heard again. "Thank God." It sounded like David again. I closed and opened my eye and everything became clearer.

A female doctor came over. "Hi..." she said as she checked me with a stethoscope. "How are you?" she asked.

"My head hurts." I replied.

She nodded. "It's normal. You'll be given some aspirin for your pain; thankfully, you didn't hit your head badly when you fell. You are really lucky."

David stared at me. "Hi..."

"David..." I stressed.

He came closer and took his seat. "I am here."

"Why did you leave me?" I asked lazily. "I thought you were gone."

He stroked my hair. "I am sorry." He kissed my forehead. "Your mom is recuperating, she's in the next room." He said.

I smiled. "Thank you for saving her."

"I was scared of losing you, Kim. Don't ever do that again."

I laughed. "You, scared?"

He scoffed. "Come on...not scared. I meant to say 'worried'."

I smiled. "It's okay to be scared, David."

"But I wasn't." he protested.

The doctor came in and beckoned to David. "May I see you, David?"

He stared at me. "I'll be right back. Don't fret, okay?"

I nodded and watched him leave. A paper dropped from his pocket on to the bed but I felt too weak to call him back. I picked it and tried to drop it on the side table, but I couldn't restrain my eyes from seeing what it read: 'Kim, don't leave me, and if you do, please know that I have always loved you and I still do.'

I read it over and over again as a smile flushed across my face. I threw it on the floor as soon as the door opened again. He picked up the paper as soon as he took his seat and stashed it into his pocket hurriedly. I couldn't keep myself from smiling as he stared nervously.

"What's funny?" he asked.

I shook my head. "Nothing. Could you please help me up?" I asked.

He nodded and bent over to pull me up, but I had other ideas, and as his face came closer to mine, I seized the opportunity and kissed the man I love.

"Ahem!"

David turned with a smile as Ini, Tola and Henry stood before us.

"I thought she was in a critical condition." Ini said.

He smiled. "Well, it's less critical now." He replied, staring at me. I blushed carelessly as Tola winked at me.

My phone rang and David passed it. "Mother Francesca?"

"Kimberly, where have you been all day?"

I sighed. "I am sorry, Mother. I have been a bit indisposed."

"But, Elizabeth needs you, she has been crying all day."

I nodded. "Tell her that I'll be there as soon as possible." I said as I ended the call.

"Hey, where are you going?" David asked. "The doctor said you have to rest."

I stared at him. "I have to go, Elizabeth needs me."

He shrugged. "Your health first!"

"I have to go."

He frowned. "Who's Elizabeth?"

## 15

I adjusted the scrubs as I reached for the side of the bed. "It's urgent I see her, she's a friend."

"Kimberly, you are in no position to decide that. You are not going anyway, and that's final."

I smiled. "David, I am fine."

"You should listen to David" Ini suggested. I eyeballed her. "Okay, fine. Do as you please."

David stood in my way. "Look Kim, this is for your own good." He said and sat me back on the bed.

"Elizabeth needs me..." I stressed.

He shook his head in disagreement. "I am sorry; we'll have to take care of you first."

I turned my face away and laid back.

He nodded. "Would it make you better if you went to her?"

I grinned. "Yes."

He nodded. "Fine, I'll take you there. Where does she live?" His phone rang. He stared at the Caller ID and rejected the call. "So, where are we going?" he asked, again. The phone rang for the second time.

"Answer your call." I said.

He took a deep breath. "Excuse me." he said, and walked out.

Ini shot at me. "Kim! How dare you make him answer the call?" she said as she approached me. "For what we know, it might be an ex, and you guys already have something special."

I rolled my eyes and collected the clothes they had brought for me from Tola. "I will be in the bathroom." I said and excused them.

\*\*\*

"What is it, Father?"

Bolu Coker cleared his throat. "What are you doing in that hospital?"

David looked around the hall. "How do you know where I am?" he asked, as he walked briskly outside.

"David, I follow you and everyone that concerns you.

David hissed. "Well, your informants must have told you that Kimberly is sick, at least. I am obliged to be here."

Bolu Coker laughed wickedly. "Sick??? She only passed out, David Coker. Don't exaggerate."

"Why in God's name are you following us?"

Bolu laughed and stopped. "David Coker, we have urgent matters to attend to."

"I am suspended, remember?"

His father hissed. "David, this is not a game! I need you here now."

David nodded. "That would be in the next three hours."

Bolu laughed wickedly. "That must sound funny to you, I give the orders, son." The laugh died. "You have twenty minutes."

"That's not possible, I have to take care of Kimberly."

Bolu yelled. "There are friends there with her."

"Dad, stay away from Kimberly. Stop following her."

"David, I didn't follow her. You have to come here now, in the next twenty minutes."

David hissed. "You can't give me orders, Father. I'll come when I am done taking care of Kim."

"How is Professor Mrs. Bankole's health?" he asked, and the line went dead.

David gasped and rushed back into the hospital. He ran straight to Wura Bankole's room. She was sleeping soundly. He took a deep breath and leaned against the door.

\*\*\*

I adjusted my top and stared at the others. "Look, guys, I'll be fine."

Tola sat beside me on the bed. "I know, I just want you to take care of yourself. This looks minor, but it doesn't mean that you should take it with levity."

I smiled and placed my head on her shoulder. "Thanks dear, I'll be fine." I clasped my hand into my cheek. "Now, where's David?"

The door opened and David came in. he blinked as he stared at us.

"What is it, David?"

He cleared his throat. "I have to go home urgently."

I nodded. "It's okay."

He knelt before me. "I am sorry. It's really urgent and important I leave." He said.

Tola smiled. "It's okay, we'll take care of her. You may leave."

He nodded and ruffled my hair. "Do take care." He said. He patted Henry's back. "Take care of them." He said and walked out.

Henry smiled. "The mantle of leadership has been passed on to a man of valour." He said proudly. He cleared his throat. "If you don't mind, Ini, go and arrange for Kim to be discharged." Ini stared at him. "Is this one mad?" We all laughed. "Abeg, go and see the Doctor." She shouted and Henry scampered off.

"What do you think could have happened?" I asked.

Ini shrugged. "You tell us, you know it's not easy to predict your families." She murmured.

"What is that supposed to mean, Ini Obong?" I asked.

She shrugged. Tola cut in. "Don't mind her, you know how Ini can be." She said, as she laid the bed.

The door opened and Henry came in with the Doctor. "Hi Kimberly." She said.

I stared at her. "Can I see my mom?"

"You can, but she's resting, and I would love to check you before we discharge you." she said, and helped me back on the bed.

She went through the formalities and smiled. "You are in a good shape, but we'll have some medications prescribed for you, and you are advised to return within the week for a check-up, preferably Wednesday. I'll set you up for an appointment."

I nodded. "Thank you. Can I see her now?"

She nodded. "Please come with me."

"I'll join you guys at the pharmacy." I said to the others and went with the doctor.

She stood before the door. "There she is... she is still very unconscious, so I advice you don't spend much of your time here" she added and left.

I stared at her as she slept with an oxygen mask over her nose. I held her hand as I took my seat. "Hi, mom..." I started as tears rolled down my cheeks. "I know you said 'hey'..." I took a deep breath. "I am sorry. I wish you didn't have to go through all this pain, you don't deserve it." I paused and ran my finger through her hair. "Mom, how are you?" I asked. I knew I would be getting all her responses logically in my heart. I knew that she would say... *'Your mom is hanging on fine until her dying day'*. "Mom, you can't give up yet. I think there's hope." I said, with a smile. "David isn't so bad,...and I think I love him." I took a deep breath. "David and I may just work."

\*\*\*

David parked his car and ran into the house. "Father!!!" he yelled.

"He is in the garden." A maid directed.

He hurried to the back of the house. "Father!"

Bolu Coker puffed his marijuana. "Why are you yelling like a rabid dog?"

"Father! This isn't funny. What do you want from me?" He hissed. "We have business to take care of. There is a major takeover soon."

"Damn your takeovers! What do you intend to do to Kim's mom?"

His father smiled. "I see you got the message." He leaned against his cane. "Prof. Mrs. is slowly become irrelevant. I don't think the society would miss her, after all they don't miss your mom."

David raised his hand in anger but restrained himself.

"Bravo! You were going to hit me?" Bolu asked, and smiled. He turned round and slapped David. "You idiot! What has come over you? I own you!"

David panted heavily. "Stay away from Kim's mom, Father."

Tunji Bankole joined them. "What is going on here? I heard noise."



David stared at him. "You despicable old man! How dare you touch your wife?"

"*Oti o!* Bolu, what an insult?" Tunji roared. "Bolu, what is all these?"

Bolu Coker threw his marijuana angrily on the floor. "Enough of this nonsense, David. Get out of here. All your actions have grave consequences and you know it."

David eyeballed them and walked away.

"What has gotten into your son?" Tunji asked, furiously.

Bolu sighed. "If you knew you were going to kill Wura, you should have done that without hesitating."

"What are you saying? I can't kill her."

Bolu rolled his eyes. "Don't play innocent with me. Wura almost died and no thanks to your daughter and David, she's alive."

Tunji shook his head confusingly. "I only hit her. I can't kill her."

"You mean you didn't know?" Bolu probed taking his seat.

Tunji nodded. "I left her in the room."

Bolu smiled. "Wura tried to commit suicide. She was found in the pool."

Tunji gasped. "She can't swim..."

Bolu nodded with a smile. "It's about time she paid Elizabeth a visit then."

"What do you mean?"

Bolu clapped his hand. "My friend, your wife is on the way to first-class depression, so we could ease her problem by dumping her in a facility, home or abroad, probably in Australia."

Tunji stood up angrily. "What are you saying? I can't do that to Wura. I have hurt her enough."

Bolu smiled. "Tunji, you have done nothing wrong to Wura. We are only looking out for our families, and these women always get in the way of everything. It's not a big deal, if we adjust them, you know."

"By adjusting, you mean killing, right?"

Bolu hissed. "Why are you making it sound so brutal? We are helping these kids out, and you are way too far in it to chicken out now." He yelled and poured some red wine. "Here, this should calm your nerves." He said, and walked in.

"David!" Bolu called as he walked upstairs. "Young man, you have been rude to daddy and my patience is wearing out." Bolu paused as he saw David dragging his bag downstairs. "What is this, David?"

David smiled. "Father, you are not blind, I suppose." Bolu raised his hand to hit him, but David restrained him. "I have had enough. I need my own space."

"I don't need to remind you of the consequences of your actions."

David nodded. "I am fully aware, Father. I just need my own space."

"Which of the houses are you moving into?"

David pulled his bag as he walked past him. "You don't need to ask me, you'll always find out."

Bolu held his hand back. "David, be careful. Don't push your luck, son."

"You shouldn't push yours too, Father." He said and walked away.

\*\*\*

"Mom?"

Elizabeth turned with a sad smile. "You have been gone."

I wore a faint smile as I took my seat. "I am sorry." I said, and hugged her.

She placed her head on my lap. "Don't leave me again." She begged.

I nodded. "I won't. I'll come to see you every day."

"Do you want to hear about my soldier?"

I smiled. "Yes, please."

"He came during the wars. They were the dark and stormy wars." She started. Cold chills ran down my spine as I listened to her. She chuckled. "He won the war and I fell in love with him. I mean, who wouldn't love a hero fresh from the fights?"

I stared at her. Her words were too wise. "Who are you?"

"A broken woman. A woman who has lost her pride and everything she stood for. A woman who lost her soldier and took the villain."

I wanted to know more. "What's your last name?"

"Elizabeth Sunflower."

I stared at her. "Really? Liz, I mean your real surname."

She nodded with a smile. "That's my name."

"I want to help you find your family. You don't deserve to be here."

She hissed dryly. "This is exactly where I belong. I have no home or family."

"What about your husband?"

She sighed and poured some water. "The villain, you mean?"

I nodded. "The villain."

She smiled as she looked outside her window. "He'll soon be dead, but before me. I must see him die."

I hugged her as she broke down in tears. "Don't be bitter."

"He took my life from me. Everything I was, he destroyed it, and made me this." She cried.

I rubbed her hair. "It would be fine."

She nodded. "I know... tell me about yourself. I should at least know about my daughter, shouldn't i?"

I smiled. "My name is Kim Banks and I am a writer. That's all, nothing important."

"That's important for me."

She sat up. "Your parents must be very proud of you. You are a pride to any mother."

"Yes, to my mother."

"What about your father?"

I blinked. "He loves me."

"He should."

I rose to my feet. "Tomorrow is Sunday; would you be allowed to go to church?"

"There's a cathedral here. We all worship together, if we want to."

I smiled. "Can I come?"

Tears rolled down her eyes. "I would be delighted."

\*\*\*

David sank into a chair. "I just need to stay here for the weekend."

Oyinkan stared at him as she took his bag from his hand. "Old Coker must have pushed you too far."

He sighed. "Please give me some water."

She left for the kitchen and returned with a glass of water. "David...what do you want to do?"

He took his water and placed the glass carefully on the side table. "Oyinkan, I don't know. But I need to find my mother."

"I think you already blew your cover by telling that woman that you are Elizabeth's son. We have to come up with another plan before your dad gets to her."

"He put her there. He just doesn't want to kill her yet, that is if she's not dead already."

She smiled. "Your mom is fine. Remember, the Mother said she isn't allowed visitors."

"And I feel if you push it, she may alert your father and you don't want anything to go wrong."

He nodded. "I need my mom in my life. I need her to forgive me."

Oyinkan smiled. "I have an idea."

"What?"

She smiled brilliantly. "Tomorrow is a Sunday. I want to believe that the house of God isn't confined to only the inhabitants of Victoria's Home." She started. He smiled. "Exactly, so we are going to church tomorrow. Hopefully, we can locate your mom in the crowd."

"I don't know what she looks like. It's been 12 years, and she probably must have forgotten me."

She winked. "A mother's heart never forgets."

\*\*\*

The security man stood firmly before the gate. "Please where is your visitor's pass?"

David hissed. "Today is Sunday, can't I worship God wherever I so wish?"

"Please sir, we are new to town and we need a place of worship. We were told that there is a church here." Oyinkan pleaded.

The security man remained firm. "This is a secure facility and the only people allowed in are those with family here."

"My mom is here!" David shouted.

The security man nodded. "Can we have a proof of that?"

David kicked the sand furiously. "What stupid proof?"

Oyinkan placed her hand on his shoulder. "Come on, David." He yanked her hand off furiously. "Calm down, David. There would be other days."

"There would be none for me." he shouted. He kicked the car furiously. "This is disgusting."

The security man approached. "Calm down, sir."

"Don't tell me to bloody calm down." David shouted as he muscled him against the car.

"Leave me alone!"

Oyinkan hurried after him. "David!"

He turned back sharply. "Go away, Oyinkan. I just want to be alone."

"This is just one set back. We'll try again."

He nodded. "I know...now leave, I'll be fine." He replied, handing the car keys to her.

She hugged him. "You don't even know her face, David. We can always try again."

"Just go."

Oyinkan smiled as she walked away.

\*\*\*

Tunji took his seat and started talking to his unconscious wife. "Wura, I don't know what to say." He started. "I think I pushed you too hard and I am sorry, but you are never interested in looking out for our daughter. I am trying to sort out her future. My measures may seem harsh, but I am sure that in the end, you would see reasons with me."

A doctor stepped in. "Professor Bankole, please, can I see you outside for a minute?"

He nodded. "Yes please." He replied. "What is it about?" he asked as he shut the door.

"When we did some diagnosis on Professor Mrs. Bankole, we realized that she had gone through some sort of physical assault. We just want to know if you can help us clarify that."

He rolled his eyes. "As far as I am concerned, my wife has not suffered any form of assault, and the fact that she attempted suicide is something that I would love to keep secret."

The doctor nodded. "We can respect that."

"It is not a thing of pride and I still think we should look deeply into the matter, for all we know, she might have just been hanging around the pool and slipped."

The doctor shook his head in disagreement. "I am afraid that is not the case. We also had to force pills out of her system, sir." He said and tapped Prof. Bankole as he walked away.

Tunji Bankole took a deep breath and walked out of the hospital.

\*\*\*

Ini sipped her drink. "I have a plan that would fetch us some more money without directly hurting our deal with Shola."

"How about we just come out with the truth? I mean this is pure blackmail." Marcus replied.

She nodded. "And what happens after we turn ourselves in? Jail, Marcus! Jail!"

He took a deep breath. "We won't serve long terms. I have a lawyer friend, he is really good."

"You really are stupid, Marcus. Aren't you?"

He shot at her angrily. "Don't use harsh words on me. I am not to blame totally for all these..."

"Of course, we share in the blame. And I should take a larger share because I trusted a moron like you. I should have just finished her off myself."

He nodded. "You are right. I should never have supported you. Look, Ini, it's a mess that we are in together, and I know I'll get us out of it."

She wore a rueful smile. "Sounds impressive, so what do you have in mind?"

"Nothing for now, so, what's your genius plan?"

She smiled. "You would agree with me that I am hotter than Shola, what if I struck a deal with the agency director not to release the actual figure of our deals to her?"

Marcus wore a grimace. "You want to sleep with the director?"

She nodded. "Shola does it, many models do it, and we need our money."

"That's disgusting, despicable!"

She frowned. "Calm down. It's my body."

"Since when have you been doing this?"

She smiled. "I intend to start tomorrow."

"You won't!"

She shot at him. "Why not? We are going to be broke if we don't find a solution as soon as possible, Shola is winning."

"Just shut up, Ini. Is this all about Shola winning?" he asked. She opened her mouth to talk but he stopped her. "I am not done! Have you no value for yourself, Ini?"

She slammed the table. "Enough, Marcus! I am from a poor home, values are not placed on self, you think about others. I am thinking about you here, your money has dropped."

"Ini, I don't need your pity or concern. You are in a battle for supremacy with Shola, and it's time you give up."

She frowned. "It's not your business."

"I love you, Ini. It's my business."

She laughed hard. "Love? I don't believe in that sh\*t!"

He nodded. "I know, but I am real. I have loved you forever and I have never stopped. Does it hurt you so much that someone cares about you?"

"I don't need it. I have never needed care."

He took her hand. "I want to care for you."

She freed her hand from his grip. "You are a fool, Marcus. A real fool. I won't love you."

He took a deep breath. "Thank you." he rose to his feet. "From now on till we find a solution to this mess we are in with Shola. I don't want any salaries." He said and walked away.

\*\*\*

I took Elizabeth back to her room.

"Did you enjoy Father Francis' sermon?" she asked, as she took her seat.

I slumped into the bed. "Erm...it was fine."

She laughed. "You are a pretender, just like my late son. He used to lie about everything to make me happy, before he changed and his death." She started. I sat up as she continued. "Do you know that I used to be a terrible cook, and when I made my baby lunch and ask, 'How is it?' he would stare at me and say, delicious."

"Seriously?" I asked.

She nodded in affirmation. "There was a day he took my food to school; I didn't know that kids had planned within themselves to show off their mothers' skills. I was called to school by the principal at lunch break?"

"Why is that?" I asked.

She smiled. "My son beat up his friends badly, they said his mother's food tasted horribly." She said, in tears. "He fought them so much, and he was only eight. My husband decided that he should never eat from me again. I learnt how to cook, but up till his death, he never ate from me again."

By the time she was through I was already in tears. "I am sorry for your loss, but how did he change so fast? He must really have loved you."



She smiled as she poured a glass of water. "He was forced into business, ruthless business by his dad, and before we knew it, my husband had his whole life mapped out, his university, his friends, and his wife. If he hadn't passed away, they would have been married by now." She paused to drink her water. "He slowly started to see his father as right, and as a kid who always adored his father who never paid any interest to him at an early stage, you can imagine his delight when his dad decided to start a relationship with him." She took a deep breath. "Unfortunately, their relationship isn't what any mother would wish for her only child. My son watched my husband hit me, toss me around and never said a word, sometimes he looked away. But the day he died, was the day he watched my husband drag me out of the house into this home."

I paused and stared at her. "Did you kill your son in your heart? Or is he dead?"

She smiled. "Kimberly, he is dead. Simple."

"Why do I think you are being poetic with this?"

She frowned. "He is dead." She replied as a tear drop rolled down her eyes.

I nodded in agreement. "I am sorry."

I left Elizabeth after a couple of hours, she had taken her 4pm medication and was asleep. I took the lonely path where I had first met Elizabeth as I walked home. I felt sad, a mother was hurting from the death of her son. My new story had a plot already, it was to me, the best love story ever told, a love that went sour, Elizabeth Sunflower and her late son, I was going to change the names and add to my fiction, but her life was unravelling a new plot every time.

The bushes danced in their beauty as the wind blew and it took my mind back to the first day I met her. It is a day I am forever grateful for. I leaned against the 'love chair' in the lonely street for support and then thought about my first discussions with her. '*I am going to find her husband*' I thought in my heart.

"If my life is for rent, and I don't want to buy...well, I deserve nothing more than I get..." Dido's 'Life for rent' streamed nearby. And I hummed accordingly. It was beautiful and it sounded pure. I thought the voice was natural. I had never heard such before. I didn't care, I hummed on.

I didn't hear the song after a while. I stood up and decided to take my leave when I saw the bushes dancing again. I am not adventurous, but for some weird reasons, I knew Elizabeth was hiding in the bushes and singing. She must have followed me without my knowledge. As I approached the figure, I could hear sobs, weak sobs. *Why would Elizabeth cry in the bushes? Yet she remained still, with her head buried down from the view I saw her.*

I walked closer and the figure turned quickly. "David?" I gasped.

## 16

David gasped as he stared at me. I stepped forward and assisted him to his feet. "What are you doing around here?" he asked.

"Can we get out of these bushes first?" I asked, stepping out. "Did you follow me here, David?"

He shook his head in disagreement. "No."

"Then why are you here?" I asked.

He took a deep breath. "I...erm...it's no use. Just forget it." He said, and started to walk away.

I hurried after him. "David, talk to me. You were singing and crying."

"I don't cry." He replied, bluntly.

I nodded. "Really? David, you can talk to me."

"Leave me alone!" he yelled. "Is that too much to ask?"

I stepped back and watched him walk away. He kicked the sand as he walked on. My heart broke to see him that way and so I raced after him. "David, I can't leave you alone, not like this." I said, staring at him. "Let me take you home."

He laughed. "There's no home for me." he replied. "Kimberly, just go away."

"I won't"

He stared at me. "What do you want?"

"Something is wrong with you, David? What are you doing here?"

He scoffed. "Kimberly, this is my business. I was checking out properties on this side."

"Are you going to buy Victoria's Homes?" I asked, getting agitated.

He nodded. "Yes, and maybe everything on this side."

"David, you can't do that. Some people actually live in these homes because they have no families." I replied and stared at him. He shrugged. "Or maybe, because they got kicked out by their children."

He hissed. "Kimberly, this is business."

I nodded with disgust. "David, I thought I was right to fall in love with you."

His shoulders fell. "Kim..." he called softly. "I am sorry." He rubbed his hair. "Kim, I have a bad past. I have hurt so many people and I am not good enough for you. I don't deserve any love from you."

I held his hand in mine. "Then let me help you, David. I want to help you."

\*\*\*

Boye passed the newspaper to Ben. "I don't see how this genius plan of yours would win Kimberly."

"Boye, I am optimistic. Kimberly and that guy don't have something strong. I intend to utilize the weak links."

Boye smiled. "That guy won't let you get close to Kim."

"You are forgetting that Kim works at Millaroca now, I'll gladly be her chauffeur, and then I'll get her attracted to me, maybe steal a kiss or two. Sometimes, a man has to be impulsive."

Boye shook his head. "I feel sorry for you, brother." He said. "The mere thought of the number of slaps that would adorn your face makes my heart bleed." They chuckled.

"But a man has got to do what a man must do. I like this girl very much and I won't let some flashy guy ruin what we may have." He paused. "She even admitted that we may have had something, so I'll work on whatever parts of her emotions I can crawl into. I must get her."

"You are desperate, man."

Ben nodded in agreement. "I am fighting for love."

\*\*\*

I tucked David in his bed. "Try to get some sleep, David."

He scoffed. "There's no sleep for the wicked."

I took a deep breath. "You know, if you are not going to tell me what's hurting you, you should at least try not to be too hard on yourself." I replied, as I stroked his forehead.

"Kim, why do you love me?"

I honestly couldn't find the words to explain how I fell in love with him. "You should get some sleep." I said.

He pulled my hand back. "Please stay with me."

"David..."

His grip was more firm. "Kim, I am scared. I don't want to be alone."

I slid into the bed beside him and let him lay on my lap as I stroked his hair tenderly. "I won't leave you alone." I whispered.

"I miss my mom."

I stared at him. "Me too..." I stared at him. "Where's she anyway? Been a while."

"I don't want to talk about it." He replied, almost inaudibly.

I nodded. "It's okay; I just want you to sleep."

"Did you love your mom when you were growing up?" he asked.

I nodded with a smile. "Yes, I did. Why are you asking?" No response came. "David?" I called, quietly, but it seemed as though he was already finding his ground in *Sleep Island* so I let him be.

The door creaked open. "Kimberly?"

I nodded. "Yes, and you must be Oyinkan, right?" I replied, almost whispering.

"Yes, I am. Where did you find him?"

I lifted David's head off my lap to the bed and walked out with Oyinkan.

"He can be a baby sometimes, I know." She said, as we walked into the living room.

I nodded. "I think he's going through some hard time. I found him in the bushes near Victoria's Homes."

"Victoria's Homes? What were you doing there?" she asked, pouring me a drink.

I collected it. "Thank you. I went to mass with a friend. I have a friend at the home."

She nodded. "He is going through some really tough times right now."

"He won't tell me what he was doing in that vicinity. Do you happen to know what he was doing there?"

She shook her head in disagreement. "I don't know."

I took a seat. "We have never really had a proper introduction, Oyinkan."

"Yes, I know." She smiled, as she took her seat opposite mine. "So, let's do it this way, questions and answers."

I nodded in agreement. "That works for me. So, do I go first?"

She shook her head. "No. I was thinking I could take the lead." I smiled. "Do you love my cousin?"

"I thought we were getting to know ourselves."

She relaxed in her seat. "Kimberly, I just want to know if the woman that my cousin would be spending the rest of his life with truly loves him."

I straightened up. "Erm...Oyinkan, David and I have a serious relationship, and I guess you are aware of the circumstances surrounding it. Of what use is a reminder?"

She smiled. "Kimberly, I just want to know if you love him or not? A woman shouldn't be in doubt of what she feels for a man."

"What are you doing, Oyinkan?"

We turned to see David leaning against the door.

"Nothing out of the ordinary. I just thought I should engage Kimberly." She smiled.

"Your girlfriend is boring." She sneered.

He nodded as he took his seat beside me. "That's some 'engaging'. Why are you prying into her business?"

Oyinkan smiled. "I only asked her if she loves you."

"That's a very obvious answer and you know it. Why bother her?" he replied.

David and Oyinkan were talking as though I wasn't seated right with them. I cleared my throat. "I am here guys." they laughed. "I love him."

\*\*\*

Ben strode into my office. He dropped some articles on the desk. I had my eyes firmly glued to my laptop. "How's your story coming?" he asked, leaning against the desk.

"Very well, thank you, Ben." I replied without taking my eyes off the laptop.

He closed the laptop and smiled. "Kim, I am not your enemy." I took a deep breath. "I know I hurt you, but I thought we could just try to be friends, again."

I smiled. "Ben, we are friends."

"Let me take you out to lunch." He said, calmly. He wore a faint smile. "It's just lunch."

I nodded. "I'll be delighted." I said and grabbed my purse as I walked out with him.

"So, how's your fiancé?" he asked, as we walked across the street.

I smiled. "David is doing okay."

"Why don't you wear a ring?" he asked. "Isn't that something that every engaged couple would have?"

I took a deep breath. "We are different."

"Kim, you want me to believe that you turned down the opportunity of having a ring, maybe even a diamond for 'being different'?"

I paused as he pushed the door of the cafeteria open. "Thank you." I smiled at him. "Ben, a difference is a lot to me."

\*\*\*

David cleared his throat. "Ms. Matthews, I am not too sure about this living room."

"You can call me Tola. Let's get less formal." She replied, as she strode across the living room. "This, my friend, is class. It is antique, French designs and I promise you, it makes a beautiful house." She said, beaming with smiles. "And eventually a home."

David nodded. "I think so."

"I know so. Kim loves you."

He smiled. "Is that possible?"

She nodded with an assuring smile. "I have known Kim for a long time and if she didn't feel anything for you, you wouldn't even be in her life irrespective of what your families think." She tapped his shoulder. "Let's go to the pool, I think Wole's there."

They walked out to the pool. "David! I can't believe you are moving out of the Coker mansion."

Wole called as they approached.

"I had to someday."

He smiled. "I never thought you would." David frowned. "Just kidding, man."

"Who got you a job, Wole? You know we've never really had the time to talk about you, it so not Wole-like to be employed."

Wole stared at Tola who was talking to some workers in the house. "When you find the right girl, nothing else matters, man."

David nodded. "Tell me about it."

"David, you have always loved Kim. Life is giving you exactly what you want. All you need now is for the lady to love you back."

He sighed. "She says she loves me, but I don't think it's true. I have always been into her, but you know, Kim has a lot of guys at her beck and call. And there's this guy now, he's all over her."

"If she says she loves you, you have to believe her."

David took a deep breath. "You know this whole marriage was staged because my dad needs her inheritance." He whispered.

"You are not marrying her for that reason, right?" Wole asked.

David scoffed. "Of course not, but I have a feeling that all they need is for that marriage to happen, my dad already has something under wraps."

Wole pulled David far away from Tola's view. "What are you going to do about that?"

"I don't know what my father has planned, but I know there's something in this marriage for him."

Wole shook his head. "Do you think Professor Bankole is aware?"

"I don't know, but he won't want to hurt his daughter."



Wole frowned. "David, you have to find out whatever might be your dad's plans, okay? In the meantime, I suggest, you be patient with Kim. She'll love you in time, if she doesn't know."

"Thanks, bro." he said and they hugged. "Where's Tola? Let's seal this deal."

Wole looked ahead and walked back to the pool. "Tola." He called but there was no response. "Maybe she went into the house, I'll go check."

A worker stopped him. "No sir, she received a call and ran off."

David and Wole ran outside. Tola's car speed off from a distance.

"My car is just here." David offered and they jumped in.

David started the ignition and raced after her. "Try to call her."

"I am doing that, but I am getting the busy tone."

David stared at him. "She's really fast, I need to catch up. Why is she driving like that?" he honked heavily. "Get out of the way!"

\*\*\*

Shola pushed the gate open to the roof top. "Hello, beautiful people." She announced as she took off her sunshades. "Hi, Michael. How's your vision?" she asked, as she kissed him.

"Doing better. Good enough to take Ms. *Oblong's* photos."

Ini snapped. "It's Obong!"

"Yeah...I know, I pronounced it correctly."

Marcus hissed. "Can we all cut the crap and finish this session, it getting boring on the roof top."

Michael called out. "Final shot!" His camera clicked. "And we are out."

The Director of the agency joined them. "Ini and Shola, I need you in my office now."

Ini's heart raced as she stared at Marcus.

"Your day just started, Ini." Shola said, as they left for the office.

The director closed the door. "What I have to say to you both is highly confidential, please sit." They obliged. "Now, as we all know, the industry is blossoming and this is thanks to your hard work over the years, but now we have come to a stage where we have to make a tough choice."

Shola smiled. "Bring it on, sir."

He smiled. "The way things are going, we have Arab investors in the industry and they are willing to settle for one face. Now, we all know that there are several belles like you, but the investors selected one of you." he cleared his throat. "Normally, I should have called only the appointed one, but I need to make sure that you ladies understand that this development is necessary for the growth of the industry, and given your track records of attacking one another on social networks and other confrontations, it is a stern warning that the loser among you must have the spirit of sportsmanship and pray for her own day of glory."

Ini and Shola stared at themselves. "Okay, sir." They chorused.

The director smiled. "Thank you, I knew I could trust you two to act maturely. So, without wasting your time..." he stood beside a covered picture. "I unveil the future of the industry in Nigeria." He said, as he pulled the drape.

\*\*\*

"This tastes good." I commended as I took a bite of the Sandwich.

Ben smiled. "It is a standard double-decker. What do you say, we hook up at my place this weekend and I'll prepare mine?"

I smiled. "Ben, you really are fast, aren't you?"

"Come on...we are taking things slow, aren't we?"

I scoffed. "Ben, there's no speed. I love David."

He cleared his throat. "So you say."

"Ben, don't ruin this...we have a good friendship, let's keep it decent." I said and picked my purse. "I have to work, see you at the office." I said and walked out.

\*\*\*

Tola pulled up and hurried out of the car. She drummed on the door aggressively and it opened. "What happened, Chidi?"

"Take it easy..." Chidi said sloppily. He dragged his feet as he closed the door after her. "He overdosed."

Tola rushed to Tolu. "Tolu...Tolu...Tolu..." she stared at a lifeless Tolu and pushed him. "What happened, Chidi?" she screamed.

Chidi picked his phone. "I am out of here, take care of your mess."

She grabbed his shirt. "Chidi, you have to help me, please..."

He pushed her back. "You should never have left him. He relapsed after you left." He said and approached the door.

The door flung open and pushed Chidi back into the room. Tola stared at Wole. "Wole..." she said, inaudibly. Chidi immediately scampered out of the house.

Wole picked his footing as he avoided the alcohol bottles, cigarette stubs, ashtrays, needles and strips that were on the floor. "Is this it, Tola?"

"Wole, deal with this later, this man needs help. Let's get him to the hospital." David interrupted.

Wole shook his head in disgust. "Tola, is this thing what you bailed on me for?"

David held him. "Get a grip, man. Let's take this guy to the hospital." He said and lifted Tolu from the couch.

\*\*\*

Ben dropped a bag on my desk. "You didn't finish up your lunch."

"Ben, thank you, but you know very well that I don't need it."

He smiled. "I am going with the thank you." he took his seat. "So, Kimberly..."

The door flung opened. "Kimberly, Mr. Adeoye's office now!" Boye announced.

I nodded and rushed out.

"You are such a fool, Boye." Ben cursed angrily.

\*\*\*

Mother Francesca rushed into the clinic. "I think we should move her out now, Doctor." She said, trembling.

"Mother Francesca, please calm down. I know how much Elizabeth means to you."

She took her seat. "She's not getting better."

"I have made arrangements for an ambulance to take her to the hospital, don't worry."  
She nodded. "I have to go and call her daughter."

\*\*\*

Mr. Adeoye paced around the office. "Millaroca is finished."

"I don't understand, sir. I thought we had a month."

He nodded. "We did, but things changed. The man has gotten very impatient and he is coming by Monday next week." I gasped. "Kimberly, can you do something? I don't want to watch all what I have laboured for to be taken away from me."

Ben rushed in. Mr. Adeoye shot at him. "Don't you knock?"

"I am sorry, sir, but Kimberly, something has happened."

I gasped. "What?"

"Your mother."

\*\*\*

"This is certainly not the right place to do this." David said.

Wole snapped. "Really? How do I want to understand that Tola runs out to meet this guy at the slightest?"

"Wole, they were dating."

Wole groaned. "He used her." David nodded. "Look at her. She's in there with him, for God's sakes, that guy has hurt her too much for her to care."

"Wole, I know how you feel, man, but you have to calm down. Getting angry would not change the fact that Tola is in there." David replied.

He screamed. "David!!! I hate that guy."

A nurse came out. "Gentlemen, please, could you step outside."

David nodded. "Of course, we are sorry." He said, and escorted his friend out of the building. "Sit, man." He said, and they sat on the steps outside the hospital. "You know, Wole, when we were younger, I thought I'd be a doctor."

Wole laughed. "You won't have made it."

"At least, I got you laughing again." They laughed.

"Wole!"

They turned around to see Tola. Wole stood up. "It's okay, he'll be fine."

"Like you care!" she screamed. "He is here because of me. He took drugs because I left him."

David held Tola. "Calm down, Tola. The guy has to be a junkie."

"No. This is my fault. I should have never left him." She said as she hugged David.

Wole scoffed. "This is just great. Let me know, what did he use on you? Because, this time, I believe you have been bewitched."

"Wole." David called. "Calm down, man."

Wole laughed. "This is just unbelievable. So what now, Tola?"

David eyed him. "Stop it, Wole."

"Really? This is becoming sick. Tola, I can see that you enjoy being hurt. Have a good life." He said and walked away.

David shouted. "Wole! Briggs!!!" He stared at Tola. "What is wrong with you, Tola? You have a good man in Wole, why do you want to screw things up with that junkie?"

"He is a junkie because of me."

He shook his head in disagreement. "That's what you want to believe. He's a grown man; he should be able to decide what he wants for himself."

"What's the worst you can do if Kimberly leaves you?"

David swallowed. "This is about you, Tola. You are kicking your man away, and that's not fair. You are going to hurt Wole really bad."

"Someone is hurting in there because of me."

He sighed. "Tola, that man is not hurting because you left. He overdosed; he's always been an addict."

A stretcher was wheeled across with so much speed. David gaped as he looked on. He stared at Tola. "I thought I just saw Kimberly."

She smiled. "You are imagining things." She stared at the stretcher as it was wheeled down the hallway. "It can't be her."

He touched his pockets. "I think I left my phone in the car. I'll be right back." He said and left for the car. Wole was inside. "Hey, you need to understand ladies a little more."

He scoffed. "David, I have tried. This is just cold from Tola, just unfair."

"Wole, I need you to calm down, and go in there and support her. You can't leave her all by herself."

He shook his head in disagreement. "I am done with Tola. I need to think."

"You can't do that, Wole. She needs you now."

He nodded, "Of course, but Tolu needs her more. She should be with him." He said and stepped out of the car. "I guess you'll be here longer. Can I go with the car?"

