

BROKEN MIRRORS

TUNDE LEYE

Episode 1

Toooooot! Toooooot! The trailer's blaring horn cut rudely into Awazi's thoughts. "Oh my days!" she exclaimed. Today, of all the immeasurable number of days in time, Lagos-Ibadan expressway had chosen to be the meeting point of the world union of traffic inducing demons. As her husband would say, the traffic tie wrapper, come wear bandana join dey dance atilogwu. Even a slither of water would not find its way through this bumper to bumper traffic mess, and expectedly, they had passed a generous sprinkling of vehicles that had coughed and given up whatever ghost cars possessed parked by the roadside. The one hour journey from Lagos to Ibadan on a normal day had taken them four hours today. And they had just barely gone past Ogere trailer park. Her only consolation was that her husband Derin had just changed his car. If it had been their old Honda, the air conditioning would have done nothing to alleviate the searing heat. She balanced in the rear seat (popularly called Owner's Corner) of Derin's new Kia Sportage jeep. The fact that this was an automatic transmission car also kept him in high spirits during the trip. Had it been their old manual transmission Honda, he would have been a grumpy grouch by now. Derin had done well for the family. He had finally made that move from his old generation, meager salary paying bank to an oil servicing firm whose name eluded her now. And voila, within a year of that move, they had been able to change the car, and had now moved away from Shomolu to finally go to that nice spot behind E-Center in the Sabo area of Lagos she had always wanted them to go to. Life was looking up.

“Your ogo looks very knock-able from behind” she said, playfully rubbing his clean shaven head now. Derin laughed without taking his eyes off the road, trying to inch ahead of the minibus that was trying to reenter the road from the red sands of the patch between the road and the bush beside it. “You this Eggon woman from the bushes of Nasarawa wants to slap a full grown Yoruba man’s head. Abomination! We Ibadan men require the liver of a male snail as sacrifice for such atrocities o.”

They both laughed as she rose to kiss the back of his head “how about that kind of head slapping, Mr. full grown Yoruba man?” she asked smiling naughtily.

“Haaaa,” he said in mock horror. “This woman, you want to cause an accident abi? And you are doing bad thing in front of the baby, you want to teach him bad bad things?”

As she collapsed into the seat laughing again, the baby chuckled out aloud, seemingly joining her in laughter. She felt a surge of love rise through her being as she looked at him. The baby. Her baby. Their baby. Her, and Derin. It had taken a heart wrenching twelve years for him to come. She had cried, prayed, fought, despaired and nearly given up. It hadn’t been an easy marriage, from the beginning. She was a Hausa speaking, Eggon woman who had spent all her life in Nassarawa. She could hear her father drilling it into her head from when she was old enough to understand the word ‘marry’.

“Awazi, my daughter,” he would say, giving her one of his carefully selected serious looks. “Ours is a small and close knit tribe, and we enjoy peace with ourselves. When you are of age, we will find you a nice Eggon man, and you will marry him.” She remembered rolling her eyes internally, but nodding obediently as she was expected to.

NYSC came and for the first time, it had taken her out of her cul de sac in Nassarawa. Her father had repeated the warnings when she was leaving but she hadn't heard them. He was the proper Ibadan Yoruba boy and they had met when he came to work in Calabar, while she was serving there. Both parents didn't want the marriage. Her father had exploded in rage when she brought the matter up. But Derin was a charmer. By means she could never understand, Derin managed to win his affection and his blessing to take his daughter as wife. She was elated. So, marry, they eventually did, and she had settled with him in Lagos. That had been the number one wahala. Lagos was simply too close to Ibadan, and her mother in-law didn't think much about barging in on them. Shebi she would have preferred her son to marry a proper ngbati ngbati woman like her. After three years without having a child, her mother in-law turned the heat up. She visited every weekend, and spoke Yoruba all through her stay. The only English words she spoke were directed at her and they were a sarcastic “one day you will confess what you have used all your unborn children to do, you this man we have married,” or something of the sorts. As the assault got more serious, the relationship between her and Derin deteriorated. It was only a matter of time before the explosion came, and when it did, it nearly blew her marriage to smithereens. She had repeatedly

heard rumors that Derin had fathered a child in Ibadan and the child was with his mother, and when the rumors got too much, she had decided to confront him. After all, she had reasoned, there was no smoke without fire. It eventually turned out to be false news, planted by Derin's mum to incite to act exactly as she had done. Derin had rejected the suggestion when his mum had brought it up, but the woman still found a way to make it hurt. And before it was exposed to be false, it had destroyed the thin fabric that was holding the marriage together.

They had been separated for six months, but Derin (bless him, she thought) came after her, and won her for his wife a second time. It was then they agreed to the ruse that preserved their marriage. They had gotten a new apartment in Shomolu, far from the Abule Egba where they had been staying. Derin then told his mum that he had been transferred to the bank's regional office in Abuja. They had forged a letter on the bank's letterhead that Derin brought home, and she had coined the letter to mean a promotion. Overjoyed at her son's promotion, the woman believed they were really moving to Abuja. They then arranged for some correspondences to be sent to her from a friend in Abuja to her impersonating Derin, sealing their ruse completely. And so they had lived, more happily for five years, while searching for a child.

There had been pregnancies in all those years, but she had lost them all. Seven times, she had had miscarriages. Seven times she had hoped, only to have her hope shattered when she had begun to find hope in her hope. When she had become

pregnant for him, she had refused to allow herself hope. As the pregnancy had advanced, the fear and foreboding within her had grown, expecting to see the now familiar telltale blood between her legs at anytime. But the months had passed and he had grown within her. One day, within the eight month, she felt a sharp spasm run through her body. She instantly recognized it for what it was – labor pains. She was beginning labor premature. Forgetting everything she had been taught in antenatal, she panicked. “No,” she had said. “No!” she had screamed. No, it couldn’t not go perfect. Why would she be having a premature child?

Thankfully, it had been a weekend and Derin had been at home. He always hovered around her protectively when she was pregnant anyway, so he wasn’t far off. He had rushed in when she screamed and assessed the situation without a word. With quiet efficiency, he gathered the kit he had practiced putting together over and over again with her, and then gently led her to the car.

The calmness he exuded didn’t translate to his driving though. He drove like a cheetah in pursuit of prey through the free roads and they were in the Surulere hospital Derin used for his HMO in no time. On the way to the hospital, the contractions had gotten more frequent, more intense. When they got to the hospital Derin’s composure was nearly gone. He hurried her in and the nurses who were familiar with their story saw what was going on and quickly took over from him, stretching her to the labor room.

They had endured a grueling two weeks after his birth before the doctors finally pronounced the baby okay. Coupled with the huge bills incurred on the incubator, they were on the edge. They were so unsure, and their faith so battered by years of loss that they chose not to share the birth of their baby with anyone, not even close family and friends. They waited to be sure, and it had taken two weeks. Those two weeks had been the longest in her life. When the doctor finally told them that the baby was out of the woods, she had seen Derin shed silent tears for the first (and the last time) in their marriage. After that, they had called and told everybody. Her whole family, including her father had flown in from wherever in the world they were. Derin's mum too had come, along with his only sibling, his younger sister. Their father was late by then. Awazi relished the look on her mother-in-law's face when she held the baby. It was a priceless look of someone who now had to eat very big, hurtful words she had said over the years. But she couldn't deny the pure love she saw shining through the old woman's eyes whenever she looked at the baby. In that, they were together. So, after toying with all manner of names of exceedingly great length in her head (she even came up with OluwaVindicateMi), she simply named her baby Isaac, like the biblical Sarah.

"Finally!" Derin exclaimed, bringing her back into the present. "The annoying thing about all this traffic is that you get to the end of it, and find the road free." True to character, the rest of the journey to Ibadan was smooth. It was when they got to the outskirts of Ibadan that Isaac began to cry uncontrollably. Not the normal baby cries. Piercing, ear shattering cries. But for the mother, it was more than ear shattering, every cry ripped at

a shred of her soul's fabric. Suddenly, he became quiet, and she noticed he stiffened and his little arms and legs began to twitch spasmodically and his breathing became irregular.

Letting out a low gasp, she picked him out of the baby car seat he had been in. She nearly dropped him back into the seat. In the short time it had taken to get to Ibadan from the point where they escaped from the traffic, his temperature had risen dramatically. He was blazing hot. Ever vigilant, Derin had heard her gasp and noticed his wife's reaction through his rear view mirror and he quickly pulled over. A mob of youths selling all manner of breads and chargers mobbed their car in the hope of making a quick sale but he ignored them all, unshackled himself from the seat belt and twisted around to face her. The baby had started crying again by now, even louder than before.

"What is wrong with him?" he asked, above the cries of the baby.

"I don't know," she responded, bewildered. "He seemed perfectly okay in Lagos and I even breastfed him while we were in traffic. This started rather suddenly."

"We'll stop by at a hospital I'm familiar with before going to my parent's place," he said.

They had agreed that they would not be staying at his parents' place to forestall friction.

They would go visit, but would lodge in a hotel.

He quickly pulled out onto the road, narrowly missing one of the hawkers who hadn't moved quickly enough. He swore under his breath.

Twenty minutes later, amidst incessant heart wrenching cries from Isaac, and repeated occurrences of the spasms, they arrived at the hospital he had spoken of, one he had been familiar with since he was a boy. It was a white two storey building with well paved lawns and a low fence. Even though there was a sign on the main road, indicating they were at the hospital, they had to turn off the main road into a smaller side road to get to the big black gate that was its entrance. The sign announced that they were welcome to Omega Clinic. Like an expert robber, he parked, unlatched his seat belt and opened the door in one movement. Awazi was still trying to gather all the loose baby things in the car together when he opened the door impatiently. He reached over her and picked the baby up and left the door open. The baby was so hot now he felt his arms warming up uncomfortably as he cradled him in his arms. He quickened his pace to a quick trot. By the time he got to the see through glass door, his wife had caught up with him, with one item or the other falling out of her hands with every step. She didn't stop to pick any of them. Derin rammed his shoulder in the door to open it.

The hospital reception area was filled with all manner of people. Old, young, healthy looking, and obviously sick. It was a busy day. He cursed his luck as he meandered his

way to the mighty looking mahogany receptionist's desk. Isaac was still crying at the top of his little lungs, the volume of his wailing quite the opposite of how little those lungs must be. The smell of drugs hit him in the face like a punch. It nauseated him but he took no notice of it. There were two nurses at the desk, one middle aged squat woman with rabbit-like teeth visible even when she closed her mouth. The other was a wiry looking nurse. Both were unsmiling, unwelcoming.

"Yes..." the older woman whose name tag said her name was Mercy asked. The question sounded more like a rebuke and her face remained as unwelcoming as it could ever be. She spoke with a slight lisp, no thanks to her teeth.

"My son, he suddenly developed a high fever, is having spasms and is crying uncontrollably, on our way from Lagos. All this started within the last one hour."

Kaffy, the younger nurse hissed. "So because you are from Lagos now, you think you can come here and jump the queue. Abi you did not see that all the people you passed were waiting since ni?" she clapped her hands together and shook her head "all you these Lagos people sef!"

"Abi o," Mercy chipped in.

"Ladies," Derin said impatiently, "if it was not such an emergency, I would have joined

the queue. But as it is, this is the first time Isaac here has been sick, and it seems pretty bad.”

Kaffy again eyeballed him and turned away to some paperwork.

Mercy was a bit less hostile “Oga, do you have a card?”

At this point Awazi lost it. “Iskanchi! How can we have a bleeding card! He just clearly said we came here straight from the road. We are not Ibadan people; we came in from Lagos with an emergency involving our only child, a six month old baby. You are a woman and a nurse, and should understand how urgent this is. The infant cannot even say what is wrong with him; the earlier he’s attended to, the better. We will pay whatever it is, just let the baby see a doctor immediately.”

Now Mercy was just as angry as Kaffy. Really, all these Lagos people that would come to Ibadan with all their pomposity. She was used to their type. They would walk in with all their airs and graces with the assumption that Ibadan was some kind of backwater inferior town to their big Lagos. I mean, even Johnson, her younger brother who was thirty before he left Ibadan for Lagos now came back preening around like a cock whenever he was in town from Lagos. Nonsense somebody! What did she mean by “Ibadan people”? And who was she to question her womanhood? And why was this woman giving her orders. She hissed loudly.

“Madam, we don’t attend to anybody that does not have a card in this hospital. Take the corridor to your left to our admin department to go and buy a card and register. And then you will join the queue like everybody else.” And then she too turned her back and joined Kaffy at the paperwork.

Derin considered his options – stay here and spar with these clowns and waste precious time or go in to get the card and by any luck run into a doctor. Doctors were known to act better than nurses in most hospitals.

He quickly made his decision. He handed Isaac over to Awazi and dashed down the corridor like a rabbit down a hole. Seconds later, he had located the admin department. It seemed empty.

“Is there anybody here?” he shouted. Silence

“Is there anybody here!” he shouted louder.

“Oga, you don’t need to shout now, this is a hospital!” someone shouted from within the admin room. The owner of the shouting voice that had told him not to shout emerged from the shadows. How ironical. It was a dark man with thick glasses on.