David tossed the keys at him. "I'll get a ride home, but are you sure you want to drive yourself?"

"What's the worst that could happen?" he asked as he jumped into the driver's seat.

David yanked the keys from him. "I am not letting you go."

"Really?! I can take care of myself, David. I am not a boy."

He nodded. "I know, but someone has to be the man here." He replied. "Come and support Tola. I'll take you home afterwards." He added and left.

\*\*\*

"Ms. Banks, I am going to need you to step outside." The nurse ordered.

I raged. "Really? I want to know what's going on. The meter has stopped. I can't hear anything."

Two male doctors helped me out and handed me to Ben. "Please, calm her down."

Ben hugged me. "Shhh...don't cry, it would be fine."

"She's dead, Ben."

He kissed my forehead. "She'll be fine, I promise."

"She's dead, Ben."

"Kimberly?"

I turned to see David and Tola. "David?"

He cleared his throat. "Are you okay, Kimberly?" he asked, as he walked over.

"Her mom is ill. I brought her here." Ben replied, holding my hand firmly.

David stared at me. "Your mom?"

\*\*\*

Marcus paced around the room. "Stop it, Marcus, you are making me nervous." Ini said.

He paused. "What are we going to do, Ini?"

"I am trying to think, and your pacing around is not helping me."

He took a deep breath. "Are we going to be tied to Shola forever, I mean this is a mega deal for you."

"I think the industry doesn't want Shola anymore, and she'll be making us her money bags if we don't find a solution soon."

He nodded. "You are right, Ini. Shola is finished in this industry, but we are going to be her source of income if we don't act fast."

She smiled. "I have an idea."

"What is it?"

She took a deep breath. "I don't know how you would take this, but I intend to give Shola this deal in exchange for the cream fiasco."

"WHAT??? Are you crazy, Ini?"

She shrugged. "What is money if we are not happy?"

"Look, I think we are fine paying her that ridiculous percentage." He replied.

She hissed. "Marcus, I am still wanted in the industry. I may not get a mega buck deal like this one, but we can be sure that we are getting Shola off our backs for good."

He took a deep breath. "We should never have switched those creams."

"I know."

The door opened. "Sorry, I don't usually knock, but I thought I should pay the latest millionaire in the industry a visit." Shola announced.

Marcus frowned. "Shola Jones, just give it up already. I am sick and tired of your charades."

"Marcus, I have business with Ini, and just as God would have it, He has decided to bless us with a mega deal."

Ini hissed. "Us? Look, Shola, show's over. No more deals."

"You know the danger of messing with me."

Ini nodded. "Yes! So, here's the new deal, have my new deal and stay away forever!"

"What do you mean?"

Ini smiled. "I would decline the job for you, and you can stay away forever."

"That's impossible."

Ini nodded. "It is possible, all I have to do is tell the Director that I am signing off to you, simple."

"Really?!"

Ini nodded. "Yes, I am sick and tired of you."

\*\*\*

David stared at me. "Kimberly, what mom is he talking about?"

"We brought her..." Ben continued.

David stamped his feet. "Mr. Wannabe, can you stay out of this? I am talking to Kimberly, not you." David replied, raising his voice.

Ben scoffed. "Really? I brought her here. Where were you?" He answered, stepping up to him.

"Ben, stop." I interrupted. "David, she is a friend, but I could call her a mother too."

David took a deep breath. "Is she dead?"

I nodded. "I think so." I walked up to him and he hugged me.

Mother Francesca came out of the room. "Kim, she woke up, they are taking her to ICU"

David stared at her. "You?"



## 17

David walked up to Mother Francesca. "You, I know you."

Mother Francesca stared at me. "Please, Kimberly, let's hurry." She said, holding my hand.

David pulled her. "You are going nowhere."

"David..." I cut in. "What is it? We have an emergency for Christ's sake." I said and yanked her hand from him as we walked away.

David yelled. I turned to look at him but didn't return to him as I followed Mother Francesca into the room.

"Doctor, how is she?"

He nodded. "She is stable for now."

I heaved a sigh of relief. "Doctor, how long would she be in here?"

"That, I can't say for now. But she is a fighter, so, we are optimistic." He said and walked out.

I stepped out with Mother Francesca. She smiled. "I'll have to return to the facility now, good thing you are here."

"Excuse me, mother? What did David want with you?"

She blinked. "Nothing important." She smiled. "I have to leave now." She said, heading for the rear.

"Mother Francesca, why are you not taking the front door? Are you afraid of meeting David there?"

She sighed. "Young lady, I am very busy at the facility and I have to leave now. I'll send some sisters over to be here with you." she said and left through the rear door.

\*\*\*

Shola sat down with her legs crossed. "In as much as it is a watering offer, I am sorry to decline."

"What the F\*ck!" Marcus slammed the table.

She smiled. "Why are you all aggressive, Marcus? This attitude won't help anyone of us."

Ini nodded. "I agree with her. Please, calm down, Marcus." She replied. "Shola, what exactly do you want?"

Shola nodded. "I want your life. I want to hurt you by taking away all you've laboured for."

"That's beautiful." Ini replied, and rose to her feet. "I don't think we can reach an agreement, Shola. But one thing is for sure, I am going to drag you down with me."

Shola smiled. "How do you intend to do that?"

Marcus laughed. "You are more stupid than I thought. Do you expect us to reveal our plan to you?"

Shola rose to her feet. "I don't like the way you guys are going about this, and I smell a dangerous play here." She clutched her bag in her arm. "Don't make me wreck your career, *Oblong*." She said, as she walked out.

"It's Obong!" Ini replied, laughing.

Marcus stared at her. "So, Ini, what were you talking about?"

She laughed. "Oh...that? I was just bluffing."

He smiled. "You are something else. I hope we haven't sprung Shola into action." His phone rang. "Excuse me." he said, and stepped outside.

Ini rubbed her hands together. "What am I going to do?"

The door opened and Marcus rushed in. "I have to go...It is very urgent."

"What is it?"

He cleared his throat. "I have to see my mother now."

"Let me drop you."

He shook his head in disagreement. "No, I am fine." He replied and dashed out.

\*\*\*

I walked over to David who was seated on a chair. "Want a drink?" I said, offering him a can of coke.

He stared at me. "No, thank you."

"David, I am sorry for yelling at you when I wanted to go and see my friend."

He wore a wry smile. "I understand. You have a large heart. How's your friend?"

I placed my head on his shoulder. "The doctor says she'll be better."

He smiled. "That's good to hear."

"Why are you here, David?"

"We brought Tola's ex here."

I stared at him. "Tolu Scott? What do you have with Tolu?"

"The dude is an addict. He ran into trouble with his drugs."

"Where's Tola?"

He looked outside. "She's outside. Wole walked away, he was really pissed."

"Poor boy. I'll go be with Tola." I said, standing up. "Maybe you should check for Wole."

I added.

He nodded. "Sure."

I walked out and sat beside Tola. "Hey..."

"Hi." She replied bluntly. "And before you criticize me, Tolu needs me now more than ever."

I smiled. "Tola, right now, I am not in the best position to do this. I wish Ini were here."

Tola smiled. "Ini? She would probably finish off Tolu on his sick bed."

"More like death bed." I replied.

She stared at me. "What do you mean by that?"

"Did you know about Tolu's use of drugs before today?"

She rolled her eyes. "How was I supposed to know?"

"Tola, don't lie to me. I am so sure he didn't just start doing drugs."

She nodded. "So what? It wasn't this serious. It was because I left him, and it's all thanks to Wole for coming into my life, he ruined what I had with Tolu."

My eyes popped in fear. "I need to call Ini, because I think I might just be the one to kill Tolu now. What is all this?"

"Is it too hard for you to understand that I love him?"

I hissed. "I think you have gone nuts and this is more critical than it looks. Are you also under the influence of drugs?"

She scoffed. "I have to be with Tolu, I am going in now." She said, standing up.

I sat her down forcefully. "Hello Ms." I shouted aggressively. "I think it's time you know how foolish you are. What else do you want? Are you waiting till Tolu kills you before you realize there's no hope for the both of you?"

She hissed. "What are you driving at?"

"That you are a fool! Look here, what you guys might have shared in the past may have been memorable. But wake up and smell the coffee, you are not welcome in his life again. He'll continue to use you and your money, and then, when he's through with you, he'll dump you." I paused. "And, trust me, you deserve it."

She swallowed. "I am not having this conversation with you."

"Why is that?"

She scoffed. "You have never been in love, your life has always been mapped out, and this thing with David is not real. I am sure you are only playing your family script well. I have had to deal with life, learnt to fall in love on my own, and my heart chose Tolu."

I nodded. "Do you think I have never had attractions for other guys all my life? I have! I have felt things for others, but as strange as it seems. And even though it is a family arrangement. I am crazy about David, he is the only man for me. He won my heart." I paused. "Tola, I am quite surprised you will go as low as dragging my family life into this because you want to stake something for Tolu, that's fine. I am going to leave you to your foolishness, and I wish you and Tolu the best." I added as I rose to my feet. "I should be with David now." I said and walked away.

\*\*\*\*

Ini pulled up a block away and watched Marcus open his door and run into the apartment. She smiled.

\*\*\*\*

Marcus saw his mother in the living room. "What was so urgent?"

"The issue about your wife."

He stared at her. "Mom! How could you drag me from work to discuss about wife matters?"

"Work? Do you consider what you do a job? That place where you are all around skinny girls who won't eat in the name of being a model. I need you to marry soon, you are my only one."

He hissed. "This is unbelievable, and I can't believe you did this to me, if you had called me because something happened to her, I would understand." He said, pointing inside.

"She's fine, I have been taking care of her. That's one of the reasons why you have to be here, I shouldn't be handling that for you."

Marcus sank into a chair. "Look, there's a woman in my life right now, however, things are complicated with her."

"I hope she isn't a model. Things are always complicated with them, she won't like you, or where you live. If we were staying in Banana Island or Garden City and all those fine places, maybe."

He nodded. "She is a model, mom. She is very nice too."

"My dear, forget it. If I was a model, I would have never married that wretch, your father."

Marcus scoffed. "That's why you weren't a model." He sat up. "But, mom, she is different."

"Na so...Chioma too was different until she left you for greener pastures."

He scoffed. "I have to return to work soon, it's obvious I have nothing to do here."

"You do...Chioma dropped a note for you."

He stared at her. "Chioma was here?"

She nodded. "Yes, and she dropped this for you." she replied, handing the note to Marcus. "She says she's never coming back."

His hands trembled as he unfolded the letter carefully.

\*\*\*

Ben walked up to me. "How's she? I have been looking all over for you."

"She's going to be better. Have you seen David around?"

He shook his head in disagreement. "No."

I nodded. "I have to look for him."

He pulled me back by my arm. "Kim, I think we should head back to the office. Mr. Adeoye is under some real tension right now."

I nodded. "I understand, but why don't you go ahead?"

"Without you?"

David walked in on us. "Go without her."

Ben smiled. "You are just full of it, aren't you?"

"David, where were you?"

David shrugged. "Searching for Wole, the dude has gone off." Ben walked away. "I don't like that guy." I smiled and tiptoed to him and kissed him on the cheek. "I like you."

He bit his lip with a corny smile. "That's interesting."

A sister from Victoria's Homes walked up to me. "Ms. Banks, I am here for Mrs. Sunflower."

David stared at her. "Sunflower?"

The sister nodded. "Yes, Mrs. Sunflower"

David stared at her. "Where have I heard that name before?"

The sister replied. "Sunflower is a flower, sir." He nodded.

"Erm...let me take you to the doctor." I said to the sister. "Please, could you keep an eye on Tola." I said to David.

He nodded. "Okay...see you soon."

\*\*\*

Bolu Coker closed the elevator door as himself and Tunji Bankole approached the top floor.

"The foolish man still has his elevator running." Bolu said.

"What did you expect? Let's make this quick. I have to go to the hospital to see my wife."

Bolu hissed. "Stop being jittery, we haven't done anything wrong, and we didn't push Wura into the pool, she attempted suicide, she should be in the asylum."

Tunji shot at him. "Watch your tongue, Bolu."

The door opened at the top floor and they stepped out. The receptionist smiled as they approached. "Welcome to Millaroca Magazine, how may we help you?"

"We are here to see, Mr. Adeoye. Tell him Coker."

The receptionist put a call through and faced them. "Shall we?" she said as she led them to Mr. Adeoye's secretary.

The secretary rose to her feet. "Good morning, sirs."

"Good morning. Is he in? Bolu Coker asked.

She nodded in agreement. "Just a minute."

Bolu Coker hissed and pushed the door open. "Are you the type of man who a secretary should still answer to?"

The secretary rushed in after them. "Sir, I tried telling them to hold on..."

Bolu stared at her. "Don't worry, he can't fire you, but we can."

Mr. Adeoye signalled to his secretary and she walked out. "Isn't this too early, Bolu Coker?"

Bolu stared at him. "Meet my friend, Professor Tunji Bankole."

Mr. Adeoye smiled. "Why the formalities? You and I know that Bankole here is no saint. Or aren't you the one buying Millaroca?"

"You heard right." Tunji replied. "I intend to take this place by Monday, but I intend to propose you a new deal."

Bolu stepped on him. "Don't."

Tunji stared at him and spoke through clenched teeth. "It's my money." Bolu smiled and stepped back. "Are you ready to listen?"

Mr. Adeoye nodded. "What could that be?"

"I would give you time up until next month if you fire Kimberly with immediate effect."

Mr. Adeoye stared. "Kimberly Bankole?" He paused and stared at Tunji. "She is your daughter, right?"

"Would you fire her?"

Mr. Adeoye rose to his feet. "You know, Tunji, I have made mistakes in the past, one of which was letting Wura marry you. I should warned her against a beast like you, but now, you want me to fire Wura's daughter?"

"Do you want the deal or not?"

Mr. Adeoye took a deep breath. "Tunji, I have never met anyone with so much will and courage like Kimberly, oh...I missed a line, my cousin, Wura, used to have such until you took away her sanity with all the shame and problems you have put her through, now that I know who Kimberly is, I am ready to protect her with everything I am and I have left." He scoffed as he continued. "Now I know why she won't even let us know that she is your daughter, she must be ashamed of you."

Tunji smiled. "I would be here for my new building on Monday, there surely won't be a re-vote this time by the board, have a nice day." He said and walked out. Bolu followed briskly.

Bolu muttered under his breath. "You have taken a foolish step." He bumped into Ben as they approached the elevator. "Watch where you are going." He shouted.

Ben bowed. "I am sorry, sirs." He stared at Tunji Bankole. "You are Professor Bankole, I am a very big fan of yours, sir." He said as he bowed.

Bolu hissed and moved ahead. "Tunji, we have work to do." He said and they got into the elevator.

\*\*\*

"Thanks for bringing me to see my mom." I said as we walked out of the hospital.

David nodded. "It's okay. I hope she gets better soon."

I nodded. "Me too...I have to return to the office now."

David held my hand. "Erm...Kim...eh...Who is Mrs. Sunflower?"



I smiled. "Why are you so interested?"

"I like the name."

I raised an eyebrow. "Try harder."

He shrugged with a smile. "It's just that, you've been too close to her, and you are even making her more of a priority."

I smiled. "Do I sense jealousy here? You come first, and you know that, right?"

He grinned. "That's comforting."

"Anyway, if it would make you feel better, I met her at the home. She lost her son, and has lived there ever since; a sad woman, broken marriage and all."

He rubbed my forehead. "Sorry, dear. Now I see why you are so drawn to her."

I nodded. "She needs comfort, someone to defend her, you know."

He smiled. "That's why she has you; you are always stepping in and helping others." He replied. We walked hand-in-hand back to the car; everything was looking beautiful between us. "Kim, would you be available on Friday evening? I would love to take you somewhere."

I sighed. "David, I hope so. Work is really tight now. I have to return to the office now, we are under so much pressure."

He opened the doors. "Everything would be fine, they have you."

\*\*\*

I fixed my gaze on my laptop as I typed on, I knew I had to round off my story, I mixed up Elizabeth's life with my mom's and mine, I titled my new piece. "This Woman", as soon I was through I left for Mr. Adeoye's. "Is the boss in?" I asked.

"He has had a really rough day, and I don't think he'll be willing to see anyone."

I nodded. "I understand, but could you just tell him that I need to see him?" The secretary was still hesitating when Mr. Adeoye's door opened. "Good afternoon, sir."

"Kimberly, you are just the person I need to see, Please come in." he said and returned into the office.

I wore a thin smile as I took my seat. "Thank you, sir, for excusing me earlier."

He smiled. "It's fine, you are like a daughter to me. How's your mother?"

"She's much better."

He nodded. "So what was she suffering from?"

I stared at him. "Well, I call her my mother, but she's a friend, she has complicated health issues."

He nodded. "I see...Anyway, are you braced for leaving work by Monday?"

"I think we can surprise them." I said with a smile.

He smiled. "I love your positive attitude, if we can make Friday's edition of Millaroca a sell-out, we may force the board to reconsider and who knows? We might stop the sale."

I nodded. "It is possible."

He took a deep breath. "Kimberly, I am taking a huge risk putting all our arsenals in for this story. Is there a chance that we might fail?"

I wore a faint smile. "There's always a chance for failure. But with God, all things are possible."

"Amen."

He nodded and sat up. "Kimberly, you have never really told me about your background, who are your parents?"

I cleared my throat. "Their names are Mr. and Mrs. Bankole, just in the educational sector."

"Would it kill you to say Professors Tunji and Wura Bankole are your parents?"

\*\*\*

Oyinkan removed her sunshades as she walked into the building. "How is it going?"

"Your institution would be finished very soon." The supervisor replied. "We just need to put a few touches here and there."

She nodded and answered her ringing phone. "Hello."

"Where are you? It's noisy there."

She stepped outside. "I can hear you now. What's up?"

"I got the house already, and I want to move in by weekend."

She smiled. "That's fantastic, David. So, has Kim seen the home yet?"

"No, but I want to show her the place by Friday, but she may not be available. She has so much on her table at work now."

She smiled. "That's sad. It means you'll take me to see the place, right?"

"Do I have a choice?"

She nodded. "Of course, not."

"Oyinkan, do you remember the name, Sunflower?"

She nodded. "Who won't? It's a flower."

He hissed. "Talk to you later."

Wole shut the door. "David, you shouldn't have come."

"Really?" David replied, taking a seat.

He hissed. "Tola just wants to kill me."

"Shut up, man! You are making this thing too serious. Tolu was her ex, it's only logical she shows some sympathy."

Wole scoffed. "Sympathy? Come on, David, you can yell at me because Kim isn't the one all over that guy. Maybe if she was, you'd understand me."

"Wole, I understand how you feel, but leaving her at the hospital and running back to the office is just unfair. She needs you."

Wole took his seat. "David, I want to be there for Tola, but she's making this all too hard for me. Is there any hope that I am going to be with her in the end?"

David took a deep breath. "Man, you have to understand that what is yours can never be taken away from you."

Wole nodded. "I know, but this one, she isn't even mine, I am doing everything I can to win her heart, but it's just a waste." His intercom rang. "Tell him I'll be there soon." He said.

"What's up?"

Wole sighed. "I tendered my resignation."

"Wole, you are taking this too far."

He nodded. "I won't be able to survive if she goes back to Tolu, it would be too much for me to take, and the chances are very likely. I can't continue to work here with her."

"Do you love Tola?"

He nodded. "You know I do."

"Then fight for her. Tola is a smart lady, but she also has a very disjointed mind at the moment, and I guess that's why she is doing this. And if you are willing to stay with her through it all, you would have the best of her, man."

Wole sighed. "I don't know, David. The true reason why I came here is because of her, I might as well just operate from my father's firm." He replied, standing up.

"Wole, just remember that whatever you do, you have to consider the hurt you are going to put the both of you through, you are indirectly breaking up with her."

He shook his head. "This isn't my fault."

The door flung open and Tola came in. "Wole, what did you do that for?"

"What?"

She fumed at him. "Mr. Asolo called me to say you tendered in your resignation."

He nodded. "Oh well...I just thought the tension between us needs to be eased off a little."

"Wole, you are bad at handling rejection."

He smiled. "Really? So, are you saying you have rejected me?"

She took a deep breath. "I haven't said so." She noticed David's presence. "Hi, David." He waved back with a corny smile. "Could we discuss this in my office, Wole?"

He nodded, "After you, please." Wole closed the door after her. "Tola, I don't want this rift between us..."

"But you are creating it...you are doing fine here, why mess it up for sentiments?"

He gasped. "Tola, this is you jeopardizing what we have for someone who isn't worth it, and it hurts so much."

"Tolu is sick because of me." she replied, adjusting his tie. "Wole, I am sorry. I don't want to lose, I love you." she muttered. "I was scared when Mr. Asolo called, I had to run down here, Please..."

He took a deep breath. "Stop playing with me, Tola. Please..."

"I am not. I just want to make sure he is well again. Won't you do this for your ex?"

He smiled. "Don't do that, Tola. This is a very difficult case, and you know it."

She nodded. "Okay, I know and I am sorry, but I just want you to understand. Would you do this for me?" I asked batting her eyelashes.

He nodded. "I'll try."

\*\*\*

Ini pulled up some distance from the house but close enough to see the house. She dialed Marcus who answered almost instantly. "Hey."

"Keep the music low, mom...What's up?"

She cleared her throat. "I need you urgently at the agency now." She said, feigning seriousness.

"Okay, I'll be on my way now." He said and hung up. "Mom." He said as he swirled round. "You need to keep the music down, it's so noisy here."

She nodded. "Where are you going?"

"The agency."

She frowned. "What are you always doing in that place?"

"That's where I work, mom."

She nodded. "You better make more money and take us out of this place."

He nodded. "That's why I have to work, for all of us." He said. "Take care of the house. And please, don't go over to the neighbour's place today."

She hissed. "You won't tell me how to live my life."

"I know, but it's important you stay indoors and you know it. Please, Mom."

She nodded. "Fine, I'll do this for you. Have a good time."

He smiled. "See you later." He said, and walked out.

\*\*\*

David slammed his box. "I think this is the last bag."

Oyinkan nodded. "Except the bag for your watches and belts."

He smiled. "I can't forget that here."

She nodded. "Can I at least have the Hublot? I like that one a lot."

"No, thank you."

She smiled. "Okay. Let's come to an agreement, when we go to take the rest of your stuffs from your father's, you could donate some of your shirts for charity's sake."

He wore a smile. "That's fine."

She helped him as they moved the boxes out to the living room. "David, what's up with the sunflower thing?"

He sank into a chair. "Apart from the fact that it is a flower?"

She took her seat beside him. "Yes. David, isn't that name more familiar to you?"

He shook his head. "At first, I thought I knew it so well. But later, I just let go of the thought."

"Well...it reminds me of something," she replied. "And yes, sunflower is a flower, but do you recall that you guys had them in your house back then?"

David shook his head. "No?"

She paused and smiled. "Now that I think of it, your mom loved that flower, right?"

He stared at her. "Sunflower... Yes, she did."

"Do you have any painting of your mom?"

David scoffed. "No, but we should at least have one at my father's house."

She nodded. "I think we should go and check that now."

"Okay, let's go." David said, pulling the bags out.

The journey didn't take too long as David drove at a high speed. "Let's go upstairs."

A maid met them in the hallway. "Good evening, Mr. Coker."

"Yes, is my father in?"

She shook her head in disagreement. "No, he has been out since morning."

David nodded. "Come on, Oyinkan. Let's go." They walked upstairs and unlocked the door to his mother's studio. "No one has been here in years."

Oyinkan bumped into a table. "Ouch!"

"You alright?" David asked, as he turned on the light. "This place is like a museum." He said, and walked round.

She limped across the room. "David, do you remember anything from when you were a boy?"

He crashed into a chair. "I was an awful son." He said as he took a deep breath. "I should have loved her more, kissed her when she was all wet and smelly. My father, he turned me into this."

Oyinkan knelt before him. "David, you are a nice man. You are better now, looking at how you tried helping people, you've really matured."

He smiled. "Thank you. Anyway, let's stop moping and find some conviction."

She smiled. "We won't have to look too much, I guess." She said, as she brought down two pictures. "Your mother signs her paintings with sunflower. *Elizabeth Sunflower.*"

David gasped as his heart raced staring at the signature on the paintings.

\*\*\*

Ini stepped out of her car after she watched Marcus' mom leave the house. She pushed the door open and walked in. She picked up a picture frame with Marcus and his mom in it. "Cute." She said, and dropped it.

"Why didn't Marcus want me to ever know his house? So I won't know he stays with his mom." She laughed, as she talked to herself. "What a kid."

She walked round the living room. "It is beautiful and simple here. Nothing complicated."

Then she heard tiny squeals. "Where's that coming from?" she said to herself as she walked closer in the direction of the noise. The squeals got louder now and sounded like a cry. "A hostage?" she thought as she approached a room with its door half-open.

The cry was more audible now and it didn't sound like a hostage, it sounded like a genuine cry. She opened the door and stared in as the cry was pronounced. It was the cry of a baby. She walked over to the cot and saw a baby girl crying. She gasped.



## 18

Ini stared the baby carefully. "You are so beautiful." She said as she touched her cheek. The baby smiled and chuckled lightly. "You must like me, right?" Ini asked and lifted the baby out of the cot. The baby stopped crying once Ini carried her. "I am not your mother oh..." Ini said, as she walked back to the living room. She took her seat as she held the baby carefully in her hand. "Is Marcus your daddy?" She scoffed. "Of course, I don't expect a response from you. What do you know?" The baby resumed the cry. Ini smiled. "Is it because of my question? Na wa o." She cried harder and harder. "Ah...stop crying na." She smiled at the baby with her teeth wide out, and the baby screamed more. "Stupid me!" she said, as she smacked her forehead. She dropped the baby kindly on the chair and made her way into the kitchen.

\*\*\*

Bolu Coker sipped his drink as Tunji paced around the room. "You had better calm down, Tunji."

"How can you expect me to calm down? Adeoye won't fire Kimberly."

Bolu sighed. "You caused this, that man didn't know that you are Kimberly's father and there was no reason to tell him that. If not for your genius idea of trying to have your own daughter fired, we wouldn't be feeling this way."

Tunji hissed. "Spare me that, Bolu. You know that I don't want my daughter under any circumstance to be a writer, and I would ensure that she quits that lame dream."

"If I were you, I would forget chasing Kimberly and we would go after more important issues. For example, I suggest we put Wura in the same facility where Elizabeth is, I can't remember where I dumped her, but I know if I make some calls, I would remember the place."

Tunji shook his head. "Bolu, I can't do that to Wura."

"Look here, Tunji. A woman, no, a professor in her right senses attempts suicide. Don't you think she is on her way to insanity? I suggest we keep her away, so she doesn't even spoil our plans."

Tunji sighed. "I don't want Kimberly to hate me."

Bolu hissed. "Tunji, stop acting like a coward, you have taken bolder steps in life. What do you care if Kimberly hates you? It is for her good. When we amass all the necessary wealth, our children till their last generations would have enough to live off."

Tunji nodded. "Bolu, I don't want my daughter to hate me."

"I am at loggers with David, and do I care? No. In the end, he'll come to his senses and apologize. I am still his father after all."

Tunji took a deep breath. "Did David forgive you for keeping his mother away?"

Bolu smiled. "David supported me." He rose to his feet. "David has always been a smart boy, he knew that Elizabeth was a hindrance to his success. If she had been around him, he wouldn't have achieved this much. It is thanks to me that David is now a man worthy of admiration, it is just unfortunate that he is becoming a softie again."

"What do you mean?"

Bolu sighed. "I think he is falling in love with your daughter."

"Shouldn't that be good?"

Bolu shook his head. "They don't need love. When you want to build an empire of ruthless business people, you have to keep love out of the way."

Tunji shook his head furiously. "No. If they want to fall in love, we should allow them. Bolu, maybe they would have a better life than ours."

Bolu eyeballed Tunji coldly. "You have grown weak, Tunji. Very weak."

\*\*\*

I stared at Mr. Adeoye. "I am sorry, sir."

"Kimberly, there is no crime in saying who your parents are. They are appreciated by the society."

I nodded. "I am sorry, Sir." I repeated.

He smiled. "You don't have to be sorry, things are clearer to me than you think." He rose to his feet. "So, are we going to jump?"

"What do you mean?"

He relaxed against the table. "All or nothing. We are entering your story and we would make it the headline. Hopefully, it forces the board to reconsider."

I nodded. "Hopefully."

He smiled. "Kimberly, even if we lose this place, I want you to know that I am proud to have met you."

I smiled with more confidence. "We won't." I cleared my throat. "I am optimistic."

"I think that's all, go and put everything in place for that write up." He said.

I rose to my feet. "Thank you, sir." I said, and walked out. Ben was waiting right outside. "Hey." I said as I walked along.

He followed briskly. "Kimberly, how is your mom?"

"She is better." I replied as I pushed my door open.

He took his seat. "So, should we be expecting a jaw-breaking write-up that would save us all?"

"Why are you asking me?" I asked, taking my seat.

He smiled. "You are the writer."

I took a deep breath. "I'll do my best, Ben."

"You had better." He said, feigning seriousness. Seeing that his joke fell flat, he laughed. "Just kidding." I fixed my gaze on my laptop.

"Kimberly, do you know who I ran into here today?"

I didn't reply.

"Kim?" he slammed my table. "Kim"

I scoffed. "What is it?"

He took a deep breath. "Your father was here."

I paused as I stared at him. "My father?"

He nodded. "Yes. I met the renowned Professor Bankole here today."

"Are you sure you aren't mistaken? My father won't be here under any circumstance."

He nodded. "I am very sure. He came here, and I guess he saw Mr. Adeoye."

\*\*\*

David stared hard at the painting. "Elizabeth Sunflower."

"Yes, that's her pen name or what do we call it?" Oyinkan asked, with a smile.

His face fell. "I think Kimberly has found my mother."

Oyinkan took her seat. "What do you mean?"

He cleared his throat. "Kimberly has a friend at that home, she goes by the name Elizabeth, and today I got to know that her last name is Sunflower."

She shook her head. "You have to be kidding, right?"

"I am not a hundred percent sure, but I can't be wrong, right? I saw the Mother from the home there."

She smiled. "David, if this is true, we are in luck."

"What do you mean?"

She tapped him. "Why don't we use Kimberly to lead us to her then we can confirm it for ourselves."

"How?"

She shrugged. "How did you find out about her?"

"She is currently hospitalized, so I guess Kim would be seeing her soon, maybe we could go together."

She nodded. "Perfect!"

David took a deep breath. "What if she isn't my mother?"

Oyinkan shrugged. "We don't know yet, we are only taking our chances. So, are you going to call Kimberly or what?"

"I don't know."

\*\*\*

"Zoommmm.....come on already." Ini said, as she tried driving the food towards the baby's mouth. "Are you really not going to eat? I am the only one who cares for you. The old woman left you and hasn't even returned."

The baby chuckled softly

"Seems like you are used to her leaving you alone, right?" Ini asked, laughing. "Now, let's try this." She attempted to feed the baby again and this time it was successful. "Bravo! Now, that's what I am talking about."

The door flung open and Marcus' mother came in. "EH! Who are you? Kidnapper!!!"

"Calm down, Mama." Ini retorted, unnerved. "Why would you leave a baby in this house all by herself?"

She stared aggressively at Ini. "*My name na Agnes and I go show you say u no fit come inside person house thief pikin.*" She rambled in her thick Pidgin accent.

Ini dropped the baby kindly and she soon started to cry. "Are you Marcus' mother?"

"Yes, na me born my pikin."

Ini nodded and pulled out her phone. "I would be dialling Marcus this instant and of course, maybe the local police for this unfair treatment towards this little baby."

"*Na my pikin's pikin.*" She yelled and reached for Ini's blouse. "*You no go comot for here today. Na the whole area go know say you come thief pikin.*"

Ini dodged her swiftly, allowing her plunge into the nearby chair. "Are you alright?" she asked as Agnes yelled out in pain. "Are you hurt?"

"*Yeh!!! Ewo!!! My back o! This witch has broken my back! I go kill you today, allow me stand up.*"

Ini shook her head and picked her bag from the chair. "You should really take care of this child and never leave her by herself."

The door opened and Marcus came in. "Mama, I think I forgot..." He paused looking startled as he saw Ini.

\*\*\*

Wole pulled up in the garage. "Are you sure about this? I don't want to pressurize you."

"I am here already."

He took a deep breath. "I would be glad to have you living with me, but don't make it look like an assurance that you won't run off to Tolu."

"Wole, I want you to trust me a little more. Maybe if I stayed with you, it could help."

She pushed the door open and stepped out of the car.

He opened the trunk and picked her bag. "Tola, we don't need to go through this."

"Wole, are you showing me in or not?"

He took a deep breath. "This way, please."

Tola walked behind him as they walked into his house. He stopped in front of a room. "Why are we stopping?"

"This is the guest room." He said, as he pushed the door open.

She scoffed as she came in after him. "Guest room?"

He nodded with a smile. "From the first day I set my eyes on you, your figure and everything, I swore to respect you until the day we are married."

"Married?" she laughed.

He nodded. "Yes. I pray I can marry you someday, but I won't be able to keep that vow if I see you every time beside me."

She smiled and walked up to him. She tiptoed as she played with his tie. "Why are you such a coward, Wole?"

He clenched his fists and stepped back. "Tola, I would call someone to help you settle in."

She bit her lip. "I want you."

"Urh."

She placed her lips against his half-open lips and kissed him tenderly. His heart raced firmly and she could almost feel his heartbeat with so much tenacity. She undid the first button of his shirt and he held her hand as he stepped back. "I am sorry." He said, and walked out.

"Seriously?" She said to herself with a smile.

\*\*\*

Bolu ended his call. "Tunji, I just got off the phone with one of my boys at the hospital and he said Wura is doing better." He took his seat. "We should take advantage of this, and dump her with Elizabeth, I am sure the poor fool is bored."

"That is if she isn't dead. Have you ever thought of the possibility of her death? When last did you check on her?"

Bolu took a deep breath. "Truth be told, I have forgotten the name of the place where I have her, but I know it is here in Nigeria." He cleared his throat. "That's the only way that I have been able to hide her from David. I am sure that inquisitive bastard must be searching all facilities abroad by now."

"I thought you said David supported you? Why are painting him bad?"

Bolu hissed. "You irritate me a lot, Tunji Bankole. We are all the same, there's no painting here. David just needs a little thickening, he is veering off the path I trained him, and I think it is because of your daughter."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

Bolu smiled. "You remember how that girl with cancer died?"

Tunji plunged into his throat. "If you touch my daughter, I will ensure you die a miserable death."

Bolu pushed him aside. "You fool! Remember we both finished off that girl, don't step on me. We would go down together."

"I didn't want us to kill her."

Bolu laughed wickedly. "Tunji, your intention doesn't count. Even in the court of law, it won't."

"What if I tell them you bribed the forensics?"

Bolu smiled. "Tunji Bankole, keep to your own end of the deal, buy off Millaroca and let's make some money." His face was stern now as he continued. "I would pretend as if your threats

mean nothing, but if you step on me, Wura won't join Elizabeth; we would bury her next week." he concluded and walked out.

Tunji picked his phone and dialed. "This is Professor Bankole, I would love to talk to the commissioner of Police."

\*\*\*

I took a deep breath as Ben pulled up in front of the house. I could see David waiting at the door.

"What is he doing here?" Ben asked.

I stared at him. "Thanks for the ride." I said, and stepped out. "Hi, David." I said, with a smile.

He smiled and kissed me. "Hey...how are you?" he asked.

"Kimberly, would the article be ready tomorrow?" Ben asked.

I rolled my eyes before I turned to stare at him. "Of course, Ben."

He shook his head and walked away into his car and drove off.

David held my hand. "What's between you and that guy?"

"You know...he likes me, but I like you." I said, with a smile.

He nodded and walked up to the door. I opened the door. "Seems like we are alone. No sign of Ini or Tola." I said as I dropped my bag on the chair. "Do you want a drink or a quick fix of food or something?"

He cleared his throat. "Food is good."

"Of course." I snarled. "Food is good." I left for the kitchen, fetched the frying pan and some large eggs. I turned to see David lingering by the kitchen door, he smiled. "How long have you been there?" I asked. He didn't say a word, he kept smiling. "What?"

He didn't say a word. I shook my head and focused on slicing the plantains. I closed my eyes as I felt his hand around my waist. "I love you, Kim." He said softly.

"Me too..." I replied, numbly.



He used his finger to pull my hair back as he kissed my neck. *Jesus! I would never wear perfumes on my neck anymore!* "Kim, I love you."

I wriggled gently from his grip. "Are you alright?" I asked comically. "You have said 'I love you like twice'"

He smiled. "Yeah...I know."

*I mean, even if I was going to lose my virginity to the man I love, why would it be in the kitchen? Anyway, I believe in the bed is best undefiled, so David had better wait!* I reprimanded him in my heart as I turned him gently back to the living room. "You would have your dinner soon." I emphasized and returned to the kitchen. "Jesus, that was close." I repeated the sign of the cross. It's not like I particularly believed I would be shielded from 'evils', speaking in context of what might have happened or might happen, but I could use the extra precaution, right?

I returned to the dining room with fried plantains and fried eggs and placed them on the dining table. "David?" There was no response. "David?" I called again.

I finally checked in the living room and he was already asleep. "Seriously?" I tapped him gently. "David." There was no response so I smacked him hard. "Stand up."

He held his head as he stared at me. "That was unfair."

"You faked it, right?"

He smiled. "Yeah...what would you do about that?" he asked, as he jumped up. "Where's the food?"

I led him to the dining table. "Here you go."

He took his seat. "Bless this food, Lord." He dug his fork into the food and started to eat, much to my amazement.

\*\*\*

Marcus was quiet as they ate dinner. He kept his gaze on Ini; the table was almost silent until his mother broke the silence. "Marcus! Is this the woman you claim to be in love with?"

Ini stared at him with the 'What is she saying?' look. He cleared his throat. "Mom, eat your food. I have to take my guest out now."

"EH...she had better not be the one oh! This one that looks like something that has not eaten because she must be a model." She turned her gaze firmly on Ini. "Are you a model?"

Ini scoffed. "I have been here all the while when you spoke to your son as though I was absent. You might as well face him and ask all the questions."

"Marcus, this one is rude. Thank God you forgot something and had to come back home. She would have beaten me up."

Marcus placed his hand on Ini's. "Please, show some respect for my mother."

Ini nodded. "Of course, Marcus." She drew her chair back. "I'll be in the car. It's parked outside near the street's transformer." She said and took her plate to the kitchen. "Nice meeting you, ma. Try not to leave a baby alone next time." She said, and walked out.

Marcus stared at his mother. "Mama, did you leave Ini alone?"

Agnes mumbled over a few words. "I went to have a few drinks with Uzo's mother. Her son, Uzo, just arrived from Europe...erm...he was in erm...I think she said Burundi."

Marcus hissed. "Burundi? So, Burundi is in Europe, mama?"

"Yes, that's what Patricia told me."

Marcus laughed. "You friends really enjoy deceiving you, mama. Burundi is here in Africa." He rose to his feet. "So you left Ini in to go have drinks? Mama, what if Ini hadn't come in here? So, my daughter would just be left to herself? You should be grateful to Ini." He said and walked out.

He opened the door of the car and took his seat. "How did you know my house?"

Ini stared at him. "Marcus, you couldn't hide it forever, could you?"

"What?"

She scoffed. "So, Chioma was with a child and left her with you?"

He relaxed into the chair. "You had no right to trace me home."

"How long would you have kept this from me? I am your friend, Marcus. You have a baby, and you hid her from me, why?"

He blinked. "You want to know why?"

She nodded. "Yes, I want to know why."

"Because you are selfish, you only care about yourself, if you knew I had her, would you have let me work with you?" he paused. "You would have ridiculed me, laughed about it, made me feel little."

She brushed some hair from her face. "What are you saying, Marcus?"

"Exactly what you can hear. I told you I love you, how did you react? You made me feel inferior, like I didn't deserve to love you, and I know I am not worth it. But would you even let me try? How would I then tell you about my daughter, and you wouldn't judge me?"

Ini took a deep breath. "Marcus, you don't know me."

"Really? Tell me about you. What else don't I know? You are too good for everyone else except yourself. You are selfish, Ini Obong."

She slammed the steering. "Get out!"

He scoffed. "Exactly, face it, you don't like who you are. I suggest you change."

Ini wiped a tear drop from her eye. "Get out of my car." She yelled. He nodded. She pushed the lock open and pushed Marcus out as she sped off.

\*\*\*

Tola opened the door to the study and stood by the doorway in her bathrobe. "Wole, did you actually run away from me?"

He cleared his throat and adjusted in his chair. "I had to take my bath."

"And now that you have had your bath?"

Wole clenched his fists. "Tola, I am taking you home tomorrow."

She smiled. "Are you ever gonna marry me?"

"I want to. I pray you allow me."

She shook her head in disagreement. "I don't think I want to marry you."

His jaw dropped. "Why?"

"Wole, you are scared of me." she replied.

He shook his head in disagreement. "I am not; I just don't want us to do anything we would regret."

"We are adults, Wole. What could we possibly regret? What's the worst that could happen?" she asked as she paced around in the study.

He scratched his head. "You could get pregnant."

"Exactly. I am not too young to be pregnant."

He nodded. "I know, but I want us to be a real couple in the sight of God and man before anything could happen between us intimately."

She pursed her lips and sat on his table. "I never knew that you were this religious."

He nodded. "It is not about being religious. I won't dishonour any woman until I make her my wife."

She smiled. "I can't believe this. I have to buy lingerie."

He chuckled.

\*\*\*

David stacked the dishes as I washed them. "Do you really do things like this?"

"Like dishes?"

I nodded. "Yes, it's really special."

He smiled. "I see...I like helping out."

I nodded. "Good. You are going to make a pretty good husband."

"Nooooo...won't help you do the dishes then." He laughed. I frowned. "Just kidding." He replied.

I smiled and left for the living room. He followed. "How is Elizabeth?"

I stared at him. "Ms. Elizabeth, right? My friend?"

He nodded. "Yes. How is she?"

"She will be better." I replied as I sank into a chair. "Right now, I am more concerned with things at the office. There's going to be a takeover at Millaroca unless we make a major sale before Monday."

He stared at me as he took his seat beside me. "Takeover. Hmmm...I surely have missed a lot since I was suspended." He stretched out and lay on my lap. "Perfect!" he said with some gusto.

I smiled as I played with his hair. "David."

"Yea..." he said, sloppily.

"Do you know who wants to buy Millaroca?"

He shook his head. "I have no idea."

I took a deep breath. "David, Ben said..."

"Ben? What has he got to do with this?" He said, cutting in.

I stared at him with a smile. "You are so jealous, David."

"I am not, I just hate that guy."

I nodded. "But you have no reason to; I only have eyes for you."

He smiled. "That's cheering."

I tapped his head lightly. "Now, just before you interrupted me, Ben said he saw my father at Millaroca."

"Are you sure?"

I nodded. "That's what he said."

He took a deep breath. "Do you think your father is behind it?"

"You tell me. It seems you know him better than I do." I replied, sharply.

He smiled. "Go easy on me." He took a deep breath. "I can find out if it is your dad, if you want me to."

I nodded. "I would love that."

"So, are you going to see Ms. Elizabeth anytime soon?"

I stared at him. "David, why the sudden interest?"

He cleared his throat as he sat up. "Kimberly, I care about you, and I believe that anything that concerns you should also concern me."

I nodded. "That's impressive." I picked up my phone. "I remember you being jealous the last time I spoke about her, so, this is really special."

"Well, I'd do anything for you."

I scoffed. "David, why are you being so nice tonight?" I asked, dialling Tola. He came closer to me. "Hey, I have to make a call." I said, stepping away from him. "Hey Tola!"

"Yea..." she replied, lazily. "What's up?"

I stared at David who was looking at the frames on the wall. "Are you sleeping at the office tonight?"

"No. I am at home."

I gasped. "Home? What home?"

"I am with Wole. I am in his house."

I smiled. "Wow...so, now it's home." I jeered.

"Good night, Kimberly." She said and hung up.

\*\*\*

Tunji Bankole shook hands with the District Head. "Thanks a lot for bringing your boys over."

He nodded. "Anything for a responsible citizen of this country. When the commissioner called, we knew it was very important."

"So, how are they stationed?"

The D.P.O cleared his throat. "We will have two in her room and two outside. Some men are also around the perimeter. We would also be watching video footages provided to us from the hospital. This is a high-class facility, they have many things in place here."

Tunji nodded. "Thank you very much, I just want to take precautions."

"I understand."

The D.P.O turned round. "Good evening, Mr. Coker."

Tunji swallowed hard. Bolu smiled at him. "Is the security tight enough, Tunji? Or do you need more men?"

"No, Mr. Coker. We are competent enough to safeguard Professor Mrs. Bankole."

Bolu nodded. "I bet we can trust in your capacities, right, Mr. Abasi-Itama?"

The D.P.O nodded. "Yes, sirs! I would leave you both." He said, and walked away.

Bolu smiled. "Are you foolish, Tunji?"

"What are you doing here?" Tunji Bankole replied.

Bolu frowned. "I don't appreciate the way you are going about this, and to be honest, my patience is running out."

"Why would you threaten to kill Wura?"

He sighed. "I take it back; can you stop this show here?"

"I don't trust you, Bolu. You said you wouldn't hurt Bola, but she died. I won't take a chance."

Bolu Coker nodded. "That's fine, but I want you to remember that no amount of local police can stop whatever I intend to do, if I would."

"I know. And I will prepare for you." Tunji replied, and walked away.

\*\*\*

Mr. Abasi-Itama took his seat as soon as he returned to the office. "What is it, Sergeant?"  
The sergeant did the customary salute.

"A lady is here to see you."

Mr. Abasi-Itama stared at him. "Who is she?"

The Sergeant checked through the paper with him. "Ms. Ini Obong."

"Ini Obong? Send her in."

The sergeant saluted and left the office.

Ini pushed the door open. "Uncle Eddie."

"You are drunk, again." He said and he helped her to a seat.

She laughed as she snarled. "I just had a few cups, I am not drunk. I drove myself down here."

He stared at her. "Ini? What is your problem, child? How long would you continue to act like a juvenile?"

"But I didn't die." She replied, sloppily.

He looked at the clock. "It is past ten. Why did you come here?"

"I had nowhere else to go, Uncle Eddie."

He nodded and dialed. "Please send a hot cup of coffee here." He dropped the intercom. "Do you think your parents would be proud to see you living like this?"

"I have a car, I stay in a very classy apartment and I earn decent money."

The door opened and the sergeant placed a cup of coffee before Ini. "Thank you." she replied and sipped carefully. "It is really hot."

Mr. Abasi-Itama nodded. "That's exactly what you need, something really hot to steam your brain back to its default settings." He opened a case file. "Are you ever going to be sober?"

"I was sober until this evening." She lied.

He nodded. "What you are saying is that someone pushed you a bit and you resorted to alcohol? Ini, this is no way to live."

She nodded as she finished the coffee. "Uncle Eddie, thank you very much."

"You are welcome, it's obvious you were just tipsy then, I expected a show from you."

She smiled. "I told you that I drove down here."

He nodded. "So, why exactly are you here? I mean, you won't just come to see me because you had a few drinks."

She sat up. "You are right." She firmed up and cleared her throat. "My name is Ini Obong, and I am here to surrender myself to the law."



## 19

Mr. Abasi-Itama stared at Ini carefully. "How many bottles of alcohol did you have?"

Ini took a deep breath. "Mr. Abasi-Itama, I would love to be taken to the interrogation room for proper questioning, I want to report a crime."

He slammed the table. "Stop this nonsense, Ini."

"Why are you not going to have my statement? I want to help the police with an investigation."

He took a deep breath. "Tell me what happened."

Ini rubbed her forehead. "It is about the attack on Shola Jones' skin."

"The Model at your agency?"

She nodded. "Yes, Shola Jones." She took a deep breath and continued. "I was the one who prompted the attack on her skin. I changed the cream."

"You did what?" A perplexed Eddie Abasi-Itama asked.

Ini nodded convincingly. "I changed Shola's cream."

"Do you know the gravity of what you are telling me? You are likely to face jail term, Ini."

She nodded. "I know."

He nodded. "Continue."

"I had carefully studied the cream she's been using for a while, so I made use of exactly the same cream vessel, but a different content." She paused to catch some air. "She was in the bathroom having her bath when I changed the cream."

He stared at her. "Ini, so you are saying you were solely responsible for this attack on Shola's skin? No accomplices or third party?"

She nodded. "Yes sir, I did it all by myself. I was the only one who carried out the attack."

He took a deep breath. "Why are you coming to me now?"

She smiled. "There is no peace for the wicked, is there?"

He smiled. "Ini, you know this is dangerous right?" he said, bringing out a file. "I can give you a statement form now, and you would write your report, or we can ignore this until someone comes forward."

Ini scoffed. "More like postponing the judgment day? Forget it, Uncle Eddie, I want this done now." She replied with a smile.

He smiled. "Now, tell me the genuine reason why you decided to turn yourself in."

"I am being blackmailed."

He nodded. "I thought as much."

She raised an eyebrow. "Blackmail is a crime too, right? There's a punishment for it too, right?"

He nodded. "Yes, it has its own case of severity."

She smiled. "Okay, Shola Jones who was the victim of my attack is blackmailing me, and she has received some money from me."

He smiled. "Ini Obong, I just knew you weren't a saint after all. So, what do you want?"

"I have to report, I just need the crime to be taken up."

He nodded. "But you know that Shola has to press charges."

"I will make her press charges." She replied and sent a text from her phone. "I am going to push her to the wall so she can press charges."

He scoffed. "Do you have any evidence?"

She nodded. "Of course, Uncle. I have payment vouchers and a contract signed."

"There is a witness."

She nodded. "My ex-manager is a witness."

"Ex-manager? Does this mean that he knew about it?"

She shook her head in disagreement. "He is totally unaware of the situation, but I am going to fire him in the morning, he has become very useless to me."

Mr. Abasi-Itama took a deep breath. "Ini, I want you to think carefully about what you are going to do before you do it?" He drew his chair closer. "This could ruin your career."

"I know, but I am ready for it." She replied. '*Shola is going down too.*' She said in her heart.

He nodded. "Okay, so, are you going to drop your statement before you leave? Or would you be back tomorrow?"

"I'll drop it now."

\*\*\*

I stared at David who was fast asleep in my bed. David said he couldn't drive back so I ushered him to my room. I fixed my gaze on the laptop and went through my article for the umpteenth time. '*It has to be perfect*', I thought.

After my last and final read, I sent the article to Millaroca's email address; they would work round the clock to ensure its publication. I closed the laptop and placed it on the side table.

I stared at David's body, it was perfect. I found myself running my eyes through his bare chest, I felt the impulse to touch his chest and I did. He moved and I took my hand off him. I took a deep breath and then kissed his lips lightly. David is a real hunk! I shut my eyes and rebuked myself. '*You shouldn't be doing this...*' I said repeatedly.

I grabbed my pillow and left for the living room.

\*\*\*

My hard-earned sleep was soon cut short. I heard the doorbell ring endlessly. I groaned, hissed, kicked before I finally pulled myself from the couch. It was bad enough that I had to sleep on the couch, now the sleep had been terminated. "Who is it?" I shouted angrily as I took a peek through the peephole. Ini's and Henry's heads bulged through it. I took a deep breath and pushed the door open.

"Sorry to disturb your sleep." Ini said as she walked in. "I didn't take my key." She added quickly.

Henry smiled. "You are hot!" I stared at him and then looked at myself. I was wearing my varsity sweat shirt and socks on my feet. I hissed and turned away, *what was he looking at?* "I could kill to have you right now?"

"Are you alright?" I asked and I repositioned myself on the couch and drew my blanket over my skin.

Ini stared at me and looked up. "I think he's hotter!" I stared at her confusingly. She then winked and raised her eyebrow. "Him."

I turned to see David standing down the hallway with his hands in his trousers and his bare chest. "Oh..."

"Excuse me David, but you are damn hot. Wow! Why did Kim leave the action?"

I jumped up from the couch. "Ini, what are you saying?"

Henry cleared his throat. "Erm...I'll see you guys tomorrow. Can I use your car, Ini?" he asked.

She nodded and handed him the keys. "Thank you, and drive safely." She said as she shut the door after him. "So? Why is this hunk standing here?" she asked, staring at David.

I cleared my throat. "I fell asleep doing some work here." I said pointing to my surrounding, but seeing that I had no work material around, I bit my lips and smiled. "...Or not." I added quickly.

"That doesn't answer my question, Kimberly. You are alone with a full-fleshed man, and not just any type of man, a really sexy man, and that is dangerous, my dear." Ini said, nodding her head. "Pure sarcasm."

David smiled. "Welcome."

She nodded and walked in. I took a deep breath.

"Why did you leave the room?"

I stuttered over a few words. "Erm...Ah...I...erm...I wanted to watch TV." I said hastily.

He walked over. "TV? Kim, try another lie. You kissed me, I know."

I buried my head in my hand. "I am sorry, I didn't want to take advantage of you."

He burst into a horrid laugh. "Kimberly, I am yours."

I stared at him. "Really?"

He took my hand and placed it on his chest close to his heart. "You have me, Kimberly. I am yours."

\*\*\*

I walked into the hospital and was restrained by a police officer. "Who are you?" he asked.

I scoffed. "My mom is in there." I replied. A man approached us. "Who are you?" I asked.

The man stared at the policeman and nodded. "It's fine, let her in."

I shook my head and walked into her room. "How many of you are guarding her and from what?" I shouted as I sighted two officers in her room. Dad came out from the bathroom. "You!"

"Kimberly, I can explain."

I scoffed. "You are a failure, Dad."

He took a deep breath and signalled to the policemen to excuse us. They walked out briskly. "Kim, don't talk to me like that."

I nodded. "Really? You led mom to this point, you failed us, Dad."

He nodded. "Say whatever you want, Kimberly Bankole, but I only want what's best for us all."

I scoffed. "Really? Did you not hit my mom?"

He took a deep breath. "Wura provoked me."

My emotions were getting in the way as I fought back tears in my eyes. "You are an animal. You have been hitting her since I was little, and then she would have to put so much makeup on to cover up." I said, raising my voice. "She has been covering up your mess since I was child, she wanted to protect me." I paused to catch my breath. "Seeing how much I respected my father, the poor woman was hanging on." I stared at my mom's unconscious body. "What was she hanging on to? You? You are worthless" I hadn't completed my statement when dad's palm sank into my face. I crashed into a chair.

He took a deep breath. "Just shut up! Shut up! Shut up!!! Shut up!!!!!!!" he screamed. "Wura won't stop! Elizabeth didn't stop! Bola didn't stop! You women are all fools! You keep provoking men,

and yet you are nothing but weak. Weak and insignificant. Weak and weak!" he shouted, kicked my chair hard and stormed out.

Tears rolled down my red eyes as I tried to absorb the fact that my father had just slapped me hard, but what I couldn't understand was why he called names. I pulled myself up from the chair and chased after him. I grabbed him by the shirt as I met him. "Who is Elizabeth? Who is Bola?" I screamed.

He stared at me and yanked my hand off his shirt. "This is a hospital." I grabbed him again and this time I crashed badly to the ground from his second hit. "Thank God this is a hospital." He said and walked out.

I was helped up by a policeman. "Leave me alone!" I shouted as I balanced on my feet.

\*\*\*

Tola stared at Tolu as he wrestled with keeping his eyes open. "Don't stress yourself."

He nodded. "Tola, I missed you."

She smiled. "I know." He smiled back. "But, I didn't miss you." his smile faded as her words sank in. "What did you think? That I'd spend my life loving you." she took a deep breath. "Tolu, it's over between us."

He cleared his throat as he tried sitting up. "Tola, I am really sorry."

"Tolu, I forgive you, but, I am not taking you back. It is not in my plans."

He stared at her. "You are the only one for me."

She smiled. "I know." She drew her chair closer. "I have paid your hospital bills, keep the car and the flat." She said, standing up.

He held her hand. "You can't leave me like this."

She scoffed. "Of course not, I dropped some *peanuts* in your bank account too, I am done with you." she said as she walked out.

Wole was waiting in the hallway. He wore a smile as Tola came out. "How did it go?"

She took a deep breath. "I told him that I was done."

He kissed her forehead. "It's okay, Tola. You can always come and say hi."

She shook her head. "No, I don't want to give him the wrong ideas."

Wole smiled. "That's fine. Shall we?" he said, leading the way out. "David is moving into the house today."

She smiled. "For real? That man doesn't spare a second in showing his mega billions."

"David worked hard for it, right from when he was a teenager, I never liked him then." He replied, opening the door for her.

She winked. "Jealous?"

He hissed. "No, just pissed." He laughed. "So, should I drop you off with the ladies?" he asked, closing the car door.

She smiled. "I am staying with you, coward."

"Lord have mercy." He muttered.

\*\*\*

I took a deep breath as I nursed my cheek. There was a knock on the door. "Great!" I muttered. The knock came again. "Come in."

Ben strolled in with his hands in his pockets. "Hey beautiful..." he stressed the 'ful' part and I could bet it was because of my face, there was a tiny bruise on it. "What happened to your face?"

"Just a tiny accident."

He nodded. "David hit you, right?"

I scoffed. "You hate David so much, right?"

He slammed the table hard. "That idiot! How dare he touch you?"

I slammed the table. "Can you stop? It is my business whatever happens with me."

He nodded. "You are kidding me, right? This guy is hitting you because he thinks you have no one who cares for you."

The intercom rang. "Hello sir."

"Have you seen the magazine yet?"

I shook my head in disagreement. "No sir, it is due to come in..." I pulled my sleeves up to check my wristwatch. "In fifteen minutes, sir."

"I have a copy and I need to see you now." The line went dead and my face went stone. Mr. Adeoye didn't sound well. I took a deep breath as I pushed back my chair and rose to my feet.

Ben fumed. "Kim, why are you doing this to yourself? I love you, why do you want to be with David?"

I smiled. "I love him." I said and turned to walk away. He grabbed my hand and I yanked it furiously from his grip. "Ben, it's a shame you want to hit David, but go and hit my father, he hit me." I said and stormed out.

I caught my breath as I knocked and turned the door knob to Mr. Adeoye's office. His face was sad. *OH no...it is over!* I took a deep breath and bowed my head. "I am sorry, sir."

He nodded. "Of course." He sighed and motioned to a chair. "Sit."

I took my seat. "Where do we go from here?"

He laughed. "Where do YOU go from here?" I blinked as the words sank. I was the one chasing a career, Mr. Adeoye had had the best part of life. Dad's deadline was closing in on me, and we had signed an agreement. I took a deep breath as I braced to answer his question. "Ah...wait, I have this *Chamdor* I think we should drink." He said standing up as he fetched the bottle from his fridge. "You know there was this woman in the bible who called her son and they ate their last meal and waited for death, so I said to myself this morning, Adeoye, you will call Kimberly and you will toast to the ruins of Millaroca."

I watched as Mr. Adeoye poured my glass carefully. He smiled as he passed me the glass. "Cheers!" he said, and returned to his seat. "So, tell me Kimberly, where would you go from here?"

I took a deep breath. "Sir...I don't know."

He nodded. "You better do, child. When stardom stares you in the face, you have to know what's next."

I stared at him trying to place his last words. "Sir?"

He smiled. "The board will re-vote, congratulations!"

"What?"

\*\*\*



David threw his phone on the table. "Dad, what is this?"

Bolu smiled as he stared at the phone. "I see you got my text, MTN is really superb these days; the speed and all." He smiled wider. "Did the network also hasten your speed here?"

David slammed the table. "Stop it! This isn't funny. How dare you threaten Kim's life?"

He gasped. "Did I?" he grinned. "I only sent a text reminding you of the unfortunate death of that lady and how people that are close get hurt. Did it sound like a threat?"

David shook his head. "Dad, you are irredeemable." He ran his finger into his forehead. "This time, I would defy you."

"You already did." Bolu replied, standing up. "There is a way to save this situation."

David raised an eyebrow. "Really?"

"KILL YOUR EMOTIONS FOR KIMBERLY, NO ONE EVER GOT SUCCESSFUL LOVING TOO MUCH!"

David scoffed. "What are you saying? I love Kimberly and nothing can change that."

Bolu shook his head in disagreement. "You don't. Maybe you are fascinated by her beauty and charm. She is intelligent, so that attracts any sensible man, but you don't love her." He pointed at David confidently. "You once told me that she is not your type, remember? I begged you to agree to her."

David laughed. "So you fell for that? I have been crazy about her since we were kids, and of course, I couldn't admit to being in love, could I?"

Bolu sank into a chair. "You are a failure, David Coker."

"No, I failed you. I didn't fail myself." He replied, and fetched a white envelope from his pocket and placed it on the table. "That is my resignation. I would be back to fight for my mother's company."

Bolu laughed so hard that he almost fell off his chair. "Oh my God! David, you have some serious guts. You dare resign?" he smiled. "David you are responsible for kicking your mother out, you are also evil, don't think you are a saint."

"I have resigned." David said, as he adjusted his blazer. "And, I would be back."

Bolu nodded. "I would be waiting for you." David nodded and turned away but was stopped in his track by his father's next statement. "By the way David, I love your new house, it is antique." David turned angrily. "Nice garden too." Bolu concluded with a smile.

\*\*\*

"Thank you." I said to the nurse, as I took my seat near Elizabeth. I held her fragile hand. "Hi." I said, with a smile.

She smiled tiredly. "Kim, how are you?"

"Very well, and you?"

She sighed. "I am better."

"What happened?"

She shrugged. "I got worse." She turned to the other side and coughed. "I have a gift for you, Mother Francesca brought it."

I smiled. "You shouldn't have bothered."

She shook her head. "Those who make us happy deserve our thanks." She tried to bend to pick a bag, but I did that swiftly and handed her the bag. "Thank you." she said as she collected the bag. She pulled out a wrapped painting. "I have had this painting for the last twelve years, i have always kept it clean. It is the last painting of my son before he died." She said, as she unveiled it.

"Why are you giving it to me?"

She sighed as she cleaned the surface. "My son threw it away, this was the first painting that David said wasn't beautiful." She said sadly as she handed it to me. "I loved that painting. I did it when he was reading in the study, and my son had become too classy too early."

I stared at the painting. The boy's face was blurry but his clothes were all sharply done.

"Why is his face blurred?"

She touched the face carefully. "I decided to fade it, it meant to say he was drifting away, I presented it to him on his birthday and he threw it at me. He said, 'this isn't beautiful'. My heart bled that day. I knew I had lost him, it didn't take long before his father kicked me away."

My heart broke. "How could anyone's child be like that?" I asked as I marvelled at a priceless work of art. "Your son's name was David?" I asked. She nodded. "My fiancé is David." I said.

She smiled. "That's nice. If it is not too awkward, why don't you give it to him?"

"I think I will give him." I replied. "Sometimes, I feel David is so lost, missing someone so badly and I just want to reach out to that part in his heart, but it is really locked away. I wish I could help him."

She rubbed my forehead. "That's sad. This painting may torment him, don't give him." She shrugged.

\*\*\*

I stepped out of the cab and stood before David's gate. "This is beautiful." I said, and stared at my phone to confirm the address. "Of course, this has to be it." I pressed the bell.

A man in a smart uniform approached the gate, he opened it without questioning me. "Welcome ma'am." He said, reaching for my bag.

"No, thank you." I said and held on to the bag. The man escorted me to the door. "Thank you." I said as he opened the door and turned back. I walked into the house unable to close my mouth yet. This is the good life! Not like I haven't seen grande buildings and all, but being antique with so many old designs, this place is different.

David stood before me with a champagne bottle and two glasses. He bowed in a French way. "Welcome to our villa, my queen."

I chuckled softly. "David?"

He nodded with a smile revealing his baby dimple. "Do you love it?"

I stared at him hard. "Perfecto!"

He nodded and ushered me to a seat. "Please sit." I took my seat and he took his beside me as he poured the wine glass. "Here you go, babe."

"Thank you."

He raised his glass for the toast. "To us?"

"To us." I replied as we clinked. I sipped my drink and dropped the glass kindly beside the table. "Congratulations, it is a beautiful house."

He smiled. "It is our home. I want us to live here together, and forever." He said, and leaned over to kiss me.

Every moment I spent with David was beautiful; he kissed tenderly and made me special with every word of his. I stared at his eyes and even though they were lit up, I could still see his sorrow. I stroked his hair. "David, why won't you let me in?"

He took a deep breath. "On what?" he asked quietly. "Don't ruin this moment."

I smiled. "I am sorry, but I feel you are hurting too much David, just tell me what it is, we could go through it together."

"You would hate me if I told you."

I shook my head in disagreement. "I could never hate you. I can't be without you. I won't hate you, just tell me."

He took a deep breath. "Where do I start? Kim, I can't do this." He said, standing up. He accidentally hit the bag I brought and the painting dropped. "What's this?" he said, picking up the bag.

"It is a gift for you. Maybe you can hang it somewhere." I said and sipped my drink.

He started to unwrap it. "Thank you."

I smiled. "My friend sent it to you."

He stared. "Who's that?" he stared at the painting and dropped it immediately. He panted heavily and crashed into the chair.

I rushed to him. "David! David!!" I tapped him as he struggled to stare at me. "I know the painting is painful. I am sorry. Baby, I am sorry."

His eyes were red. "Elizabeth Sunflower gave you?" he said, as he struggled to breath. He looked afraid as he held my head. "Kim, you'll hate me."

"David, I won't hate you." I said as I knelt before him. "Please David, just pull yourself together." He turned his face away. I touched his face and it was hot. "David, please. Don't do this to me. Your face is burning up."

Tears streamed down his face, he tried to hide them as he sobbed under his breath. "I am sorry."

"David, what is going on?" I screamed.

He stood up and picked up the painting, he wiped his eyes. "The woman who made this painting is Elizabeth Sunflower." He said as he ran his fingers across the painting. I nodded in agreement.

"Kim...what have I done? Oh my God" he paused and took a deep breath as he closed his eyes and held the painting close to his chest. "She is my MOTHER!"

## 20

I stared at David, unable to believe what I had just heard. "David, I want you to calm down." I started. I mumbled "Erm...Er..." and stared firmly at him. "You are pressurized. You don't know what you are saying, right?"

David shook his head in disagreement. "I know what I am saying, Kimberly. I am a monster." He paused and took a deep breath. "She is my mother."

I ran my finger through my hair. "David, I don't think you know what you are saying. I want you to please calm down, and let's talk about this."

"STOP IT, Kim! I am not stupid! Stop making me feel stupid. I know my mother."

My eyes burned with raged. "Elizabeth's son is dead. What are you saying?"

He took a deep breath as he panted heavily. "I told my mom that this painting was ugly." He said. I swallowed heavily as a tear drop ran down my left cheek. "I told my dad to send her away from me, she wasn't helping me concentrate." He stared at me. "It's been 12 years since I last saw her."

"GOD! DAVID? WHAT KIND OF A MAN ARE YOU?" I screamed.

He rubbed his forehead. "Kim, I regret everything. I have looked for her tirelessly, but my dad won't allow any contact with her."

I shook my head. "David, how could you do that to your mom?"

"I told you before, I am not worthy of your love, I am not a good man. I am a man born to rule over the weaker species, my dad always told me that" He paused and swallowed. "Just leave me alone, you don't deserve me." he said and took his seat as he stared at the painting.

I wiped the tear drop off my face and took my seat beside him. He turned his face away. I held his hand in mine. "David, I am sorry. I shouldn't have yelled at you."

He shook his head. "I am sorry, I am sorry for not being good enough for you."

"You are more than enough for me." I replied, and wrapped my hand around him. "It would be alright."

He stared at me. "I am not sure, she must hate me."

"She doesn't." I replied. "David, you were a kid."

He scoffed and released himself gently from my grip. "Kim, don't cover up for me. I messed up." He stared at me. "She would never forget what I did to her."

I nodded as I walked up to him. "David, with time, this wound will heal. You have been through a lot too." I stroked his arm. "David, your mom would forgive you."

"Do you forgive me?"

I smiled. "Of course. What's there to hold against you?" I asked. "I must confess I did hate her dead son that she always referred to, but now I know better."

He held my hand. "Kim, she even regards me as dead. What am I going to do?"

"We would talk to her." I said as I helped him to a chair. "But first, I want you to tell me everything I don't know already. Let me in totally, don't hold anything from me."

He nodded. "Yes, I will tell you everything. Everything."

\*\*\*

Wole pushed the door open and it creaked slightly. He used his leg to swiftly shut the door as he slipped in the bed beside Tola with a tray. He pecked her all over her face till she woke up.

"What is it?" she asked, still very sleepy.

He took a deep breath. "Tola, it is 9 in the morning and you are still asleep."

She sprang up from the bed and held her head. "Oh my...Work?" She hit him. "I will be late for work."

He smiled. "It's Saturday."

She took a deep breath. "Good morning." She stared at the tray with Chinas covered and smiled.

"What food is that?"

He passed the tray to her. "See for yourself."

She opened the tray with excitement but her face soon fell as she lifted the toothbrush and paste before him. "What is this?"

"Toothbrush and Paste. To give you a sparkling clean mouth."

She hissed. "This is offensive."

He stared at her. "Unh? I was only prompting you to the bathroom early, we have to go out."

His face fell. "It was not in my intention to embarrass you."

She smiled. "Your sense of humour is weak, Wole."

"Really? I thought this was funny. My mom used to do it a lot, we had so much fun while growing up, pranks and all."

She scoffed. "Whatever." She said and walked into the bathroom. "Wole." She called.

"Yeah?"

She cleaned the brush delicately. "Where are we going to?"

"To see my parents. We would be having lunch together, my kid sister just returned home from the states so we are having like a family lunch."

She poked her head out of the bathroom. "Family lunch?"

He nodded. "Yeah, for us all."

"What would I be doing there?" she asked.

He shrugged. "You are my girlfriend. You should be by my side."

She raised an eyebrow. "Sounds cheering."

He smiled. "It is cheering."

\*\*\*

The doorbell chimed repeatedly like it wasn't going to stop and then thunderous knocks followed. Ini dragged herself from the bed after hurling swear words to the wind. She bumped into the side table and screamed. "Oh My God...everything is going wrong today." She complained.



The knock continued. "Enough!" she shouted as she limped to the door, she took a peek through the peephole and opened the door with fury. "What is it?"

Marcus stared at her. "It is bad enough that you are naturally selfish, but what is worse is that you go to the police to report our crime without giving me any warning. Shouldn't I have been aware?"

She eyeballed him coldly and tried to shut the door but he stuck in his feet. "What do you want, Marcus?"

"This issue is very delicate. You should have consulted with me first before taking such a very harsh decision. You should have thought about me."

She nodded. "Is that all?"

He fumed. "You can't repent." He shouted. "I have a daughter. How is she going to grow up without her father? You should have thought about my daughter!" he yelled.

Ini summoned all strength in her and slammed the door hard against his face. She dragged herself to the floor as tears rolled down her eyes. "I turned myself in because of you. I turned myself in. I claimed responsibility." She muttered underneath her breath.

\*\*\*

Wura pushed her weight against the bed as the nurse helped her sit up. She stared at Tunji angrily. "This must be a curse. Why are you the first person that I would see after a coma?"

Tunji smiled at the nurse indicating that she leaves. He waited until they were alone. "What is that supposed to mean, Wura?"

"You are a murderer! Why are you here? Do you want to finish me off?"

He hissed. "What you saying, Woman? I have been protecting you."

She scoffed. "From who? From what? Is it the other animal like you? Bolu Coker? You both are the same."

Tunji snarled. "Don't provoke me."

"Or else? I have seen the worst." She pressed the bell by her bedside furiously.

"You would soon be seen out."

Tunji gasped. "Stop making me look like the villain, I didn't prompt you to attempt suicide."

"I wish I had died."

The door opened and a nurse came in. "Ma'am?"

Wura smiled. "See this man out, and I don't want to ever see him again."

Tunji scoffed. "You can't stop me from coming here. You are my wife and I am responsible for you."

"No, Tunji. We are done."

The nurse tapped Tunji Bankole lightly on the arm. "Excuse me, sir. This way please."

Tunji took a deep breath and stared at her. "My men would still be here." He said and walked out.

\*\*\*

I stared at my phone; it had been ringing ever since I left David's *Mansion*. I had burst out of there this morning after breakfast when he completed all what he had to tell me about his former life, I couldn't stomach it. It hurt too much. I turned off my phone and pressed the bell.

A security man opened the gate. "Good morning."

"Is your boss in?"

The security man stared at me. "And you are?"

I frowned. "Do you have a problem identifying *Elite*?"

The security man smiled. "Bankole, right?" he asked as he pushed the gate open.

I hissed and walked past him. I strode across the once beautiful lawn which now depicted sorrow, it's been years since it had the glow that it once had. I made my way through the maids and staffs and walked into the room. I stared at the maid that welcomed me. "Where is he?"

"In the study."

I walked upstairs and flung the door to the study open. I stared hard at my new worst enemy.

"I always knew you had more courage than the others. Sometimes, I wish you were my own daughter. Seeing how you arrived at my gate without any caution, you must be really angry." He stood up and motioned towards me. "Not that I didn't see this day coming. I just didn't think you would be so stupid to come here alone." He pressed the controller in his hand and the study door shut. My heart skipped a beat. "Don't worry, it can only be opened from outside, and I don't see anyone coming to your aid."

"I am not scared." I replied.

He nodded as he walked around me. "What do you want, Kimberly Bankole? I allowed those servants grant you access on purpose. Tell me, what's your mission here?"

"You are a heartless brute."

He nodded and took a seat. "I know, I have always known that. What's new?"

"You killed Bola, didn't you?"

He smiled. "She was your rival. What did you think?"

"I had no rival. I never even knew her, sir!"

He smiled. "Still as respectful as ever. Let's forget the *sir*. Call me Bolu Coker."

"Not yet. But when you become a first-class inmate, I would call you by your name."

He scoffed. "You have to live to see that day first, right?"

I took a deep breath. "I know what you made David do to his mother, which is unforgivable."

He shook his head. "That weakling! Sometimes I worry that his mom had too much effect on him. He told you everything?"

"Mr. Coker, why? You killed a lady with cancer that your son cared about. You threw his mom away, why?" I asked.

He nodded. "Obvious reasons, my dear. How many families are as powerful as the Cokers, Bankoles, and Briggs? We are the families that run the continent and it has to stay this way."

I scoffed. "You make me laugh. The Cokers never had a name; you made the name from David's mom."

"Wrong. Yes, I took her money, but I have managed it well. See what we have made from it."

I slammed the table. "You disgust me, Sir. You turned your own son against his mother at a very tender age, which is unfair."

"Sweetheart, David was fifteen. That, my dear, is not a tender age. He was no saint; he suggested we send her away."

I nodded. "That's because he had to succumb to your will, he was only a boy then, and things are different now. I would make sure that with everything in me, you pay for killing Bola and sending your wife away." I said and turned towards the door.

"Don't you want to know more about your *dear future husband*?"

I smiled at him. "I am not a fool, sir. I won't let you cook up stories about David, a man that kicks his wife out and turns his son against his mother is capable of anything." He scoffed. "Have I lied to you? I don't lie." He rose to his feet. "It hurts a great deal that you are going to marry a man that you don't know. You should wait and know the rest." He said.