“How may I help you?” the man queried.

“I need a family card,” Derin responded.

The man slowly turned around and went to get a bunch of keys from a nail on the wall. Then he methodically selected one of the keys, wasting seconds that seemed like hours to Derin.

“Would you please hurry it up Mr.” he said to the man, clearly irritated.

The man ignored him and continued at his unhurried pace. He opened a safe and went through a blue, then green and red card, before finally separating the green card from the three. He then went about putting the other two cards back into the file, locking the safe, putting the bunch of keys back on the nail before returning to Derin. He seemed to be deliberately taking his time and nothing Derin said hurried him up.

Five minutes later, he had paid Three Thousand Naira and filled out loads of forms.

Then and only then did the man hand the precious card over to him. Derin bolted from the place back to the reception area.

Apparently, while he had been gone, Awazi had gotten into a shouting match with the two nurses, and had attracted a more senior nurse and a doctor. She was angrily

explaining the situation to the doctor when he returned, interjecting her English with a sprinkling of Hausa now, like she did when she was exasperated.

He held the card triumphantly in his hands towards the doctor, and addressing the doctor, he said “sir, now that we have a card, can you please take a look at our baby?”

“Ha, gentleman,” the doctor said, I would love to, but I have about three patients waiting to see me right now, and they are my personal patients.”

Derin did all he could to keep his calm as he explained “Doctor...” he said, looking inquiringly at the doctor who obliged by supplying his name “Hakeem,” he said.

Derin smiled his most beseeching smile “Doctor Hakeem, I understand that these patients have been waiting to see you, and they are important. But you see, this happens to be an emergency...”

Hakeem waved his hand dismissively and interrupted “Mr. Banwo,” he said in a bored voice as if he was explaining a more than obvious point to a dimwit, reading his name off the card “as I have told your wife here, I understand perfectly. But the truth is that every patient feels their own case is an emergency, even the ones with mere headaches and tries to influence us to break protocols for them. It is the Nigerian way, but it is one of our jobs to maintain this order. Hence...”

This idiot was comparing this to a mere headache? Derin couldn't control himself any longer. "What the fuck are you saying dude! Are you not a doctor? Do six month old babies develop boiling point temperatures over thirty minutes for regular ordinary ailments? You could do your job with some sense and at least take a frigging look at the baby!"

"Mr. Banwo, that is no way to talk to me, I am doing my job by being here and sorting the hullabaloo that you and your equally uncultured wife have raised here. I will not be insulted by your likes. Mr. Banwo..."

"Do not Mr. Banwo me! You are an insensitive clod of cold steel, the whole lot of you. This is not the hospital I remember this place to be as a kid."

"Well, it is not the hospital you came to as a kid. Things have changed since my father handed over the running of the place to me. I have made some changes and run this place differently now, Mr. We are now modern and orderly, and we have systems and protocols we follow strictly. Now if you don't mind, I have real work to do."

As if on cue, everyone went quiet. And it was in that sole moment of quiet that they noticed what had eluded them. For as they shouted and quarreled amongst each other, Isaac had become quiet. And he wasn't having spasms this time, he was still. Awazi

screamed.

Episode 2

Derin spun around and quickly took Isaac from Awazi. The first thing that struck him was how cold the child had become, in contrast with the vivid memory of how hot he had been when they were bringing him in.

A panic ran down Dr. Hakeem's spine. He collected the child from a numb Derin, and practically ripped the clothes off his body. Placing him on the receptionist's desk, he confirmed what his cursory observation had told him the moment the mother had screamed. The baby was dead.

He turned around to face Derin, whose eyes were glazed as if not seeing anyone in the room "I am sorry, Mr. Banwo but..."

A sharp pain caused him to swallow the rest of the sentence and he found himself reeling backwards. It took a few split seconds to overcome the shock and realize that Derin had punched him square in the face.

"You are sorry? YOU ARE SORRY? Oh, you are not yet sorry, but you will be sorry when I'm through with you!" As he spoke, the tears began to flow freely from his eyes, and through her tears, Awazi saw her husband cry for the second time ever.

Kaffy was trying to cover Isaac's body up now and she caught the movement in the corner of her eye. She rushed over to the reception desk in one stride and screamed "Don't lay your filthy hands on my baby!" shoving the nurse away with such force that she fell heavily into the chair just behind her. By now Derin was beside her. As if in a trancelike state, they silently wrapped the baby in his shawl and then began to move towards the exit. Dr. Hakeem called out from the seat he was nursing his chin from "Mr. Banwo, there are still things we can do for you, that you require..." He swallowed when Derin turned back towards him. The look he saw in the man's eyes, plus the very real pain he was feeling in his chin warned him that drawing attention to himself by talking wasn't a wise choice at the moment. He had wanted to suggest that they would require a death certificate to move around with the child, but he kept quiet.

Derin slowly turned back towards the exit and then walked briskly to the car with Awazi in tow. "Where are we going?" Awazi queried as soon as they got into the car.

"My mum's place. We have to bury Isaac, and do it immediately," he responded in a colorless monotone.

"And why do we require your mum to do this? I really need to get this," Awazi said.

"Because," Derin responded and started the engine "we are not going to be part of the burial. It is forbidden in Yorubaland for parents to bury their children."

“Well, I am not a Yoruba woman,” she responded, “and I will bury...” At the mention of the word bury, she burst into tears. It was Isaac they were talking about burying. Isaac. She looked at him looking so peaceful in his carrier. You could almost think he would wake up any moment from now, and cry out to demand for his food. But she was not going to hear those cries any longer. The tears flowed freely and she lost the will to protest wherever Derin was taking them.

They had barely driven for ten minutes, when they took a sharp bend into one of the very narrow Ibadan streets that always confused Awazi. Just around the bend, there was a group of policemen. Two of them were searching a white saloon car they had pulled over, while three stayed in the middle of the road, guns in hand, to flag them down. As they had slowed down to negotiate the bend, they didn't have a choice but to stop. The policemen must have picked this spot for just this reason.

Derin parked the car and wound down. “Yes, officer,” he asked, clearly irritated by the delay “how may I help you?”

The officer scowled, his face a reflection of what Derin's countenance must have been and said “Oga, this is a stop and search operation”.

Derin frowned even deeper and said dismissively “Chief, this is a roadblock, and I hope

you know that we all know that roadblocks are now illegal.”

“You are a troublemaker abi? Who told you this is a roadblock? We are conducting a stop and search operation, based on information we have. Now,” he undid the safety of his rifle, “get down and open your booth and let us see wetin you carry.”

Derin knew better than to argue with a group of gun toting, probably drunk police officers. And it was early evening already, so they might as well get this done with. If he had been paying attention, he would have noticed Awazi looking at him, trying to communicate something. Two of the policemen went to the booth with Derin. They took their time to practically go through everything in there, bringing all the items they had packed to give his mum down, going through them, while an obviously impatient Derin tried his best to hurry them along.

After about fifteen minutes of this, they slammed the booth and followed Derin to the driver’s side.

Awazi had been silently praying that the policemen would be content with looking in just the booth. She saw that her husband’s anger had beclouded his mind and he wasn’t thinking what she was thinking. She was glad when he came back into the car and began to work the gear to move it.

Constable Dimka had been with the madam while the other two more junior officers had gone to search the booth with her husband. That Isa always annoyed him with the way he handled these things. Proud Hausa man that he was, once he felt someone was looking down on him because of his police work, he would forget why they had risked coming on the road in spite of stern warnings from DPO that the IG was serious about this no roadblock business. They were here first and foremost to get paid, not to pick fights with the people who would “drop” for them. Now, it was obvious that this man had nothing they could hold him for (the car looked very new, so he guessed the papers were in order) and he was too angry to drop anything for them. Foolish Isa. As the husband returned, he noticed that the madam’s eyes went to the back seat quickly, twice. It was then he realized she had been doing that quite often while they had waited.

“Isa, make we check the back seat,” he said out aloud. And watched for the woman’s reaction. He got the reaction he suspected he would and became even more convinced there was something there she was hoping they wouldn’t check. He smiled, a display of teeth browned from eating kola and snuff. Payday, he thought.

Derin watched the policemen swoop in on the back seat of his car. And then it hit him. Even as they began to exclaim, he sensed that he was in trouble, deep deep trouble.

“This pikin don die! And as e cold, no be now now e die,” Isa exclaimed in heavily accented pidgin English.

“Oga, who get this pikin,” he said, addressing Derin.

“He’s our son,” Derin answered.

“You don’t know he is dead?” It was Dimka asking now.

Awazi answered “we know, we just left the hospital where he died.” She went on to explain all that had happened to the police officers, watching their eyes to see if it was softening as she spoke. When she was through with her narrative, the policeman whose name tag said he was Dimka asked her the question she had dreaded all evening

“Can we see the death certificate?” he said, his eyes twinkling with something that Awazi knew wasn’t good. He was the most intelligent of the lot, and by extension, she guessed, the most devious.

She went ashen faced, and she saw that Derin had broken into a sweat, even though the AC had been running.

“Officer,” he began “I can explain this...”

“Oga! Which explanation? You get abi you no get the certificate?” Isa hollered,

obviously pleased that the man who minutes ago had been proving to be stubborn was now in their palms.

“Actually,” Awazi ventured “because of the way they treated us in the hospital, we left without it.”

“How do we believe you madam? How do we know you are not ritualists who killed this baby? Okay, do you have the child’s birth certificate? We can use that to confirm identity and check against your ID card” Dimka asked. Of course, he knew they wouldn’t have it with them. When the man said he didn’t have it, he smiled again and said “you will have to go to the station with us to explain yourselves.”

Derin was exasperated. He could sense that this smiling policeman was deliberately asking what they couldn’t provide but there wasn’t much he could do in this situation except appeal.

“Officer, I understand your position, but we can easily sort this out, if you would just go back to the hospital with us. I’m sure the doctor will confirm our story, and there will be some of the patients there who were also witnesses to the whole thing. So, please officer, en?”

Dimka suddenly switched to his vicious mode. He released the safety of his gun noisily

and shouted menacingly “you think we have time for such nonsense? I’ve even given you some options with my ‘church mind’ yet you could not. When you get to the station and we deal with you, you will confess to what a dead baby was doing in your car! Isa! Join them in their car, and if they try anything funny, scatter their heads!”

Awazi wept silently.

Otunba Haruna Ajanaku paced in his former office, hands behind his back, with his left hand running occasionally through his grey hair. His trim figure was evidence of years of paying particular attention to his health. That body had failed him a couple of months back, when he had suffered a stroke at work without warning one morning. Thankfully, it hadn’t been as major as it had initially seemed, but he had still had to go through two months of physiotherapy to get use of the left side of his body back. And it was then he had made the decision to retire and hand the running of the hospital over to his son. The hospital. It was his pride, and the crowning jewel of his life’s work. He had set it up from scratch, with almost nothing, and it had grown into one of the finest in Ibadan. In those years, he had earned the nickname Dr. Omega, after his hospital. Now he wondered if he had not made the worst mistake in his career by being sentimental and leaving Hakeem at the helm of Omega Clinic.

“How could you possibly have been this stupid?” he was saying to Hakeem as he continued pacing. “One, you let the hospital devolve into that level of professional negligence that is the direct cause of this baby’s demise. On febrile convulsions that could have easily been treated with a simple injection! And two, you allowed them leave here without a death certificate! Incompetence has never found a better ally as in you, Mr. Chief Medical Director! Damn, how could I not have seen this?” He had worked his way to his chair and he sat down with a thud.

Hakeem saw that his father was ready to let him speak and he quickly started before the man began talking again. The old doctor had a knack for talking and pausing and talking and pausing whenever there was an issue, and his memory was archival. He could bring up something that happened when Hakeem was five that was somehow related to this incident.

“Look, dad, it’s an unfortunate case, but really, the hospital is not liable. The baby was not yet our patient when he died and hence, we cannot be legally accused of professional negligence for someone who wasn’t our patient. And just in case you missed it, I tried to give him a certificate but got a broken nose in return!”

“You are a fool to assume this is about the legal ramification of things!” Otunba exploded, his hands trembling. “Do you think a hospital thrives on legality? It is perception and reputation that drives this business, sonny boy, and if this story gets out,

our reputation is a goner. I know young Banwo well, hec, I treated him as a kid! Do you know they had been through several miscarriages, and twelve years of marriage before they had that child? You are lucky all you got was a broken nose! In his shoes, I would have ensured that not only your nose was broken, but your neck as well. Now imagine, for a moment, Mr. Legalist the spin the press would put to this. Especially with all these online people that can make things spread like wildfire. 'Omega Hospital, Haven of Death, Baby Killing Factory murders baby a Lagos couple searched for for 12 years in cold blood for their processes and procedures' would be some of the nicer ways this would be reported!"

"But dad," Hakeem tried to say

"Do not interrupt me when I am talking!" Otunba shouted, jumping up from his chair.