I stared at him. "Open the door, sir."

He shook his head in disagreement. "I am sorry, you would have to hear this." He said, taking his seat.

\*\*\*

Niran Briggs smiled at Tola. "I must say I am very impressed with you, Tola Matthews. You are a real woman." He stared at his wife. "Just like my wife."

Olamide Briggs smiled. "When Wole told us that he had found someone to settle down with, we were worried. The kid had never stayed with a woman for over a week. They had always been too this or that for him, but when I met you at the fundraiser, I knew you were different."

"Thank you, sir and ma, for welcoming me into your home." Tola replied.

Wole smiled. "They have no choice."

"I am just surprised that Wole is really serious." Mirabel interrupted.

He nodded. "Of course, I am serious." He replied, holding Tola's hand.

She scoffed. "But it is difficult to believe you can be serious, I mean after all your escapades."

Olamide Briggs cleared her throat. "That was a long time ago."

Mirabel nodded. "Really?" Niran Briggs smiled. "Why are you sounding upset Mirabel?" She cleared her throat. "I am just surprised that Wole is looking like the perfect son here."

"What do you have against me, Mirabel?" Wole asked, holding Tola's hand.

She grinned. "Wole, do you really want me saying all your sh\*t here?"

Niran Briggs clapped. "Mirabel, you have officially won the award for the 'show of shame' at this family lunch. Congratulations." He said, drawing his chair back.

Olamide Briggs stared at her. "Why do you hate your brother so much, Mirabel?"

"I just hate people that deceive the female race. All of them. I fight against them."

Wole slammed the table. "I have had enough, Mirabel." He held Tola's hand. "Tola, we are leaving."

Mirabel smiled. "Oh Tola dear, that's your name, right?" Tola stared at her without saying a word. "Wole has a kid in the states, has he told you?"

\*\*\*

"I don't know why I am telling you all these. You must hate me, right?" Ini said as she sipped her drink.

Henry smiled. "I am probably the only person who can understand you." he held her hand. "And I don't hate you. Shola can be a real pain."

Ini shrugged. "I should have never gone that far."

"You probably shouldn't, but, what can we do? The deed is done." He replied, standing up. "What I don't know is how we are going to force Shola into that trap. I know she loves money, she'll continue to want money."

Ini nodded. "But I don't think she'll risk a jail term. We would eventually both go to jail if she decides to risk it."

"Naija jail no dey smile oh." Henry said.

She smiled. "I know, I just need to get prepared. I will contact my lawyers tomorrow."

Henry nodded. "That's okay. But why haven't you told any of your 'sisters' about this?"

Ini smiled. "Tola and Wole are having the time of their life that she has moved out of the house to his, and Kimberly, hmmm...she is busy being in love with David."

He chuckled. "I am happy for them; they deserve all the happiness and joy they can get."

Ini smiled. "I understand. You are right." She replied as she downed the drink. "More, please..." she signalled to the waiter

"A classy woman doesn't drink like a fish before a man."

Ini grinned. "This woman has lost her class." She replied and grinned. "In any way, you are a boy, Henry."

\*\*\*

"Oyinkan, I am losing it. I don't even know where she went."

Oyinkan took a deep breath. "Just calm down, David. What did you tell her?"

"Kim found my mom and I just had to tell everything to her about when I was a teenager and all."

Oyinkan adjusted her sleeves as she scribbled down on a piece of paper. She held her phone firmly to her left ear as she passed the paper to the Engineer in the building. "I'll see you at 6." She said, and walked out. "David, where are you?"

"I am home. I don't know where to go to look for her."

She nodded. "Just stay at home. I will be right there." She said as she dropped the phone and faced Ben. "I'll be back here in the evening. Paperwork is ready."

"So when would the office be in full swing?"

She smiled. "Early next month."

"That's good news. So, where do we go to celebrate?"

She shook her head in disagreement. "I won't be going anywhere to celebrate. I have to see my cousin."

He smiled. "That's fine, it's my chance to meet him."

"I don't know if that's a good idea. He is really sad at the moment."

Ben shrugged. "He is a man, men always shake it off. I am a man, I know that."

She smiled. "If this boomerangs?"

"It won't happen, men know these things."

She shrugged. "You were so confident about how men know so many things that I beat you silly at tennis today."

Ben took off his sunshades. "I let you win. Moreover, you have a card at the club. If you didn't win, you wouldn't let me play there next week Saturday."

"You are crazy, Ben." Oyinkan replied, laughing.

He nodded as they walked towards the car. "So, how do I get entitled to join the elite society?"

She scoffed. "Forget it. Let's go, do you want to drive?"

"Yeah...I love this Bentley." He replied, jumping into the driver seat. "And it's red too, amazing car."

She smiled as she joined him in the car. "Ride my baby easy."

"With all pleasure, my lady."

Ben drove with so much joy. He was smiling throughout the ride. "I must get this ride."

"You would need one for your honeymoon, right?"

He nodded as he took the right turn on Oyinkan's instruction. "Exactly! Soon and very soon."

She smiled. "Pull up at the gate."

Ben pulled up as he screeched the tyres. "Wow! Your cousin lives here?"

She nodded. "Yeah! Just hang on, I need to register with the security system." She said and hopped out of the car. She came back after a few minutes and the gate opened. "Okay, let's

go in." Ben drove in and pulled up in the garage. "Okay, here we are." He said, taking off his sunshades.

Oyinkan pressed the doorbell. She stared at Ben. "He is a very cool guy, you would love him..."

The door flung open and David paused on seeing Ben. "You? What do you want here?"

\*\*\*

Olamide Briggs cleared her throat. "Mirabel, could we talk about this later?"

"What is she saying, Wole?" Tola asked, as she held Wole's arm. He stared at her with the *'I have no idea'* look.

Mirabel smiled. "Why don't I explain further, people? Wole left Monica when he found out she was pregnant and returned home."

"I never touched her." Wole replied, calmly.

Mirabel smiled. "Really? Why don't we fly back to the states and have a paternity test?"

"I never even dated Monica, we only hung out once at the superbowl." He replied.

Mirabel grinned. "Seems it was one big 'SUPER' bowl." She replied.

Wole rose to his feet. "I can't take this anymore. This is embarrassing and disappointing."

He stared at Tola. "I am sorry for this."

She nodded. "It's okay." She replied, as she held her clutch.

"Awww...this is touching, but the sooner the better for you, Ms. Tola. You have no future with Wole, he has a baby mama." Mirabel concluded.

Niran stared at Mirabel. "Now your joke is turning sour, would you stop? Show Tola some respect."

Mirabel smiled. "I am shocked at everyone here." She replied. "I could forgive Tola because she is new to the family, but did all of you lose your sense of humour while I was away." She said and covered her face.

"What?????" Wole shouted and threw the cake on the table at her.



She licked the cake with her tongue as it dropped from her face to her mouth. "Now that's the Wole I know."

\*\*\*

David stared angrily. "Why is this guy here?"

Oyinkan stared at them. "Gentlemen, it is obvious that you must have met before, but can we take this inside?"

"Not in my house. I want him out."

Ben nodded. "I came here with Oyinkan."

David laughed. "You don't only want Kimberly, you want my cousin too?" he paused as he stared at Oyinkan. "Is this the idiot you have been talking about?"

"I have talked to you about Ben, but he is not an idiot, David."

David nodded. "I see..."

Ben held her hand. "I'll be in the car, Oyinkan."

David scoffed. "Have you no shame left in you?"

Oyinkan hissed. "Come on, David. Why do you hate him so much?"

"Isn't it obvious that this is the guy who is always trying to hurt my relationship with Kimberly?"

She nodded. "I understand how you both feel, but let's talk about finding Kimberly first. Or, isn't that more important?"

Ben held her. "Finding Kim?" he walked up to David. "What did you do to her?"

David scoffed. "What right have you to ask me questions about her?"

Ben cleared his throat. "I am the man who loves her."

Oyinkan held Ben's hand. "Easy does it, Ben. This issue is more complicated than you think."

"Now more than ever, I am ready to fight for Kimberly. She is mine and now I would look for her." He said and walked back to the car.

David smiled. "It is my cousin's car."

Ben nodded and walked away.

Oyinkan frowned. "Are you happy?" she hissed and hurried after Ben.

\*\*\*

I picked the documents as they fell carelessly from my hand. "I don't believe this."

"Those papers don't lie, and there's more." Bolu Coker replied as he brought out more documents and stretched them towards me.

I rose to my feet. "I don't want them. They don't prove anything."

He nodded with a wry smile. "I always save the best for last." He walked over to a safe and pulled out a file. "This, my dear, is the reason why David is acting like he loves you." he said, stretching the file at me. "Have a look."

I shook my head. "I don't want it."

"Kimberly Bankole, you would see this one day. And if not now, on your wedding day, so just check it."

I collected the file and flipped it. "What is this?"

He took a seat before me. "It is an agreement between me, your father and David. It is a deed saying that all your fortune would be David's the day he marries you."

I stared at the agreement unable to believe my eyes. "Oh My God!!!"

"Oh yes...the best part is that the fortune would be split between David and myself and this makes it better. Look at the next page, the clause is there."

I threw the file at him as I fought back my tears. "You dirty old man. What's in it for my father then? Why would he sign over everything to you and your son? And how I am supposed to consent to this?"

He smiled. "It would be included in your marriage certificate carefully, so, you would just sign it over with ease. And yes, your father prefers his good name in the society, everyone adores Professor Bankole. So, we would keep that name preserved and not uncover any of his dirty deals. You, as a Bankole, should know these things."

I screamed out in tears. "I hate all of you."

He nodded. "That's okay. We just need mutual understanding in our families; Love is not a big deal."

I struggled to pull myself together. "What do you want to do to me in the end?"

He smiled as he tried to wipe my tears. "Not me." I pushed his hand away. "David would do to you as I did to Elizabeth. Take away your money, pride and dignity, reduce you to a first grade vegetable. Coker men are born to rule over the weaker species."

I took a deep breath and nodded with a smile. "It's shame that you have no remorse."

The door opened and Dad walked in. "Bolu!" he stared at me. "What is going on here?"

"Dad, the door!" I shouted. But before Dad could turn towards the door, Mr. Coker closed it and dropped the controller in his drawer.

Tunji stared at him. "What is this, Bolu? Are you kidnapping my daughter and I?"

Bolu shook his head in disagreement and fetched a gun from his drawer. "My friends, I would love to have the both of you in here."

Tunji scoffed. "This is unreasonable and you had better be careful." Dad replied and walked up to me. "Let's go." He said, pulling my hand.

I trembled as I saw my dad's best friend and David's father point a gun at us. "Where are we going?"

"Home." He replied as he held my hand firmly and pulled me up. "Bolu, this, you would regret, now open your door."

Bolu shook his head in disagreement. "You are a fool if you think I would let you both out of here. On a second thought, one of you would actually leave here."

I was unable to believe my ears. What seemed unreal to me was now taking shape, Bolu Coker was ready to kill one of us. I rose to my feet. "Take me."

He nodded. "You know, you are my favourite Bankole for two reasons. One, the money. Two, the attitude. I can't kill you." he said and pointed the gun at my father. "This one is old and useless."

Dad nodded and closed his eyes. I leaped before Dad as Bolu Coker pulled the trigger.

## 21

I held onto Dad in fear as the flower vase behind us shattered. "Jesus!" I screamed.

Bolu nodded. "It is a pity Jesus is up there right now and he has more important things to deal with. The poor, Syrian gun fire and more, not us. He is too busy for us."

Dad pushed me aside and faced Bolu. "Have you gone mad? What was that for?"

Bolu smiled. "Tunji, when are these kids getting married? The pace has really slowed down, I need money."

"There is no way I would allow my daughter marry your son!" Dad replied.

Bolu scoffed. "That's one huge joke. You know what would happen if they don't get married."

Dad hissed. "You just threatened my life before my daughter, do you know what this implies?"

"What? Is she disappointed in her father-in-law already?"

I trembled as I sat at the door listening to the two greedy old men. "I won't marry David." I screamed.

Dad and Bolu stared at me. "What?"

\*\*\*

"He's gone, let's go inside." David said.

Oyinkan flared. "David, you are very insensitive! That is no way to talk to a man who has done you no harm."

He hissed. "You don't even know that guy! He has always been in my face. I hate him."

"I know him. Ben has been my friend for a while now, and we have enjoyed a good friendship and I trust him."

He nodded. "Do you like him?"

"Of course! He is my friend."

David hissed. "I mean, do you love him?"

She scoffed. "I love Ben, but not in the way you think. I don't have the room to be in love with anyone again. But I stick out for my friends, and Ben is a friend."

David held her hand. "I am sorry. Can we talk about me for now?"

She shook her head in disagreement. "Solve your problems, David. I am going to look for Ben."

She said, and turned to walk away.

He dragged her hand back. "Please, Oyinkan, I don't know what to do, I want to find Kimberly."

She scoffed. "Kimberly is important to Ben too."

He took a deep breath. "Are you really going after Ben?"

She nodded. "Yes, just call Kim's lines or check her house. Your skeletons might have been too much for her, she probably had to hide."

"I hadn't even told her yet about the marriage agreement clause when she left."

She sighed. "Make sure you tell her soon."

"She may never forgive me, Oyinkan. My life is nothing without her."

She took a deep breath. "I know, it has always been like that." She said and pecked his cheek.

"There is a man roaming the streets now because of the same woman, he probably has no life without her too. I have to find him." She added with a smile and walked away.

\*\*\*

Mirabel passed the champagne bottle to Tola. "I love drinking from the bottle." She said. "But Mom would kill me if she saw me do that. She would say, we are civilized people, and civilized people should never do such."

"I quite agree with her." Tola replied, pouring her glass.

Mirabel snickered. "Who cares? I spent my life horseback riding, bungee jumping, snowboarding and anything fun. I never really care about this family. Wole is their son."

"They love you too." Tola replied.

Mirabel smiled. "I know, sweetheart. But they want too much from me." she replied as she gulped from the bottle. "I want to express myself in any way that I possibly can, and that's what life is about, expressions, not impressions."

"Impressions matter too." Tola replied, nodding.

Mirabel nudged her. "How are you coping with Wole? That dude is too proper. Not fun at all."

Tola nodded. "I might agree with you on that note."

She smiled. "See? He must be with Dad and Mom now discussing how the country is rotten and is needing good people."

Tola smiled. "Wole is a lovely guy, he is sweet and honest."

"All my female friends adore him. When we were back in the States, some would wait in his room naked and all just because they want a baby with him so he would start a family with them. But my brother, oh boy... he would wrap a cloth around the girls and call a cab for them. Who does that?"

Goose pimples flushed across Tola's skin. She was proud of Wole. "A real man does that." Mirabel nodded. "I quite agree with you, and I guess he would make a fantastic husband and father."

"I have no doubt about that."

Mirabel scoffed. "Do you think you are Wole's type?"

Some heat flushed across Tola's face, she must have assumed too much in her heart.

"Erm..." "Boom!!! You fell for it again." Mirabel said as she laughed.

Tola took a deep breath. "Could you please take it easy with me when you are joking?"

She smiled. "I am sorry, it is not in our tradition here."

Tola nodded. "Wole pulled a prank on me this morning, I guess I would have to cope."

Mirabel shook her head. "I can bet he brought you toothpaste and a toothbrush in a dish."

Tola nodded excitedly. "Exactly! That guy is so funny."

Mirabel hissed. "That guy is not! That prank is so old, Mom stopped it early enough." She said, and started laughing. "Poor boy must have missed it."

"Could you please let me know when you are kidding and when you are not?" Tola asked, looking confused.

Mirabel nodded and emptied the contents of the bottle. "Welcome to the family."

\*\*\*

Dad squatted before me. "Don't say that, you would marry David."

"I think you should kill me instead." I replied, quietly. "I am ashamed of you. Is this about your name?"

He shook his head in disagreement. "No, it's about you. About everyone."

I yelled angrily at him. "Don't fool me, Dad! I read the clause, I saw everything. David and his old man here would have all my inheritance. Is that what you have traded for the good name you have?"

He took a deep breath and whispered. "But you love David."

I scoffed. "I don't know what to say anymore." I said and helped myself up to my feet. "Let me go, sir, or kill me now, and that's an order."

Bolu smiled. "That's my type of girl. You know exactly how to swim in deep waters. Very soon you would be like the whales and sharks. You have potential."

I smiled. "SIR, very soon, I'll kill the sharks and whales."

"Impressive." He replied, and opened the door. "I don't take threats lightly, Kimberly Bankole."

I nodded. "Me neither." I replied and walked out.

\*\*\*

Tunji pushed the table before him away. "That's my daughter, Bolu. How dare you?"

Bolu used a piece of cloth to wipe his gun carefully. "I pointed a gun at David and his mom when he was only 7. Kimberly is more than that now, she should be able to take it."

Tunji held him by the collar. "I should kill you before you finish me and my family, Bolu."

"Forget about it, we have better things to accomplish than killing ourselves." He said, as he pushed Tunji away. "First, we need Millaroca. It would be a major acquisition for us."

Tunji nodded. "After then, what? Kimberly is not going to marry David, you heard her."

He scoffed. "She will. We'll send a message to her through Wura."

"What are you planning to do to my wife, Bolu?"

He smiled. "Just something to tinker your daughter's head to know that she must marry my son."

Tunji took a deep breath as he sat down. "Kim and David would be unhappy, they would hate each other."

"That's fine, I have always told you, we don't need love. We just need understanding."

Tunji took a deep breath. "Did you tell her about Bola?"

Bolu shook his head in disagreement. "I only confirmed what she already knew. But, I didn't tell her more."

"What about the Doctor-in-charge of Bola? I have a feeling Kimberly would want to know more."

Bolu nodded. "Of course, she is inquisitive." He picked up his phone. "I need to know if Elizabeth is still alive. It's been many years. She should have passed away out of frustration and loneliness."

Tunji shrugged. "Elizabeth is a fighter. I don't think she would give up easily."

Bolu nodded. "Stupid woman! If she resurfaces anytime soon, all the wealth I have now would be threatened. I think I might have to hasten things for her."

Tunji hissed. "Bolu, don't have more blood on your hand. How do you sleep at night?"

Bolu took a deep breath. "When all my enemies are gone, I would sleep."

\*\*\*

I took my seat beside my mom. "How are you?"

She took my hand. "You have been crying. What happened?"



"I was just tired." I replied, wiping a tear drop from my face. "It's been a tiring day for me."

She rubbed my forehead. "I understand. The doctor said I can go home tonight, but I don't want to return home."

I nodded. "Where do you want to go to?"

She took a deep breath. "I want to leave this country, maybe go to Qatar or Finland, Turkey. Anywhere your dad won't think of."

"Do you hate my dad that much?"

She shook her head. "I have suffered enough with him. I just need my sanity. Is that too much to ask?"

I held her hand. "No, Mom. But I need you to help me with a few questions."

She nodded. "Ask."

"Tell me about Elizabeth Coker."

She sighed. "No, dear. Why do you want to know about her?"

"She is David's mother. I am to marry that man, I want to know about his family." She nodded. "Kimberly, must you marry David? You could run away with me. Maybe to Puerto Rico, Rio, anywhere."

I held her hand. "Mom, I am in love with David."

She squeezed my hand in hers and smiled. "Love is a beautiful thing." I smiled back. "But it has to be returned." My smile faded. "At a time in my life, I tried to love Tunji, but he never reciprocated. I am sorry for you, honey." She said, wiping a tear drop from her face.

I blinked as I stared at her. "David loves me, Mom."

She took a deep breath. "Kim, I don't believe it. David is exactly like his dad. That kid has always been ambitious."

"Mom, David is different, and he loves me, I love him too. I am sure about that."

She nodded. "I won't waste my time convincing you otherwise. If your love is so strong, ask him about his mother."

I took a deep breath. "Mom, I know some things, I just need you to tell me more. Did you and Elizabeth have a relationship at all? Were you friends?"

She nodded. "Yes, our husbands are best of friends, we had to blend. And we discovered that we had similar problems." She paused to take a deep breath. "But, Elizabeth had always been withdrawn. She never really wanted to mingle with me, she loved to paint."

"Do you know her whereabouts?"

She took a deep breath. "She may be dead or in a faraway place. She just took off and no one has heard from her since."

I shook my head in disagreement. "Mom, I have to tell you something, but you must not mention it to anyone."

"What is it?"

I took a deep breath. "Elizabeth is in Nigeria."

Mom shook her head in disbelief.

\*\*\*

Ini turned off the engine. "Now what?"

Henry wore a smile. "Just leave the rest to me, and stay here. I don't want her seeing you."

She nodded. "Hurry up then. Don't forget to let her know everything."

\*\*\*

"Did you get any message on your phone?" Bolu asked as he scrolled through his messages.

Tunji shook his head in disagreement. "No." he said, staring at his phone. "Is there any problem."

Bolu nodded. "I just got a text from Millaroca's board." He stared at Tunji. "May I have the honour of reading it to you?" Tunji nodded. Bolu cleared his throat. *"Owing to the success of the last edition of Millaroca Magazine, we have decided to call for the emergency reinstatement of Mr. Adeoye as President of the board. This meeting is scheduled to hold on Monday."*

Tunji stared at him. "That's a lie!"

Bolu smiled. "It seeMs. Kimberly is more dangerous than we thought."

"What does she have to do with this?"

He scoffed. "Your little monster wrote an article and it's spreading like wildfire." He replied as he searched for the article online. "Here you go...Kim Banks, women are crazy about it and the youths have gone wild in respect of the new Soyinka and Achebe."

Tunji cursed. "That girl!"

Bolu nodded. "That's what happens when you don't tame your child."

"It's not like you tamed David." Tunji replied, angrily. "It is a voting process, right?"

Bolu nodded. "Yes, it is."

Tunji smiled. "It is time for our money to speak, let's meet the board members." He pressed the speaker. "Driver, take us to the club."

Bolu stared at him. "I thought we were going to see your wife."

"Wura can wait till tomorrow, Kimberly is so devastated, she would probably be with her friends now at home."

Bolu nodded. "Okay then, let's take care of these men."

\*\*\*

Oyinkan walked into Ben's living room. He hissed as she walked in. "What do you want?"

She shook her head. "That was no way to behave."

"Your cousin humiliated me."

She took a deep breath. "I am sorry, but Ben, I know both of your sides, and I must say, there are better ways for us to handle this. I know you like Kim."

"I love her."

Oyinkan rolled her eyes. "Whatever that is, Ben. But I must tell you that I know Kimberly loves David and he loves her too."

He nodded. "Of course, I didn't expect you to take my side, he is your cousin."

"Ben, this is not about David. This is about you, there are too many things to love, one of which is selflessness. Ben, you are quite selfish."

He smiled. "Oyinkan, you think I am selfish? Is this because the guy happens to be your cousin?"

She shook her head. "I want to tell you the truth because you are my friend and I care about you. Your self-esteem is so not good, you already feel inferior to David, and that is not good."

He laughed. "I don't even know what to say. It's obvious you have decided to see me as the villain here."

"Ben, this is not about being a villain, this is about your self-esteem. You have to work on it. And from everything you had told me when I did not even know that you were referring to Kim and David, you have so much to work on, Ben."

He scoffed. "You are taking sides, Oyinkan. I wonder what sort of counsellor you would be when you decide to put your psychology degree to use."

\*\*\*

I helped my mom as she slipped into her dress. "I have the discharge papers with me and I have called for your plane."

"Who is the pilot? I don't want your father knowing my new location; I don't want to be around anymore."

I blinked. "But Mom..."

"Kimberly, you know what to do." She replied, and rubbed my hand. "And if David is really true, I am happy for you."

I took a deep breath. "You are running away, Mom. You have to stay and fight back, Dad took a lot from you."

Mom shook her head in disagreement. "I would communicate with you regularly. I would be in Calabar for a few days, after which I might leave the country. I just need some fresh air, a good therapy session and my dignity back. I would be back, Kimberly."

"Mom, I can't help Elizabeth alone."

She smiled. "You can. And as a matter of fact, you have." She said, lifting Millaroca Magazine.

"But no one would know it is about her, I had to tell you for you to know."

She nodded with a smile. "That's true. It is all over the news. It is a good thing that you are also doing for Mr. Adeoye."

I nodded. "Mr. Adeoye is a good man." I stared at my phone as the backlight came up and a text popped up.

"The car is here, Mom. We can go now." I announced. I pushed the door open and a policeman stood before me. "She wants fresh air. Can't I take my mother for a walk?"

The policeman nodded as he stepped back. "I am sorry, ma."

I hissed and walked out with Mom. I opened the door of the car. "Call me, Mom." She nodded and hugged me. "Of course, my love, thank you for helping me. Now, help Elizabeth get her life back, take her son to her."

"What if she hates him?"

Mom smiled. "A mother's heart would always forgive, it doesn't matter how long it takes. But, you have to try."

I wiped a tear drop from my face. "So long, Mom."

"I would be back, Kimberly Bankole. I owe it to women like me." she said and shut the door.

I watched the car as it drove off.

\*\*\*

Shola pushed Ini out of the way as she rushed in. "Ini Obong, what kind of joke are you trying?"

"I don't understand." Ini said as she tried to close the door. "You know, this apartment is paid for and furnished by three serious ladies. Now, barging in here is really rude, Shola."

Shola scoffed. "Why did the police visit you?"

Ini took a deep breath as she took her seat. "Shola, I am surprised that you would even ask. You must have gone to report the case or hint the police, right? Why are you playing innocent?"

Shola tapped her fingers. "Ini Obong, I know you. This is foul play, right? We had an agreement. How on earth did the police find out?"

Ini shrugged. "You are the one with the evidence, not me. How am I going to submit myself to the police?"

"Are you trying to tell me that you knew nothing about the police coming to see you?"

Ini nodded. "Zilch!"

Shola took a deep breath. "Oh God...what could be going on?"

*Moment to pounce!* Ini wore a wry smile and stared at Shola. "How did you know that the police were here? Are you following me, Shola?"

Shola blinked. "What? Why? I have no reason to follow you. Look, Ini, we had better find a solution to this. Else, you are going down. You are the one who hurt me."

Ini nodded in agreement. "Yes, I know."

Shola smiled and picked her purse. "Well...seems justice was going to take its course either way, someone reported you. Ini dear, your life is over."

"I know." Ini replied. She walked over to the door. "Please leave."

Shola grinned. "You know what, it is unfortunate that you would go down in history like this, but this is why you should not be too desperate, my dear." She smiled as she touched Ini's cheek. "I'll visit you in prison once a month, but if they put you in solitary, I am sorry." She blew a kiss at Ini and walked out.

Ini ensured that Shola was far out of sight before she started her victory dance in the room.

\*\*\*

Bolu Coker shut the door to the room. "Thank you for having us." He said, smiling in Tunji Bankole's direction. "Not to take any of your time, we hear there is a decision to re-vote Adeoye back into Millaroca."

"Yes, I suggested it. Erm...I don't know if you have read the last piece on the supposed last edition of Millaroca. It has been spreading like wildfire. In fact, as of today, almost all the women came in with a copy of Millaroca, just like old times." Chief Bello replied with a smile. "It seems Adeoye saved his best for last."

Tunji cleared his throat. "Does this mean that there won't be the sale of Millaroca?"

Chief Bello cleared his throat and stared at the other board members. "Gentlemen, I think Millaroca can do much better if we invest our time in it as members rather than sell it."

"We already had an agreement to sell to them." Alhaji Jega replied.

Bolu Coker smiled. "At least some people still know how to honour their word, Bello. Thank you, Jega."

Chief Bello stared hard at Jega. "Why would we turn a long-standing business into a casino? Isn't that unwise and more personal than beneficial?"

Jega smiled. "Bello, it is not our business. We made a promise, we should keep to our word."

Bello scoffed. "As the second senior member of the board, I have decided that we revote. I hope you all sleep over it, and let your good consciences speak to you all." He stands up. "I don't regret us trying to take the company from Adeoye. See the good result it fetched us, a power-packed article." He cleared his throat and stared at Bolu Coker. "You know, when I read it, it took my heart to a long, long time ago, and it brought back memories of my friend, Elizabeth. Where is she, Bolu Coker?"

"Are we here to talk about my wife?" Bolu asked.

Bello shrugged. "No, the article touched me too much, and I just felt my heart go out to her. It's been years"

Bolu smiled. "Elizabeth is very popular. All you have to do is search the internet, you would find articles on her."

Bello nodded and smiled at Tunji Bankole. "I think your daughter is a great writer." He said and walked out.

Tunji took a deep breath. "So, can we count on you?"

The others nodded in the affirmative. Jega stared at them. "There is, however, a tiny snag, there is a silent partner at Millaroca whom we have never heard of, and it is rumoured that the person owns 5%. So, even with all our percentages pulled together, we may not be able to topple Adeoye if he wins that partner over."

Bolu Coker snapped. "God! So, the remaining of you have 50%, right?"

Jega nodded. "Exactly, and it seeMs. Bello would be giving his share to Adeoye. But if we can get the silent partner's 5% on our side and stop Adeoye from having that 5%, we would be able to overthrow him."

Tunji hissed. "Who is this silent partner?"

Bolu scoffed. "Tunji, he is a silent player, that's why we don't know."

"But Bello knows." Jega replied.



## 22

I wiped a tear drop from my face as I scanned my finger at the gate and walked in. It is not as if I could tell for sure that I was wiping tears off, it is raining really hard. *'Stupid security system! Stupid gate! Stupid lawn! Stupid car! Stupid house! Stupid David!'* I muttered underneath my breath as I walked across the lawn. I cursed under my breath as I tapped the door with no strength at all.

All I wanted to do was cry and tell David how much I had heard about him and how he had disappointed me. I knocked the door again, this time with some venom. As I thought of my discussion with Bolu Coker, I pounded on the door.

"Kim?" David said startled as he opened the door. "Where have you been? I have been worried sick, you didn't pick your calls or text me back."

I pushed him out of the way as I walked in. "So, which of these is real?" I asked, staring round the house.

David dragged his feet. "Kim, what is this? You asked for the truth and I told you. Why did you have to run away?"

I stared at him. "David..."

"Kimberly, I have never portrayed myself to you as a saint, I am just a man who loves you the way I am."

I nodded. "Really?"

"You are the only woman I have ever loved since I was a boy. I have had a huge crush on you from when we were kids, and that's why I was glad to agree to my father's and your father's plan." He paused. "I thought we had talked about this?"

I stared at him. "Really, David? Is that all?"

He blinked as he stepped back. "What is this, Kimberly? Why are you so cold towards me?"

I scoffed. "Just in case you haven't realized, I was in the rain."

He nodded. "I am sorry, excuse me." he said and walked away. I took a deep breath as I allowed the tears that had welled up in my eyes to pour freely.

David returned with a towel. "The bathroom is down the hall to the left."

I collected the towel and walked away. I turned on the tub and lay in the water as I listened to the iPod play. I closed my eyes and allowed my thoughts stray. For the first time in my life, love had made me stupid, I saw proof against David, yet I couldn't bring myself to believe it.

"I won't hurt you, Kim." I heard. I closed my eyes as I heard the words resound. I slipped deep down into the tub and my eyes grew numb and weary.

\*\*\*

Wole shut the door after Tola. "Baby, I hope you love my family."

She nodded with a smile. "Of course, they are exciting, especially your sister." She replied as she poured a glass of water. "Water?"

"Yes please." He replied, collecting the glass. "I would have loved to know your family."

She took a deep breath. "Well, it's unfortunate. But I have the useless uncles if you don't mind."

He smiled. "Family is family."

She scoffed lightly and scribbled something down in a piece of paper and handed the paper to Wole. "That's the address. Say hi to them on my behalf."

"What do you mean? We are to go together."

She laughed. "Really? You actually don't think I am going to show up there, do you?"

He nodded. "I know they hurt you, but, this is tradition. We need to meet everyone and register our relationship as formal, you know." He dropped his glass. "Erm...I will just go upstairs and freshen up."

"When you are back, I would be gone."

He paused as he stared at her. "What do you mean? Why?"

She shrugged. "I miss the girls."

"Are you sure?" he asked.

She nodded. "Wole, yes."

He walked back to her. "Mirabel was kidding, she said that herself, nothing existed between Monica and I. I swear."

"Why then won't you sleep with me?"

He took a deep breath as he held her hand. "Tola, I can't do that if I am not married to you. That would be dishonouring you and God."

She scoffed. "What are you? The pope? Wole, this is the new century, everyone does it. It doesn't mean they are bad."

He nodded. "It doesn't mean it is right either. Please."

She yanked her hand from his. "You have issues, Wole."

"Tola, why are you making a big deal out of this?"

She hissed. "Isn't this a big deal?"

"I mean, you deserve more than casual sex, I mean." He paused as he raised his voice. "Maybe this is why Tolu used you."

Her jaw dropped. "Uh..." she swallowed and fought back tears, which eventually broke.

"I am sorry, I didn't mean it, Tola." He said, trying to hold her hand.

She pushed him back. "Just leave me alone!" she said, and ran inside her room.

\*\*\*

The doorbell chimed and Ini sprang from the sofa. She wore a sad expression. '*Shola fit dey door*' she thought as she opened the door with her head bowed. There was no one there. She looked right and left and eventually looked down to find a box and a huge teddy bear. She smiled as she picked it and shut the door.

"This is sweet! So, I will consume the chocolates before Tola or Kimberly return. Who even owns the gift?" she ranted on as she opened the gift box. "Chocolates! I guessed right. There is a note here." She tossed the note on the table. "That one is for the gods. They

can read the notes." She pulled the first bar and started to eat. "Brutal life! No one gives me chocolates, and those two are having the time of their lives. Stupid teddy! See how it is staring at me." She tossed the teddy on the table and continued with the chocolates.

The doorbell rang again. "Jesus Christ! The owner of the chocolates oh..." she exclaimed and placed the box beside the table as she rushed to the door. She opened it and saw no one there, she looked down and picked the gift-wrapped pack of Fayrouz drinks at the door. "This is really good." She said as she shut the door. "It has a note too." She pulled out the note and threw it on the table with the other note and teddy bear. She opened a bottle and gulped down, eating the chocolates. "Who says the good life isn't good? I need to get a boyfriend too, someone to baby me like this."

The doorbell rang yet again. "The excitement continues." She said aloud as she picked her bottle with a bar of chocolate and strode to the door.

"Wow...you got my gifts." Marcus said as soon as she opened the door. "Does this mean I am forgiven?"

She eyeballed him. "You couldn't have sent all those things."

"Well, I did, and the biggest gift is coming. Please close your eyes."

She hissed. "Do I look like I am interested in your gifts?" she asked, raising the bottle before him and chewing the rest of the bar in her mouth. "I didn't even know that you sent them."

He smiled. "Please close your eyes."

She shrugged and closed her eyes. "Whatever."

"Now, open them." He said.

She did and saw his baby in a carrier. "What is this, Marcus?"

"I am sorry, I never really got to thank you for taking care of her for me. And I think she might just like you."

She scoffed. "Really? The kid is too small to understand anything. So FAIL! Apology accepted, gifts received. Now, leave."

He nodded. "I am sorry for earlier today. My baby would love to say thank you."

"How?"

He smiled. "In any way you let her."

Ini scoffed and stepped out of the way. "Take the baby out of the cold, it's getting dark."

He smiled as he walked in. "Thank you." He dropped the carrier on the sofa. "Where is everyone?"

"With the love of their lives."

He nodded. "Don't you think you should do likewise?"

She eyeballed him. "What are you saying? Do I look like someone who is ready to be in love?"

"A little bit of love is what you need."

She nodded and tossed the chocolate box at him. "So, that's what the chocolate is all about?"

Marcus drew closer to her. "Ini, you know I love you."

"Like in the way a loser loves a woman. *Durr!*" she passed him a bottle of Fayrouz.

"Anyway, this woman you say you love would be in police custody pretty soon."

He took a deep breath. "I want us to talk about that. Ini, you had no right to report without consulting me."

"I consulted you, and I took a decision."

He scoffed lightly. "No, you didn't." she smiled. He paused and rubbed his forehead. "Ini, God! Why would you take a decision when angry? You left my house really upset and decided to turn us in."

"Who said anything about turning your sorry ass in? You can't even stand prison."

She replied and sipped her drink.

Marcus stared at her. "Ini, what do you mean?"

"Exactly what I said. I am the one going to jail, not you. You have a child to take care of. I have no one to live for."

He swallowed hard. "I won't let you. I love you, Ini, and even though I may not be the kind of guy that you deserve and all, it doesn't mean I would stop loving you. I haven't stopped and I can't."

"Marcus...forget about me, you deserve better. I am trouble."

He smiled. "One of the reasons why I love you." he said and kissed her gently. Ini kissed back.

\*\*\*

Tan brown skin! My head came out of the water forcefully, I gasped as I panted.

"Kim, are you alright?" David shouted, holding my head.

*Oh no!* "Get me a towel!" I shouted. *What are you looking at?* I thought as I tried to hide my naked body. He returned back with the towel, and I yanked it instantly from his hand. "Get out!" I ordered.

"I can't go." He replied.

I turned the towel slowly from my shoulder as I tried to wrap it around me. "What do you mean?"

"I have been calling you for minutes and I didn't realize you had slipped under the water. What if you do that again?"

I took a deep breath. "I wasn't attempting suicide, I was meditating."

"Okay. I will stay here till you are ready to come out."

I sighed. "David, you are embarrassing me."

He nodded and took a deep breath. "You are safe. I won't leave."

I scoffed. "This is serious. Can you turn around? And close your eyes and ears."

He chuckled softly. "Seriously?"

I nodded. "Yes."

He took a deep breath and turned. I ensured that I saw him stick his fingers in his ears before I got up from the bath and tied the towel properly. 'STUPID MAN!' The towel was far

off from my knee. I stepped out of the tub and slipped into my slippers. "Keep the eyes closed, David."

I toed hurriedly out of the bathroom into the room where my clothes were and changed in a flash. I returned to the living room.

"Kim, what I have done wrong?" David asked as soon as I walked in.

I took a deep breath as I clasped my bag to my hand. "Do you even love me at all?"

"Kim, I love you. You are everything to me, please."

I nodded and wiped a tear drop from my eye. "How could you fool me so much? I am still in love with you, I can't be without you and I know you don't love me."

He walked up to me and held my hand. "What happened to you? Where is Kimberly? Where did you go? I want my Kimberly back, she knows me. I love her."

I yanked my hand away from him. "Is it not about the money? My inheritance? David, I know about everything. Don't lie to my face." I replied.

"Kimberly, don't do this to us." He said as he blinked. "I love you the way you are."

I nodded. "I am really a fool, David. I still love you now and I know this is not real. You signed those documents."

He nodded as he swallowed. "Yes, I did. But, Kimberly, this is not about the money."

"You said you have always loved me. How could you have ever signed it?"

He took a deep breath. "Kim, I was stupid then. But that was an agreement between my father and yours. All I cared about was being with you and not the money."

"You don't fool me, David. I know you have had a terrible past and I get it, but now, you should rewrite your wrongs. You still want to marry because of your father and the money, not because of you."

"Kim!!!" he screamed and stepped back. "I am sorry I signed them. I am sorry I was bad in the past. I am sorry you are hurt. But you know, I am sorrier for being hopelessly in love with you. I can't take this anymore. You don't even trust me." he blinked and used his hand to

stop his tears but I could see them all clearly and my heart raced fast. I wanted to hug him and say I was sorry, but my lips were stiff and my feet were cold.

He shook his head and continued. "Kimberly, I am sorry." He said and walked inside, leaving me standing in the living room.

\*\*\*

"Love gone sour?"

I ignored Ini and crashed into a chair.

She smiled. "God has taken away from the mighty and given to the humble."

"Just shut up." I replied.

She sneered. "God is a miracle worker! I didn't even have to go for one of those 'My Husband must come today or I die' crusades before God provided mine."

"What are you driving at, idiot?"

She smiled. "God has ended your little romance with hot boy and Tola's own with gentleman to provide me with *Prince Charming*." She said and did the famous Nigerian *etigi* dance. "I know how much you love this dance." She started singing a famous *Ibo* gospel song as she danced, revelling in excitement.

"You are a complete fool, and until you go for one of those 'Give me my husband' crusades, he won't come!" I shouted angrily. "And when he comes, he would be a stout man whose genitals can't be seen because his stomach has covered it all up. And yes, he would have a bald head."

"And hair in his nostrils that will flutter into his mouth." Tola joined in the rant.

Ini jumped on the sofa in excitement, laughing so hard. "Eh!!! These ones are *pained oh!!!*"

I threw my bag at her and Tola joined me as we slapped her from left to right. We eventually crashed by her side and had a group hug. "Who goes first?"

"Marcus kissed me and I kissed back." Ini said, excitedly.

I smiled. "That's good. It seems you are finally getting some love."



"And in the oddest place." Tola added as she sneered. "Anyway, it is better than having an impotent boyfriend."

I jumped off the chair and so did Ini. "What???" We screamed together. Tola hissed and repositioned herself on the sofa. "You have to be kidding me." I said as I took my seat.

"Did you guys confirm it at the doctor's or what?"

She hissed. "What do I need to confirm? The dude won't get into any action."

Ini and I sneered and eventually laughed loud. "You are a slut, Tola! Is it compulsory for him to sleep with you?"

She scoffed. "What are you guys saying? This is scary. He runs away giving me the 'marriage is best with the bed undefiled' sermon, *Durr!* I have been in and out with Tolu."

"Maybe that's why the guy never respected you." Ini replied.

The room was quiet. I stared at Tola and nodded slightly. Ini was right! She just dropped a bomb and she did it in style.

Tola took a deep breath. "I have to apologize to Wole."

Ini and I smiled. "Wise choice."

"He said the same thing to me and I left his house really mad at him." She added.

Ini smiled at me. "Your turn."

I paused. "Me?"

Tola and Ini nodded. "*Yes ke!*"

"I can't remember saying David and I were having problems." I blurted. I didn't want them coming down on me if by their verdict I was found guilty. David hurt me! "We are fine."

Tola scoffed. "I see...so it is time for you to lie to your girlfriends?"

I blinked. "Girls, I am not lying."

"Does he have HIV? Gonorrhoea, Hepatitis? I mean that fine boy must have one of them." Ini said. I hissed dryly. "Or Cancer?"

I slammed the couch. "STOP!" The room was quiet. "It is not to cool to joke with any of those diseases."

"Just tell us. We could solve this together." Tola replied.

I nodded. "Are sure you really want to hear about it?" They nodded in agreement. "Olofofo!" Ini drummed her hands on her lap in excitement, Tola smiled sheepishly. "David is marrying me for the money!" I blurted. Their smiles faded, Ini withdrew her hand and placed her face in her palm Tola took a deep breath. Both of them burst into an exciting laugh. "What's funny?"

"You people from rich families are crazy! And it is obvious that you, Kimberly have become disillusioned." Tola said.

I stared at them. "What are you saying?"

"What do you have that David doesn't?" Ini asked. "I mean..."

I cut in. "I have proof! Solid evidence!"

Tola scoffed. "I don't believe you. I am sorry, dear, but you might have to cross-check your facts."

"There is nothing to cross-check, Tola. This girl, clearly has lost her mind."

I yelled as I stamped my feet. "Of course! I have! I was held at gunpoint by David's father. I saw all the legal stuffs that back my marriage to David with tonnes of money and inheritance going in his favour." Tola and Ini signalled to me to reduce my voice. "Now you want me to shut up. I am sorry, I can't do that. You wanna know the truth, there you have it. David signed it. He signed it."

"Are you using this as an excuse to like Ben Ten?" Ini asked.

I scoffed. "I love David, damn it! It hurts so much that I love a man who has lied to me. He never told me what all his love was about. I can't forgive that."

Ini hugged me. "It is okay, Kim. Just calm down, I know it hurts too much."

"I am sorry. But I do not believe you, Kimberly. I know David, he is a good man."

I took a deep breath. "I know what I am saying. David fooled me."

"Did you not say his father held you at gunpoint? If your father-in-law to-be could do that, he is capable of the worst lies."

I sighed as I took my seat. "Tola, he showed me proof."

She snapped. "And so what?! Remember, proof can be forged. And also, it may have been before you guys met, things are obviously different now. I won't let you throw away that joy that David brings you because of whatever might have happened."

"Shooo...wetin be your own, Tola?" Ini queried in Pidgin English

Tola took a deep breath. "I have made mistakes in my life, but if I have the opportunity of helping someone like her..." she said pointing at me. "I would. Kimberly would have done this for me."

"Tola, I appreciate you trying to return the favour, but let us be realistic here."

She nodded. "Exactly! That's what I am doing for you. You are pissed off and that makes you blind. I would be realistic on your behalf. Case closed!" she said and picked up her phone. "Ini, did you cook?" she paused and hissed. "Why did I bother to ask?" she said and walked inside.

Ini smiled at me. "Tola is right."

"You too?"

She nodded. "Yeah...now I know what love is like, I won't want to lose it to my foolishness."

\*\*\*

"I can't believe those guys charge separately for Sunday evening jobs?" Tunji Bankole said as he sank into a chair.

Bolu Coker closed the door to the study. "Today is a holy day, we are asking for someone to be taken care of; we need to compensate them heavily."

"Bolu, so, when Bello is dead, what's next?"

Bolu poured himself a glass of whiskey. "He won't die until he tells them who the secret partner is. We would have that information in, say, ten minutes." He said, pulling his sleeve to check the time.

"I am scared, Bolu." Tunji confessed.

Bolu shook his head. "Drink this."

"Bello is someone's father, someone's brother, someone's son."

Bolu nodded. "I agree, but he is a stumbling block."

"How are you so cold?"

Bolu smiled. "When you go through life the way I did, you would be cold."

Tunji nodded. "I need to see my wife. I should be on my way."

"Err...Tunji, just so you don't get shocked when you find out tomorrow, I already put information on Kimberly and David's wedding in the magazines."

Tunji's eyes popped. "What?"

He sighed. "We were going to do it eventually. Besides, I need that Kimberly's money, and those kids won't get anything done left to them."

"How on earth did you get this done?"

He shrugged. "Simple. I told the magazine companies to make use of their photos from the charity fundraiser and then I sent in word on our behalf."

"Our behalf? I don't like being caught off guard, Bolu."

He nodded. "Sorry about that, but the wedding party, from what I announced, would be in two weeks."

"Are you mad? 2 weeks? 2 weeks, Bolu?"

He yawned. "Can you stop yelling? We have a busy day ahead of us tomorrow and it is important that we get this thing done soon."

Tunji scoffed. "It is past ten minutes, your boys haven't replied."

He checked his wristwatch. "They would soon do that."

Tunji Bankole's phone buzzed as a message popped up on the screen. FEMI: *Done!*

"Any problem?" Bolu asked.

Tunji shook his head in disagreement. "It is just the gardener at home."

"Since when did your gardener have your personal phone number?" he asked. His phone buzzed and a message popped on his screen. *FEMI: Done, sir. The Silent Partner is dead. Bello said his shares won't be valid.*"

Bolu Coker smiled. "Bello must be saying hi to his ancestors by now, I just got Femi's text. Also, he said the Silent Partner is dead and has a clause for his shares to be invalid once dead. So, my friend, we are in luck.

Tunji nodded with a smile. "That's good...good news"

Bolu smiled. "You don't sound so excited about it."

"Me? Of course, I am excited about it. It is just that I haven't seen Wura yet. I was supposed to yesterday but I couldn't because of those men and today might just be the same."

Bolu smiled. "You worry too much about the wrong things."

"Wura is my wife."

Bolu nodded. "Okay, let's do it this way. We would see her tomorrow after the acquisition of Millaroca, is that good?"

Tunji took a deep breath. "Yes." Then he cleared his throat. "Although we know that it won't count, I think you should read my daughter's article in Millaroca."

"You read it?"

Tunji nodded. "It kept me up all night, and it is really something."

"Come on, Tunji. You are getting worse every day. Go home, we'll see tomorrow."

Tunji nodded and walked out.

\*\*\*

I peeped from my office door as I saw secretaries running around with trays and jugs. I ducked my head in to avoid seeing the men that walked in through the elevator door. I took a deep breath as I took my seat and stared at my article in the magazine which had drawn so much attention. My phone vibrated, 'David'. I turned off the phone and drummed my hand nervously on my table in my almost empty office; I had packed all my stuffs in case of 'eventually'.

The door flung open and Ben walked in. "Hello beautiful." He said as he took his seat. "I can see you are all packed, you need to see Boye and the other staffs." He took a deep breath. "I believe in you."

I nodded and clenched my fists. "Is it over?"

He laughed. "Mr. Adeoye just joined them. In a matter of minutes, the door would be shut. "I nodded. "That's good. I just hope we win this. It would mean a lot to Mr. Adeoye and all of us here." I rubbed my palms together. "My God, I am so nervous and scared."

Ben walked up to me. "Mind if I hold you? We could just stay in a warm embrace until it is over."

"Uh?" I wished at that moment that it was David. I missed him. It started to dawn on me that I had been acting too hard on him. Ben put his hand around me and even as I wanted to resist him, I was far away, my thoughts were wandering.

"I love you, Kimberly. I can make you happy." He whispered into my ears. I could perceive the scent of his cologne, but it was nothing like David's. Everything about David was different - his warmth, his touch, his words, his smile, his fears and tears.

I wriggled out of Ben's grip. "I am sorry. I love my David." I said confidently with a smile.

"Well, I am the one who is here for you. Where is he?" Ben asked, raising his voice. I wore a wry smile. Ini's type of response played in my heart and before I knew it, I had said to him something that was *Ini-like* to say. "You are in a zone, a zone you can never come out of." I replied.

"What?"

The door opened. "I am sorry for not knocking, but you are needed in the board room, Ms. Bankole." Mr. Adeoye's secretary said.

I nodded and picked my phone as I followed her. The receptionist pushed the door open and I walked in to see many faces, familiar ones inclusive. I swallowed as I saw my dad and Mr. Coker seated. Mr. Coker flashed a smile at me.

"Please sit, Ms. Bankole." Mr. Adeoye said. I took my seat instantly. "It is a shame that Mr. Bello is unavoidably absent, but I guess we can still go on with the votes. Mr. Jega, who is deputy to Mr. Bello, would be handling this session."

Mr. Jega waved lightly. "We have to go on with the voting, but we must thank Professor Bankole for his huge interest in this property and efforts to make it his to serve the society. Left to me, we should not even deliberate a company that is folding up."

Mr. Adeoye interrupted. "Why not get along with the vote? Are you not aware that our last sales shook the market in a couple of days?"

"I am sorry I missed on that tiny detail. In the absence of Mr. Bello, we should be able to go on with the process." Mr. Jega continued. I was irritated. He stared at me. "Ms. Bankole, I would say you had a decent article. But sometimes, our best is not good enough."

I smiled back in response.

He nodded. "You are to vote on the laptops placed before you. The results would be automatically displayed on the flat screen here." He added, pointing at the flat screen monitor.

Mr. Adeoye's secretary came in and whispered into his ears. He smiled and faced us all.

"Our silent partner just arrived. Please, let's hang on."

I stared at Dad who was talking indistinctly to Mr. Coker, but I could tell from their expressions that they were not comfortable.

The door opened slightly and all heads turned in its direction. My jaw dropped and a tiny smile lurked around my lips.

"I am Professor Wura Bankole, Millaroca's silent partner."

## 23

"I have to apologize for the delay in getting down here. My chopper had to be replaced." Mom said as she helped herself to a seat.

Jega scoffed. "How do you expect us to believe this? You? Silent partner?"

Mom smiled. "I came with my documents." She replied. The door opened gently and a tall, light-skinned man walked in. He walked over to Mom with a smile, whispered something in her ears and opened his briefcase. "My secretary, Mark, would give each of you a copy of my documents."

Mark walked with this aura that was peculiar to the robotic secretaries, like the ones you see in the movies or those ones who took direct orders from top shots like Trump, Abrahimovich-Chelsea's billionaire president and the rest. *'I never knew my mom commanded much.'* I thought as Mark handed me copies of the documents with a smile.

*Okay, Mark is cute! That I must confess! Or is Mom sleeping with him? Hmmm...this would be a big deal! He should be for the younger generation, not her. I allowed my thoughts to play on as I watched him go about in his bold grey suit.*

I snapped out of my thoughts as Mr. Adeoye cleared his throat. "Just in case any of you still doubts it, I have her deed here with me."

Bolu Coker smiled in Dad's direction.

Dad cleared his throat. "Please, I would love to have a word with Professor Wura Bankole in private."

"Of course. If you would excuse us." Mom replied and stepped out.

Dad followed quickly.

\*\*\*

Tunji Bankole held Wura's hand as he pulled her away from the door. "What are you doing, Wura? Silent Partner?"



"I am an investor just like every other person." She replied, releasing her hand from his hold. "I have money too, remember?"

Tunji snapped. "Woman, I don't even know how you got out of the hospital, but right now, you need to go home."

She nodded. "Yes, I will. But I just came to perform my duties here, after which, I'll be on my way."

Tunji's took a deep breath. "Wura, for the sake of the love that we shared on the night that we made Kimberly in that beautiful and romantic atmosphere, do not give your shares."

She nodded. "It was just one night, Tunji. Whatever love you claimed to feel for me died after that night, you became a monster."

"Wura...let's save our daughter. What would become of our firms and businesses when she becomes a petty writer?"

She took a deep breath. "Kimberly just rocked this nation with an article. I am doing this for my daughter."

He held her hand but she yanked out of his grip immediately. "Don't do this to us."

"I have few minutes to spend here, after which, you have to sign another paper. I bet you know what that means." He sighed. "Divorce?"

She nodded. "Yes, I have put up with you long enough. I need my life back." She said, and returned into the board room.

\*\*\*

David poured himself some water. "You care?"

"You indeed are sober. I expected liquor." Wole replied.

David drank carefully. "I stopped a long time ago, and even though I am tempted to run to a liquor store, I won't."

Wole nodded. "That's a good decision my friend. Tola broke up with me too."

"Is it over the same issue you have had with your previous?"

He nodded. "Yeah...David, I think I am being stupid. This issue has cost me every girl I have been with, and I can't afford to lose Tola. She is everything I want." He gulped his water. "I'll bend."

David smiled. "Wole, you are a good guy, and I think you deserve the best woman on earth. Well, not Kimberly though, she is mine."

Wole laughed. "I see...you won't even share Kimberly?"

"Never! She means everything to me, I am just lost right now. I want her here with me."

Wole took a deep breath. "I think we should fight for these women. I believe that Kim would forgive you eventually, I know she will. She loves you."

David smiled. "How could she even love me? I am no good."

"You are a good man, David. Yes, we all make mistakes, and you have had your share of that. But in all, you are honest with your feelings. You have always loved her, you shouldn't be denied what you both feel." Wole replied as he walked over to the window. "For me, Tola would leave me because I am a foolish man."

David scoffed. "I am proud of you, brother." He said, joining him at the window. "You are a great guy, and I respect you."

"Liar, you never liked me when we were kids, you used to call me a *sissy*."

David laughed. "I apologize, but you won't even come for the parties or board meetings or hangouts, man. You were boring. Mirabel was fun."

Wole smiled. "She is back now. She didn't ask of you though."

David smiled. "I didn't think she would. I let her down."

"It was for the best man. You always loved Kim, and I am glad you didn't fool my sister."

David smiled. "I couldn't hurt Kim. Not then, not now."

"What about Bola?"

He took a deep breath. "Bola was special. She was my friend, she understood me. She was the first person I told about my mom."

Wole nodded. "Wow...she must have meant a lot..."

"She meant a lot, Wole."

He smiled. "I know, but you have to fight for Kimberly now and you have to be the man you were before."

"I was a monster." He replied.

Wole shrugged. "But you always knew how to get things done, David. I am not asking you to switch off on everyone like in the past. But, you have two women in your life to win back, you have to do that now."

"Sometimes I wish your dad was mine, your dad is a real man."

Wole smiled. "You know, I was actually envious of your dad when growing up. I wished he was mine, he put you out there, made the rest of us jealous, you know."

David scoffed. "See where that got me, I threw my own mom out of my life." David puffed out some air from his mouth tiredly. "I am glad your dad abstained from mine and Kim's. He even made it so good that you didn't even know her."

"Kim was not one to even care about our circle. You are a lucky man. Apologize to her, and try to win your mother over for a start."

David stared at him. "My mother? It's been years, I bet she doesn't even know who I am." Wole took a deep breath. "David, you have to do something special, something unique. You should know better."

\*\*\*

"I am putting my vote in for Mr. Adeoye." Mom said.

Bolu Coker smiled. "I am under the impression that you are seeing this as a bidding war, Wura Bankole. It is just a subtle business." I stared at Bolu Coker. He sure loved to impress people with his crooked intelligence. "Millaroca is doing badly. We want to salvage this situation and buy over a company that is about to fold up. Mr. Adeoye would make lots of money, and you

partners would too. It is a win-win situation. Millaroca has served her cause, now it's time for her to go."

"Are you forgetting the sales that Millaroca made in the last few hours due to just one article? Millaroca is about to take over and this would be huge. This is the best time for anyone to invest." Mr. Adeoye interrupted.

Bolu cleared his throat. "You are looking at this from the angle where a simple article won you some audience." He said, staring in my direction. "What if her next write-up is disappointing?"

"You have no idea about the arts; why not just forget this discussion." Mr. Adeoye retorted. "She is good." He said, staring in my direction.

Mom tapped the table. "Gentlemen and ladies, the last time I checked, this is no debate or summit. We are here to cast our votes and that's all." She said, cutting off all arguments.

"Where is Chief Bello?"

Jega cleared his throat. "I am deputizing for him, we haven't heard from him."

She nodded. "In that case, shall we?"

"Please vote in favour or against, your votes would be counted as per the percentage you hold in this place. Vote wisely." Jega said and pushed a button. "We have five minutes." He said and took his seat.

Dad bit his fingers uncontrollably as the clock ticked. *Five minutes was so close, yet so far.* I watched the clock anxiously and couldn't wait for the alarm. My 'impatience' was soon rewarded as the alarm went.

Jega fetched his remote control and turned towards the flat screen. "I will now reveal the results which would determine the fates of Mr. Adeoye and Millaroca." He said and then turned on the TV.

\*\*\*

Ini covered her nose as she used her fingers to pick the diaper lightly. "Eewww!!! OMG! I am so dead."

Marcus smiled as he walked into the bathroom. "Ini, is that how to hold a diaper?"

She wore a frown as she hurled the diaper into the bin. "You should train this girl how to do her business in the toilet. I mean, this is unfair."

"Did you know anything about doing your business in the toilet at her age?" he asked, as he took his seat in the tub. "Do you want to wash her?"

She scoffed. "Hell NO! It's bad enough that I have to take out the messy diaper."

"You are one lazy person. I mean, I do this all the time."

She hissed. "You think I am lazy? I don't think so. I am just avoiding the mess."

Marcus smiled as he opened the tap. "Can I have her?" Ini nodded as she stretched the baby across. "On a second thought, you wash her."

"No way, Marcus."

He smiled. "Yes way, Ini. Wash her! Time to get responsible, get in the tub."

She frowned as she sat by the edge of the tub. "I will run the water, while you wash. I can't imagine touching poop."

"Seriously? We were all once babies, you know." He said, washing the baby. "Pour the water gently."

She sighed. "Can't we just get this over and done with?"

"Not that easy, she is only a baby."

She nodded. "She would need a nanny, or better yet, tell your mom to get responsible."

He frowned. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, where is your mom? The other day she was out and she left this little baby alone. That's cold."

He nodded. "I know my mom, but she has really been helpful in taking care of my daughter."

"What's her name?"

He stalled and shook his head. "Ini."

"What?!" Ini screamed as her jaw dropped. The baby yelled too, probably from the fright of Ini's scream. "I am sorry, Ini." She said, eyeballing Marcus.

\*\*\*

Oyinkan dropped her bag on the table and took her seat. "You are not going to do what I think?" she said.

Wole smiled. "We are."

She stared at David. "Man, this won't be funny and you know it. At least, let's hear the outcome of Millaroca first."

David smiled. "I have made up my mind. I would do this without Kimberly. I would go to my mother and apologize."

"David, we would have an advantage with Kimberly. You need to first sort yourself out with Kim before you even talk to your mom."

He shook his head in disagreement. "I am going to do it alone. I am a man now, I can't keep running away."

"What about Kimberly?" Oyinkan asked.

Wole tapped the table. "Guys...TV!!!" They all turned to see Kimberly, Prof. Mrs. Bankole and Mr. Adeoye on National TV.

"In what could be described as a major turnaround for long-standing magazine, Millaroca, Mr. Adeoye has reaffirmed his position as President of Millaroca Magazine. The expected sale of Millaroca to unnamed prestigious bodies would no longer take place and according to Mr. Adeoye and even from the wide audience, this is thanks to one lady, Kim Banks."

The reported said, and turned the microphone in Kimberly's direction. "How does this feel? You are the most talked about person. How does it feel?" she asked.

David turned off the TV. Oyinkan groaned. "Back to business." He said.

"You should have at least allowed us to hear what she had to say." She replied. He smiled. "That's my woman there, I decide whether I want you guys to hear it or not."

"Durr! She's is now a celebrity. She has made her own name. She is our celebrity."

Oyinkan retorted.

David smiled. "Whatever guys! Now, let's focus. I don't want that Ben dude around her, so we have to find a way to keep him away."

"He loves her and he wants to fight for her." She replied.

Wole scoffed. "Oyinkan, forget about that. David loves her more. You know that."

"Oyinkan, do you love Ben?" David asked.

She scoffed lightly. "David, give me a break! This is about you, not me."

He smiled. "I am curious."

"No. I don't love anyone."

David shrugged. "I will take you by your word; I will visit my mom tonight."

"So soon?" She asked.

David nodded. "I need to meet her. I can't wait any more."

\*\*\*

Bolu passed Tunji a glass. "I must congratulate you, my friend. You have enemies in your family."

"They are not my enemies."

Bolu smiled. "Wow!!! Your daughter writes an article that happens to cause a change in the minds of the board. And to cap it up, your wife is the silent partner." Tunji frowned. "Sorry, soon-to-be ex-wife."

Tunji hissed. "I won't sign those papers."

"Wura would drag you to court."

Tunji scoffed. "She can't! She won't dare"

Bolu laughed. "I don't think you noticed, but the Wura I saw back there, looked to me just like Kimberly, a real viper. That Wura would drag you across the country and beyond to get her divorce."

"I won't let her."

Bolu nodded. "What do you intend to do about it?"

"I will cry. I will ask for her forgiveness. I want to work my family into place."

Bolu spat into the cup. "You are a fool! You are a weakling, a woman, a dog!"

"Shut up, Bolu! Just shut up! I am not a fool or a woman or any of those vulgar names. Is it a crime to want to have my family together?"

Bolu nodded. "Now you talk back to me, that's impressive, Tunji. You don't want to get on my bad side, you know."

Tunji scoffed. "Damn you, Bolu Coker. Enough of your dominance and all. You need to show me some respect."

"You can never have any respect from me. You would get your respect from your fans if you keep to your end of our agreement. Else, I would expose everything about Bola, Bello and you are doomed."

Tunji smiled. "We both would be doomed eventually."

"You are an ingrate, Tunji Bankole, I have always put myself out there for you."

Tunji slammed the table. "No!" he hissed. "You have always been selfish, very greedy; money is never enough for you and that's why we are in this fix."

Bolu took a deep breath. "Tunji Bankole, you can't get away with all these you have said."

"I know, but I am ready to come clean. What's the worst that could happen? We will get the jail term that we deserve!"

Bolu laughed out loud. "No one would ever arrest me. As for you, your end is sooner than you think. You have offended me this time and there is no forgiveness."

Tunji nodded. "I am ready for the hit. But I promise you, Bolu, you are finished." He said and walked out.

Bolu Coker grunted heavily and hurled the bottle at the door, he scattered the table in anger and sank into a chair soaked in his sweat.

\*\*\*\*

"Are you sure about this?" Mom asked as she opened the door.



I shrugged. "I have left everything behind already."

"Including David? You didn't touch your meal throughout the flight, you kept staring out of the window."

I nodded. "I need this break, away from him, away from work, away from everything. Just seeing David's signature on that paper broke my heart. I couldn't even come to terms with the fact he might have signed it a while back."

"I wish he felt this strongly about you too."

I nodded. "Mom, David loves me."

She smiled. "You sound confident." She poured a glass of wine. "I would have stayed back to make things work if I were in your shoes then."

"I don't understand."

She sipped her wine. "The Wura that cared about your dad then is gone. I had to put up with him for your sake, but now, I can't do that anymore."

"Mom..."

She cut in. "You are not to blame, Kimberly. You are my own pride and joy. I am grateful to God that I have you."

I hugged her. "I love you, Mom."

"I love you too...Now, I suggest you return to the man you love."

I shook my head in disagreement. "Not yet, we need this space."

"But why? You are hurting and I am sure he is too."

I nodded. "Mom, David has been through a lot as a kid, as Bolu Coker's son. I yelled at him that day, and I feel so bad about it. I need him to forgive me, Mom, he walked away from me. He was hurt."

She smiled. "That's why I think you should be with him now. He needs you."

"You need me too, mom."

She scoffed lightly. "Don't make these excuses, Kimberly."

"Mom, they are not excuses. Sometimes, we need to really be sure about what we are into."

She nodded. "I just have one question. If after this break, David tells you that he would move on with someone else, how would you feel?"

I took a deep breath. "My life would literally be over. But then, maybe we weren't meant to be."

"Let's look on the positive side, honey." She said, and passed me her glass. "Wine?"

I shook my head. "I want to sleep. You should get some rest."

"Kim, I am getting a divorce from your dad, how do you feel about it?"

I scoffed. "Mom, I am not a kid anymore. And to be honest, you never had a marriage." I replied. She smiled lightly and blew me a kiss. "Good night, Mom."

"Good night, my dear."

\*\*\*

Tola 'hibernated' her laptop. "So now it would be Skype?"

"Na so we see am oh...*Skype zone*" Ini replied in her casual *pidgin* English as she yawned. "It is good to have enough money oh...I mean, why would someone just walk out of her office and fly to Abuja and say it is for a break?"

Tola hissed. "Kim's mother must have told her to accompany her. Now our girlfriend has decided to take a break."

"If you ask me, I'll say she is running away from David. Amazon lady is madly in love with David and the mere thought that he may not love her frightens her." Ini replied.

Tola scoffed. "David would never leave Kim, that guy is too attached to her."

"Never trust men, and you? Have you gone to Wole?"

Tola shook her head in disagreement. "He may never forgive me. I am scared of being rejected." Ini drew closer to her. Tola wiped a tear drop. "I feel so disgusted and ashamed of myself. Wole must see me as nymphomaniac. It's horrible."

Ini smiled. "He won't. Wole is a very understanding, I am sure he would come around soon. Truth be told, I am very positive."

"What about you? Marcus?"

Ini smiled. "Marcus, right? I find it hard to believe but it is real, Tola. How could I have been so blind? Marcus is the only one for me. Who else would love me?"

Tola sneered. "We always told you. I am so glad you have finally realized it."

Ini smiled and drew Tola closer for a hug. "I wish Kim was here to complete our groupie. I miss her."

"Me too..." Tola replied, almost inaudibly. She paused and stared at Ini. "What if Kim returns and she moves out of this house to live on her own, you know? What if she starts to drive a Range Rover Sport? Or those flashy cars and she doesn't want to associate with us again? I mean, you should check her twitter. She has been up by at least fifty thousand followers since her post went viral. We are finished, Ini."

Ini laughed with a great deal of sarcasm. "Very funny, Tola Matthews. You know Kimberly isn't like that, she loves us."

"I am just saying. You know when fame takes over, we all change. I mean, I'll change when I am famous."

Ini smiled. "Exactly! That's why you must continue to work for Mr. Asolo in Christ's name."

"Ha! *Which kind nonsense be that one na? Abeg o!*" Tola rattled in Pidgin.

Ini's phone vibrated and a message popped on the screen. 'Shola Jones: When are you going to jail?' Ini replied. 'Soon!'

Tola stared at her. "What's up?"

"Oh that...where you actually spying on my chat?"

She shrugged. "Not exactly. I just thought I could take a peek."

Ini smiled. "Well...I might have something to tell you since we are alone, and it is obvious you are not really a saint like *Madam Kim*, so we might keep this secret."

"We don't hide anything from ourselves." Tola replied.

Ini scoffed. "Trust me, we are both filthy enough to withstand what I would tell you, Kim would just die."

"I think you are underestimating Kimberly's innocence."

Ini hissed. "The worst that girl must have done in her life would be to hide her clothes and shoes under the bed if she wanted to avoid church." Both ladies laughed. "I need a beer."

"Thought you were sober."

Ini scoffed. "Sober? I am not an alcoholic, I just drink."

"Social drinker?"

Ini winked. "If you put it that way." She said and left for the kitchen. "Smirnoff?" she called.

"No, thank you. Wole won't like that."

Ini laughed. "I see."

\*\*\*

Oyinkan dropped her bag by the bar. "Why did you call?"

"I am sorry. I was harsh, right?"

She shrugged. "Ben, I am your friend, and I care about you, but you can't keep doing this to yourself in the name of love." She said, pointing at the drinks.

He sighed. "Please sit." She obliged. "It's just that I think I have lost Kimberly forever."

She took a deep breath. "She may not have been the one for you, try to understand." She said softly.

"You know, earlier today, I was with her, and she told me to my face that she loves David." He sipped his drink. "Not like she had never said that to me before, but it was so confident. She was reassuring me that we would never have anything." He paused to laugh. "She even said I was in a zone."

Oyinkan smiled. "Zone? Sorry man, that's cold."

"Do you want a drink?"

She waved lightly. "No." she tapped him as she smiled. "In other cheering news, my License got approved."

He smiled. "That's good news. Congratulations. We should drink to that."

"Yeah...but not today. Do you want to walk? The waterfront isn't far from here."

He nodded and picked his jacket. He pulled a thousand naira from his pocket and placed it under his glass. "Thank you." he said to the barman.

He staggered as he tried to balance on his feet. Oyinkan helped him with his balance as she put his hand around her neck. "You are wasted."

"No...not yet. I have an extra bottle at home." He said sloppily.

She took a deep breath. "You will be okay, my friend. You will."

"I will never be." He replied slowly as they walked into the cold night.

\*\*\*

Wole pulled up in the garage. "Are you sure about this man?"

David nodded as he unbuckled the seatbelt. "Yes, I am going to turn it all around."

"What if it goes bad?"

David smiled. "Then it goes as we have expected. I am not expecting her to hug me, I just want to see her."

Wole took a deep breath. "We should have waited for Kimberly."

"Kim didn't throw my mother out, I did." David replied.

Wole nodded. "I understand your point but man,..."

"No buts..." David cut in. "I would do this."

Wole nodded. "I am with you, my man." He replied as he opened the car door. "Let's go."

They walked into the hospital and stopped by the help desk. "Good evening, ladies." David said.

"Good evening, sirs." One of the attendants replied.

David clenched his fist. "We are here to see a patient. She goes by the name Elizabeth Sunflower."

The receptionist looked through her laptop. "Mrs. Sunflower? What is your relationship with her?"

Wole cleared his throat. "Family friends."

"Family Friends?" She asked.

David nodded. "Yes."

The receptionist smiled. "Just give me a minute." She said, as she put a phone call through.

She smiled as she stared at them. "Please hang on, do have your seats."

Wole and David took their seats. "Do you think they would let us in? David asked.

"We are doing this the right way, it's better than sneaking in and drawing your father's attention if we are caught."

David nodded. "I tried calling Kim."

"I thought you said you wanted to give it a break?" Wole asked with a smile.

He nodded. "I know, but I need her. I am scared here."

"You have got me, man." Wole replied

David hissed. "Who are you?"

"I might as well leave you alone." Wole replied, attempting to stand up.

David forced him back on the chair. "Where are you going? You can't leave me alone."

Wole smiled. "Say you need me."

David frowned. "Are you crazy? Can't you see the ladies staring at us?"

"And so?" Wole asked, lazily.

David shoved him kindly as he flashed a smile at the pretty receptionists. "You are embarrassing me, Wole." He said, through his clenched teeth.

A doctor walked up to them. "Mrs. Sunflower's relatives?"

David and Wole nodded. "Yes, sir."

"I am afraid only one of you can see her."

Wole nodded and tapped David. "Good luck, man."

David followed the doctor. He stood by the door as the doctor walked in. "Elizabeth, how are you tonight?"

She smiled feebly as she turned off the TV. "It is a glamorous evening, my *daughter* had a fantastic day. Millaroca is back on its feet, thanks to her, and she's all over the news."

David wiped a teardrop from his eye as he watched his mother refer to Kimberly as 'daughter'. His mother looked feeble. He watched her speak, her eyes were dark. Same mother he knew, the one with no glow. The only difference now was her age.

The doctor nodded. "That's good, Kim Banks wrote something that moved us all. We are happy for you." he said as he adjusted her bed. She turned her face in David's direction, but he bowed his head immediately. The doctor smiled. "A friend is here to see you." The doctor said and walked out.

David picked his steps slowly with his head bowed. He blinked as his heart raced fast and wished to turn back immediately.

"Who are you, son?" Elizabeth asked feebly.

His teeth clattered as he slowly raised his head. Their faces met, he stared into her eyes.

"My name is David...David Sunflower."

## 24

Elizabeth smiled slightly. "I am sorry; I don't know who you are."

David swallowed. "Of course, you do. Please, don't deny it."

She blinked. "You are harassing me, kid."

He dropped to his knees. "I am sorry, mom." He cried.

She laughed sarcastically. "I don't have a son, he died."

"No, Mom. He didn't. He's right here; it's me, David." He paused to catch his breath.

"David Sunflower, your son."

She scoffed. "Young man, you are getting me really upset. Please, don't make me call security."

He shook his head. "You may call them; I just want you to know I am sorry."

"I am not your mother. Please get out." She whispered as she shook her head, unable to believe what was going on. "You are not my son, you are a liar."

He held her hand. "Mom, I am David. Stop this, mom."

"You are David Coker!" she yelled. "Now get out!" she shouted as she pressed the emergency bell near her bed.

\*\*\*

Tola took a large gulp directly from the vodka bottle. Ini laughed hard as she sipped gently from her own glass. "You were sober..."

"Up until this moment!" Tola retorted. "Ini, you are the devil! I can't believe you would go that far just to hurt Shola."

Ini shrugged. "That devil would have done the same to me if she had the opportunity." She replied and took a deep breath. "Although, I must say, I regret it now."

"You should!" She stressed as she took a deep breath. "Shola is good. She cut a serious deal."



Ini smiled. "Her tenure is over."

"What are you planning?" Tola asked as she poured herself another glass. "You always have a plan B. You are too evil not to."

Ini smiled faintly. "Of course, I have a plan. I have turned myself in to the police! My jackpot! That idiot is not aware and so I am going to force her to file a report and then make her withdraw it when I let her know that I have turned her in for blackmail"

"What?! Ini..." Tola started.

She scoffed. "Tola, you really need to be smart in life. Our people say *when you are in the sea, if you can't eat the whale, get ready not to be eaten by it, be fast.*"

Tola hissed. "Does that even exist?"

She nodded with a grin. "I just coined it, and so, it does."

"Rubbish. I don't like what I am hearing. You have gone too far, Ini."