"You were always a legalistic, unfeeling child, but I thought your training as a doctor would have instilled some compassion in you. Clearly, I was very wrong. Do you think I am not thinking of how to make sure this doesn't hurt the hospital? Of course I am! But the crucial thing is this; that's not all I am thinking of! I'm thinking of that young man and his young wife and how to help them through this. And that is the crucial difference.

You're clearly not ready to run a hospital just yet."

"What are you saying? That you are relieving me of my position as Chief Medical Director? Dad, you seem to be forgetting something."

“And what might that be sir?” Otunba asked.

“That with your retirement, you turned ownership of the hospital to me, as well as its running. You cannot simply waltz in and relieve me of this sir. I know I’ve never been good enough for you dad, but really, you simply are in no position to do this. Oh, and to make sure that this probability was cancelled, I had the lawyer make changes to that effect,” he said with mock politeness.

Otunba began to laugh, a deep, rumbling sound from deep within his belly.

“Bi omode l’aso bi agba, kole l’akisa to. And just in case you didn’t get my Yoruba, allow me translate for you. Even when a child has more clothes than his elders, he cannot have as much rags. Hakeem, I gave birth to you and you grew in my hands. If I didn’t know you as well as I do, what sort of father would I be? Of course I knew you would try that. And that lawyer was watching you on my behalf, young man. You don’t get to my age and build a business such as mine with naïveté. I’m glad to disappoint you young man, but I still own Omega Clinic fully. And of this moment, you are no longer the Chief Medical Director. Now if you’d still like your job as a doctor here, you would go and write that death certificate. I’ll personally take it to his mother’s house and see what I can do to manage this very bad situation.”

Mrs. Agatha Banwo came to the living room to receive the Otunba. Since her beloved Adeoye had passed away, she relished the opportunity to see faces she had known from the days when her husband was with her. And Otunba was one of those faces. He had been Derin's doctor when he had been a small, sickly child, and a loose friendship had developed over the years. She couldn't say he was a close friend, but he had been part of those years that she looked back on with fondness and hence was always welcome in her home. She was a taller than average woman, with what Adeoye had always called a "Yoruba ikebe". She had always teased him that he fell in love with her backside before even really seeing the rest of her. She missed him sorely.

She exchanged pleasantries with the grey haired doctor and then they asked about each other's children until the househelp had served some drinks.

Otunba had deduced two things. The first was that Derin hadn't come to his mum when he had left the hospital. That worried him, as that was where he expected that the young man would come. He also deduced that the woman sitting before him, chatting away and laughing politely had not heard the news. This was going to be much harder than he had thought.

"Madam, about your son, is he around? I would like to see him," he started.

“Now that you mention it, he’s supposed to have arrived from Lagos today. Last we spoke, he said he was in serious traffic on the express. But I’m sure he will be here anytime from now. He’s bringing my grandson to Ibadan for the first time today.” She chuckled as she said grandson, and Otunba felt a shiver run down his spine.

“Yorubas in our wisdom have said that no matter how big a message is, we do not require a knife to deliver it. I have some bad news, and I want you to be prepared for it.”

Agatha sat upright immediately “What happened? Was Derin in an accident? Did they rush him to your hospital? Doctor, talk to me now!”

“Derin is fine, Madam. In fact, I’m surprised he isn’t here. He was at my hospital about three hours ago, with his wife and baby. I’m sorry, but we lost the baby...”

Agatha felt her heart lurch into her mouth at the doctor’s words. “Ye! Mo gbe! How doctor, how? And where is my son?”

“He left the hospital in despair madam, with his wife. We were unable to stop him from leaving”

“Ah! Otunba!” the tears were flowing freely from her lined face now. She picked her

phone and dialed Derin's number from memory. All she got was the monotonic female voice telling her the phone was switched off. She tried three more times and then tried his second number. She still couldn't get through. Then searched for Awazi's number in her phonebook and tried it a couple of times. The number was unreachable too.

"Where is my baby? Where is my baby!" she kept mumbling repeatedly to herself as she tried the numbers. Her worst fear was that grief had driven him to do the ultimate – suicide. She shook her head through her tears at the thought.

"I have an idea I think we should explore to find him. When they left the hospital with the child's body, they forgot to take this," he said, handing the death certificate over to her and then continued "if he had tried to bury the child without this, or even unluckily ran into policemen and he didn't have the certificate in his possession, he would be in serious police wahala.

She calmed down a bit, at the prospect that Derin was still alive "How do we find out for sure?" she asked him, using the back of her hands to wipe the tears from her eyes.

"In my line of work, I have vital contacts in the police. Let me make a few calls so they can check if my theory is correct."

He stepped aside and made the calls briskly.

“Now,” he said gravely, “we wait”.

Episode 3

And so they waited. The doctor got into his habit of pacing, while the woman sat still, staring at the Africa Magic movie without really seeing anything. Forty five minutes later, Dr. Ajanaku's phone rang and he whipped it out of his pocket sharply.

"Hello, Saliu, have you found something out?"

Agatha sat up on the edge of her chair trying to pick what the other person's response was but it was too muffled for her to hear clearly.

"Really?" Dr. Ajanaku said. Hearing the worry in his voice, it took all of her restraint to stop herself from jumping him and grabbing the phone. She grabbed the cushion of the chair and sank her nails into it to calm herself down.

She tuned off and just waited for him to conclude the call before her blood pressure went through the roof. A few seconds later, he sat down opposite her, and it was only then she realized he had rounded the call off.

"They have been found," he said gravely.

"Found ke? Are they dead ni? Why did you say found like that, as if a piece of jewelry is

found?" she asked, the tears beginning to form in her eyes.

"Sorry," he said, "that came out wrongly. What I meant to say is that though they are alive, the police have them."

She let out a sigh, her body sinking into the chair, visibly relieved. Then as if realizing that they were not safe and sound in that instant, she sat upright again.

"Which station? For what? We need to get my baby out fast!" she spoke each word fast, as if trying to get more than one word at a time.

He stood up and went over to her side, placing a hand on her shoulder, "Calm down Mrs. Banwo. Like I guessed, they were arrested for having the baby's corpse with them without having a death cert. It's a salvageable situation. And don't worry about whatever it will cost; we will get them out today, unfailingly. Let's get going. They're being held at Iyangaku police station"

She instructed the househelp to ensure that warm bathwater was running until she got back. Derin would definitely need a warm bath to wash away the filth when they got him back from the police cells. They got into the doctor's car and as the driver pulled out onto the road, the doctor informed Agatha that they would be picking up a friend who would help them facilitate the release of the couple.

They stopped by at Dugbe and picked a short, stocky man who Dr. Ajanaku introduced as Saliu. "Saliu will help us navigate the police world to speed things up," he said.

About thirty minutes later, they got to Iyangaku. They parked outside the gate and Saliu led them in. The men behind the counter recognized him and shouts of "shun sir, shun sir" rent the air, accompanied by exaggerated salutes. Saliu ignored them and led the doctor and his friend straight to the DPO's office. The DPO was his junior and the man saluted accordingly when he entered.

"Jenkins, at ease. We are here on important business, no time at all. You have someone and we are certain there was a mix-up, so the good doctor here," he pointed at Dr. Ajanaku "has come to right that wrong."

Jenkins was a balding man with a bald patch that shone like he took time to polish it even inside the bulb lit office. "Which of the accused are you referred to sir?" he asked. Agatha cringed, first at the way the DPO spat the word 'accused' as if it disgusted him. It was her Derin he was calling accused. And then, the man's poor grammar which he tried to pull off with a polished accent. He sounded absolutely ridiculous in his dingy, threadbare office. If the situation wasn't this grave, he would be comical.

"A gentleman named Derin Banwo, and his wife. It seems they rushed out of the

hospital with their dead baby without collecting the death certificate, and your men picked them up. We all know how the loss of a child can leave one forgetting such things. The doctor has brought the certificate and we hope that you will realize this is a mix-up and let the couple go and bury their child.”

The DPO folded his arms across the table as if he was in deep thought. Only later would Saliu tell the doctor that it was merely an act. He unfolded his arms as he spoke

“Oga, I can understand their devastate, but you know thing are not that straightforward.” He smiled as if pleased with himself for using a word as long as straightforward. He continued “we have take statement. We have start the case filing. This is murder of their own child we are talking about. We can’t let them go just like that.”

Saliu knew it was all bullshit the man was spewing. In a police station, as long as the case had not gone to court, the DPO was the all in all. He could kill almost any case, except murder.

“DPO, you know who you are talking to,” Saliu said menacingly, pulling rank. “I’m not one of the family of the boy, not a bloody civilian. I know how these things work, and a genuine mistake when I see one. Of course I know you can’t just let them go like that, but we don’t have much time. So to cut the long story short, what would it take to have them walk free?”

“Haba, oga, you know if not for the boys that need to be settle, I would not take anything with a senior officer like yourself involved in the matter. But as their expectations will be very high, we will need like 50k to keep everybody quiet on this matter.”

“What!” Saliu banged his hands on the table. “50k for what? I thought you would be reasonable, shay you will prefer not to get anything and just release them on order from above abi? I’m sure you know I can go above you for this, but I thought you were a good officer.”

Agatha wanted to tell Saliu she would pay even 100k if that was what it took, but a look from the doctor stopped her.

Saliu seemed to calm down and then told the DPO in even tones “we will give you twenty five, take it or leave it.”

“Oga, twenty five no go do all the boys o.” the DPO had dropped his English pretensions now. “If you fit add five, we go do am.”

On a normal day, Saliu would have pressed his bargain, because he knew that the DPO knew that this was his only chance to get anything out of this now that Saliu was involved. But he had seen that it was only the doctor that was restraining the woman

from saying anything stupid, so he closed the deal. “Oya bring them and all the papers they will need to sign. Where is the baby’s body now?”

“We followed due process and put him in the mortuary.” Then walking to the door, he shouted “Isa!”

Isa came to the doorway and the DPO whispered instructions to him. He left and returned in like two minutes, followed by a haggard looking Derin. Awazi was behind him, her dark skin crusted with dust from her cell.

Agatha rushed to Derin and held him in her arms, not minding how dirty he was, checking every inch of him. She barely acknowledged Awazi, who also maintained her distance.

Doctor Ajanaku quickly settled the bill, and then Derin signed the papers. They could not wait to get out of the station. Derin got into his own car along with Awazi, while his mum and the doctor drove behind them. Saliu gave them directions to the mortuary and then left on his own, to spend what doctor had paid him on his new catch, Onome the hairdresser. The girl had been proving hard to get for him but now that he had some money to play with, he was certain he was going to bed her before this weekend was over.

The mortuary was a few minutes away from the station and again the doctor handled the proceedings there. He came out with the child's now stiff body. Awazi began to sob quietly in the car as the doctor carried the body into his own car. This time, the doctor's car led the way and Derin followed.

It took another thirty minutes to get home, and by then it was pretty dark. The moment they stepped into the house, Agatha called to the househelp "is the water still running?"

"Yes madam," the girl said, trying not to show how bewildered she was at the company before her.

"Derin darling, you should have your bath..." she was saying to Derin now.

"What is he," Derin pointed at Doctor Ajanaku as he spoke, "doing here." The malice in his voice surprised Agatha.

"What do you mean what is doing here?" She asked. "The good doctor was the one that went out of his way to bring the death certificate and used his contacts to find out where you were being held and then got you out of the station. You should be grateful!"

"And, have you bothered to ask yourself why he is being so damn nice?"

“Young man, I do not care what you have been through, but you will not talk to me, your mother like that! What is wrong with you?” Agatha was livid.

“Did the ‘good doctor’ tell you that his hospital killed my son?” Derin exploded.

“You cannot be serious about what you just said!” she shouted. Then she turned to Awazi and spoke directly to her for the first time. “It isn’t true what Derin says, is it?”

Awazi didn’t bother to be polite and answer. The woman hadn’t even seen her since and now she needed support against Derin, she was turning to her. She simply turned away and sat down without answering.

“So you will not answer me, you this girl?” Agatha turned her venom on Awazi. Yet Awazi remained silent.

“I wonder why you allowed this one come out into the world before you killed him like all the unborn ones of many years past, you this barren woman!” Agatha continued. How dare the indolent young girl ignore her?

“Tell me, how do you feel now? In our area, we would have forced you to confess. But let me tell you, this one you just did is the last you will do, you are definitely leaving my son’s house after this! I will get him a proper, well trained Yoruba girl who will bear him

children and who will respect her elders.”

Awazi had had it. “What did I do to you? My son, my only son, your only grandson just died and this is all you can think? What kind of wicked mother are you? Just so you know, my child was very fine, with no issues at all while we were in Lagos. It was when you insisted on us bringing him to Ibadan that all this happened. And just so you know, we never went to Abuja, we were in Lagos all along. It took us lying that we were in Abuja to get you off our backs and let us have our baby. Who sounds more like the baby eating witch, gaskiya?”

She turned to Derin “Husband, I am definitely not staying here tonight, before something happens to me.”

“Two of you should stop it!” Derin shouted, holding his head in his hands. His mum tried to say something but he raised his hands and repeated “Stop it, I say! Both of you, listen to yourselves! Women! Arrrrgh!”