She sighed. "Too far to look back now!" she replied as she drew closer to Tola. "The truth is I am really sorry about what I did to Shola, but she is paying evil for evil."

"What did you expect? You staked her career. An eye for an eye!"

Ini sneered. "Is what you go to learn at church?"

"Don't even go there." Tola replied moving away from her gently. "What if Shola doesn't file a report?"

Ini smiled. "She will! Don't be a pessimist. Henry is putting ideas in her head on my behalf."

"Her cousin?"

"Yes, he is helping me nab her! I am expecting her to do that tomorrow. She is already upbeat about who filed in the anonymous report. So, I guess she would want to topple it as soon as possible."

"Have you thought of the possibility that she would play the victim and not turn herself in?"

Ini scoffed. "She won't! I know that fool. She won't, and I am putting all my cards on it."

\*\*\*

Tunji Bankole's driver pulled up in front of a warehouse. "We are here, sir." He announced.

Tunji pulled his sleeves up slightly to check the time. "Are you sure?"

He nodded. "There he comes."

They watched as Femi approached from the warehouse twisting and turning right and left. He knocked lightly on the glass as soon as he got to the car.

Tunji pushed the door open. "Thank you for meeting me."

"Yes sir! But sir, why am I doing this? My life, my job, my family, they are all at stake here."

Tunji took a deep breath. "Femi, I know you have worked for Mr. Coker for a long time and you are loyal to him. But sometimes, we don't need to do things wrongly."

"What's your point, sir? I have kept Chief Bello alive and lied to my employer risking my own life. What's in it for me?"

Tunji brought out an envelope. "That's enough money for you to run away and start your life in any country or city of your choice. Get away before Mr. Coker finds you."

Femi nodded. "Bbbbut sssir...Why are you doing this to your friend?" he stammered

"That's none of your business! Where is Chief Bello?"

Femi took a deep breath. "He is in my house."

"Get him out of there as soon as possible. And let me know when you do."

Femi nodded and without another word, stepped out of the car.

\*\*\*

The nurses tried to keep David back. "Please leave, sir."

Wole held him. "It's okay, man."

"I don't know you! You are not my son! You are Bolu's son!" Elizabeth yelled furiously. David fought hard to get away. "Mom, I am sorry. I am sorry."

"Go away, David! I don't want to see you. I don't ever want to see you! Leave."

The nurse stepped up to her. "Please calm down, ma. We don't want you to get yourself worked up."

"Get that man out of here." She ordered.

The nurse nodded and turned to David. "Please leave."

David stared at her. "I just want to talk to you, Mom. Please..." Elizabeth turned her face away. Heat flushed across David's face as tears rolled down his cheek.

Wole pulled him out. "Come on, David."

David swallowed. "Wole, she will never forgive me."

"We would keep trying. She must forgive you." he replied as he walked with David to the car.

\*\*\*

Ini hurried to the door in her bathrobe. She took a peek through the peephole. "Oh my..." she muttered as she opened the door. "Good morning, sirs."

"Good morning. We are from the police station."

She nodded. "Clearly."

"We have a warrant for Ms. Obong to be interrogated."

She nodded. "That's me, let me see it." She replied, collecting the document. She breezed through it to confirm Shola's name in it. "Okay, give me fifteen minutes." She said, and shut them out.

\*\*\*

Shola smiled as Ini took her seat. "Justice always prevails, my dear."

"I know." Ini replied.

Mr. Itama walked in and signalled to the standing officers to be dismissed. "I have read your statement, Ms. Jones." He started. Shola nodded with a smile. "We have decided to file a report back to your agency and we would check with the security unit for evidence."

Shola scoffed. "I have the evidence here." She said, dropping a CD on the table.

"How did you come across this kind of information?" he asked, raising the CD before her.

She smiled. "I simply helped the police do their job."

He nodded and turned towards Ini. "Ms. Obong, I have also read your statement and we would try to reconcile yours with hers."

"I have some evidence here too." She replied, bringing out a file from her bag.

Shola slammed the table. "What evidence could that be?"

Mr. Itama stared at her. "Ms. Obong here also reported a crime from your end. Are you not aware?"

"Not at all. They are all lies, cheap lies."

He nodded. "We would see you both in due time once we have processed your information."

"What are you doing, Ini?" Shola asked.

Ini smiled. "Nothing."

Mr. Itama cleared his throat. "On a lighter note, you both are public figures. Are you both ready for this?"

Ini nodded. "Yes, we are."

"Speak for yourself. What do you mean, sir?"

He put Ini's file into his drawer. "You both have filed reports against one another. I am not even a judge but I can promise you both that you are both guilty."

Shola slammed the table. "Impossible! I was the victim."

"You blackmailed me." Ini replied with a smile.

Shola stared at Mr. Itama. "Sir?"

He nodded with a wry smile. "I am in a very nice mood and I would be willing to help you both resolve this matter as long as you both are prepared to let go."

Shola swallowed. "Are you saying that I could go to jail for that?"

"Exactly. You both are on the wrong side of the law."

Shola's face fell. "Not fair."

He nodded. "I understand how you feel. But, Ms. Jones, you are in luck that I am not willing not to send you both to court without a warning. What would it be for you both?"

"What choice do we have?" Ini asked.

He smiled. "There is only one. Both of you would close your cases here and as a law enforcement officer, I would mete out the punishment which I am liable to give to you."

Shola took a deep breath. "What sort of punishment?"

He fetched his handbook. "We could regard this as a mild case of public nuisance and since you both have a history of that, you each get 2 hours of community service for a week."

"Fair enough." Shola replied.

Ini shook her head in disagreement. "I want to go to court."

Mr. Itama took a deep breath. "Are you sure?"

Shola stared at her. "Please give us a moment to talk alone outside." She replied, dragging Ini out.

\*\*\*

Bolu Coker stared at David as he walked in. "Have you forgotten about your suspension?"

"I haven't forgotten. I just want to know why I am getting married in two weeks. Do you need Kim's inheritance so badly?"

He nodded. "Yes, I do. I know money means nothing to you, you have made a lot for yourself, but I want my right soon. I am broke."

"Father, have you no shame?"

He smiled. "Why? It was an agreement. I am proud. I want it soon and I want it now."

David took a deep breath as he loosened his tie. "When last did you check on my mother?"

Bolu hissed. "She must be dead."

"My mom is not dead."

He smiled. "Good for her. What's this all about?"

"I saw my mother yesterday." He said as a tear drop rolled down his cheek. "My mom doesn't want me again."

Bolu blinked as he sat up straight. "Where did you see her?"

David scoffed. "Why?! So you can finish off what you started?" He shook his head stubbornly. "No, I won't tell you."

"Then why are you here?"

David took a deep breath. "I am here to let you know that I am no longer getting married to Kimberly..." he said. Bolu's jaw dropped. "Not on your terms, father."

"What do you mean? I don't care what you do and how you do it. We already have an agreement which you would sign at the registry and that's final."

David smiled. "Things change. This...has changed."

Bolu scoffed. "You can't do that."

"Dad, I love Kimberly and I refuse to lose her to a selfish old man like you."

Bolu slammed the table. "You don't have a choice! That paper is valid as long as two people are in agreement, I have her father."

David nodded. "Not for long..." he replied and approached the door. "Dad, remember my mom is alive. So don't get too comfortable."

"Is that a threat, David? Elizabeth is a vegetable."

David turned towards him. "It's funny how the weakest could hurt us, right? I heard Prof. Mrs. Bankole ruined your takeover."

Bolu charged towards him and held him by the collar. "What are you driving at?"

David smiled. "You are sitting on my mom's fortune, it would soon be pretty uncomfortable."

"Be very careful young man, you know what I am capable of." He retorted.

David dropped his father's hands. "Don't ever touch me like that again."

"I made you, David."

He scoffed. "I am not proud of it." He replied and walked out.

\*\*\*

Henry took off his sunshades as soon as he came out from the sports centre. His phone rang. "Dear cousin, what do you want?" he said aloud as he stared at the caller. The following conversation ensued between them;

*Henry: Hello, Shola!*

*Shola: I won't need your services anymore.*

*Henry: Take a chill pill, couz! Why is that?*

*Shola: Ini and I have resolved our differences and so any info you have for me is useless, therefore, no money for you.*

Henry shook his head as the line went dead. A wry smile lurked around his face and he soon started to dance. "We did it." He said aloud.

"This can be regarded as a first grade madness."

Henry stopped dancing as he stared at the lady in the Chrysler who had just hurled at him. "Excuse me?"

She took off her shades. "You shouldn't be dancing in the streets."

"FYI, this is no street, this is a free road, university campus. My dance didn't hurt anyone, did it?"

She nodded. "Yes it did. There is a lady across the road that just dropped dead because of it."

He raised an eyebrow. "Your sense of humour is really weak." He replied as he adjusted his tennis bag and leaned against her car. "Smooth ride, you are not from around here, are you?"

"I think I have a good sense of humour." She replied with a smile. "That aside, I need to get to Moremi Hall, could you please help me?"

He smiled as he stared at Moremi Hall which wasn't far off. "It is really far, you will have to give me a ride." He replied.

She nodded with a smile. "With all pleasure, thank you."

He jumped in. "Straight down."

She drove on. "So, is my sense of humour really that weak?"

He scoffed. "That should be the least of your worries, you are in a car with a guy you don't even know." He flashed a grin at her. "You should be scared."

She scoffed. "Why? You are in a car with a lady you don't know, she just picked you randomly. She could have picked any other guy."

He stared at her as he slipped his hand underneath his shorts. "Really?"

"You are scared. Cool." She replied.

He cleared his throat. "Here's Moremi." He lied.

She pulled up. "Don't be scared, I am not a serial killer. Thanks for the help."

He immediately jumped out. "Sorry boo!" he said with a smile. She raised an eyebrow. "What? You really are not from around here. Moremi is back where you picked me, just opposite. This is my destination. Thanks for the ride."

She took a deep breath. "That's not cool, man."

"I know! Henry is typically 'not cool'." He replied and ran off.

\*\*

Oyinkan dropped the receiver as she smiled. "Nice to have you here. What's up?"

"Oyinkan, I came to get you for lunch."

She smiled. "Ben, stop consoling yourself. I can't be Kim."

"No, I am not using you. The thing is Mr. Adeoye just certified a pay raise with this success Millaroca is enjoying." He replied with a smile. "I have decided to spend the lunch with you as a way of celebrating."

She scoffed. "Is this because Kim is out of town?"

"Just shut up, okay...I love you!"

She giggled. "You know movies and pick up lines will do you no good." She replied grabbing her bag. "Let's go eat. I am starving."

"Are you running away from me?"

She eyeballed him. "I have two counselling sessions after lunch, I am starving." She said as she walked out.

He smiled and followed briskly.

\*\*\*

Tola stared at Wole as he tried convincing a client to take on a house. He had learnt the ropes pretty fast. She withdrew from the conversation and took her seat staring at them. Wole never flashed a glance at her as he walked smartly along with the client. She hoped and prayed that



he would at least turn in her direction, but he didn't. *'He must have written me off!' she thought.* They even drove in separate cars to meet up with the client.

Wole ushered the client out of the building and stepped aside allowing the client to make a phone call. He stared at Tola from afar. *'She was so quick to jump into her car. She must hate me so much. What if she decides to break up with me? I can't let Tola go.'* He thought.

Tola took a deep breath as Wole approached her. "The client is ready for the final negotiation." He announced.

"Tie it up, it is your commission." She replied.

He wore a faint smile. "I am still under you, ma'am."

"Wole..." she stressed sadly. "I think..."

He cut in. "It's okay, I'll tell him you are unwell. I would tie it up properly." He said and walked away.

She wiped a tear drop from her face as she watched him leave.

\*\*\*

Oyinkan wiped some mayonnaise from her mouth. "My first two clients are coming in soon."

Ben smiled. "So, you would get paid for psychoanalyzing them?"

"Of course! But that's not the motive."

He nodded, "I see." He cleared his throat. "So, what's your first case about?"

"It is confidential." She replied with a smile. "Let's talk about you. So, did you also get a promotion?"

He smiled. "I would tell you if you agree to go out with me."

"I am out with you already."

He scoffed. "Like in a proper way. On a date, perhaps."

"What would happen when Kimberly returns?" she asked.

He took a deep breath. "Oyinkan, I don't know, but one thing I know is that, I don't want to ever lose you."

"Don't worry, I'll be your friend forever." She replied with a smile. "We have to go."  
She said, picking her bag as she walked out.

\*\*\*

"If I were in your shoes, I would jump at the opportunity of working here."

I stared at Mark. "That is exactly why we are different." I replied with a smile. "Clearly, you enjoy working with my mom, that's good for business."

He smiled. "What do you know about business? I think you should frequent your mom's enterprises."

"I never knew she had so much." I replied, flipping through the pages of a magazine.

He collected the magazine carefully and replaced it with a folder. "These are financial records from last month. You might want to take a look at them."

"You have got to be kidding me!" I replied, placing the folder on the table. "I'm not going through that."

He smiled. "Why do you want to return to Lagos so badly?"

I smiled. "Do you have a family?"

"I have my little girl in Calabar." He replied.

I sat up. "I have my life in Lagos."

"Your life?" he asked with a smile. He then paused. "David Coker, right?"

I nodded with a smile. "Yeah...everything is not right without him." I started. "I don't know why I am telling you this."

He smiled as he took his seat. "I know how you feel, love is crazy."

"But David and I are going through some tough times." I replied. "I am scared."

He smiled. "You have been sad since the flight down here, and all through breakfast. Why don't you go to him?"

"It's complicated." I replied.

"Love is a beautiful thing, I only realized how much I loved my wife when she died."

I took a deep breath. "I am sorry."

He smiled. "It's fine. I never knew back then, I was too occupied to notice."

"We all make mistakes, although it's really sad that she's gone now."

He nodded. "Yeah...I wish I could relive those days. Anyway, I think you should stop running and return to Lagos. Go back to your love...your life."

"I don't know if it is the right thing to do. I think I hurt him."

He smiled. "We all make mistakes. Don't wait too long to have yours fixed."

I stared at him with a faint smile. "What am I gonna do?"

"I can get you a ticket to Lagos for tonight." He said, with a smile. "Might not be first class."

My eyes lit up with some hope. "I'll take anything."

\*\*\*

"I cannot believe you are still here. Are you stalking me?" Henry asked.

"Why should I?"

He smiled. "I left you here, you should have been long gone. You are lucky the bad guys are not here to hijack this baby." He said tapping her car's bonnet.

"Are you better than the bad guys? I gave you a ride only for you to turn out to be a con man."

He frowned. "That's a strong word, lady. I am no con man!"

"I want you to take me to Moremi Hall."

He scoffed. "Henry doesn't take orders from anyone, my dear." He replied, with a smile.

She nodded. "Okay, I have actually been to Moremi and returned, I thought I'd give you a chance to redeem yourself."

He laughed. "Why?"

"I am a fan of yours. It's a shame." She replied. He raised an eyebrow. "I read your article on the 'break my heart' thing, the one you posted online."

He stared at her. "My paper! Oh my..."

"Henry Rodger? It's okay, wasted journey!" she said as she pushed her weight up from the car. "Thanks."

He pulled her hand. "I am sorry, I am usually very playful."

"I see...anyway, I have to leave now."

"Please...I really am sorry. To be honest, I didn't mean to piss you off."

She scoffed. "Well, you did." She said and wriggled from his grip. He hurried to the car.

"What do you want?"

"I want to make it up to you. I am sorry."

She nodded. "Now you are sorry because you know I am disappointed in you, right?"

He nodded. "Yes. I am a jerk, I know."

She scoffed. "Impression has been made, sorry."

He jumped into the front seat as she entered. "I am sorry." He said, with a smile. "And I think your sense of humour is cool."

She laughed. "You are a real jerk."

"What can I do?!" he said with a smile.

She smiled back. "I'll take the drink."

He nodded. "Henry Rodgers, nice to meet you." he said, stretching out his hand.

"Mirabel Briggs." She replied, taking the hand.

\*\*\*

David watched carefully from a distance with his binoculars. Mother Francesca waved at Elizabeth as she drove off in the Victoria's Home pickup truck. He watched as his mom walked slowly towards the garden. "*Now or never*" he said to himself and jumped out of the bushes.

Elizabeth gasped as she saw him. "What do you want, young man?"

"Mom...I just want to talk to you."

She scoffed. "I think I haven't had a bath yet, I might embarrass you."

He took a deep breath as his voice broke. "Mom, I am sorry. I regret everything I have done."

She nodded. "Why are you looking for me all of a sudden?"

"Mom, I have been looking for you for a long time now."

She scoffed. "David, I don't want to ever see you again. Please, don't ever look for me." she said, as tears flowed down her eyes. "Go away from me."

Tears flowed from his eyes freely. "Mom, I have lived the last twelve years of my life in regret. Please, don't do this."

"Are you saying I am not justified?"

He shook his head in disagreement. "You have every right to hate me, but I don't want that to happen."

"All those years of rejection from my own son... You meant everything to me, but now, David...David you are dead to me."

He dropped on his knees. "Mother, please." He said with his head bowed. "Please, mother, forgive your son."

Elizabeth lifted her eyes up to fight back tears which didn't stop. "David, you hurt me."

"I know, Mom...I am sorry. I just want you to forgive me." he pleaded as he held onto her legs. "Please..." he cried.

She stared at him and shook her head. "It is hard for me to forgive you. I can't."

"Mom, please." He begged as he prostrated. "I want to be your friend again."

She knelt down and stroked his hair tenderly. Her voice broke. "David...I am your biological mother, but I can never be your friend." She said, and walked away.

\*\*\*

Tola waved to her secretary and hurried to the garage. She started her car and drove off. She played some music as memories of Wole flooded her thoughts. "If Wole leaves me, it's over. Why did he have to come and leave me this way?" she asked herself. "Wole, I am sorry." She said, softly.

"Madam!!! Madam!!!"

She stared to her left and saw a driver flagging her down as he tried to overtake. She pressed the controller for the window and turned in his direction.

"Flat tyre!" he shouted as he sped off.

She instantly hit her brakes. She didn't do her routine check before leaving the office. Honks blasted behind her. "Just shut up all of you!" she shouted. She heaved a sigh of relief as the traffic light went red. She kept her door and window firmly closed as some people walked over to bang on her door. She ignored them, Wole had eroded her thoughts. "Damn you, Wole! This is entirely your fault!" she said as she cried.

She looked up and had a blurred vision of a man standing in front of her car. She cleaned her eyes and opened the door to step out. She stared hard. "Wole!" she said, with a smile. His face was hard and stern. Her smile faded immediately. She approached him slowly as he stood just a line from the zebra crossing. "Wole?" she called softly.

He took a deep breath as she stood before him. The lights went green and cars drove past them leaving them in the centre

"What are you doing, Wole?" she asked.

He raised an eyebrow. "I don't understand, you are the one who came out of your car."

"Wole...I am sorry for everything."

He placed his finger across her lips. He stepped back slowly and got down on one knee and opened a tiffany box with a diamond ring before her. "Tola Matthews, would you please, marry me?"

Tola gasped as she covered her mouth with her right hand.

## 25

Wole lifted the ring before her with expectant eyes and heart; his hope was on its way to being shattered. Tola kept staring at him with her mouth agape and this really bothered him. Horns were honking and blasting from all directions; some out of impatience and anger, some out of curiosity, while a few others were simply confused. A few "gbeboruns" (people who wouldn't mind their own businesses in typical Yoruba Language) had actually pulled up to watch the end of their showdown. He had hired some of the road officials for his fifteen minute "drama"; time was time! But that was not his problem at the moment, his heart pounding heavily in his chest seemed more like it.

Tola didn't know how to say 'yes'. She had watched too many movies and even though she had always envisaged her screams with the potential 'Yes', it looked all too real. She was scared, shocked and filled with joy. She didn't even notice when a tear drop rolled down her cheeks just before she screamed "YES! YES!! YES!!!"

"Is that a Yes?" he asked excitedly, still on his knees.

She nodded and held his face in her hand. "I will marry you, Wole." She screamed.

There was a thunderbolt of applause and cheers. Wole smiled as he took a deep breath and slipped the ring onto her finger, the "audience" gleefully applauded until he rose to his feet and drew her in for a kiss.

"I love you, Wole." She muttered while still in his grip.

He was about to respond when a harsh light flashed in their faces followed by severe horns. "GET A ROOM! ..... GET MARRIED!"

They laughed as they ran away hand-in-hand from the zebra-crossing to the pavements and took their seat on the side walk as they watched a tow vehicle pull Tola's car off the road to the side.

"Did you really have to do that?" Tola asked, as she stared at the ring.

He grinned. "The tyre, right?"

She nodded as she kissed his chin. "You are really something."

"They will get your tyre fixed soon and return your car to you." He replied and kissed her forehead. "You are mine, Tola. I love you more than I can explain."

She smiled as she hugged him. "Wole, there is still time to wake me up from this if I am dreaming."

He giggled as he pecked her forehead. "We are living our dreams, sweetheart." He said.

\*\*\*

I tapped on the door lightly with my bag by my side. No answer. I took a deep breath and tapped on it a second time. The door opened almost immediately, Ini stepped back with a grin lurking around her mouth.

"Save it!" I ordered, and pulled my bag inside.

She squealed and jumped on me from behind. "I missed you, baby." She screamed, as she forced me into a seat. "There is no place like Lagos." She said standing up. She swirled from one part of the living room to the other. "The streets...the lights...Oh no...you missed Lag!" she continued.

I rolled my eyes as I wriggled out of her grip and took a seat. She dashed into the kitchen and returned with a glass of water. "Really?"

"Of course...I am being nice, enjoy it while it lasts." She said, handing me the glass which I gratefully collected and gulped. "Kim, what was Abj like?"

I nodded with a faint smile. "Very decent, less noisy and chaotic unlike Lagos."

She scoffed. "*Wetin dey do this one?* How long did you stay in Abuja sef?"

I smiled. "I just knew this niceness of yours wasn't gonna last." I took a deep breath.

"Where's Tola?"

She slid into her chair. "I don't know oh..." she replied, yawning. "I am really tired; maybe you should wait up for her."

"She has a key, doesn't she?"



The door flung open and Tola 'jumped' in. "I am getting married!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" she screamed, showing off her finger.

Ini and I jumped up from our seats. "Oh my God!" we screamed at the same time as we rushed to meet her. "It's real!" I shouted.

She nodded as she hugged us and then paused. "Kim, you are back?"

Ini scoffed as we all took our seats on the same couch. "She is not back; she is still chilling at the airport."

Tola hugged me tight. "My love, I have missed you. You have no idea of what I have been through staying with this witch, Ini." She started.

Ini pulled her hand. "Let me see the ring! This one must cost a fortune oh..." she exclaimed and rolled her eyes. "Marcus had better start saving money oh! Else, I will buy my ring by myself."

We all giggled. Ini kissed the ring. "How did he propose? Gist us!" Tola grinned. Ini gasped. "Oh my God! You guys finally had sex?"

"Idiot!" Tola replied. She then smiled in my direction. "Wole Briggs asked me to marry him on the road, right in the middle of Lagos City traffic."

Ini's eyes popped. "Really? I have to check YouTube; those *Naija* gossips must have done something by now." She said as she grabbed her phone and started to search. "This YouTube is sick." She said, lifting her phone high and low obviously searching for network.

"You mean to say your service network is sick." I replied.

Tola rolled her eyes. "Port to the winning network."

"Don't even mention that name, they are the worst service provider ever." Ini replied as she took her phone near the Television. "It's faster here."

I took a deep breath as I smiled in Tola's direction. "This is beautiful; you are going to be very happy. Wole is a great man." I said.

"Loading..." Ini stressed as she was squatted beside the TV.

Tola and I rolled our eyes as we watched her drama.

"YES!!! MTN...You rock!!!" she screamed and then slowly took a seat. She stared at her phone with her eyes wide open. I could hear the sound coming from the video stream. "Jeez! This is Tola. Awww...this is so sweet!" she said with a smile. Tola and I rushed to her to confirm it. I smiled as I watched Tola scream in the video. "Oh girl, your video has got ten thousand likes already." Ini continued. "This has got to be the best proposal of the year." She said and paused. "I will put that of Peter, the P-Square guy's proposal own as second; he gave his babe a Range Rover."

"That was also pretty beautiful." I chipped in.

Tola smiled. "Nothing as beautiful as Wole and I." she said smiling.

"I am really happy for you, Tola. I'll go get the Champagne!" Ini said, and dashed into the kitchen.

I pulled Tola close and hugged her. "Congratulations!"

She smiled as we drew back for a moment. "Kim, thank you for everything. I can't believe this is happening to me."

I smiled. "I don't see why you are thanking me, you worked things out and everyone can see that clearly. I am happy for you guys."

She nodded and took a deep breath. "And David?"

I sighed. "I don't know." I took a deep breath.

"Kim...are you guys going to kill everything you feel for each other? She asked.

"Kim is unserious!" Ini jumped in.

"You should go talk things over with David. He was honest with you, so he needs you by his side right now more than ever" Ini said, joining us as she placed the bottle on the table.

"Kim, you need to see David and talk about this. You guys can't just throw everything away." Tola added.

I took a deep breath. "I don't know." I said and didn't know my eyes had turned red. "It's just that I love David and I don't know what to do." I couldn't hold back my tears anymore as my girls hugged me. "I came back because of him. I want to see him."

\*\*\*

"You have no idea how the press have stormed this place since your article went viral." Mr. Adeoye said. "We are really getting solid." He stared at me. "I was scared you had run off with Wura."

I took a deep breath. "I love writing."

He nodded. "I know. It's a beautiful art. We have received more articles from other departments. I will pass them on to your email, and we would have to review your salary and allowances."

I smiled. "Thank you, sir."

"It's the least I can do, you are a real talent and thanks to you, we can show our face again." He took a deep breath. "I remain grateful and indebted to you."

I smiled faintly. "The renovations are going swiftly too. Congratulations, sir."

He nodded. "It's time to take this place one step higher. You have taught me a lot. Some things can't always remain the way they have been, we have been too traditional." He paused to lean against a door. "We have to mix tradition with the trends too." He cleared his throat. "You are indeed God-sent. God bless you."

"Amen." I replied

\*\*\*

Marcus held the baby carrier in his hand as Ini walked alongside with the baby's bag in her hand and her handbag dangling carelessly. People turned and stared as they walked into the agency.

*'Oh my...they have been sleeping together!...' 'They have a baby! Oh!' 'Ini and Marcus? It's like Priyanka Chopra and the geek! Oh God ... Pyaar is possible!' 'When was Ini ever pregnant? That girl is a wonder!!! How did she hide the pregnancy?'*

The thoughts and discussions continued in hushed-toned groups as Marcus and Ini walked on. Marcus pushed Ini's room open. "Oh boy...my ear was full!" He dropped the carrier on the table.

"Did you actually listen to them?" Ini asked, placing the bag on the table.

He nodded. "I couldn't help it. They were talking about us."

"They actually think I am her mother, and that is true." She replied with a smile.

Marcus smiled as he walked up to her. "Really? Are you gonna be a mother to Ini?" he asked as he kissed her gently.

The door opened and Shola came in. "Huummmm!!!! I see...it is true after all." She said as she closed the door. Ini and Marcus broke away abruptly and stared at her. Shola walked up to the carrier and peered into it to see the baby. "She is beautiful...hey baby!" she said, waving at the baby.

Ini scoffed. "What do you want, Shola?"

"Does this pretty baby have a godmother yet? I would love to be."

Marcus hissed. "No, thank you."

"Hehe... Look who is getting touchy! Baby's Dada! I see you both...hmmm...so, when did you *carry* this pregnancy?" she asked raising her eyebrow. She paused and smiled. "You evil thing, you must have had an in-vitro fertilization, right?" she asked as she smiled. "You just want this shape intact so you can keep modelling!" she said, touching Ini's waist.

"Just cut the crap, Shola." Marcus interrupted.

She shook her head disapprovingly. "You two apparently have no idea what parenting entails: foul or swear words are not to be used around kids." She smiled as she took a seat. "The first reason I am offering to be her godmother is that she needs a proper role model."

"Role model?" Ini scoffed. "Are you under the impression that you have a kind heart?"

Shola smiled. "I am." The baby started to cry and she went over to the baby and smiled. "Little baby, don't you cry... mommy's here all the while..." she sang softly. The baby chuckled. "See?"

Ini and Marcus hissed. Marcus cleared his throat. "What do you want, Shola?"

Shola grinned. "Nothing. I only heard about your baby and came to confirm." She replied. There was a light knock on the door. "I'll get it." Shola said and opened the door. She stared at the petite stewardess. "Yes?"

"I'd love to see Ini Obong." She replied.

Shola stepped out of the way as the stewardess walked in. "Ini, the director would like to see you in his office."

Ini nodded and dismissed her. She stared at Shola and Marcus. "I'll be right back"

\*\*\*

"Do you really have to do this, Wura?"

Wura smiled as she placed the divorce papers before Tunji. "Yes. Please, sign them."

He scoffed. "You came all the way from Abuja to make me sign these papers? I don't believe you, you still care. You could have faxed it."

She smiled. "I am surprised that you think I care." She took her seat. "Tunji, I went through all those years of nightmare because of Kimberly, it's over now."

"Are you going to hurt our daughter?"

She scoffed. "Tunji, Kimberly is aware. She is not five anymore. She knows what we have been all this time: A lie!"

"I have changed."

She laughed sarcastically. "Losing has a way of humbling you, doesn't it?" she placed a hand on the document. "Tunji, sign these papers. I want my life back."

"The bible doesn't support divorce. I won't give it to you."

She gasped. "Tunji!!! You are unbelievable! Did the bible support the torture you dealt me?"

He shook his head sadly. "I regret everything, I am sorry."

"Tunji, you don't have to be sorry. I don't need it. All I want is for the document to be signed." She said, standing up. "I will leave them with you now and send Mark over to retrieve them in the evening, and I hope they would have been signed by then."

Tunji stood before her. "Please, Wura, I want you to forgive me."

She took a deep breath. "Forgiveness? Tunji, you owe more people, your daughter, and yourself." She said and approached the door as she opened it. "Just grant me my divorce, that's all I need from you." she said and walked out.

\*\*\*

Bolu Coker drummed heavily on the gates. He looked around as he knocked even harder.

"WHO BE DAT MAD MAN?!"

Bolu swallowed as the vulgar rants continued. He waited till he saw a man approach. "Were you the animal that was hurling abusive words?"

The man eyeballed him coldly and nodded. "I *no be animal oh...wetin happen?*"

"Where is Femi?" he asked.

The man stared at him. "Which Femi?"

Bolu took a deep breath. "Femi, the man who lives in the top flat."

The man laughed. "Fem-Fem, abi?" he asked as he licked his tongue staring at Bolu Coker. Bolu sighed and brought out some money from his trouser and threw it at the man. The man bent and picked it excitedly. "Well done, Baba!"

"Now where is he?"

The man took a deep breath. "*Fem-Fem don comot for here.*" He replied. Bolu raised an eyebrow. "He does not live here again." The man reiterated.

Bolu Coker took a deep breath. "Did he say where he was moving to?"

"No. He just took his bags and family and left."

Bolu nodded and returned to his car. He slammed the door hard and undid his tie nervously. He picked up his phone and dialed Femi's number again, but it indicated 'SWITCHED OFF'

"Is everything okay, sir?" his driver asked.

Bolu scoffed. "Did you get the address I asked you?"

He nodded. "Yes sir. It is Victoria's Home."

"Take me there."

\*\*\*

I clutched my purse to my arm as I stepped out of the office to the road.

"Kimberly!"

I heard my name. *Must be the press!* Mark had told me to always walk on whenever I heard my name. If it was the press, they would catch up. I obliged.

"Kimberly!!! Bankole!"

I stopped in my tracks and turned. It was my father. I took a deep breath as I allowed him to meet up. "Good evening, sir."

"Kimberly, how are you?" he asked. "Congratulations on your current success."

I nodded. "Thank you, sir."

He took a deep breath. "Kimberly, we need to talk." He started. "We need to clear the air on many things. Since you are free now, can we just go to the bar around the corner?"

I shook my head in disagreement. "I am afraid it might be impossible, I have somewhere to be."

"Kim, we need to talk. Your mom is trying to get a divorce from me, I have hurt you too much, I have failed in my role as a father, and I need to right these wrongs."

I scoffed lightly. "There is nothing to talk about Dad." I shrugged. "You can talk things out with Mom. I didn't marry her. And as for me, I've accepted everything you have done."

He held my hand. "Kim, I know I married her, but you are our daughter, a fruit of the love we once shared. Can't you just think about that?"

I yanked my hand out of his grip. "Stop this, Dad! Fruit of what? Where is all this coming from?"

"I love you, Kimberly."

I nodded. "Good for you, Dad. I have to go." I said, and walked away.

\*\*\*

Bolu paced round Mother Francesca's office. "What do you mean by I am no longer responsible for Elizabeth Coker?"

"Sir, she already signed over her responsibility to someone else."

Bolu slammed the table. "You have to be joking! She is in no mental frame of mind to decide who her guardian is."

"I must remind you sir that this is no mental institute and it is an Old Parents' home which is set out to take care of people." She replied standing up. "We put their interests first."

He nodded. "I see...where is she now?"

She shook her head in disagreement. "I am afraid, we are unable to release such classified information to you."

He clapped. "Great!" he said sarcastically. "I don't know how it works, but I'm sure this country's system wouldn't mind my locking up a 'Mother' in Federal prison?"

"On what charges would that be, sir?"

He shrugged. "We'll see...Good night!" he said and walked out.

\*\*\*

Niran Briggs smiled. "This is great news. I am so happy for you both."

Wole placed his hand on Tola's. "Thanks a lot, Dad." He said and stared in his mother's direction. "Thank you, Mom. God bless you."

Olamide smiled. "I pray God blesses your union too. It is my prayer that all your heart desires would be met."

"You know, when I decided to marry Olamide..." Niran started. "I did so because of how much she really cared for humans and other creatures. She used to feed my dog then. So generous!"

She hissed. "It was a stray dog. Niran never had food to eat, so how would his poor dog have something? That's why I was nice to the poor thing."

Wole and Tola watched with smiles as they continued.

He scoffed. "Woman, I had food. I was watching my weight."

She smiled. "Really? Then why didn't the poor dog eat?"

"Err....I was scared that if I had to make a meal for the dog, I would be tempted to eat also."

She raised an eyebrow. "Niran...and this happened almost every day, remember?"

He cleared his throat. "Olamide, case closed!"

She nodded. "Of course, your secret is out."

Mirabel walked in. "Hello everyone!"



Niran and Olamide grinned at her. "Hiiiiiii"

"What is going on here?" she asked, taking a sip from Tola's wine. "I hope you don't mind."

She said, looking serious.

Tola shook her head with a smile. "Not at all..."

Mirabel scoffed. "Who cares if you do?" She said, taking a seat. Tola smiled faintly. "Just kidding." She added.

Wole smiled. "Mirabel, you might have to refresh your sense of humour."

Mirabel stared at him and hissed, she fixed her eyes on Tola with a smile and then her eyes popped. "You are getting married!" she screamed.

"Yes, we are." Wole replied with a smile.

Mirabel smiled. "This is good news."

Olamide nodded. "Yes, and we all are excited about it."

"Have you picked a date?" Mirabel asked.

Niran interrupted. "Isn't that supposed to be a collective decision? We will all sit together with Tola's family." Wole stared at her. She swallowed lightly. Niran got the message. "I see...we'll talk later." He said with a smile.

Olamide nodded. "Exactly."

\*\*\*

The door creaked open slightly and Wura stepped into the room. Elizabeth sat up immediately. "Good evening."

Elizabeth smiled faintly. "Wura Bankole?" she smiled. "I saw you on TV recently." She said with a smile. "You looked good."

Wura nodded and closed the door gently. "How are you, Elizabeth?"

She nodded. "I am okay, trying to stay alive."

Wura took a seat beside her. "You are beautiful, Liz."

"I was beautiful, Wura."

She shook her head in disagreement. "You are still beautiful, my dear."

"Wura, did you ever see me as a loner? We never really got along."

Wura smiled. "I have always seen you as special. You had a beautiful gift, your talent is exceptional."

"It was exceptional. I don't paint anymore. I don't even remember what a brush looks like."

Wura smiled faintly. "Elizabeth, you have to find yourself again. I did and I'm the better for it."

"Find myself? Wura, it's over for me. Some of us are finished articles."

Wura took a deep breath. "I was finished too."

Elizabeth scoffed lightly. "You? You could still see the sun at will. I had no life." Wura blinked as she listened to Elizabeth. "I had a son who didn't care. He watched his father send me away...on exile." She continued. "I was alone, hurt, and sad. A broken woman!"

Wura wiped the tears in Elizabeth's eye. "How much do you want your life back, Elizabeth?"

She swallowed. "I don't know...do I still have one?"

"You do. I know you do."

Elizabeth took a deep breath. "You are so kind, Wura. Kimberly is also very special, I love her."

"She loves you too."

Elizabeth smiled. "Thank you, Wura."

She took a deep breath. "Let me take you home."

"Home?"

She nodded. "It's time to go home, Elizabeth."

"Kimberly has signed your papers for discharge from here and the home."

Elizabeth smiled.

\*\*\*

I finished my cup of coffee. "Thank you, Mark."

"You are welcome, Kimberly. Your mom should be done talking to Mrs. Sunflower. That's her name, right?"

I nodded. "Yes, she is Mrs. Sunflower...but we should give them some more time. Allow them talk."

"That'll be fine." He replied and paused to finish his coffee. "Have you spoken to David?"

I turned my face away. "I am scared he might not even want to talk to me."

"But you know him better and you know he loves you."

I nodded. Mark didn't even know David and he was sticking up for him. "I am too scared to even look at him after everything. He trusted me too much and I let him down."

Mark smiled. "He understands. You just have to talk about this."

"Should I go and see him?"

Mark nodded with a smile. "Of course, go to him. He is everything for you." he said, holding her hand. "You came back to Lagos. It might be your abode, but your home is with David, in his heart, in your heart. Just go to him."

I smiled with so much joy. "Bless you, Mark."

He nodded. "Go to him."

"What about Mrs. Sunflower?"

He smiled. "She'll always be here for you. Go! No more excuses!"

I nodded and walked out of the clinic's cafeteria.

\*\*\*

I walked through the hospital as I made my way for the exit. I stared through rooms and saw family members together. I stared at a family through their window blinds. I watched them hug and laugh together. Did I ever have a family? Would I ever have a family? I couldn't imagine life with another man if it wasn't David.

I walked away slowly from the family's room and walked on towards Elizabeth's room. I was hoping my mom would have talked her into leaving the hospital. As I drew closer to her room door, I

didn't know if I was wishing or hoping, but I saw David walking towards me. As we got closer, it looked real. YES! DAVID! He stopped as he stared at me with his hands in his pockets. *Say something, David.* I prayed quietly in my heart as I stared at him with a smile. David smiled back, and he looked good. I didn't know what happened next, but I wasn't walking anymore, I was floating in my heart and I ran off into his waiting hand. David took me in his manly grip and lifted me up.

"My girl." He said.

"I am sorry, David." I said as I whispered into his ears.

He dropped me kindly and kissed my forehead. "I love you, Kimberly."

"I love you too." He said, and kissed me. "Did you miss me?"

I gasped. "Are you kidding me? I was lost!"

"I feel special, Kimberly."

I smiled as I stroked his face. "You are special, David."

## 26

David took my hand and took me to a seat opposite his mom's room. "Kim, my mom won't forgive me."

"Don't worry, she will come around eventually. A mother always forgives."

He smiled. "I love the way you console me."

"Console? Baby, I am not consoling you." I replied and forced his head on my shoulder.

"In any case, I will be a mother to you."

He laughed. "Kim..."

"Of course, I mean...what choice do I have?"

He nodded. "Yeah...what choice do you have?" he asked as he stared at me. I always felt chills in my heart whenever he did that. He took a deep breath and stared at the door.

"She is in that room and I am too scared of going close to her because I feel she won't accept me." he said standing up. "I really hate myself."

I took a deep breath and walked up to him. "She will accept you."

"I don't think so. I hurt her too much and now, it just seems like she has closed her heart to me."

I held his hand. "We will get through this together and no matter what happens, I will always be here for you, David."

"Even if she doesn't want me?"

I nodded. "You are the man I love, and I know you are a good man."

He took a deep breath and pulled me close for a hug. "I love you, Kim." He whispered.

I closed my eyes as I wrapped my hands around him. I felt safe in his embrace and I hoped he felt safe in mine. "I love you too, David."

"What is this?"

David and I turned to see Elizabeth and my mom. "Mom..." David stammered.

"Don't ever call me that! What are you doing with my daughter?" she asked, staring at me.

I stepped forward. "Hi..." I walked up to her and hugged her. "I am glad to see you are well." She broke the hug quickly and asked. "Why are you with that man?"

"That's your son. David is your son."

She scoffed. "I don't know him. How do you know him?" I took a deep breath. She scoffed and shook her head incredulously. "Is he the one?"

I nodded and I walked back to David. I held his hand. "I love David."

"This is just great!" she replied and walked away dragging her suitcase with her.

Mom stared at us. "Sorry guys, I have to go." She said with a faint smile and started after Elizabeth. "Liz! Elizabeth!!!" she shouted as she hurried after her.

\*\*\*

David took a deep breath and smiled faintly as we walked into the night. "She'll never forgive me."

"She will. David, don't lose hope."

He yawned tiredly. "Kim, I hate myself so much for being my father's son. I should have made the right decision then. At least, I should have said something. I just sat there and watched."

I held on to him as we walked. "David, don't beat yourself."

"I wish I could travel back in time, you know...go back to that day, just that day and fight for my mother." He said as he took a deep breath. "Kim, I haven't had a single night of peaceful sleep since then. I live in fear and shame of my rebellious act."

"David stop this!" I ordered, in a bid to try to shake him up. "You are drowning in yourself."

He scoffed and he held me firmly. "What can I do, Kimberly? I just want her to forgive me."

"Give it time."

He shrugged. "I failed my mom, she would never want me near her again. It's over."

"Are you giving up?" I asked. He turned his face away. I pushed him and yelled. "You can't give up, David!" He shrugged and started to walk away slowly. I followed him quickly. "Is this it? You want to quit? You want to throw it all away? David, this is not you!"

"Kim, I am wasting my time."

I pulled him back. "This is not a waste of time; you have to fight for it. You must earn it."

He stamped his foot lightly. "You heard her."

"She is hurt, but you will not give up." I replied. "You have no right to give up. You must fix this!"

He rubbed his forehead. "It's hard for me." he said, and wiped off a tear drop. "It's too hard."

I took his hand. "I will be here with you, we will get through this together." I said. He took a deep breath. "You won't carry this burden alone. We'll talk to God."

"God?"

I nodded. "We should have done this a long time ago."

He scoffed. "Kim, even God knows that I deserve this, let's leave him out of it."

"We can't, David. He has always been involved."

\*\*\*

Bolu walked up to the reception. "Good evening, ladies."

"Good evening, sir." They chorused.

One of them smiled. "Who are you and how may we be of assistance?"

"My name is Bolu Coker and I am here to see a patient. She is Elizabeth Coker."

She nodded and checked through her system. "I am afraid we don't have any patient by that name."

He blinked. "Really? Please check again."

She nodded and ran a search through the laptop again for reassurance sake. "There is no Elizabeth Coker here."

He took a deep breath as he stared at his driver. The driver whispered into his ears. He nodded and faced the receptionists. "She was brought in here from Victoria's Homes."

The second receptionist's eyes lit up. "Elizabeth Sunflower?"

"Exactly! Elizabeth Sunflower! Why didn't I think of that before?" He replied laughing. "Thanks a lot, dear. Please can I see her?"

She shook her head slowly. "I am sorry, sir. She checked out about an hour ago."

He took a deep breath as he rubbed his forehead. "Back to the home?"

The second receptionist was about to talk when the first lady who earlier attended to him nudged her. "I am sorry, sir. We are not allowed to disclose such information."

"Please, my ladies, it is very important I see her." He said reaching for his wallet.

She shook her head. "Keep the wallet. We can't give you any more information." She replied sharply.

"OH...that's really a shame." He replied and took a deep breath. "Thanks all the same, I appreciate your help." He replied and beckoned to his driver as they walked out.

The first receptionist jabbed her partner. "Nike, you need to keep your mouth in check sometimes."

"Funto, Ahan! Why? The gentleman only needed our help, and he was even going to pay us, but in your self-righteousness, you ruined it." She replied as she hissed. "We won't be able to download *Burden of Proof* tonight." She grumbled.

Funto rolled her eyes. "*Burden of Proof* by Tunde Leye is free; I don't know who wrote the one that you have to pay for."

Nike hissed as she dragged her leg. "I have to go and use the ladies'."

Funto laughed. "Remember Gehazi in the bible? He went after Namaan to collect gifts and he became a leper. If I was you, I won't run after that man to disclose information and collect money."

Nike mumbled something and sat back down.

\*\*\*



I yawned as I flipped through the next article on my table. Mr. Adeoye had sent me a truckload of articles for certification. The door opened slightly and Ben poked his head in with a smile. I smiled back. He took a seat. "You are really busy these days."

I nodded as I raised a paper sheet before him. "They keep piling up. I had to send some to the other departments."

He smiled. "You can't do this alone." He took a deep breath. "I am glad you are here."

"Thanks. How have you been?"

He shrugged. "I have been doing okay. How's David?"

I took a deep breath. "David is fine."

"Kim, I know you love David and I am gonna respect that."

I smiled. "Thank you." I replied.

"I think I like someone now."

I laughed. "Ben, you are a case."

He nodded with a smile. "I am serious, she has been around for a long time, and I guess I just didn't see this coming." He said staring at me. "Who can see anything with you in their head?" he asked, smiling. *Of course I knew there was no answer to that.*

I blushed slightly. "I don't know if I should take that as a compliment."

"Well, it's a sad truth for me." he replied and cleared his throat. "The thing is, I don't know what I can provide for her."

I smiled. "Ben, you are too concerned about not having enough. Who cares about the money?"

"...says the woman with a lot of money" he replied sarcastically.

I chuckled. "Whatever, Ben!"

"I mean, you were practically born with a silver spoon! You are Professor Bankole's daughter; you've had the best education, best summers, and best vacations. Me? I haven't got anything. Can you blame me?"

I took a deep breath. "Ben, it doesn't matter what kind of life we have had." I started. "What matters is the future, Ben. You will have to build a life with her. And yes, I know you are

talking about Oyinkan." He smiled. "She might be wealthy, beautiful and all, but a woman is always a woman."

He raised an eyebrow. "Are you saying that Oyinkan might like me? You didn't want me, why would she?"

"Ben, you are a very good guy, but, for me, there could only be David. And Oyinkan is obviously different from me. We never can tell; if it isn't her, it would be someone else."

He nodded. "If I lose Oyinkan, I'll simply accept that I am cursed."

I laughed as he picked up an article from my table.

\*\*\*

Marcus sipped his drink carefully. "Are you sure about this, Ini?"

She nodded with a smile. "I have never been so sure of anything in my entire life."

"Do you have the slightest idea what this is going to do to Shola's career?"

She giggled. "It is going to *touch* her more than when we tinkered with her skin."

He smiled. "In a good way though..." he replied as he watched Shola from a distance. "She won't know what hit her." He smiled. "I can see she's back to having her photo sessions."

She applied some cream on her hands. Marcus stared at her as she did this. "What?!" she asked with a smile.

"Do you think it's funny?"

She smirked. "I don't understand you."

"Haven't you learnt to share?"

She chuckled. "I am the model. I am the one who needs to keep my skin fresh."

He nodded. "I see...well, you should also be the one to pick up the baby after the shoot."

She shrugged. "No *biggie*." She replied and then grinned with an eyebrow raised.

"What? Wipe that silly grin off your face."

She smiled. "You will clean her poop."

"Ini, I am the man!"

She giggled. "And I am the model, the woman. I need my skin in tip-top shape, pending the time I decide to quit, of course."

"Quit? You are gonna quit modelling?"

She nodded. "Yes, and pretty soon too. Ini is still a baby, she would need all the attention I can provide her."

"Your career?"

She scoffed. "Would you rather we have a successful career and raise a bad girl?"

He took a deep breath and bowed his head. "Ini, I am robbing you of your life."

She smiled. "As long as it is for you, I would go penniless."

He bent over and whispered into her ears. "Is this really you?"

She smacked his head as they laughed. Her laughter stopped as she stared ahead. She scoffed lightly "Shola Jones approaches."

Shola arrived and smiled. "Hello people. Where's Ini?" she asked. She waved at Ini. "Not you, I mean the beautiful Ini."

"She is at the crèche facility."

Shola nodded. "I will go and say hi."

Ini held her hand back. "What's all this niceness for?"

"Ini *Oblong*..." she stressed.

Ini scoffed. "It's *Obong*!"

"I think the baby is cute and I like her. Is that too much?"

Marcus nodded. "It is too much."

Shola hissed. "I don't care what you guys think of me, but I think babies are absolutely adorable."

"Go and have yourself one with sonny boy, Michael."

She blew Marcus a kiss. "Very soon."

Ini drummed on the table. "Okay Okay...I have news for you, Shola."

"Oh...what news could that be?"

Ini took a deep breath. "How would you feel about sharing my new contract with me?"

"EHN?!" Shola replied with her eyes popped out in amazement.

Ini nodded. "I was told to work with any model of my choice, and I chose you."

"ME?!" Shola replied and fell off her chair.

\*\*\*

Wole pulled up in front of a house. "Do you like this?"

Tola took off her Gucci sunshades. "No"

"Tola, you have not liked any house so far today. The last house was perfect!"

She nodded. "The last one is as big as your current house. As a young couple, do we need that size?"

He sighed. "Tola, there's nothing wrong with the current size of my house. We are gonna have kids, remember?"

"Yes, but not as many as a football team line-up."

He nodded. "So, we get a smaller house, say a duplex?"

She nodded. "A duplex is fair enough." She replied, re-adjusting her sunshades. Tola's phone buzzed. "Now who's disturbing our house hunt?" she thought out loud as she ransacked her bag for her phone.

"I really think we should look at this house. At least, just check it out."

She groaned. "No...No....No!" she fetched her phone, but it was already a missed call. "Now you made me miss my call." She said, checking the number. "I don't have this number. 08135..." she mumbled as the phone rang a second time.

"Hello!"

Wole stared at her as she happened to be turning her face to the other side to listen to her caller. He became worried.

"Of course, I'll be there right away." She replied, as she dropped the call.

He raised an eyebrow expecting her to brief him.

"Uh? The call? Err...it's from the hospital. Tolu wants to see me."

Wole nodded rhythmically. "I see...err, do you want a ride?"

She scoffed. "Before *nko?* We are going together."

He smiled confidently as he started the ignition and drove off.

\*\*\*

David hissed lightly as he opened the door. "What do you want, Dad?"

"You can hiss all you want, I am still your father." A nervous-looking Bolu Coker replied as he pushed David aside and walked in. "I can see you have a very big taste. Beautiful house." He said as he helped himself to a seat. "I want some water." He replied, stroking his hair.

David dragged his feet and left for the kitchen. He returned with a glass of water and handed it to him. "What do you want?"

Bolu downed his glass and handed the glass to David who in turn placed it on the table. "Where is Elizabeth?"

"My mother, you mean???"

He hissed. "Whatever you call her! Where is she?" he barked.

"What right do you have to come here and ask me questions?"

He scoffed. "I am your father! I made you; you are this rich man because of me!"

"Dad, give me a break! I admit you put efforts in my life, but I worked hard ...and legit too."

He nodded as he rubbed his palms against his trousers. "Where is your mother? I want to see her now!"

"Why?"

He slammed the edge of the sofa. "Stop this rubbish, David. Elizabeth is my wife!"

"Really?" David laughed scornfully. "You are sounding very pathetic, Dad. I want you to leave my house now."

He scoffed. "You can't stop me from seeing my wife, kid. She is still my wife!" he argued.

David shook his head and walked up to the door. He opened the door and waited "Please leave."

Bolu laughed wickedly and approached David. "You little brat!"

"The boy has grown, Dad"

He nodded. "In that case, the man should be ready to take the heat." He said and grabbed David's neck.

David eyeballed him and plucked his hands off. "What are you trying to do?"

"I'll get you, you bastard." Bolu stuttered as he walked out wobbly.

David stared at his father' bad leg and took a deep breath. "May God forgive your soul." He said silently.

\*\*\*

Tola folded her arms as she stared at Tolu who was drinking some water. She rolled her eyes as he coughed and she cast a knowing stare at Wole which caused him to giggle. "I am going to be better." Tolu said slowly.

"Oh...yeah" she replied. She took a deep breath. "Why did you send for me?"

He took a deep breath. "The doctor said I would be discharged tomorrow, but I'll be leaving town."

She nodded. "Ah...that's good. Lagos won't miss you." she smiled.

He smiled. "I will miss you, Tola. I wish I was a better man." he stared in Wole's direction and smiled at Tola. "He is a great man. I wish you guys the best."

"Thank you." she replied as she smiled and tapped his bed lightly with her fingers hoping he would see the engagement ring.

He smiled as soon as he noticed it. "Congratulations guys!"

She stared at him. "Oh why?"

"Your engagement. It's a beautiful ring."

Wole smiled faintly. "Thank you." he said and placed his hand on Tola's shoulder with a light squeeze indicating that it was time to leave. "We would be on our way now. Do take care, Tolu." He said and helped Tola up gently.

"Bye, Tolu." She grinned. "So long!" she said and walked out after Wole.

Wole folded his palm and shook his head as they left the room. "Tola..."

She smiled. "What?"

"You are something else, you really came here to humour yourself, didn't you?"

She smiled. "Didn't you enjoy it?" she asked giggling as she walked out.

\*\*\*

I smiled as I pressed the doorbell to Mom's. I couldn't figure out the genuine reason for my joy. It couldn't be Mom's new house despite its amazing architectural designs and all. To be honest, I had been shocked when Mom had sent me a text message which contained her address. Not because I had expected her to live in space but the speed at which she had bought herself a beautiful place amazed me. *What can't you do with money?*

"Hello beautiful." Mark said as he opened the door with a smile.

I smiled back. "Hi." I said as I walked into the house. "Lovely place."

He nodded. "You have to admit your mom has taste."

I smiled faintly. I honestly had no idea she had 'taste' when she was with my father. I followed Mark into the house and he ushered me into the living room as though I was some guest. I laughed as he bowed courteously.

"The *lady of the house* will be with you shortly." He said and ran up the stairs.

I waited for the *lady of the house*. While I waited I took the opportunity to re-watch Tola's proposal, I had actually downloaded it. I prayed softly in my heart.

I heard footsteps. As I turned to stare at the stairs, my lips parted with a smile. Elizabeth's weave dropped carelessly around her neck. She spotted a long black gown and a silver neck chain. *Oh my God!*

*She is beautiful!* I thought I was looking at some Sarah Jessica Parker or Sandra Bullock. This woman was beautiful! *What can't you do with money?*

I smiled as she finally stood before me. I then went on my knees and greeted. "Good evening, ma."

She looked stunned as she picked me up. "Why did you do that?" she asked.

I smiled and took a deep breath. "Pardon me for what I am about to do." I said and knelt down. "This time, don't help me." I replied.

She took a deep breath and touched my head. "What is it?"

"I want you to forgive me."

She took her seat gently. "I don't understand."

"I have hurt you so much, I have made you sad and I have disappointed you, but I want you to forgive me."

She looked worried as she tried to wipe my eyes. "What is going on?"

"David is my life. I want you to forgive us. I won't be able to live without David."

She rubbed her forehead. "Kimberly, I won't stop you from being with the man of your choice."

"Then you forgive him?"

She shook her head in disagreement. "I am sorry."

\*\*\*

Tunji burned the documents he had ordered to be stolen from Bolu's house in regret. If he could not atone for all his sins to his daughter, he could at least wipe some pain away.

\*\*\*

Elizabeth looked through the window unseeingly as she wiped her tears. "I lost David. He was all I lived for. Do you know how I felt when I realized that I had given birth to a replica of Bolu?"

"What kept you alive, Elizabeth? Why didn't you just give up and die at the home? Why did you die out of bitterness and sadness?" I yelled.

She stared at me. "I wanted to see my son!"

"Fine!" I yelled back. "That son is crying for his mother. David is still a boy at heart; he has never stopped loving you. It's hard when Bolu influences you."

She nodded. "I know, but I trained David well. He didn't even remember any of those values. Why?"



I took a deep breath. "I know it's hard, but David was wrong then. He knows it, he has always known it. I know David, I have seen him cry and it's only been because of you. He roamed Victoria's Home crying out for you and singing Dido's *Life for Rent*, exactly the same song I heard you sing. If David had forgotten you, would he even remember?" I asked softly. She took a deep breath and turned her face away. I held her hand. "David longs for his mother. He was a boy who had to endure been tortured by his father, with no mother to defend him. He hurt his mother and he's paid for it all through his life, even though he was only a boy." I said.

She wriggled gently from my grip and started to walk away as she wiped her eyes. I followed her quickly, like a shadow. "Do you know what it's like to look at the man you love when he is asleep and see worry lined on his forehead? I don't want to marry *that David*." I said and held her. She turned her back towards me and sobbed gently. "Please mother." I called as I got down on my knees again. "Forgive your son. A mother's heart always forgives."

She stared at me and kissed my forehead. "Take me to my son." She said.

## 27

Bolu Coker walked sloppily into his study. He held his marijuana stick in one hand and a newspaper in the other. He took a deep breath as he sank into a chair. "Am I finished yet?" he asked himself as he laughed softly. "Not yet...I am not yet finished." He answered to himself as he lifted the intercom. "Bring me some coffee and crackers." He ordered and replaced the intercom.

The door opened shortly afterwards and a maid walked in, carrying a tray with his order. "Good morning, sir." She greeted with a smile and dropped the tray gently on the table.

"Where's Mary?" he asked as he watched her pour the coffee.

The maid took a deep breath. "Mary left the house yesterday and hasn't returned ever since."

He cleared his throat. "Any idea on why she would do such a thing?"

"Not at all, sir" She replied, handing him the cup of coffee.

He shrugged slightly. "Okay, you may leave." He said as he sipped his coffee gently. The maid walked out of the study briskly. He reached for his drawer and pulled out his aspirin bottle and took a few tablets. As he tried to replace the lid, the bottle slipped, sending the tablets scattering all over the floor. He swore quietly and bent down to pick up the bottle. His jaw nearly dropped to the floor as he gasped, staring disbelievingly at his half-open safe. He took a shaky breath and opened the safe with trembling hands. Empty safe!!!

\*\*\*

I pressed the doorbell gently. I loved everything about this house. I would be proud to have it as my home, someday. I pressed the doorbell again.

The door opened gently and David smiled lightly. "Kim, good morning"

I stared at him till he bowed his head in some form of mock shyness. "How are you?" I asked.

He took a deep breath as he folded his arms. "I am a little tired. I just made breakfast, come in." he said.

"Did you make for three?" I asked.

He scoffed lightly. "What do you mean?" he asked with a smile. I stepped out of the way gently and Elizabeth came from behind and stood before her son. "M...Mo...Mom." David's voice broke as he stared at her. I took a deep breath as I watched them. Tears rolled freely down Elizabeth's cheeks as she threw her arms open in love. I stared at David who didn't even bat an eyelid as he ran into the arms of his waiting mother like a toddler. I wondered how they felt in their hearts with a wide smile on my lips.

\*\*\*

Elizabeth ran her finger across the painting on David's wall. "When I gave this to Kimberly, I never knew it would come back to you."

"Mom, I don't know how to explain how much I regret hurting you."

She smiled. "You were just a boy."

"Don't make excuses for me, you taught me right."

She scoffed lightly. "You know, I spent days and nights in that home praying silently that one day I'd still see my son, my boy, the David I have always loved." She said and took a seat. David took his seat beside her. "You know what really makes me proud today?"

"No..."

She smiled. "The woman you are with." She started and he smiled. "I know you must be proud to have her." She said as she stroked his hair. "You know, I have to say this is the only right thing Bolu did. At least, he arranged for you and Kim to be together."

"Oh well, can we not talk about him?"

She scoffed. "We can skip him temporarily, but, I want to go to the house. I want to see him."

"Mom, why?"

She swallowed. "He owes me." she replied. "Bolu destroyed me and everything I stood for, he made me feel less than human. I want my life back."

"Mom..." David struggled as his voice broke. "Dad is dangerous. I don't want you to go there."

She nodded. "I want to see him, I need to move on with my life and he needs to hear me out."

\*\*\*

I walked into the living room with a tray and placed it carefully on the table. "Do I serve your drinks?" I asked.

Elizabeth shook her head. "No, I would like to see the house. It's antique, and I like it"

"You could paint it, Mom." David said.

Her face fell. "I don't paint anymore." She replied. "I'll be outside." She said and walked out.

David stared at me. "Kim...I love you, only God knows what I would have been without you."

"Awww...I'm so touched" I replied sarcastically.

He smiled and pulled me closer for a hug. "Don't ever leave me, Kimberly. Please..."

"I am not going anywhere, David." I replied, softly.

He kissed my forehead. "Thank you for coming into my life. You are a blessing to me."

"And you complete me." I replied with a smile.

He smiled and his lips came down tenderly on mine as he kissed me deeply.

"Who is going to show me the house?" Elizabeth screamed behind us. David and I giggled as we broke the kiss and stared at her. "You guys can get back to what you *weren't* doing when I see the house, how about that?"

David nodded and cleared his throat. "Yes ma." He replied, pulling me along as we walked out.

\*\*\*

Wura Bankole smiled as she went through the divorce papers. "This is good news."

"I guess...but I think he is sorry"

She laughed. "Mark, don't be fooled, Tunji has always been sorry."

"I think it is for real this time, he even had tears in his eyes."

She blinked and took a deep breath. "Mark, when you break something really bad, say an egg, and you had all the resources to mend it, would it ever be as good as new?"

"No, but, I would at least still have my egg, right?"

She smiled faintly. "The marriage is over and there is nothing we can do about it."

He nodded. "When do we return to Abuja? I have received several calls from the office there demanding your attention."

She tapped the table lightly. "We'll remain in Lagos for now. I need to finish some work here and call for a press conference to announce this divorce."

"Really? Is it worth the spectacle?"

She scoffed. "You don't know a thing about spectacle." She sat up. "I am taking Tunji down! After all he has done to me and my daughter... It's high time" She replied coolly and sipped her drink. "Besides, they would find out eventually. I'll make a subtle announcement; the press will do the rest." She added with a smile.

\*\*\*

Bolu adjusted his neck scarf as he stared at himself in the mirror. He took a deep breath as he snapped his cufflinks in place. *'Tunji Bankole, that bastard! He must have taken the bond.'* He thought.

"Still as dashing as ever."

Bolu's eyes popped as he saw Elizabeth in the mirror. *'Am I dreaming?'*

"It's not a dream." She replied as though she had read his mind.

He turned slowly and stared at her from toe to head and then head to toe. This had to be a dream. "You?" he panted.

"Yes, me. Elizabeth Sunflower."

He shook his head incredulously and slid into his bed gently. "What do you want from me, Elizabeth?"

"My life! I want it back. My sanity. You took everything away, but now, I want it all back."

He took a deep breath. "What do you mean? I don't understand."

She strode across the room. "I see you have renovated the place."

"Your paintings were depressing." He replied as he swallowed.

She smiled faintly. "You sent me away from my home, you kept me away from everyone, from everything, from my son."

He scoffed. "Your son never cared." He replied, standing up. "He wanted you out."

She nodded. "But on your instruction, right?"

Bolu adjusted his jacket and walked up to her. "I forgot to ask, who dressed you up? You actually look good which isn't very Elizabeth-like." He said with a sly grin. "You are not this beautiful woman; you are dirty, smelly and a terrible artist."

A slap landed heavily across his face as he fell into a chair. He was shocked. "Did you slap me?" he shouted.

"I will do it again with all pleasure, you shameless lowlife!" she replied.

Bolu nursed his cheek gently. "I could kill you right now, you know."

She nodded. "I know, but I am no longer scared of you."

"Why?"

She smiled faintly. "When you spend seventeen years of your life with a man who never loved you and another twelve years in confinement, what or who else is there to be scared of?"

"Don't exempt David! That creep is not innocent either!"

She laughed scornfully. "Bolu, you are pitiful. Are you going to drag a then-fifteen-year-old into this?"

"He was a man. He had a choice!"

She shook her head. "No one has a choice with you. You are a domineering piece of thrash. How is Tunji? Have you succeeded in destroying him too?"

"Not yet! But very soon too."

She took a deep breath. "I wish you won't ever repent, you don't deserve a good life." She said as she walked past him. "Bolu, I am back already. Show's over." She added and walked out.

He panted and rushed after her but bumped into David. "You?"

"Are you going after her?" David asked, standing in his way.

"I will finish you off, both of you, I promise."

David nodded with a grin. "I guess you will be doing that behind bars."

"What do you mean?" Bolu yelled as he grabbed David's shirt.

"It's high time the police got wind of your innumerable crimes, don't you think?"

Bolu pushed him back. "You wouldn't dare."

"Not me, Dad. You have hurt other people, like my mom. She won't forgive that."

"Your mother hit me, tell her I don't forgive easily." He replied and returned to his room slamming the door hard after him.

\*\*\*

"Thank you very much, Mr. Ojo." Oyinkan said as she stretched out her hand to a client for a handshake.

Mr. Ojo took the hand as he tried to avoid her stare. "Thank you, Psychic."

She scoffed. "I am not a Psychic, Mr. Ojo." She replied. He bowed his head. She smiled. "But if it would help you apologize to your daughter and wife, I'll gladly be your Shrink."

He nodded and used the chair for support as he rose to his feet. "Thank you. I hope I won't have to come back here."

"Me too...I hope you have a happy family from now." She replied and watched him leave. She cast her gaze back on her laptop. She heard the door creak slightly. She didn't even look up as she knew it as her assistant announcing the next client's session.

"Next session is in ten minutes, Sophia, please put the next client on hold."

"I was thinking we could speed mine up."

She looked up and smiled at Ben. "What do you want, Ben?"

"Hey! Ben...you look tired! Awww...sweetheart, I have missed you." he replied with a grin. "That would have sounded better than a grumpy 'what do you want Ben?" he said as he helped himself to a seat.

She rolled her eyes. "Do you want some water?"

"Water?" he scoffed. "I come all the way here and you are offering me water? Come on, we are going out for lunch."

She scoffed. "Some of us have work to do, you know."

"I am your client for the next one hour and how about I say I want to take you for lunch and then we discuss my problem there?"

She shook her head stubbornly. "Declined."

He chuckled. "I have paid already."

She took a deep breath. "Can we order in?"

"I'll take anything." He replied with a smile.

\*\*\*

I handed Elizabeth a glass of cold water. "You shouldn't have gone to see him."

"Bolu is unrepentant. I fear for him."

I wore a faint smile. "Don't worry about him, worry about yourself."

She nodded. "I have plans, I want to open a facility like Victoria's Homes. There are so many unloved people out there; it's time I made good use of my money."

"Way to go!" I replied with a smile.

She held my hand. "Thanks for saving my son. Only God knows who David would have been without you." she said, with a smile. "God bless you."

I blinked with a smile. "Amen. And speaking of which, where is David? He didn't even come in."

"He said he wanted to clear his head."

I smiled. "He'll be fine."

"You two would make a great couple."

I nodded and prayed silently in my heart. I could only hope for the best, sometimes, that's all we can do.

"Wura is getting a divorce, and Bolu would be signing ours pretty soon." She said. "I want to be totally free from him."



I stared at her. "Do you think Mr. Coker would sign the papers?"

"I don't know, but even if he doesn't, I'll help him. I'll go public. The world must miss me anyway."

I smiled. "True...they will be shocked to even know that you are alive."

"Well, it would be a good surprise."

I nodded. "Yes, a very good surprise." My phone buzzed and a text message popped up from David. "Kim, please bring my mom to this address....."

"What's going on?" she asked.

I shrugged. "I don't know."

\*\*\*

Ini closed the door of the apartment after Marcus. "Hectic day!" she said as she collapsed on the sofa.

"You can say that again." He replied taking a seat. "Good thing the shoot is almost over! It's so tiring"

She nodded and dragged herself up. "I'll get you some water."

He held her back. "No, I'll do that for you." he said with a smile.

"Am I dreaming?"

He smiled. "It's for a while." He replied as he left for the kitchen and returned with a glass of water. "Ini...I am considering looking for a better apartment."

"You should...your current neighbourhood is a mess, no offence."

He smiled. "None taken." He replied casually. "When I get the money from the deal, I will find a decent place to live."

"Oh my dear, it had better be a good place. You have responsibilities."

He nodded. "Yes, I have two 'INIs' to cater for. I must be lucky."

"What do you mean?" Ini groaned as she jumped on him.

He laughed. "Ini, I mean you guys are a big deal, don't you know?"

"Oh well...I never knew that." She replied, kissing him.

He kissed back. "Have you always liked me?"

"Oh shut up...you are ruining the moment." She replied.

\*\*\*

"Professor Wura, could you please explain the reason for the divorce?" A reporter asked.

She smiled as the cameras clicked away. "Like I said earlier, Professor Tunji and I have come to a mutual agreement to continue our lives separately. I know this is sudden and might be disappointing, bearing in mind that we were recently crowned Father and Mother of the year, but sometimes, we have to make tough but good decisions so as not to put more pressure on ourselves."

"Professor Wura, did Professor Tunji Bankole protest the divorce?" Another reported asked.

"Yes, I did..." Tunji shouted as he walked into the room. The reporters swirled in his direction and flashed the cameras on him. He blinked as he walked forward slowly. "Any reasonable man would protest a divorce, especially when you are at fault."

"What are you doing, Tunji?" Wura muttered beneath her breath.

He blinked and stared at the press. "Fellow Nigerians, I am a disgrace to every father out there. I have failed in my duties as a man, a father and a husband, and I am sorry. Wura was the one who held the home, I broke it apart. And yes, I protested the divorce because I realized my wrongs and I felt ashamed about it, but, I have to let her go. She doesn't deserve me. No woman deserves an animal."

"Professor Tunji Bankole, could you shed more light on what led to this divorce?" A reporter shouted.

Tunji wore a wry smile. "I am afraid, those details are better left unsaid. But, what I can tell you is that I am ashamed of myself and that I failed Wura, I failed my daughter, Kimberly, I failed my friends, I failed the society, I failed myself and I failed God." He concluded and went down on his knees.

Wura stared at him from her seat, she held on to restrain herself from standing up.

Tunji Bankole bowed his head. "For not being a real husband, father and role model, I am sorry." He concluded and walked out slowly. Some members of the press chased after him like cats but were fended off by his security men who helped him out of the hall.

"Professor Wura, what do you have to say?" A reporter shouted as they swirled in her direction again.

She turned her face away. Mark immediately stepped up to his duty. "This session is over. Thank you all for coming."

\*\*\*

Wole closed the door to the house. "I hope you are happy with this."

"Yes, it is small and decent. We could take care of ourselves here without having maids."

He raised an eyebrow. "No maids?"

"No maids! What do you want them for? Answer me!"

He grinned. "Easy babe, it's just that you work so hard at the real estate and I work too, and I just feel, we would be tired after work and would need someone to help us out."

"We would help each other." She replied, sharply.

He nodded. "Chill..." he grinned. "It is not a big deal you know..."

"It is o!" she replied. "Let's familiarize ourselves with the house. Our house...Our home!" she chanted leading the way.

He scoffed lightly. "Yes ma!" He replied and followed coolly.

\*\*\*

Elizabeth and I met David in front of his car. He winked at me and fetched a tiny scarf from his car. "I have a surprise for you, Mom." He said and tied her face gently with the scarf. "Help me, Kim." He said and I joined him as we walked with his blindfolded mom. We stopped in front on a gate and he opened it. We walked in and then stopped at the door. I smiled as I kissed his forehead. David had gotten his mother a house! He removed the scarf gently from her eyes. "Your home." He said as he got on his knees. "I am truly sorry, mother."

She kissed his forehead, helped him up and hugged him tenderly. I smiled at them from a distance. She then broke off from the hug gently and hugged me too. "Thank you, Kimberly." She whispered.

I smiled as she stared at the house. "Thank you, David."

He handed her the key. "Take a good look around. Kimberly and I would be around." he said and held my hand.

\*\*\*

"I love the view here." I said as I rushed to the water front.

David walked slowly behind me. "It's a fantastic view."

I smiled as I walked back to him. "David..." I asked as I kissed him.

"Hum...uh..." he replied cheekily.

"Why did you leave Elizabeth alone in the house?" I asked, as I smiled staring at him.

"You are up to something, aren't you?"

He drew me closer for a hug. "I did something there, it scares me too..."

I broke away from the hug as I stared at him. "What did you do?"

\*\*\*

Elizabeth smiled as she walked up the stairs. Everything she had seen downstairs was beautiful, the living room, the kitchen, the backyard. A simple haven! She smiled as she saw a large tag on the floor. "TURN RIGHT" she read. "Oh David...what are you up to?" she said as she continued in the direction of the tags she saw as she walked.

The directions stopped and she was standing in front of a room. She held the door knob and turned it. The door squeaked and she was standing in a dark room. She found the switch on the wall and turned on the light.

She stood motionless for a few seconds and couldn't fight back the emotions in her eyes as she stared at a painting brush, paint, and a board. She walked to the board and ran her hand across the paper. "Priceless joy" she said as she picked up her painting brush. Her eyes caught a

note stuck near the board. "Welcome home, Mom. You never left my heart." She read and smiled from the depth of her heart

## 28

David and I walked hand-in-hand down the lake. "I can imagine the look on your mom's face." I said. He smiled and I smiled back. David's phone buzzed and a text message came in. He stared at it and passed the phone to me. "*You are always in my heart...now...then...and forever.*" I read out loud and hugged him.

"We did it, Kimberly." He said, softly as he stroked my hair. "I love you."

I wanted to remain like that forever. In his arms! Everything about David was different. I could feel his heartbeat so close to mine. "I love you too...sometimes."

He pulled away slightly from the hug with my hand still firm on his back. There was a tiny glint in his eyes. "Sometimes?"

I chuckled. "Now and forever." I replied with my eyes moist. "I love you, David."

He smiled and pulled me back into his warm embrace.

\*\*\*

I rolled off the bed and landed onto the floor. "Ouch!" I yelped.

Tola hissed as she adjusted her jacket. "Sonny boy left pretty early?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, looking down at myself. I was wearing a guy's shirt, but I had my own trousers on. "Oh my God! What happened?" I screamed.

She snarled. "You don't remember?"

I shook my head numbly. "Tell me what happened." I said as I slowly sat on my bed.

"Nothing *jor*..." Ini replied as she strolled into my room. "And David left last night not this morning." She added as she sank into a chair. "I don't know where you guys went last night but you came in asleep and he had to bring you in here." My jaw dropped. "Don't worry, he wore a round neck tee." I heaved.

"Killjoy!" Tola said eyeballing Ini. "Why didn't you let me continue?"

Ini hissed. "*Na so...so you can continue deceiving the poor girl, abi?*"

I heaved a huge sigh of relief and collapsed back into the bed. "Don't you guys have anywhere to go?" I yawned.

"Of course, I do" Tola replied, stressing the 'I'. She turned in Ini's direction. "Can I borrow your car? The Range Rover is giving me some problems."