Doctor Ajanaku spoke up “I’m sorry, and I know this might be a bad time, but I don’t think there can be a good time to show how sorry we are for your loss Derin. I know nothing can replace your child, but you can be assured that every member of staff involved in the sad episode, including my foolish son Hakeem, is being dealt with and...”

“So you have your own son alive to deal with, but I’ll never be able to discipline my own son because of his callousness and stupidity? And you expect that you will come and say sorry, and all will be well?”

“Derin, where are your manners? How can you be talking to an agbalagba like that?”

Agatha chastised him.

He turned to her angrily “but you can talk to my wife just anyhow you like in my presence abi? You can accuse my grieving wife of killing and eating our children just now and then accuse me of speaking without etiquette and disrespect in the next breathe? You are being hypocritical mum.”

“So you are siding with her over me, your mother, Derin?” an agitated Agatha asked.

Wordlessly, Derin picked the baby, signaled Awazi and they began to leave.

Agatha grabbed his arm “where are you going with a dead baby in the night? Derin be reasona...”

He shrugged her off, and continued to the door. He turned back to the doctor at the door and told him coldly “you will be hearing from my lawyers.” And they were gone.

At that moment, the househelp came back down and said “madam, the water don begin cold o, oga no come baff again?”

Agatha lashed out at the poor girl “get out of here, you idiot!”

The confused girl scurried away, wondering what she had done wrong.

“Doctor, what happened at that hospital when they brought the baby in? I want to hear all of it.” She asked

“The baby was rushed into the hospital straight from the express. He had developed some alarming symptoms while they were in traffic from what I gather. You know since my stroke, I handed over running the hospital to Hakeem, my son. My worst mistake, I regret. He insisted on following procedures and...”

“Noooooooooo!” Agatha screamed, bringing the househelp running back in to see what was wrong. The girl scurried back out when they both looked at her with fiery eyes.

“So Derin was right. Oh my God, he was right. I have to find him.”

She tried to dial his numbers, but it was turned off. “he could be anywhere now!” she

exclaimed.

“There’s one thing I need to ask you,” Dr. Ajanaku said quietly, as he got up with the ‘it’s time to go kind of movement’.

“What?” she inquired.

“Derin has threatened to that the hospital will hear from his lawyers. While I understand his grief and I sympathize and empathize, I will not allow my hospital to go down the drains. If lawyers become involved, I will fight him hard and I will fight him with all I have. It will be long, drawn-out and messy. It will ultimately be a battle he cannot win. That however is not the way I would like to go. While we cannot simply replace the baby, no human being is replaceable, I have a proposition. He and his wife need to move on, and try to have another baby. There are new in-vitro fertilization techniques that would guarantee pregnancy. They’re expensive treatments, yes, but the hospital will pay for the treatment for them. We will also dedicate a doctor and a nurse resident in Lagos on our own bill to monitor the pregnancy to ensure that the baby is delivered safe and sound. I believe the joy of having a new baby will soon eclipse the sorrow of losing baby Isaac. Now, in his state, Derin will not even listen to me, and if I was in his shoes, I would do the same or even worse. But you are his mother, and must know your son well. I plead with you to find a way to convince him to fi owo wo inu and see reason and take our offer.”

The doctor then left, leaving Agatha feeling very alone. She wished Adeoye was still alive. He would have taken charge and known what to do, and how to talk to his son. Now, she was confused, angry and sad. She tried Derin's number again repeatedly. It was still switched off. She slowly made her way upstairs to have that bath she had prepared for Derin earlier. She needed it now.

Episode 4

Kamal was reclining on his couch, watching Discovery Channel and allowing his mind to wander here and there when he began to hear voices at his doorstep. He had recently relocated his wife and two kids to Ireland and he would soon be joining them in a few months. He had found that his kids would get better education at a cheaper cost than if he tried to give them the same quality here in Nigeria. He lived alone in the BQ of an apartment off University of Lagos Road pending the time he would finally move. The main building was an office and it was empty at night, so he was practically alone in the building. He wondered who it was that the mallam had let in without his prior instruction. He got up and padded towards the window that gave him a clear view of his doorway. He made out the familiar form of his friend of twenty years, Derin and his wife, with Derin carrying their son Isaac. They seemed to be having some argument but he caught none of what they were saying clearly because of the din of the neighborhood generators. He quickly went to open the door and then undid the burglary proof. The first thing he noticed in the light of the doorway which he hadn't when looking through the window was how disheveled they both looked. The last they had spoken the night before, Derin had told him he would be visiting his mum in Ibadan.

“What happened in Ibadan?” he asked as he let them in without a greeting. Derin was his brother from another mother, and they had the kind of relationship where he could ask stuff like that. This time however, Derin didn't answer him but went to sit on the

edge of the L-shaped couch.

“Oga, I know you haven’t had plenty practice, but I’ve had more than you, and I at least know that sitting like that and holding a baby is atrocious. Now, Awazi, can you tell me...” Kamal was saying, when Derin cut in rather coldly

“The baby is dead.”

“What!” Kamal exclaimed, then turned to Awazi and asked with a shake of his head “he’s joking right?”

She turned away without an answer and the tears poured from her eyes once again. Kamal practically jumped over to Derin’s side and one look at Isaac told him that they weren’t joking. Rigor Mortis was already setting in on the little man’s body and it was obvious he had been dead for a while.

“When? How? Oh my God, Why?” Kamal asked, punching the couch to punctuate each question.

“Look, Kamal, you’re the only one I could come to for this. I cannot bury my child, it’s an ewwo. You would have to oblige me with this. Tonight.”

“Kamal, I’ve told him, I don’t care if his Yoruba-ness means he cannot bury his own child, but I am not Yoruba, and I will bury my child!” Awazi thundered.

“Woman, will you be reasonable? Parents should not bury their own children!” Derin equally bellowed.

“Calm down, you two! You’ve obviously been through a lot today, and your nerves are frayed. But you shouldn’t be tearing each other apart, what you both need the most now is to comfort each other.” Kamal said, stepping in between the quarreling couple.

Facing Awazi, he continued in a much softer voice, “I understand how you feel dear, but you’ll also need to understand Derin. He’s not saying you cannot know where your child is buried to pay respects. But to be the one burying Isaac, your own child, is taboo here.”

His words seemed to calm them both down, and he simply took Isaac from Derin and then collected the death certificate.

“You guys cannot go home today, so you can have my place for the night. I’ll sleep out in a hotel.”

But Awazi shook her head firmly and said “I want to go home.”

And then she turned to Derin and said “Now”.

Together all three left the house, Derin and his wife for their Sabo apartment, and Kamal for Atan Cemetery. Kamal had done much for Derin in their career as friends, but this was yet the most painful he had to do.

Early the next morning, Dr. Haruna Ajanaku sat in a meeting he would rather not be having. But he was a shrewd businessman and he knew that he could not afford to be unprepared for the possibility of legal action from the young Derin. He remembered the young man’s father well, and if the boy was anything like his father, he would be reasonable. Seated in the room to his right was his long time friend and lawyer, Rasheed Sanda. The young man that had ensured Hakeem’s coup didn’t work had been recruited by him. Also present were Hakeem, and the head matron of the hospital, Bintu. Bintu knew more about the actual running of hospitals than most doctors and she had become a trusted confidant over the years. Prior to the meeting, she had interviewed the two front desk nurses extensively to get information on what had happened. He trusted her that much, he would not need to talk to them himself.

The lawyer was saying “from Bintu’s account of things, Otunba, there are two things that

are clear immediately. The deceased was never your patient; hence, you cannot be accused of neglecting him in a court of law. Neglect is only technically possible if the individual is already a patient of your hospital, which isn't the case here. Remember, I speak only of law here, not public opinion. I've examined your procedure book too, and it would seem there was no breach in your documented procedure. These two are strong points."

"That's what I've been saying sir," Hakeem interjected.

"And a smart lawyer could bring up the fact that the baby's father was in fact our patient, and that the baby died on our premises in front of two nurses," and with obvious disdain, she added "a doctor who happened to be our Chief Medical Officer at that time."

"What do you think about Bintu's thoughts, Rasheed?" Dr. Haruna said.

Hakeem seethed. Even a mere matron's thoughts seemed to carry more weight than his own words in these discussions.

"It's a valid point. We can counter that however. The proof that he's a patient is when he produces his card, which he did not. However, you're A&E procedures would be called into question anyhow you want to look at it. A baby's case should have been handled separate from regular patients, and I expected that even if the nurses did not know that,

Hakeem here should have.” The lawyer’s voice was expressionless as he spoke in a well practiced professional monotone, but even that needed Hakeem.

“So the best bet for us would be?” Dr. Haruna asked, even though he knew the answer already.

“First, we do all we can to convince him not to go to court. That would be the most favorable outcome for us in this matter. Your offer to him through his mother will hopefully accomplish that. Where that fails, and he serves us notice of litigation, we will go to court and attempt to convince their lawyer and the judge that settling out of court will be the best course of action for all the parties involved. That can be kept quiet and easily managed to ensure there is no negative publicity and we can work a clause into the settlement to ensure that they do not speak to the press or public about the matter once they take the option.” Rasheed reeled out.

“And if he refuses to settle?” Bintu asked.

“Then we prepare for a court battle, the intensity of which will be determined by the quality of his legal representation. We might be able to blow a simpleton away, but if he gets a formidable lawyer, this will be a serious battle. That is what we have to wait and see.” Rasheed responded

“And, manage the media, Rasheed. We don’t want any of this getting out now, do we? In my long career, many men have died under my watch. But none of them has been because I chose not to treat them; all without exception were beyond my treatment. And now this debacle?” Otunba said more to himself than to the others. Then he dismissed the meeting with a sigh “we wait.”

Awazi’s night had been tumultuous. She had slept in fits, and watching Derin sleep so deeply annoyed her for quite no reason, even though her brain told her he should be tired after all of that driving. She managed to finally find sleep at about five in the morning. The sound of the doorbell woke her up, and when she checked the time, she realized she had slept for about three hours. Derin was already up, and she guessed he would get the door. She woke up with a banging headache, and it seemed the turmoil of the previous day just began to take its toll on her body. She sat up in the bed, and as she did, her eye caught something beside the pillow. It was the plastic bunch of keys toy they used to distract Isaac when he was being restless. The sight of the toy brought back a deluge of memories to her. He had just begun trying to move from his sitting position as he tried to follow the toy when he flung it forward. The tears formed in her eyes as they roamed the room, picking items that had been there only because of Isaac. Diapers. His bib. His tiny socks. She couldn’t take seeing them any longer and in spite of the pain in her head, she jumped up from the bed and raced to the living room.

She almost ran back into the room. Seated in the living room was Kamal. That wasn't the issue though. The real issue was her mother-in-law who was also seated there. She could not phantom why the woman had come this early in the day, and she unconsciously scanned the living room for signs that the woman had brought some Yoruba damsel to come and audition for wifely roles. No signs. She steadied her breathing.

She stepped into the parlor and said hi to Kamal, mumbled something that was meant to be a greeting to Agatha, and then turned to her husband who was seated in one of the dining chairs with eyes that said "you better start explaining this to me right now."

Derin got the question his wife was silently asking and he quickly began to explain "mum just came in with Kamal now and they say they have something important they would like to discuss with us." He placed the emphasis on the "us" so she her apprehensions would at least be calmed down. They had not begun to say what they had come for, but it was obvious to him they had discussed and agreed on whatever they had come to say. He had just been about to go and wake Awazi up when she came out anyway, so it was all well and good. Awazi sat at the edge of the couch closer to him. He was still upset with his mum for her outburst the previous day, but then, she was his mum. It was unthinkable for him not to have let her in, and he was sure Awazi knew that.

“Derin, in Yorubaland, it is not the elder that makes peace with the younger. But this pain is one we all share, and I know no one would feel it deeper than your wife. So first, I would like to say sorry to her for yesterday...” Agatha began.

Awazi was incensed. She was sitting right here, and this woman was here in her own home talking about her as if she was not here, speaking only to Derin. She had had it!

“With all due respect ma,” she said “I am seated right here. Please talk to me, as a person in my own right, and not through Derin as some sort of proxy.”

Agatha opened her mouth to say something, and then she thought better of it. The thought of what the doctor had told her, and how she knew it would destroy her son if she didn’t succeed at this kept her.

Instead, she said “it is a habit, my dear, and it will take time to move beyond it. But to the crux of the matter, as to why I came into Lagos this early. I am sure you are wondering why. Look, Awazi, I will need your help in this one, and that is why you must listen to me now and forget the years past. If you love your husband, as much as I love him as my son, then we must do this for him.”

“What are you saying, mama?” Derin asked

“I know you very well Derin, and I know that all you want to do now is fight the hospital to the finish. You want to take them to court. You want to make them pay for your loss, for what they’ve done to you and your family. Your last words to the doctor yesterday evening said that clearly. And if you want all that, I don’t think anyone in their right senses would say you shouldn’t feel that way.” She paused and drank a bit of water.