Ini shook her head stubbornly. "No! I have to pick Ini from the daycare today after the photo shoot."

"Just take a taxi." Tola shouted.

I blocked my ears with my fingers as blurted out. "Why don't you take a taxi to work, Tola?"

She swirled in my direction. "Hello! You are talking to an office executive here."

Ini chuckled. "Oh my dear...you are gonna need that taxi 'cos there is no way I am riding in a taxi to a photo shoot."

Tola hissed and eyeballed us both coldly. "I'll manage my car." She said and walked out.

Ini and I giggled. "Why can't she ask Wole for a ride?"

"I tire o!" Ini replied in Pidgin English

I smiled and drew my duvet up to my chin. Ini pulled it off aggressively. "What?" I shouted.

"Don't you work?"

I rolled my eyes. "Ini...I would go to work soon, besides, it's just 6am." I replied, glancing at my alarm clock.

"I have to ensure you aren't late." She said and walked out with the duvet.

\*\*\*

I bumped into Ben as I approached the office hallway. "Ben...what's up? Did you get the articles I sent to you this morning?"

He nodded in the affirmative. "Yes, I did."

"How are things with Oyinkan?" I asked with a smile.

He took a deep breath. "I don't really know. I don't think I can win her heart."

"Of course, you can. You just have to give it sometime. These things work themselves out with time."

A lady, the secretary to the managing director, approached us. "Excuse me, Ms. Bankole, Mr. Adeoye would love to see you in his office now."

I nodded. "I'll be there shortly." I said, dismissing her. I smiled in Ben's direction. "Ben, you have to win Oyinkan's heart. I think she will like you." I said, tapping him lightly on the shoulder. "See you around." I said and walked away briskly.

I smiled at Mr. Adeoye as I closed his office door. "Good day, sir. You sent for me?"

He nodded. "Please, take a seat." I obliged. "How's work going?"

"Very well sir. We would have the next set of articles ready soon."

He smiled and tapped the table lightly. "I would like to talk to you about something more personal." I nodded, prompting him to go on. "Did you hear about your dad bursting in during your mom's press conference for the announcement of their divorce?"

I took a deep breath. "I haven't heard about it."

"I watched him last night, a real shocker." He started. "I must say your dad is really sorry for everything."

I nodded. "That's left for him and my mom to sort out."

"Wura already chose the divorce. All your father wants is forgiveness."

I interrupted. "Excuse me, sir, but what's going on here? Are you advocating for my Dad?"

"He's not."

I turned to see Dad as he walked into the room. "What is going on here?"

"Kimberly, I want you to forgive me. I am really sorry."

I rubbed my forehead. "I don't know what to say...you hurt my mom and I. You almost destroyed our lives."

He nodded. "I admit. But, I have said a lot to Mr. Adeoye here and I don't know where to start from with you, you know most of it." He paused and swallowed. "Kimberly, I am a disgrace to you as a father, and I know it." He said as tears rolled down his cheeks. My heart broke. "Kimberly, I am not ashamed to say I am sorry. I would be worse for it if I didn't."

"Dad...stop." I said softly as I stared at him.



He shook his head pitifully. "I should have been different, and I am sorry." He swallowed. "Kimberly, please forgive me, forgive your father." He said as he drew closer to me.

I wiped off the tears welling in my eyes. "Dad...you don't have to do this."

He bowed his head and got down on his knees. I bolted from my seat. "Stop this, Dad." I said as I tried helping him up.

"Please forgive me, Kimberly." he said as he remained on his knees.

I wiped his tears and drew him up for a hug. "I forgive you, Daddy."

\*\*\*

Bolu walked briskly into his office. His secretary followed immediately behind him carrying a parcel. "Welcome sir."

"Yes? What do you want?" he snapped. "When is the meeting with the investors?"

She nodded as she placed the parcel on the table. "They are expected to come in by 7pm. They also requested the presence of Mr. David Coker as they have done favourable deals with him in the past."

"Tell them that David is busy... he is on leave...or preparing for his wedding. Just say anything." He barked.

She trembled as she nodded in fear. "Yes sir...I will do j..."

"Erm...has anyone been by the office today?" he asked, cutting in. "Like a female, looking elegant..." he scoffed. "Did anyone come here?"

She shook her head in disagreement. "Not at all, sir. The only person that stopped by was a messenger who brought this parcel for you." she said, lifting the parcel before him.

He scoffed. "What's this?"

"I don't know, Sir, but, I could open it for you if you don't mind."

He hissed. "I mind. Just drop it there and get me a glass of water." He said as he pulled his drawer open to fetch his aspirin bottle. "Also, schedule a meeting for me with my doctor. My head's been clanging a lot these days."

His secretary nodded and hurried out of the office. She returned almost immediately with the glass of water and dashed out again.

Bolu picked up the parcel and ripped the wrapper apart carelessly. He trembled as he stared at the parcel. It was a painting. The painting showed a *man sliding off a chair with his hands on his head*. His eyeballs ran across the painting nervously and they were soon wet with tears. He held his head in fear and screamed out loud.

\*\*\*

David pulled my chair back and waited for me to take my seat.

"I hope you feel better now."

I smiled faintly. "Thanks for bringing me here." I said quietly.

He nodded and stretched out his hand across the table to meet mine. "Kim, we both know how it feels to have fathers who have hurt us a lot, but there is a difference here. Your dad is sorry, mine isn't!"

He paused and shook his head sadly "But I am glad that you have forgiven him."

I smiled faintly. "I had to. I had no choice."

"You did, my love. But your kind heart chose forgiveness. Baby, I love you."

I smiled as I squeezed his hand. "I love you too, David. How's your mom?"

"She is doing okay. I called her phone today. She said she is having a good time at the house."

I nodded. "That's great news." I cleared my throat. "David..."

"Yeah?" he started as he raised an eyebrow.

A waiter approached us with a smile. "Good afternoon. May I take your order please..."

\*\*\*

The intercom rang once before Tunji picked it up. "Yes."

"Sir, some policemen are here to see you."

Tunji nodded. "Send them in." he replied and replaced the intercom.

The door opened slowly and three uniformed men walked into his office. He blinked as they he stared at him. "Good afternoon."

"My name is Inspector Amos and I have with me a warrant to arrest you." he said, flashing his badge and dropping the warrant on his table.

Tunji nodded. "Okay." He took a deep breath. "I will just call my lawyer to meet us there."

"Sir, we would like you to accompany us right now so we don't have to apply some force."

He nodded. "Okay...let's go." He replied.

\*\*\*

The doctor adjusted his stethoscope. "I don't think our services here at the clinic would be sufficient. What happened to the boss?"

"Dr. Malcolm, I don't even know what happened. I heard him scream and I rushed in. When I got there, I saw him soaked in sweat and that was when I sent for you."

Dr. Malcolm blinked. "Have you called his son?"

The secretary nodded. "I just sent someone to do that."

He blinked. "I am expecting the ambulance here soon. We would take him to our affiliated hospital."

Bolu stared at them. "Where are you taking me?" he asked, slowly.

"Sir, you are under a lot of pressure right now and you need to rest." Dr. Malcolm replied.

Bolu snarled and slammed his table. "Are you both insane? Who is under pressure? This is my office and no one..."he shouted. "Absolutely no one would take it away from me! Or me from it!" he said, slamming the table repeatedly.

Dr. Malcolm stared at the secretary. She trembled and started to step back slowly. Dr. Malcolm swallowed. "Sir, we just think that you need to rest before your next meeting."

Bolu's eyes popped out and he hurled his phone at them, the huge painting followed immediately and the secretary rushed out of the office. Dr. Malcolm stared at him as he pushed his

table angrily. "I will finish Elizabeth! She can't come here to take over from me." he shouted angrily as he punched his table furiously.

\*\*\*

"Why are ignoring your phone calls?" I asked as I sipped my wine.

David stared at his phone. "It's from the office. I don't want to have anything to do with them there for now."

I smiled faintly. "But it could be important."

He nodded. "Well...nothing is more important than the both of us being here together."

I smiled. "You flatter me."

"It's not flattery, babe. I love you, and I refuse to choose work over you."

I grinned. "I feel honored." I stretched my hand across the table and picked up his phone. "But...sometimes, you have to attend to some matters." I said with a smile, picked up the call and slid the phone to him.

"Yes?" he said harshly. I stared at him and he relaxed a bit. "How may I help you?" he asked with a smile and I smiled back. His smile faded slightly and he blinked rapidly. "Okay...I'll be there now." He said quickly as he dropped the call.

"What's going on?" I asked worriedly.

He took a deep breath. "It's my father...he is sick."

\*\*\*

I held David's hand as he placed his head against my shoulder. I tried to block his ears so he wouldn't hear his father screaming so uncontrollably from the ward. He'd scream, laugh, talk to himself and then scream again. I kissed David's forehead tenderly.

"My dad is losing it." He said softly.

I nodded. *Mild word for going gaga or crazy.* "He'll be fine."

The door opened and two doctors approached us. David immediately walked up to them. "What's going on?" he asked.

"Mr. Coker, we are afraid but your dad is having serious problems here. We've had Dr. Obinna here take a look at him."

David and I cast our glances on Dr. Obinna. "Sir?" we asked.

Dr. Obinna took a deep breath. "I am a psychiatrist and I have a facility where we are going to take him, but that would be if you grant us permission."

David stared at me and smiled faintly. He then whispered into my ears. "Asylum."

I chuckled and stared at the Doctor. "Do you mean an Asylum?"

"Well if you put it that way."

David stared at me with a corny smile. "Payback time." He then smiled in the doctor's direction. "Where do I sign?"

I pinched him and muttered between my teeth. "Why are you so excited?"

He nudged me slightly with a smile. "I am not excited, I am blessed. I feel so glad doing this to him, exactly what he did to my mom."

"You must love this." I replied with a sly grin.

He winked. "We are yet to get to the best part." He replied with a smile. "Can we please see him?" he asked the doctor.

The doctor nodded. "Yes, we would have a nurse with you in there."

David and I were escorted into his father's room. Bolu Coker widened his eyes as he saw us walk in. He had been cuffed to the bed. "I'll get you both!!! I'll finish you off!!!!"

"Of course, except that you will have to do that in white scrubs." David replied.

Bolu struggled with the bed. "No...no....no....no...no...NO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" He screamed. I held onto David tightly as I watched him kick aggressively.

"This was what you did to my mother!" David shouted.

The door opened and the doctors rushed in with two policemen. We stared at the policemen. "What do you want?" David asked.

"I am Inspector Amos, and Mr. Coker is under arrest." He said showing his badge and a warrant.

David swallowed and stared at his dad. "Well...this is more interesting than I thought." He turned in the inspector's direction. "Well, if you can arrest a mad man, be my guest." He said and walked out.

I shook my head and hurried after David. "Baby, why are acting like this?" I asked.

He took a deep breath and pulled me close for a hug. "You have no idea how much I have waited for this day. The day my dad would pay for all his sins, for hurting me and my mom." He sniffed a bit. "I feel horrible seeing him in that condition, but, I thank God he is getting what's coming to him."

"My dad must have been arrested." I mumbled

"Baby, I am sorry...your dad is a better man though. He at least repented."

The policemen walked out of the ward. "Err....It's obvious that Mr. Coker can't be arrested in his condition, but he is under arrest by the law and so we would have him cuffed at the Asylum and under police watch until the court decides what to do."

"Has he already been charged to court?" David asked.

Inspector Amos nodded. "Yes. We would be in touch." He said and walked away.

I smiled faintly and stared at David. "Oh well...I pray for his soul."

He nodded and kissed my forehead. "Kim, I want to be with you all my life. You are all I've got." He said.

I smiled.

\*\*\*

"I am sorry sir, I was unable to grant you bail pending your trial."

Tunji's face fell as he stared at his lawyer. "It's okay. It's hard behind bars. Have you told Wura?"

The lawyer nodded. "I did, but she was indifferent. She said all the best to you."

Tunji swallowed. "And Kimberly?"

"I sent her a text message."

Tunji nodded. "Anyway, I hope they get Bolu."

"Err... Mr. Coker has been transferred to an asylum."

"Asylum! That bastard! How low can he get to run away from the law?"

The lawyer shook his head in disagreement. "I don't think he's faking it, he did not even know anything about the police before he was taken to the hospital."

"Well...seems like God had other plans for him."

\*\*\*

Ben walked into my office. "Staying late?"

"Waiting for David." I replied.

He nodded. "It's 7pm, maybe he's not coming, I could give you a ride."

"He'll come. It's probably traffic that's having him delayed or something. Don't worry, I'll be fine"

Ben smiled. "Alright then. See you." he said and walked out.

David had sent me a text saying he would pick me up. I would wait.

The door opened shortly and David walked in looking so smart in his suit and trimmed beard. "Babe, what's this?" I asked with a smile.

"What?" he asked as he smiled.

"You are looking too good. Are we going out?" I asked.

He shook his head. "I came to take you home." He replied.

I took a deep breath. "Well, this is some appearance." I said, grabbing my bag and getting up.

"Shall we?" he asked, as he held my hand.

I nodded and followed him.

\*\*\*

David pulled up in front of my house. "Get some rest." He said with a smile.

I nodded and kissed him. "Take care."

"Bye." He replied. "I have office work to attend to."

I nodded and stepped out of the car. "See you." I said and watched him drive off.

I unlocked the door of the house and walked into the empty house. Tola and Ini were usually in before me. I took a deep breath and went to the kitchen to get some water to drink and then left for my bedroom to get ready to take a bath. My memories played back to kissing David as I enjoyed Lynxxx and Banky W's *'Letter to my unborn child'* He looked sharp this evening. Why didn't he stay? Why did he have work to do? I cursed my luck.

I wore my bathrobe and returned to the living room. My phone's back light turned off. I picked it up immediately. "3 voice messages!" I gasped as I played them. "Kim, I need your help. Quickly...please..." my mouth dropped agape as I played Tola's second and third distress messages. "My car... I would try to muscle it into the es-..." I panicked as I dialed her phone number.

"Switched off." Came the service response. My heart raced. I immediately dialed David's number.

"Switched off!" "Oh my God!" I said as I adjusted my bathrobe. I ran my finger through my wet hair. 'Ini should have given Tola her car this morning' I thought. What could have happened to Tola's number...and David's too. Did they crash into one another? I mean...he just left, right? I thought as I bolted from the chair.

My phone rang. "Ini". I picked it. "Ini...where are you?" I shouted.

"Kimberly, hurry down to the Estate gate. Tola has been in an accident!"  
I shrieked.



## 29

I swung the front door open and raced down the lane. It wasn't about my wet hair dangling around my neck, or my white bathrobe or the slippers. I hadn't thought about it for a second. Tola was in danger thanks to our negligence, and maybe my David was too.

The roads were blocked. Estate security was on the patrol, I looked ahead as people gathered, chattering almost indistinctly. I caught a glance of Tola's Range Rover as I approached the police mark. "Let me through." I shouted as I started to push them away from their clusters. Some pushed back and I was partially sandwiched as I tried to get through the crowd to the siren lights that beamed ahead. I couldn't see a thing but I had seen Tola's car afar off. "Tola!" I shouted as I pushed. "Out of my way!" I screamed.

I pushed myself through the last line and jumped out of the crowd - I almost stumbled as I saw a security man. "What's going on? Where's Tola?"

He panted. "She was just taken down that way", he pointed. "The last hospital before the creek."

I took a deep breath and turned left as directed. It was so dark and annoyingly sandy on the road which actually led to the creek. I walked as fast as I could in the dark as different thoughts ran through my mind. I saw a red light blinking ahead and quickly hurried on towards it. They became two, they blinked simultaneously. I gasped and smiled. My luck! Something or someone would direct me to the hospital. I smiled to myself but something made me stop dead in my tracks; there were many red lights now and they weren't blinking simultaneously as before, but in a beautiful sequence, almost as if they were being set there on purpose. I shook the thought from my head.

"Who would want to do such a thing in a place like this?" I walked on slowly and approached the beautiful red buds of lights. They were tiny but beautiful. I tried to look around in the now semi-red-dark environment and couldn't really make anything out.

I advanced and immediately stepped back as the sand started to glow. "What's going on?" I said. The glow turned into letterings that came out one after the other. I blinked as I read:

KIMBERLY, WILL YOU MARRY ME?

I gasped as I read it again. I looked up and saw David before me on one knee as he lifted a red tiffany box with a diamond ring in it. "Kim, please, would you marry me?" he asked with an eyebrow raised.

I smiled as I bit my lips. Cold chills ran through my body and I could feel goose bumps all over my body. The cool sea breeze also contributed to it, but it was more because of this special moment. He blinked nervously as he stared at me with a smile. I looked up to the heavens and thanked God and then looked down at him. "Yes." I said softly.

"Yes? Is that a yes?"

I nodded excitedly and screamed. "Yes!!!"

He chuckled as he slipped the ring onto my finger. "I love you." he said, softly.

"And I love you." I replied and smiled as he kissed my hand.

He rose to his feet and pulled me closer for a kiss. "Can we stay like this forever?" He asked as he pulled away for a second to wrap his arms around me.

"I'd love to." I replied. "Except that I am in my bathrobe."

"I like you in your bathrobe." He replied and kissed my forehead.

I scoffed. "Where are those losers?"

"I don't know what you are talking about." He replied.

"Tola and Ini? Car accident?"

He giggled. "Oh well...you fell for it, didn't you?" he asked as he whisked me up in his arms. "Dear future wife, I won't be able to carry you like this when you are all preggy."

"Really?" I scoffed. "It's for better or worse, David. I'll advise you to go gain a few more pounds."

He smiled and stopped right in front of the lake. He dropped me kindly on the cloth he must have spread there earlier and took his seat beside me. He fetched a bottle of wine and two glasses from a picnic bag and filled my glass first. "Here you go."

"Thank you." I said, collecting the glass. I sipped carefully and placed my head on his shoulder.

"Are you really going to marry me, Kimberly?" he asked.

I rolled my eyes with a smile. "Unh uh..."

"Oh God...I am so blessed." He said and slid down slowly so that I'd rest my head on his chest. "We'll be here together."

I nodded. "Of course...except that you have clothes, and I don't." I grinned.

"You have me." he replied with a smile.

I stared at him with a smile. "Really?" I asked teasingly.

He blinked with a smile. "Yeah...now...and forever."

We kissed.

\*\*\*

### **Weeks after...**

"Ini! Baby is crying!" Marcus shouted as he adjusted his bowtie. "Ini!!!!"

Ini hurried into the bedroom. "Marcus, she just wants a change of diapers. Can't you do that?"

"Me? No way! You do it?"

She frowned. "Why?" she asked as she tilted her aside and started to remove the old diapers. "Thank God your mom is coming over this evening."

He nodded. "She should be here soon. She knows we have to go out." He said as he adjusted his cufflinks. "Babe, when are you going to move in here with me *permanently*?"

She eyeballed him. "Are we married?"

"Bu...but, I'll propose to you eventually, do you know how many couples live together without getting married?"

She nodded. "Not interested." She said as she finished with the baby's diapers. "Let's hurry or we'll be late."

"You are the busy one. I am ready." He replied with a grin as he adjusted his collar.

\*\*\*

"Thank you, Tola." I said as she helped me with my necklace. "The guys should be here soon." I said, staring at the clock.

She nodded as she applied her lip gloss. "I hope this gown isn't too short for the ceremony."

I stared at her. "It's perfect."

She nodded. "Ini should be coming in tomorrow, right?"

"I think so. We need to plan the take-off quickly."

She nodded with a sad face. "I'll miss this place."

"Me too...but I will gladly swap it for David's arm in the cold."

She sneered. "Na so... Let's wait and see."

I hissed and picked up my phone and we started taking pictures while we waited for the guys.

\*\*\*

David held my hand as we walked into *Liz Art Gallery*. I smiled as Oyinkan approached us. "Hi guys!!!" she said with a smile and pecked me. "You guys look so cute together."

"Thanks, couz." David replied. "What about Ben?"

She raised an eyebrow. "Ben? How would I know?"

"Ta-da!!!" Ben said as he slid behind us. "Oyinkan, I have been looking for you since like forever."

"Later guys." She said and excused herself.

Ben smiled at us. "Gotta go." He said and followed her.

"David, let's go see the paintings on the other side." I said, pulling him along.

\*\*\*

Elizabeth welcomed some intending customers as she walked along with them.

"Elizabeth!", someone shouted.

She turned to see Niran and his wife, Olamide. "Hello..." she said coolly and hugged Olamide Briggs. "How are you, Olamide?"

Olamide smiled. "It's been a while. It's so nice to see you."

Niran stretched out his hand out for a handshake and Elizabeth took it coolly. "Fantastic gallery you have here."

"Thank you." she replied.

He nodded. "We'll be looking around." He said as he walked ahead with Olamide.

\*\*\*

"I like this painting." I said as I touched a painting. "It's so lovely, it says so much about love."

He pulled me slightly into his grip. "Don't I say all about love?" he asked with a smile.

I shook my head smiling. "NO...I love the painting."

"Oh then...you are gonna be getting married to me." he said as he planted a kiss on my mouth.

I giggled softly. "David..."

"Yea..."

I adjusted his tie. "I'll marry the painting."

He giggled. "I see... In that case, I'll buy the painting, put it in my room, and that's where you'll be." He replied.

I smiled. "Am I lucky to be marrying you?"

"No. You are blessed."

I nodded and rolled his tie playfully.

The bright lights went off and were replaced by dim emergency lights.

"Everyone, please come to the centre!!!" Security beckoned through the voiceover.

David pulled my hand and we walked back to the centre. Tola and Wole joined us. "What's going on?" Wole asked.

"I don't know." I replied as I held David's hand.

Ini hurried to join us. "Do you think there's a problem?" she asked. "Maybe David's father came here to haunt us?"

We all hissed as we stared around thinking of the possibility. Ini gasped. "Where's Marcus?"

The lights came on immediately and Marcus was standing on the podium with a microphone in his hand. "What is that idiot doing there?" Ini asked.

Marcus cleared his throat. "Hello everyone! Sorry for that hitch, but, I need to have all your attention. I am in love with the best woman on this earth." The 'Awww' floated. "She is over there. She is Ini Obong." The lights beamed on Ini. She smiled lightly and then eyed Marcus. "Ini..." he started as he walked towards her. "Ini, I love you so much, you are my life." He said. He then got down on one knee and raised a ring box before her. "Please marry me."

She gasped.

\*\*\*

"That was some proposal by Marcus." I said as I closed the door after Tola and Ini.

"YES!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" She screamed and jumped into the sofa. "I join the league of soon-to-be-married women! Yaaaaaayyyyyyyyyy" she shouted as she stared at her ring. "This is so beautiful."

Tola jabbed me lightly and I knew she was about to say something offensive or funny. "How much did you buy the ring, Ini?"

Ini frowned. "What do you mean, Tola?"

"Just saying." Tola replied with a grin.

I giggled. "Congratulations, sweetheart." I said as I took my seat on the sofa. Tola and Ini joined me. "We are so blessed, right?"

"Of course...I have got the best man in Marcus." Ini replied. "He even staged a show. I should have said no." she replied, giggling.

I smiled as I wrapped my arms around them. "It's time to plan the yard sale for this place."

Tola nodded. "I'll miss my bedroom." She said as she wiped a fake tear from her face.

"I'll miss the kitchen." Ini said.

Tola and I hissed. "Like you ever cooked." I replied.

"It's not like I have a choice anymore, I have a baby to cater to."

I nodded. "Yes, and a chef for a husband. Marcus is a genius in the kitchen, you shouldn't be bothered."

"I think we should call the boys to help us with the yard sale." Tola suggested. "And our kid brother too."

Ini yawned. "Henry, right? He was all over Mirabel, is he dating Wole's sister?"

"LASTMA, yes." Tola replied. She then swerved in my direction. "And Ben Ten likes Oyinkan, unh?"

I nodded with a smile. "Seems so."

Ini hissed. "See this thief o! Do you want to keep Ben as a spare?"

"I haven't said anything like that." I replied.

Ini sighed. "You don't have to. Now, in other important news, I would move in with Marcus after the yard sale."

"When did you decide that?" Tola asked.

She shrugged. "What's left?"

"The wedding." Tola replied.

She scoffed. "Tell me you are not itching to move in with Wole."

"There will be time for all what you are thinking later." Tola replied.

Ini stuck her tongue out. "Whatever."

I left them to their banter.

\*\*\*

"Oga, you get visitor." The warder said and opened Tunji's cell.

Tunji stretched his muscles and slipped into his slippers and followed the warder. He dragged his feet painfully after the officer. He had been welcome to the Maximum Security Prison

in grand style by his cellmates' months ago and even though they were all friendly now, the scars wouldn't leave.

"Oga Tunji!!!" Some inmates hailed as he walked by.

He waved back as he walked on after the warder.

"Ten minutes." The warder said and walked away.

Tunji took his seat before his lawyer. "How are you holding up, sir?"

"I am healthy. I have a class with some inmates by 3pm, so make it fast. Any update on Bolu?"

The lawyer nodded. "Yes, the judge has said that he is sentenced to life imprisonment on recovery."

"If he recovers..." Tunji added.

The lawyer nodded. "The chances of his recovery are, however, slim. "The doctors say he has a severe case of insanity and are not sure if he would ever be sane again."

Tunji took a deep breath and looked up. "Thank you, Lord."

The lawyer stared at him. "Why are you thanking God?"

"He kept me sane." He replied with a bleak smile. "How is Kimberly?"

The lawyer smiled. "She would be getting married next weekend."

Tunji's face fell. "I won't even see my daughter marry. I deserve it anyway."

"Don't be so sure." The lawyer replied.

Tunji stared at him. "What do you mean?"

\*\*\*

I pushed the door open slightly and stared at Dad. "Hi..." I said as I waved. David walked in after me. The lawyer stared at Dad with a smile.

Dad blinked pitifully. "How are you?"

I ran to him and hugged him. "Daddy..."

"My girl...I am so proud of you." he said as he stroked my hair. He then kissed my forehead. "I am so happy for you."



David stepped forward and bowed. "Good day, sir."

Dad took a deep breath. "David, I am sorry about your father."

David smiled faintly. "You shouldn't be. He's getting what he deserves."

Dad nodded and stared in my direction. "Congratulations to you..." he paused and stared at David. "You too, son."

David nodded and handed the Invitation Card to Dad with a bow. "Sir, you are invited to our wedding." Dad gasped as he collected the Invitation Card. Tear drops rolled down his eyes.

"Dad, would you also walk me down the aisle?" I asked as the lawyer brought out Dad's permit with a smile.

Dad bowed his head. "This is too much for me." he said as he wiped his face. "Do I deserve this?"

I smiled and hugged him. "You are my Dad, now and forever..."

\*\*\*

ASYLUM:

Bolu Coker was subjected to needles and treatment as he screamed all day long in his new mental state. He had become an object of ridicule and was considered the 'mad man of the mad men'.

\*\*\*

"Oyinkan, thank you so much for everything, my marriage has improved over the last few months."

Oyinkan smiled. "You are welcome, Mrs. Madu. All you have to do now is make things better for the family. Spend more time with your husband and kids than with your friends, they are single and can't really offer you the best advice."

Mrs. Madu nodded. "Thank you so much." She replied as she slipped a cheque on the table. "Thank you so much."

"Oh...you have to pay to the attendant outside." Oyinkan replied

Mrs. Madu smiled. "I have done that, this is an extra showing how grateful I am."

Oyinkan smiled. "Thanks a lot, I am really grateful."

Mrs. Madu nodded and walked out. Ben walked in almost immediately with a bouquet of flowers. "Happy Anniversary, Baby."

She smiled as she collected the flowers from him. "Happy Anniversary." She replied as they kissed. "They are beautiful. Thank you, Ben." She said as she placed them carefully on her table. "I got a tip today." She said, flaunting the cheque.

He smiled. "Nice, when don't you ever get a tip? People love your job."

"You never pay for your sessions." She replied.

He nodded. "I am having them with you, why should I pay?"

"Encourage my job, pay me."

He smiled. "I'll do that in due season."

She nodded. "We'll see. How's Millaroca?"

"Well...Editor-in-Chief is doing fine."

She gasped with a smile. "What? You got a promotion."

He nodded with a smile. "Yep! That's me, baby."

"Congratulations." She replied as she walked over to him. She sat on the table with her legs crossed. "So, do we drink to that?"

He nodded with a sensual smile. "Most definitely."

\*\*\*

I adjusted the video camera in our almost empty living room. I rubbed my hands against my jeans as I stared at our house...well, almost not anymore. The yard sale was due in the next thirty minutes, but pending the time, we could use some moments alone.

Tola walked in with Ini. "Ready?" she asked.

I nodded. "The guys are outside?"

Ini smiled. "Making friends."

\*\*\*

Marcus jumped on the sofa. "I should buy this sofa."

Wole stared at him. "You wan die?" he asked in pidgin English.

David smiled. "Ini would have your head."

"That babe is a handful but I love her anyway."

Henry scoffed. "We all love her."

Marcus eyeballed him. "Who asked for your opinion, son?"

Henry popped his collar. "Easy guys, you need me else none of my sisters would be with any of you."

"Really?" David asked.

Henry nodded and stared to whistle with a smile.

\*\*\*

"My name is Ini Obong." Ini started. Tola and I giggled. She then swung at us. "Stop it." Tola and I stopped giggling but we managed to pull faces at her. "Okay, whatever...I am Ini. Model, hottest of the three. When you see the other two, you'll understand. However I am a mother too early, my baby is a beautiful girl. I hope I can be a great mother too. Oh well...I am not going to be a model anymore, maybe in the next two years. I need to take care of my baby." She paused and smiled.

"Marcus is the man I am going to marry, my ever invisible best friend turned out to be the love of my life." She said and paused to blink. I smiled and Tola gave the 'Awww'...we then giggled. "My own life lesson, never thought I would be a wife, not to talk of a mother. Never saw myself as the perfect fit for anyone, but today, I can say I am on my way to being that woman you want." She said with a huge smile. "Or not." She concluded.

Ini smiled as she came to us. "That's mine. Tola, you are next!"

"Me? Why not Kimberly?" Tola asked.

Ini scoffed. "Oh come on, you are next and that's that. Why does everything have to be a big deal with you?"

Tola rolled her eyes and took her seat before the camera.

"My name is Tola Matthews, I work in Real Estate, and contrary to Ini's opinion of her having the nicest body among the three of us, I say no. You see...I actually have Omotola Jalade's shape, yes, seriously, well, not exactly...but almost, just a little more work...work in progress." Ini and I giggled. She flipped her hair over shoulder and continued.

"My life has not been really perfect, and my biggest imperfection was holding on to nothing." She said and took a deep breath. "A reserved apology to Tolu's future wife if he ever gets married, but, Tolu was my biggest mistake. Sometimes we have to always let go and let the right man in. By the way, the next time you slash my car tyre Wole, you are getting me the latest ride in town...Ahan! What kind of man are you? *Na to dey slash tyre you sabi and bring toothpaste and toothbrush as breakfast in bed for person!* Anyway, I love you with my life, not like I have a choice; you are my life, Wole." She said with a smile. "Wole gave me a reason to smile, a reason to live and a reason to love. He became the reason and that's why life won't be life without you, Wole." She said and took a deep breath. "Life lesson?" she asked and stared at Ini. "Why did you even say that nonsense?" She asked. Ini shrugged. Tola swirled back before the camera. "Okay, Life lesson, if you have a Tolu Scott in your life, please throw him out, no lady deserves such a man. *Gracias!*"

Tola curtsied as she approached us. "Madam, it's your turn." She said staring at me.

I took a deep breath. "I already recorded mine."

"What?!" they shouted and pounced on me.

I screamed out

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Dear Future Husband,

I am just a young girl with life, love and more love for you. I was already *married* to you before I met you (our fathers' wish). But, looking back at their decision, I am glad they brought us together.

David, I could never imagine my life with anyone else but you. I met Ben, but, (smiles) he wasn't it. I just knew it. I knew I would wait, I would wait for you.

I was afraid of you. I was scared of being David Coker's wife, but I knew I didn't have any choice then, but now, I would be scared and afraid if I was not your wife...well almost. The thought of being a mother terrifies me right now, but, I bet we would make terrific parents. I am optimistic.

David, I hope we don't have to face storms in our marriage but even if we do, we'll come through it all together, I hope we don't have to fight. (Deep breath) Who am I kidding? These things happen...sometimes or always; but I hope that in every argument, I find love in your eyes; in every pain or anger I can still feel our love so strong. (Smiles) I hope in every moment of fear we find strength to go through it all.

Mom swears that she is through with Dad, he is really sorry, but what can I say? I hope she could one day forgive him. Maybe you could talk to her on his behalf?

I hope we raise the finest kids. Kids who will fear the Lord and that would be proud of us and we would be proud of them also. (Wide grin) I hope we have a girl first. What would I call her? Hmm...we'll think about that later. But I'll call our son *George*, I absolutely love that name. (Blows kiss)

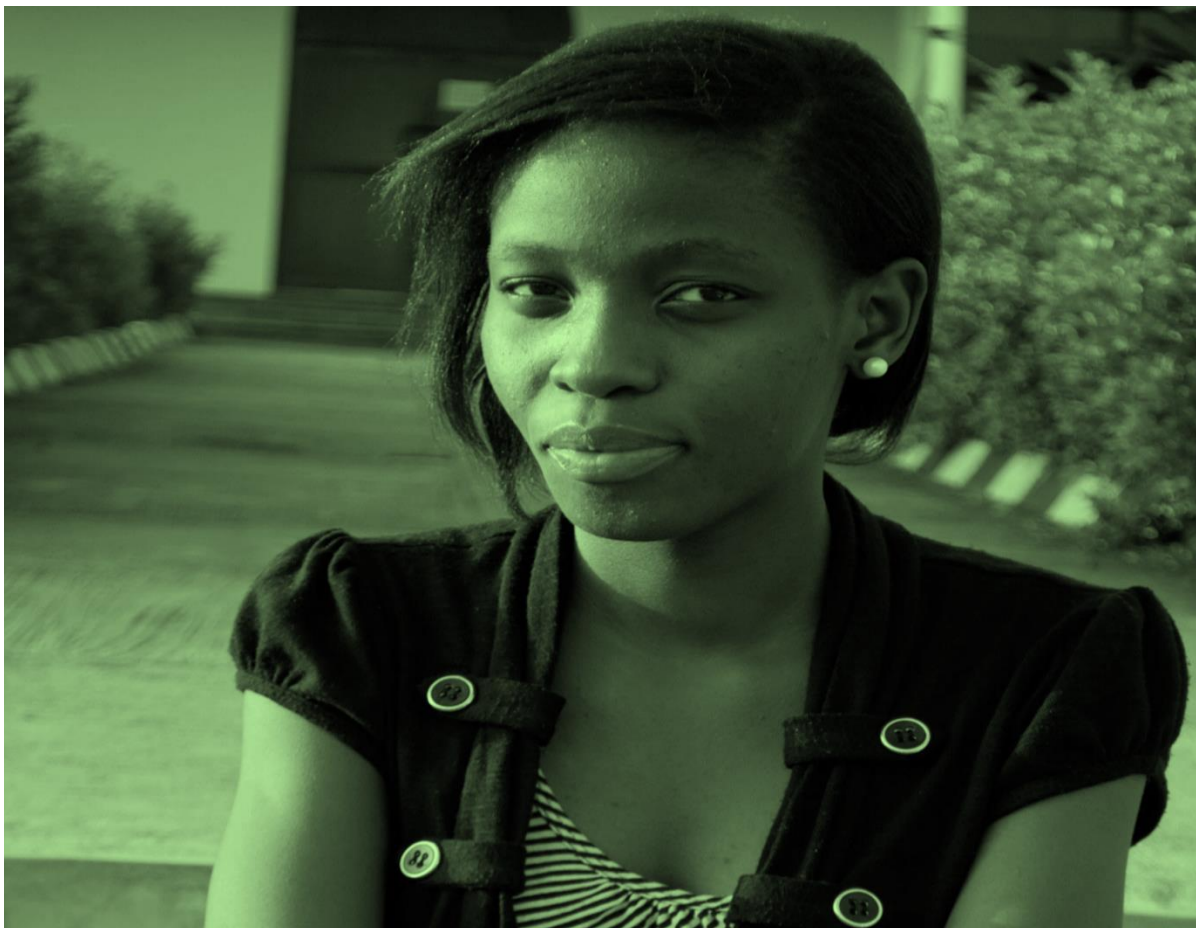
David, I hope and pray that I never lose you, not to death, and even when we would die, we would be old, rusty and still love. We would have our graves next to each other and who knows, *God* might just have our mansions close to each other in Heaven. I don't know how it is over there, but I can't wait to see you there too.

David, you have my heart as your home, your haven. I am not going to leave your side; I'll be a sister, friend, wife, mother and lover. I am yours.

David, my love, I pray *God* blesses us and we forever stay in love.

David, I'll love you with everything I have and everything I am, now...and forever. (Smiles)  
I am Kimberly Bankole, your future wife.

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Tomi Adesina is a fiction writer and also a screenwriter.

She blogs weekly at <http://tommyslav-island.blogspot.com> and is currently writing her fourth series, **All Fun and Games**. She has previously completed **Please Break My Heart, Dear Future Husband**, which was adapted from the blog series to the eBook, and **Broken...or not?**

Her Fiction blog, Tommyslav's Island, was nominated under the Best Writing Blog of the Nigerian Blog Awards in 2012. She went on to win the Best Writing Blog Award (Judges' choice) in 2013.

As a Screenwriter, she wrote the first season for the hit TV series, **Deadline** which aired on DSTV's cable network Ebony Life TV. She also co-wrote episodes for a Ghanaian TV series, **Broadway**. She hopes to have her works adapted for film and Television in the nearest future.

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