Then she continued “But that legal battle would destroy you Derin. It would take your all to fight, and the hospital owners will not lie down. They will fight, fight hard and fight dirty. I do not want our pain to become the spectacle of the whole world. I do not want you to enter into a fight that will cost you more than you can afford.” She turned meaningfully to Awazi as she said the last line.

“I think it would be best if we all offered each other strength to move on from this, and leave all the fighting behind.”

It had taken all of Derin’s self control to allow his mum finish so that he would not set a bad precedence for Awazi by interrupting her. But now that she seemed to be done talking, he burst out

“So they should kill my child and get away with it? What kind of man would that make me? What is the difference between what they have done and if they actually put a gun to Isaac’s head and blew it away? Somebody has to make these people pay when they

do things like this. And to make sure others like them are warned of consequences.”

“Look, Derin,” Kamal chipped in “why does that someone have to be you? You should be more interested in comforting your wife, and trying to pull your family together in this kind of time, rather than spending your energies on crusading against a behemoth!”

“Kamal! So if someone was to walk into your house to kill one of your kids... scratch that, both of them, you would simply try to move on and let them walk free?” Derin retorted

“Derin, those are two very DIFFERENT scenarios.” Kamal stood up and said with a wave of his hand.

“You see? Just the thought of it got you upset enough to stand up. See, Kamal, to me, they are the same! Someone else is responsible for the loss of my only child, and you people are asking me to let them go scot free.”

“Derin, we are asking you to do what is best for your family. It is the tougher decision to make, but ditch this vengefulness and think about your family!” Kamal returned to his chair as he said.

Agatha had been watching Awazi as the exchange ensued. She sensed that Derin

would not agree to what she was going to propose, but Awazi might be her best ally to make this work. She addressed Awazi when she spoke next.

“Doctor Ajanaku deeply regrets what has happened, and is unwilling to fight. Look, I know a child is irreplaceable, hec Derin, I’m your mother. But more than ever, you need to begin to try for a child again.”

Awazi sat up at this. The suggestion of the Yoruba girl was about to come up. She said quietly

“Seeing that we don’t make children, and that it took us twelve years to have Isaac, what are you suggesting? That Derin should try to have a child with someone abi? So you can have your precious grandchild?”

“When I said you, I meant two of you, Awazi and Derin. The doctor is no stranger to the struggles to have Isaac, and his offer is that his hospital will sponsor the most advanced in-vitro fertilization therapy abroad for you. And he says though its expensive, it’s almost a hundred percent guaranteed to lead to conception. And then after conception, they will have a doctor and nurse dedicated to you when you return to Lagos until delivery.”

“Never!” Derin shouted, bolting up from the dining chair. “So they contrive to bribe me into being quiet and not dealing with them? Never, never, NEVER! We will try for a child

by ourselves and still deal with them definitely. God who gave us Isaac will give us another child. But Dr. Omega and his ilk will be taught a lesson and made an example of.”

Awazi wasn't flustered. “Did the doctor actually make this offer?” she addressed her question to Agatha.

“Yes, he did, after you people stormed out yesterday. He is an honorable man, and he will keep his word. If he had still been running the hospital and not that his excuse of a son, this unfortunate incident would never have happened.”

Derin looked at Awazi as if she had grown horns. He wanted to say something but Kamal caught him right before he spoke and stopped him “Derin, let's hear her out abegi. No be by this your vexing and shouting.”

“If we were to take this offer,” Awazi queried “I would prefer to stay in the U.S. or whichever country the therapy is done throughout the pregnancy and deliver the child there, all at cost to the hospital. Travelling up and down can cause complications. No matter how dedicated the dedicated doctor and nurse are in Lagos, I'll feel safer with their healthcare abroad than here.”

Agatha was happy that Awazi was on the same page with her. “I'm certain the doctor

would be more than happy to accede to your requests once he is certain that you will be taking the offer up.”

Derin was livid with rage. “What stupid offer are you all talking about taking up? Awazi, you cannot be serious about allowing the people responsible for Isaac’s death to go scot free. I am not a party to this offer and will never be.”

Awazi stood up and went to her husband. “I miss Isaac, more than you can imagine. The sight of every little thing he used reminds me painfully of our loss. His socks. His bib. Everything. Every single little thing. But I want to move on from this pain, or it will drown me. If this treatment will give us a baby, please, I am begging you,” she went on her knees, “forget about this revenge and let us take it, and begin healing.”

Derin looked down at his wife. She seemed to be in so much pain as each word she spoke was obviously from depths of this pain. But he would not betray Isaac. He would fight to avenge his son.

He cupped her face in his hands, and told her “healing will only come when we have closure on this matter. I cannot betray my conscience and betray the memory of our son.”

“So you would rather hold on to a painful memory than let us move on?” Awazi inquired.

“You would rather we forgot our son in order to move on?” Derin asked right back.

He moved away from her, and faced his mother “tell him he will be hearing from my lawyers. And if he wants a fight, oh, he will get one hell of a fight.”

With that, he picked his keys and left the house.

Episode 5

Agatha watched her son go, and with his exit, she knew what was going to happen. Yet she chose to cling to hope, no matter how faint. A voice niggled at her mind however, telling her that if the combined efforts of the three of them in the room didn't convince an unprepared him to change his mind, then it was as good as out of their hands. A friend's frankness, a mother's earnest plea and a wife's passionate appeal to the heart hadn't gotten through to Derin. He had his father's will.

"Awazi, my daughter," she said, as she got up to help her stand. "You mustn't give up. As it stands, you are the one who is most likely to reach him. You are his wife, and you must know as I know that this pursuit of vengeance will destroy many things."

"How do I reach him? He can hear no one but his own heart. And all it seems to say to him to avenge his only son, a legitimate desire." Awazi's voice quivered with emotions as she spoke the words.

"You are the only one with access to that heart, and you must find a way..." Agatha responded.

A resolve rose within Awazi's heart, and she promised herself she would do this for her marriage, and for her own sanity. She was unsure if any of the two would survive a long

drawn out legal battle. When she spoke next, her voice was steady and firm. “What kind of hostess am I? Let me make breakfast quickly.”

And then she walked briskly into the kitchen and set about busily preparing the easiest meal she could think of for her guests. But even as she went about her cooking, she wept quietly at the way her life had changed in the last twenty four hours. Time indeed changes yesterday.

Derin dialed a number he hadn't called for years, wondering if the owner would still use it. It had a noisy version Gangnam Style as its caller tune, but thankfully, the owner picked the phone before the second line and his ears were saved from the hullabaloo.

“Mr. Banwo,” the sultry female voice said. “And to what do I owe the pleasurable surprise of this call?”

Derin smiled in spite of himself. “You will not change, abi? Barrister Opeyemi Dada. Get off your bed; I want to talk about something serious.”

“Ah, I am totally unserious on Sundays. Please call back tomorrow.” She pronounced her Rs with a slightly exaggerated roll of her tongue which made her manner of

speaking even more interesting with its promise of a sensuality that was only thinly veiled. He imagined her playfully pouting as she spoke those words. With some effort, he dragged his mind away from that to the task at hand

“Ope, I need to see you, and no, I’m not coming to your house lailai.”

She let out a soft laugh, “and would I eat you up?” then as if just realizing other meanings to her statement, she laughed again and then said “not to worry sir, I have no such designs on happily married you. Let’s meet up at La Mango. I might just show up in a swimsuit though, since they have a pool there.”

Derin shook his head. She was just naughty and couldn’t resist any innuendo laden opportunities.

“Can you make it in another thirty minutes?” he asked

“Ah, slow down, farabale, oga Banwo. Didn’t know you were that eager to see my Bikini body. Thirty minutes is out of it though, I can do another one hour.”

“Alright then. I’ll just wait for you until then, since I’ve already left home so I will just head towards Ikeja. Shall I order anything for you while I wait?”

“Naa, all the things I’d like to have there are a la carte and they come from a cold bottle.” She replied.

“omuti” he replied.

“Ah, I learnt from the best drunkard club member of FOADs (for only addicted drunkards), remember?” she responded.

“Madam, oya, come and get off the phone and start coming. See ya in a bit,” he responded, and then cut the call off.

Agatha enjoyed the breakfast of French toast, sausages, eggs and baked beans, in spite of the circumstances. She had also forced Awazi to eat, while Kamal had not required any encouragement to gulp down his own portion which was significantly larger than those of the two ladies.

“I’ll need to head back to Ibadan now; I think you and Derin need time alone so you can get through to him.”

Awazi nodded, and helped her move her things to Kamal’s car. For the first time in her

marriage, she wished her mother in-law wasn't leaving. Kamal promised to come by the next evening on his way back from work, and then she watched the car cruise away. She turned back and went into the house. And for the first time since Isaac passed away, she was all alone. She tried to call Derin's number but it rang out twice. As if to emphasize the aloneness, PHCN took the power and the whole area became quiet. All the neighbors seemed to have gone to church, so the typical cacophony of generators didn't break the silence. The quiet was maddening. She lay on the couch, until the tiredness again overtook her, and the sleep delivered her from the despair.

Derin watched from his vantage point beside the large transparent glass that divided the bar and lounge area of La Mango from the pool area as the woman he was expecting walked in. She was taller than average, almost as tall as Derin himself. Her skin was a light chocolatey shade, and years of pampering left it flawless. And she wasn't afraid to show off that skin. She was wearing a pair of cream shorts displaying her toned legs and one of those chic sports jerseys female football fans wore to support their husbands' or boyfriends' clubs. And as he looked at her now, it seemed the years had not done anything to affect her figure (except she was using some advanced packaging, he thought with a smirk). But he knew the truth, that her stunning figure was for real. Several male and female heads turned as she walked in, the male ones glued to her in open admiration, and the female ones with unmasked jealousy. She had that effect on

everyone, and he wasn't exempt. In fact, in his case, she had more than an admiration kind of effect, because unlike other men whom she ignored, she went out of her way to induce those responses in him. He felt a stir within his tummy. He hadn't expected to still be affected this way by Ope, and he was thankful he hadn't decided to go and "pick her up from home".

Presently she arrived at the table and sat opposite him.

"Mr. Banwo, I believe?" she asked in mock seriousness.

"No, I'm the pope," he replied with a smile

"Then you are of no use to me sir, as I'm here to meet the hot, dashing Derin Banwo, who I intend to speak in double entendres with all morning."

"Ope, you sha will not change," he responded. "So which of your bottled friends would you like to meet?"

"Ah, I haven't changed yet. I'm a very faithful' friend" she said, emphasizing the faithful while flashing a falsely innocent smile at the same time.

He signaled the attendant to bring his food and the drinks he had pre ordered. He hadn't

eaten since the previous afternoon since he had left the house without eating this morning. He was very famished but had chosen to wait for her to arrive before having his meal. He had ordered jollof rice with plantain and grilled fish. She would be having Heineken as she had always done since he could remember.

Amidst small talk, the food and drinks arrived and was served. The moment the waiter was gone, her countenance became serious.

“While I’d like to flatter myself that you suddenly began to miss me and wanted to see me after five years, I am with enough of my wits to know that isn’t the case. So, would you save me from worrying my pretty head and tell me why you called me away from my blissful Sunday morning laze fest?”

“I just lost my only child, Isaac.” Derin said. Suddenly, the food became unappealing and he could have been looking at a plate of sawdust.

“Oh my God, oh my God, it cannot be true. How?” the normally composed Ope lost her composure. She knew of Derin’s struggle to have a baby and how much of a miracle that baby had been. She shook her head. “Tell me it’s not true.”

“I would love nothing more than to say it isn’t true, but it is my sad truth. And what’s more, he didn’t just die, he was killed!” His voice had become a low painful drawl.

“What! WHO THE HELL DID THAT. I WILL PERSONALLY GET THE BASTARD HUNG.” She said rather loudly, and a few heads turned but she couldn’t care less.

Derin was convinced he had made the right choice in this fight. Not only was Ope his friend of many years, but she was one of the best lawyers around, and she worked on her own, taking civil cases from plenty top corporate legal departments, so she would be able to take this case on if she wanted to. And he intended to make sure she wanted to.

“Let me tell you what happened,” he began, and then went ahead to recount their experience to her and the offer they had asked his mum to come and make earlier in the morning.

When he was done, the first question she asked was “do you still have the card you took from the hospital yesterday?”

“Yes I do, it’s in the car. Would you like to see it?” he responded

“Yeah, later. But it establishes you as their patient. Makes our case easier to pursue. And I don’t know why everyone is asking you not to fight this fight. Yes, it might take a while, and be long, but it’s worth it. People are allowed to almost literally get away with

murder in this country because no one wants to fight. The 'it is not my head that the coconut must be broken' mentality is annoying. Look, Derin, I'm with you on this, and will do everything in my power and expertise to win this fight."

Derin unconsciously compared how this woman supported him almost instantly and how he didn't have his wife's support. He shook those thoughts out of his head, but they kept clawing back in. Ope had been his first girlfriend in the university and they had been the "it" couple in school. Everyone assumed they were going to get married. But service year had changed all that. She had wanted to relocate from Nigeria after they had finished serving, and he was having none of it. After going back and forth on the matter, she had eventually left to pursue her master's degree and it had torn them apart. He had met Awazi around that time, and by the time she came back three years later, he was married. But it was obvious she had not gotten over him, and there would always be space for her in his heart. She blamed herself constantly for letting him slip away, and hadn't married.

They had kept in touch, and when Awazi had left him years ago, it had been in her arms he had found solace. The issues had resurfaced after a while. She was even more independent now, and again the relationship had ended. That was five years ago, and he had pursued his wife again until she returned to him. Awazi had found out about Ope eventually, and he had nearly lost her again, but he had been tenacious and they had worked it out after she had made him promise to cut Ope off. He had made the promise,

but hadn't totally made good the promise. Yes, there had been no romance again between him and Ope, but they still kept in touch and he had called her instinctively in this situation, not just because he wanted her to be his lawyer, but because he also knew she would think like him and offer her support, a support he was critically lacking at home now.

"The first step," she was saying now "is to write the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria. We will demand for the withdrawal of the operating license of the hospital, as well as the practicing licenses of the doctors involved."

"Okay..." Derin said in question.

"They will not respond or do anything as expected. But we are doing this, so that we would be able to join them as parties to the statement of claim we will file against the hospital and doctors. The truth is, it is not a murder legally, so we cannot get a criminal case instituted. But we can file a civil case, and pursue the loss of license as well as payment of huge compensation. How is that?"

"If it's the best we can do, then let's go for it."

"Okay Derin. We are also going to register an NGO to crusade against hospitals treating their patients poorly, and whatever money comes out of the compensation goes to it. To

remain credible, you must not be seen to be trying to make any personal money out of this.”

He nodded in agreement and then she continued “I’ll need to find out who their lawyer is so I can know what I’m up against, whether it’s a fight by the book we are looking at, or if it will be a roforofo type of fight.”

“How soon can we start this?” Derin asked.

“I’ll have the demand to the Medical Council ready by morning and they’ll receive it before noon tomorrow. The statement of claim should be ready by Wednesday as I have something else I have to work on and have ready for a client by Tuesday.”

Then she pointed at his plate and said “Now, eat this very expensive food you have ordered while I tell you what I think we will be up against, and how to win.”

Doctor Ajanaku had just received bad news. When the older Mrs. Banwo had called him earlier to tell him she was enroute Lagos to talk to her son, he had been optimistic. He had called her just now, and the first warning signal of wahala was when she had said she was on her way back to Ibadan. He wondered why she was returning to Ibadan so

quickly. She had then told him of the episode with Derin, but had been quick to assure him that the wife was willing to go with the plan and had even made demands. He had thought the wife's demands reasonable and doable and he had said so. Agatha was still hopeful that Derin's wife would be able to convince him to drop pursuit of the case in court, but even as she said so, he knew that it was a lost cause. If three people couldn't convince him in a concerted effort, it would take a miracle for one of them to.

He was now at his lawyer, Rasheed Sanda's house to give him an update on the matter.

"The boy will not listen." Rasheed said with certainty after he had listened to the gist of the matter. Rasheed was a fine judge of character and Doctor Ajanaku agreed with him.

"So, what should we be expecting now, Rashy?" Doctor Ajanaku could be informal here, since they were meeting alone and in his lawyer's Dugbe residence.

"Again, we don't know who his lawyer is, but I'm certain we won't have to wait for much longer to find that out. I expect that they will file claims, and will go for license revocation and crippling monetary compensations, effectively ensuring not just the hospital dies, but that you're unable to practice again."

"That is as good as killing me now, removing my means of livelihood, and also ensuring

I cannot even try to build anything again in future. Nkan buruku! Rashy, Gba mi o, help me, ti e o ni baje”.

“We will counter their claims, and then if that fails, we will invite them to negotiate at a pre-trial conference. With the generous offer you have made, they will be compelled by the Judge to take your offer, rather than burden the legal system with a case that would probably achieve almost same result in the end. I expect it to end there, but in case it goes to court, we’ll need to dig up as much evidence as we can, because in a case like this, it’s not just a case of creating reasonable doubt, but rather a weighing of evidence on both sides against each other. It is the side that tips the scale the most heavily that carries the day”

“This my son will not kill me! Omo eni I ba joni, a bayo, how can my own son be the source of my greatest crisis. It’s not his fault, it is that stroke. When the big thing brings one down, then the smaller ones run roughshod all over.”

“My doctor, you cannot keep thinking like this o, lest the thing comes back and brings you down irrecoverably. The boy has done this one, now it is for us elders to calmly salvage the situation.”

“I would have loved to be certain of the cause of death; there might be a loophole there. But now, the body is gone, and the baby is buried.” Doctor said.

“Hmmm. Doctor, now that you mention autopsy, I have an idea.” Rasheed said.

“And what might this be, my friend?” a now curious doctor asked, seeing the twinkle in his friend’s eyes. He had learnt over the years to sometimes speed up things with Rasheed; otherwise he would take all the time to get what he wanted to say out.

“You said the Derin’s mother reported that his wife does not support this case. So we have a weakness to explore there, should he want to go to trial. At pre-trial, one of the items of evidence we will require to proceed to trial would be an autopsy report detailing causes, time and all other info as regards the death. Let’s see if his wife would still allow him go to court, knowing that would mean their baby will have to be dug up, sawed up and that they would probably have to relive the experience of burying their child all over again.”

“Kai! You these lawyers, I fear you people o. Of course the woman would not have that happen. The case would die at pre-trial.”

With that, Rasheed called for the steaming Amala to be brought in.

When Derin walked in, Awazi smelt the strange perfume on him, and it was a feminine fragrance. She almost tore into him in that instant, with accusations of going to find comfort with another woman but restrained herself, knowing what she planned to do that night.

She would wait.

Episode 6

Derin walked on needles all day in the house. He had been expecting a blowout, some boiling over when he came back home, but Awazi had been surprisingly calm. But her quietness reminded him more of the quietness of a lioness before it sprang upon its prey. He remembered that broadcast message that had been making the rounds on blackberry sometime ago about when a woman was quiet – it meant she either thought you were too stupid to get what she had to say, or she thought you were a lost cause and couldn't be bothered to speak with you. He consoled himself by occupying his thoughts with the match he was watching, and when that was done, he fiddled with his laptop, working on a report he had neglected since yesterday but had to turn in at work the next morning, all the while thinking of the kickoff of the case against Omega Clinic.

Evening came, and she disappeared into the kitchen for hours, the occasional clanging of metal utensils and a sweet aroma wafting out from there the only confirmation that she was actually making a meal. He assumed she was deliberately staying that long in the kitchen in order to avoid him. When she emerged from the kitchen in a pair of bum shorts and a small spag top, he marveled at how quickly her body had bounced back from childbirth. He felt something stir in his loins as he gazed on her dark skin glistening with sweat, and her firm, full breasts peeking out from above and beside the top, nipples firmly pushing against the fabric of the top.

He was so carried away gazing at her breasts that he didn't notice she was carrying something in her hands until she set the tray down in front of him.

She spoke the first words she had said to him since he got in "I'm certain you are very hungry, you've not had a proper, homemade meal since yesterday morning. And I'm not talking what you ate wherever you went, fast food iskanci. Now eat up, Mr. Banwo."

She had set before him a steaming plate of pounded yam, with what Derin liked to call a thickly populated bowl of efo riro (vegetable soup). It was the type where you would pick one of crayfish, stockfish, smoked fish, pomo, or some other condiment with each bolus of pounded yam you dipped into the soup. Beside the food, she had put a bottle of chilled Fortunela red wine, which she knew was his favorite. The sight of the heavenly food and its aroma made his senses register just how hungry he was. He really hadn't realized he was that hungry until now. But even as he began salivating, something in his brain told him Awazi was up to something. He had been with her for long enough to know this was the preamble to something, and he hoped she wasn't trying to have him well fed for a fight.

But all that thinking was shoved to the back of his mind as the hunger got the better of him and he attacked the meal before him, mumbling his thanks to his wife.

“Let me let you eat in peace while I run your bath water,” she said, and then was away before he could respond.

Arinze Kilanko rounded off the call and turned to hold the young girl he was with for tonight. As the owner of one of the most discreet but major players in the Oil and Gas industry, he could afford these and more exotic luxuries even at his age. He always found it interesting as girls who were young enough to be his last daughter’s age would profess undying love for him and tell him how attractive he was. He knew it was the money and good life he could give them they loved, but it wasn’t bad for his ego to hear them say what they said anyway.

The call had been from his longtime friend. He had been the son of an Ibo woman married to a Yoruba man, and when his father had died; his father’s family had raised hell for his mum and for him by extension. They had been left with virtually nothing and were almost going into the streets, when a certain Chief Sanda had taken them in and treated him as a son. It was when he grew older that he realized that Chief Sanda had also taken his mum in and treated her as a wife, one of the sixteen he had, albeit being legally married to only one.

The call he had just finished taking was from one of Chief Sanda’s sons from that legal

wife who had become a good friend as they had grown up together. Rasheed was the only one of the kids who was nearly as intelligent as he was (He liked to tell himself that he was just slightly more intelligent) and they had grown up in a competitor/collaborator kind of relationship. Rasheed was now a respectable lawyer with prestigious titles like SAN, and while he didn't have all the prestigious titles, he had way more money.

The conversation with Rasheed had been disturbing though. He replayed it in his head now, as he fondled the young woman's perky breasts absentmindedly.

"There's a case I'm working on, Kilanko," Rasheed had said. He never called Arinze by his first name, as if he had something against his Ibo background. So since they were kids, Rasheed had called Arinze by his Yoruba surname.

"En, and so? How does that one concern me, Mr. SAN?" Arinze responded. It was his own pastime to refer to Rasheed by whatever title he had acquired and was proud of, first Barrister and now SAN.

"Mumu, you are with one of those your foolish small girls abi? You will have a heart attack on top one of them one of these days, you this after seventy trying to feel among." Rasheed had responded.

"Bigger Mumu, is it because you are stuck with only all those your Ibadan big bumbum

old women that you are envious? You better state what you want, the girl is busy here under me o” he responded. Such banter was common with both of them. He preferred to carry out his own amorous affairs with girls his daughters’ ages while Rasheed preferred much older society women.

“The thing is, my client would prefer that the case doesn’t make it to court, and we’re willing to settle generously out of court. But the other party is just bent on going to court, destroying my client’s credibility, and ruining an old man in the twilight of his illustrious career.” Rasheed said, then paused for breath before continuing “but we have one piece of good fortune. The boy is one of your employees. This case will be all consuming on him and take all his time. He won’t be productive for you, and he will be a nuisance to us. So, in the interest of all of us, I would like you to ‘persuade’ him to take the out of court settlement and forget about the case.”

The girl moaned by his side as his fingers tightened around her nipple and his thoughts were jarred for a second.

“Which of my staff would this be?” he asked.

“He would be an Ibadan boy, called Derin. Derin Banwo, I believe,” Rasheed responded.

Arinze remembered the young man. He had like the boy the first day he interviewed him. He was one of those bankers that came for oil company interviews in sharp suits and shiny shoes, only to be deflated by the jeans wearing and sneakers wearing interviewers. Arinze always enjoyed doing what he had called the Pointing and Puncture game with them. He would ask the shine shine banker what he earned and typically got figures like three million naira per annum, up to about seven million per annum, depending on the banker's level. Then he would point at some lowly looking member of his staff, and ask for the guy's ID card and show the banker the name. He would then ask for the person's payslip to be printed by HR and show it to the banker. He always enjoyed the expression of shock when the banker saw the figure of jeans wearer was double his own. He had taken a liking to a fellow Ibadan boy and the boy had proven to be an asset.

"I know the boy well, and he's a reasonable young man. So I wonder, what exactly is this case about that has made him so bent on prosecuting it?"

"Is that important?" Rasheed quizzed.

"Oga, how am I supposed to convince him about something I don't know about? I don't want him surprising me with any info and I will look foolish. Come to think of it," he added "the fact that you didn't tell me at once means that it's a real terrible thing your client did. Full disclosure, my good SAN, before I involve myself in this your scheme."

Rasheed hesitated for a moment and Arinze had to ask “Rashy, are you there?”

“Yes, Kilanko. Just weighing things in my mind. This is between you and I, and it is because you are family that I can even tell you this.”

“Okay, go ahead,” Arinze said. His hand had stopped its ranging on the girl’s breasts and he was now paying full attention to the conversation.

“You know Ajanaku’s clinic, Omega?”

“Ajanaku, Ajanaku,” Arinze mumbled trying to place a face to the name.

“Dr. Omega! You can forget people sha.” Rasheed said in mock exasperation.

“Ah, I remember the guy now. He is a fine gentleman, and I always wondered how he ended up befriending a rascal like you. What trouble have you gotten him into?” Arinze asked.

“I’m afraid it isn’t me this time that got him into trouble. You see, he had a stroke a while ago, and left the running of the hospital to his son, Hakeem, who really doesn’t deserve to run an ice cream van. Derin and wife rushed their baby into the clinic yesterday

afternoon and while Hakeem and his staff were giving them the run around about hospital procedures and waiting their turns and all manner of bullshit, the baby died.”

“What!” Arinze exclaimed, startling the lady beside him. “I heard from the office grapevine that it took them twelve freaking years to have that baby! How can?”

“I am as angry with that block headed Hakeem as you are, I can assure you, but I need to save my friend and client here. This could never have happened on his watch and we have the stroke to curse for that. And so, while I empathize with Derin, his threat to go to court, get a hefty compensation and shutdown the hospital and get my friend to lose his license is not one I can allow happen.”

Arinze was shaking his head as he spoke “hell, the boy would be within his rights if he wanted to do that!”

“Yes, but I cannot allow him. We have offered him and his wife IVF in the US fully sponsored by the hospital to the point of delivery as compensation. I am told the wife is positively disposed to it, but the boy is adamant. Again, he needs to think of his wife. We can even pay some money as compensation. I will not hesitate to destroy him, if it will be what it will take to win this case.”

Arinze knew Rasheed, and he knew how ruthless he could be in pursuit of a win.

“So you want me to convince him to drop the case and take the compensation, abi? And maybe sort of force him with the leverage I have of threatening his job. Rasheed, you are one ruthless old man.”

“Call me whatever you like,” Rasheed responded, “but I’m trying to save him in my own way here. I’ve tried to reach him through his wife, his best friend and his mother, all to no avail. Maybe if I threaten his livelihood, he will see reason, and maybe have some commonsensical fear and back down.”

“You know this is a hard thing you ask me abi? But I take your point and I know it’s best for him to let the case go. So I’ll do this for you, and for that fine gentleman.”

The call had ended and he had sat for a few moments, thinking about how unfair life could be. Then he turned around and looked at his companion. She lay on her chest, he rounded buttocks in the air, and her limbs spread around wantonly. He spun her around with his still powerful arms and spread her legs wide. He came after a few thrusts. The age had taken its toll.

Awazi cleared the dishes and then informed Derin that his water was running and he

could have his bath now. The same way the food had tempted him to eat, the promise of warm water, just as he liked it pulled him away from the couch to the bathroom.

When he entered the bathroom, he was surprised to see that she had filled the bathtub with water. Normally, they just stood inside the tub and used the shower. But she had gone through the pains of running water to fill the tub. The water had soap bubbles and the half empty bottle of Radox bathing gel beside the tub confirmed what he was thinking. Awazi!

He quickly relieved himself of the boxer shorts he was wearing and stepped into the bathtub. The warm water felt heavenly as he immersed himself fully in it, holding only his head above the water. He lay like this for about fifteen minutes, just allowing the flotation relax him, and ease the stress out of every pore.

Then he scrubbed himself until he felt squeaky clean and emptied the tub. He stood and washed the soap off with a cold blast from the shower, causing his hairs to stand. He felt very fresh as he stepped out of the bathroom, in only his towel.

When he stepped into the room, his jaw nearly dropped to the ground. She must have had a bath in the guest bathroom while he had his. Awazi stood right at the edge of the bed, in the nothing but white lacy lingerie. Against her ebony skin, it stood out like neon symbols, drawing attention to what they covered. The bra did an even poorer job of

covering her full boobs than the spag top she had been wearing earlier had done. He felt the blood rush from his brain and the speed at which he became erect left him with no doubt as to where all the blood had gone. In the period he had been in the bath, she had changed the sheets into a deep red one. Without a word, she signaled that he should with her index finger. He took measured steps towards her, and he got harder with each step.

When he got to her, he covered her lips with a kiss like he hadn't in a long time. Having a baby in the house to constantly tend had affected many things and that had been one of them. She tilted her head upwards to meet his halfway and the slight gasp she let out worked some magic in his tummy. He cupped her boobs in his left hand and wrapped his right around her, pulling her closer, kissing her even deeper.

With some urgency, she tugged at his towel and it fell off him. She also dug into his back with one hand and with the other, she grabbed his turgid member. Derin deftly unhooked her bra with one hand and bent to reach her hardened nipples with his tongue. Her perfume filled his nostrils, giving him a warm heady feeling. When his mouth finally covered her nipple, the appreciative gasp she let out again caused his blood to race. Then he tried to get her onto the bed but she resisted. Instead, as if getting a grip of herself, she turned him around, so that he now had his back to the bed and then pushed him firmly onto the bed. It was then he noticed four of his neckties lying on the bed. He wondered what they were doing there, but that thought raced from

his head when he felt her mouth cover his erection. She teased for a bit before began to suck. Even as the pleasure registered in his brain, he wondered what the Awazi who was normally much gentler in bed was up to. He couldn't hold on to lucid thoughts for long though.

Suddenly, when he began to feel he was going to cum, she stopped and reached for the first of the silk ties. She tied it firmly on his left wrist and she tied the other end to the bedpost. He wanted to say something but she covered his mouth with a kiss and he swallowed the words. She tied each of his limbs to each bedpost, spreading him out. He tested the strength and saw that he couldn't move much.

Now, she stood over him, and looked into his eyes with such an intensity of desire that he felt himself become even harder. She removed her panties slowly, not breaking the eye contact for one second as she did.

When she bent over and covered his pulsating member with her mouth this time, he couldn't touch her, couldn't use his hands to control her. The total control she had made her more intense and she sucked more vigorously. The pleasure he felt was multiplied too and he felt he was going to explode. She stopped and slowly lowered herself onto him, taking the whole of him into her. She was so warm inside, practically dripping. She rode him, slowly at first as, if in a dance, and then reached a frenzied pace on her immobile husband, letting her hair fly, the cool air from the AC keeping them from

sweating in spite of the intense action. When he came, he launched deep within her, his shaking restrained to a vigorous vibration by the silk ties she had bound him up with. Moments later, she came too, collapsing in a heap onto his chest, with spasms of varying intensities running through her body at irregular intervals for the next few minutes.

“Please don’t continue with this case, Derin, it would destroy us and all I want is to be happy,” she whispered to him.

This was what all the dramatics were about, he thought.

“I met a lawyer today and she has taken the case up already.” He responded.

With some effort, she raised herself off him to be able to look him in the face. “She?”

She asked. “Which she?”

He searched for the words to tell her but he couldn’t find the right words in this situation.

He had meant to tell her later but...

“It’s her abi,” she said, with a voice that was as low as a whisper, yet with the venom of a thousand cobras.

Without waiting for an answer from him, she got up and left the room, leaving him tied up as he was. He tried to free himself, but she had tied him up so well that he couldn't. He pulled hard, but the silk stood firm. He couldn't move. He called out to her at the top of his voice, but she did not answer. And so he waited.

Episode 7

Awazi did not return to the room for an hour. What killed Derin the most while he waited was that he had to guess at what she was doing by listening to the sounds. As if to torture him with more uncertainty, she slotted a Bob Marley greatest hits album in and turned the volume up so that the music drowned every other sound in the flat, effectively removing his auditory eyes.

When she came in, she stood at the edge of the bed, and looked him in the eyes for minutes. He could see she had been crying, her eyes were puffy even in the dim light. He opened his mouth to say something but even as he did, her right hand which had been behind her back came into view. The light reflected sharply on the object she was holding and it only took an instant for comprehension to hit him. His wife had returned into the bedroom where he was tied to the bedposts, immobile, with a huge kitchen knife. He tried to say something, but the music was so loud it drowned his voice. He tried to scream but a lump formed in his throat. If he screamed, to what effect? The house door was probably locked and no one could gain access, save for having powerful tools to break through the burglary proof and door. And even if they did, did he want them to see him like this? And in all that time, she would have done whatever she had in mind to do anyway. He knew, realized in that instant that he was fully at her

mercy. What gripped his heart the most was the look in her eyes as she looked down at him. They did not hold hate or love, or any emotions for that matter. They were blank, empty eyes.

Ope had had a good day. She had long gotten past the beating herself for letting him go phase with Derin. She truly had tried to love other men, but it just hadn't been the same, the relationships with them never measured up to what she had experienced in those magical years with him. She would have all the fun possible and do either of two things – marry a very rich oil block owning dude when she was almost forty or just have a baby and focus on her child. She had tried to get pregnant for Derin the last time they were together when his wife left him, but somehow, fate hadn't smiled on her. He had gone back to his wife, and she hadn't gotten pregnant. She had fallen into a mild depression.

She shifted those thoughts away from her as she sifted the information she had been able to gather since her meeting with Derin earlier in the day. First was that she was up against a formidable opponent. She had found out that Omega Hospital's lawyer was the respected warhorse Rasheed Sanda, and an oooooooooold SAN. She couldn't have drawn worse from the fates. She wondered if Derin would be up to the dogfight she envisaged this would devolve into.

She had randomly googled Hakeem Ajanaku, and had seen that he was on Facebook. His profile had listed that he had worked in a hospital in the U.S and she decided to research his career there. When she googled using his name and the hospital's name combined as keywords, the first and second pages of the results were majorly adverts and links to the hospital. But she struck paydirt on the third page – the never-forgetting internet threw up a series of news reports. She spent the next one hour scrounging every detail of the story, flitting from each news story back to his Facebook page. She established the timeline for his move back to Nigeria and smiled. This was good. She settled down to write the demand to the medical association. She decided to write the statement of claim simultaneously, as she was sure she would not get the response from them anyway.

Derin watched as Awazi rounded the bed to stand on the side, big kitchen knife in hand. She was still as naked as she had been when she left, and in spite of himself, he became erect, his body betraying his mind. Tears had begun to flow from her eyes, silent, quiet tears. The loud voice of Bob Marley came over the home theatre

“is this love, is this love...”

She leaned over and put her lips beside his ears. “Why would you do this to me, Derin,

why?” and then without waiting for a reply, she cut the ties that held his hands and sat back on the ground.

Relief flooded through Derin, numbing him momentarily. His hands were finally free. He quickly undid the leg restraints and jumped to his feet. The sudden rush of blood to his feet made it feel like he was walking on miniature needles as his feet hit the ground. The first thing he did was to race to the living room to turn off that now maddening Bob Marley jam. As if the hours of inactivity had confined his movements to short races, he sprinted back into the room and stood in front of Awazi who was now sitting on the edge of the bed and shouted

“What the hell was that about? Tying me up and scaring me like that! What exactly were you planning on doing?”

Awazi didn't shout initially but as she spoke her voice got louder. “What was what about? Tying you up was about having sex with my husband. Leaving you tied up was about my insensitive husband who raced to his ex-lover whose number he isn't supposed to have and then asked her to be the lawyer in a case that every single person that matters in his life advises him not to prosecute!”

“She is the best lawyer I know for this case. Plus, she will not charge huge legal fees which would have made me unable to pursue the case. She was the only option for this

case!” he shot back

“Why do you HAVE TO PURSUE THIS CASE EN? And you assume she would not ask for other payments if she’s forfeiting the financial ones? I’m not stupid Mr. Banwo, contrary to what your actions are suggesting, and I know nothing is free even in Freetown. Oh, you will pay and pay in full you will. And we both know what payment she will be demanding from you!” she shot right back.

“So, I’m a mindless fool without a will of my own? Once she demands, I will give in? Your opinion of my honor is really high, I see!”

“Oh shush! Honor, honor, honor. You want to pursue the case, to preserve your honor. You will fight this to the end even if you lose everything else, to preserve your honor. And then what?”

“And then we have justice!” He shouted

“And. Then. WHAT!” she said, getting up from the bed.

He searched for an answer, but he couldn’t find one.

“You won’t understand,” he finally said, a bit more quietly.

“But Ope does, yes?” she asked in measured tones

“Yes! She supported me, understood the need for closure. I wonder why my own wife cannot see things as I do!”

“And you assume she’s supporting you because she feels this is the best course of action? Or because she sees that you correctly don’t have support from your best friend, from your mum, and from me, and is offering you support because you are support needy, because you need someone to support you to convince you that you are right and we are all wrong?”

“Arrrghhhh!” he cried, raising his hands to his head. This was not getting them anywhere.

“I’m pursuing this case, with or without your support, even though I’d rather do so with it.” He said with finality and then picked the towel he had discarded earlier, wrapped it around himself and left for the parlor. Awazi did not bother to follow him; he could not truly hear anything she was saying.

The next morning, Derin and Awazi got ready for work, practically avoiding each other in their preparations. He bathed in the guest room, and only came in to pick his clothes up, dressing up in the living room. Awazi had thought of calling in sick at work, but she knew she wouldn't have been able to bear being alone at home all through the day. She would drive herself mad with thoughts of what Derin was doing, and would see Isaac in every turn. The despair she felt tore her inside. How could she be dealing with the loss of a precious child to death, and the loss of her husband to this folly of revenge? She breathed a prayer to heaven.

When Derin got to his office in Ikoyi that morning, he was glad he had decided to come to work. At least the familiar routine and environment would take his mind off the many things that troubled him. A text message came in as he settled into his chair.

"The demand just left for the medical org as per license withdrawal. Would be sending claims on Wednesday as promised. Hope you're holding up well. And here's my PIN so we can keep up better"

He read the text message twice, rolling over adding her on his BBM for a few minutes.

"What the hec," he said out aloud and then added her. The request went to the pending list.

Theirs was a small company of two teams and he worked in the business development team. He directly interfaced with the MD and so wasn't surprised that morning when he was told by the MD's secretary that he was calling him. He was on his way to the MD's office when he realized he hadn't finished the report he had been working on for his MD over the weekend. He hadn't been planning on disclosing the events of the weekend to anyone at work yet, but he knew he would have to tell the boss when asked why he didn't have the report.

"Good morning sir," he greeted the MD, bowing slightly as he entered the exquisitely furnished office.

"Morning Derin, how was your weekend. I thought I made it clear that I wanted the report waiting for me this morning," Arinze said, putting on his best glare for Derin's benefit.

"Sir, there's a perfect explanation for this," Derin said, wondering why the nonsense secretary had not left.

"Let's hear it sir," Arinze said turning on his skeptic look.

"Sir, I'll have to speak to you about this alone," Derin said, tilting his head slightly towards the secretary.

“Dorcas, leave us,” Arinze said. The skinny legged young girl deliberately took longer than necessary to leave. Arinze made a mental note to cut her off; she was beginning to grow wings because she had seen oga naked. These girls always amused him at how replaceable they were without knowing it.

He turned his attention to Derin after she left “yes, I’m listening.”

“Sir, I lost my son over the weekend,” Derin said quietly.

“Ah! Lord of heaven, God of love,” Arinze exclaimed, feigning appropriate surprise.

“How? What exactly happened?”

Derin went on to summarize the events of the weekend to his boss, and that he would be going to court. It was at that point that Arinze stopped him.

“I understand your grief, Derin, but going to court would not be the best for you now.

First, on a personal level, your wife needs you more than your dead son, take that from an old man who has lost one son.”

Derin’s eyes widened. He didn’t know his MD had lost a son before.

Arinze continued, his voice sterner now, “and I cannot afford any disruptions to your work here that the court case would warrant. Except you would be appearing in court at non work hours, that is. I have a business to run here, and you would agree with me that I should think of that first.”

Derin could not believe his ears. How could this man who he had given so much to in the past one year be this callous and unfeeling to his pain?

“Sir, but the courts are in session only during working hours on weekdays. The court appearances will be few and far between and it will not disrupt any work sir, I can promise you of that.”

“Why don’t you ask your wife to represent you at these hearings? She might not be as essential to the work in her own office, maybe their operation is bigger. But here where I run a lean and mean one, I cannot have a staff distracted by a court case and bringing attention to our business. I don’t want some reporter snooping around about you and then digging up stuff I’d rather keep out of the public view.”

Derin could not have noticed the sly slant of Arinze’s eyes as Arinze said “wife”.

“Sir, my wife does not fully support me getting justice for our son, so I cannot count on her to be in court.” Derin responded.

“She is a wise woman, Derin, and you should again listen to an old man’s advice. Listen to your wife more. I have said my own. I will not condone incidents like this morning where you don’t deliver because you are pursuing a case. And I am not giving you any days off for court appearances. In fact, because of this subsidy wahala, no one is getting any time off anytime soon. If you can sort yourself out with that, fine. And if you cannot, I’ll be one staff short for a while, before I get your replacement.”

“But sir, I thought you will understand and be supportive of me...” Derin blurted out.

Arinze stood up, looking very imposing as he did “and you assume that I built a business of this size by being an understanding man? On sentiments? I’m a pragmatic, practical man Derin, and I’ve told you exactly what I’ll do, even as much as I like you. Listen to your wife.”

Derin stood up and left the office, his head held slightly lower than it was when he came in. He trudged through the rest of the day absent mindedly.

Awazi was facing exactly what she had hoped she wouldn’t have to. How the gist of Isaac’s death had spread in her office, she could never tell, but she had handled

enough commiseration and condolences to last for a lifetime from her colleagues. She escaped for a breather for lunch when her phone rang. It was her mother in-law.

“Hello Awazi, how are you,” Agatha said

“I’m fine ma, I tried to call to find out how your trip went, but your number didn’t go through.” That was a lie, but Awazi didn’t mind telling it.

“It’s okay. How is Derin? Did you talk to him when he came back home about this court case matter?”

Awazi rolled her eyes. The woman wasn’t concerned about how she was holding up; she was just concerned about Derin. Some things would never change. She was just being friendly now because she thought Awazi could be useful to what she was trying to achieve.

“Yes I did ma,” Awazi responded.

“And what did he say? I hope you were able to make him see reason and leave this case?” Agatha asked.

“No,” Awazi responded, piqued. Agatha has suddenly phrased it like it was her

responsibility to make Derin do something. How could she make a full grown man do anything when his mind was set on doing just the opposite?

“No, just like that? Awazi, you are his wife, you should be able to reach him and change his mind.” Agatha said

Awazi was not having any of this “And you are his mother and should also be able to reach him and change his mind!” she shot back.

“What!” Agatha shouted, enraged. “What responsible daughter in-law talks to her mother in-law like that?”

“The type that the mother in-law doesn’t care about how she feels after losing her only child and sees her only as a tool to reach her husband. I have to get back to work now ma, if you don’t mind” Awazi said.

“It’s not your fault. It is my yam that has made my hand to be stained with palm oil. Good day.”

The line went dead. She had hung up.

Awazi gathered herself up to go back to her desk. People at the canteen made bad

efforts to conceal the fact that they had been looking at her. She must have been shouting. Silently, she sobbed, tearlessly on her way back to her desk.

Rasheed called Arinze that morning. He wasn't sure about if his friend would actually try to convince the boy. Arinze had the annoying habit of pulling on some piety at the most unbecoming of times.

"Kilanko, good morning." He said

"SAN, I know the morning is not good jor. It's the boy you have called about."

"But of course, you think I relish hearing you voice daily? How is that going? Did you speak with him?" Rasheed asked

"Rashy, that boy is stubborn. I spoke with him first thing this morning, threatened and all, but he didn't budge. You are in for one hell of a fight." Arinze responded.

"En, so carry out the threat now!" Rasheed said

"Oga, calm your creaking body down. First, he isn't in court yet, so why would I say I

sack him? Second, I don't want an annoying court case on my head, so I have to make sure if I sack him, it is clean. As long as his pursuit of the case doesn't require him to be absent from work, or cause non-performance at work, I cannot sack him without that possibility."

"So, I take it that you are feeling cool with yourself now abi. Cos I know you won't be spelling out all of this if you haven't thought of a favorable solution in all this," Rasheed said, slightly irritated that Arinze seemed to have bested him.

"Well, you should pay me for all this consultancy oh, Mr. SAN..." Arinze said

"Oh please, stop gloating and just talk jor!"

Arinze chuckled at his friend and then continued "well, you simply have to work with me to create a situation where he will have to choose between jeopardizing the case or lose his job. And I don't think any sound thinking young man will chose to lose his job. So we win, you and I."

"I see, and I can think of just the perfect scenario for this." Rasheed said.

"Mo jeri e, I trust you, SAN, practicing law since we were under her majesty!" Arinze said.

“You are just a senile fool, Kilanko,” Rasheed said, laughing too.

“Oya, let me make calls that will bring money”

Derin checked and saw that Ope was now on his BBM contact list

He had been worried about the conversation with his MD in the morning. He couldn't fault the old man's logic, and yes, he wasn't expecting the man to run this place like a charity. But he just felt that the man was just being plain rigid. He needed to talk to Ope, to hear a lawyer's view on this. But even as he tried to convince himself that this was the reason he was sending her this message now, a more truthful part of him told him it wasn't true.

“There's something that happened at work with my boss today, a sort of veiled threat about pursuing this case. I need to discuss this with you, are you up for drinks tonight? We can do somewhere in Ikeja”

He waited nervously (he wondered why he was nervous at all) for about five minutes before the D changed to R on the message, indicating that she had read the message.

“Sorry, not in town, recall I said I would be out till tomorrow. Let’s either discuss on phone, or wait till we see lunch hour on Wednesday.”

Derin felt like a fool. He didn’t like rejection (even though again, his mind told him he hadn’t been rejected and that only circumstances disallowed her from seeing him). He quietly began to round off work, somewhat sad that he would have to go home straight. Or maybe not. He called Kamal up.

Ope smiled on her bed. She knew Derin very well. The fact that he was unable to see her today and tomorrow would make him long for her even more. He wasn’t used to rejection by women, and his mind and ego would have construed her message as a tacit rejection. She turned to the computer and continued work on the statement of claim. For the right time, she would wait.

Episode 8

Dude, are you totally out of your mind?" Kamal exclaimed over a beer as he listened to Derin's story. They had decided on the garden beside the National Theatre and were by now on their third bottles of beer, accompanied by steaming point and kill. The djay regaled them with sweet highlife tunes and the breeze rustled pieces of paper.

Derin wasn't flustered "no bro, I'm with all my wits, I assure you. Nothing can happen with Ope, it will be strictly professional client/lawyer relationship."

"Oh, and if it's strictly professional, how much are you paying for these services?"

Kamal paused for an answer and when Derin didn't respond, he continued "I thought so! Nothing. Look, you might want to keep it professional and all, but there are two of you, and she sure doesn't want to. I'm your friend, and as no be you dey feed me, I can tell you without mincing words when you're being foolish and stubborn. You've had many instances of this in the past, but this has to be the most stubborn you're being ever.

Dude, drop the damn case!"

"En, so if you know me, shebi they say, once you know your person's behavior, saying they behave that way isn't abusing them. Drop this talk of dropping the case bro, its' not

happening.”

“Suit yourself. But at least have the sense to preserve your marriage and find another lawyer,” Kamal said.

“Na you go pay? I don’t have the money for any expensive lawyer, so Ope would have to do. Wonder why all of you are seeing it as Ope using me, when it’s the other way round. Women flirt to get what they want all the time, don’t they? Men should do it once in a while. As long as Ope assumes she can have me and winning this case is her only way of achieving that, she will fight this case with all of her strength.”

“As you wish, your highness,” Kamal responded, and sipped his beer.

Awazi’s day couldn’t have ended worse. The traffic descending third mainland was killing. She had chosen to pass here when her colleague, Tessy who had left before her called to warn her of the killer traffic on Eko Bridge, all the way to Western Avenue. But she was certain whatever the situation had been on Western Avenue, it could not be as bad as it was on Third Mainland. Then suddenly, she heard a crunching sound of metal and glass colliding, and she realized she had taken out someone’s side mirror when her mind had wandered. Like an expert Lagos driver, the black tinted-glass Toyota Camry

car crossed her to block any escape she might have been contemplating. Not like she had been contemplating any though. She turned off the ignition and came down to go and inspect the damage.

The moment the white linen bespoke wearing occupant of the car came down, she gasped. She rubbed her eyes. It simply couldn't be.

“What the hell were you thinking that...” the guy was saying when Awazi screamed “Samir!”

He stopped mid sentence, seeing her properly for the first time beyond the damage of his car.

“Awazi!” he screamed right back.

They embraced and kept checking each other out until the angry blaring horns of homebound weary Lagos drivers reminded them that they were on the road.

“There's a KFC somewhere along this road we're about to enter, let's meet up there,” Samir suggested and she nodded in assent. Forgetting his dangling side mirror, a visibly excited Samir hopped into his car, and they weaved through traffic for another thirty minutes before reaching the KFC. In those thirty minutes, Awazi remembered

Samir. Growing up in Lafia in those days, the tensions had been high between her Eggon people and the Fulani settlers. There had been series of clashes between them over grazing lands, and the Fulani herders had been particularly brutal in their night attacks on Eggon villages.

So when she had seen this very fine (the way Fulani people can be fine when they want to be) Fulani boy in Lafia, in her third year in university, she had at first been wary. But he had been so nice and so un-Fulani that she capitulated and fell for him. But she had hidden him from her friends and family; she knew they would all not approve a Fulani man. But even as she hid him from her own family expertly, Samir had not been as good at hiding her. All hell broke loose when his father found out that Samir was seeing an Eggon woman. Samir's father had come to see her father and it had not been a cordial visit. Her father had forbade her from seeing Samir, and Samir's father had moved him abroad to go and study. They hadn't seen each other since then and it had been in the pre-GSM, pre-Facebook days, so they lost touch totally. And lo and behold, she had run into him in Lagos traffic of all the places on God's earth.

"You didn't change one bit, Awazi," Samir was saying, looking at her with open admiration.

"And you haven't changed, Mr. using your eyes to say all the nonsense in your head. I'm married now o, so tell your eyes to stop talking" She retorted.

He laughed. "Kai, I wish it was in these days of all manner of connectivity, we would have kept in touch. Now your dad has finally succeeded in shipping you off to some lucky Eggon man." He made a sad face as he said this.

"Ah, you're right on that one, we would have kept in touch. But you're wrong on that one. My name is now Awazi Banwo" she replied.

"What! A Yariba man," he said. "Noooooo way your dad agreed to you marrying someone who isn't even a northerner. What did you do to the old man? Is he dead? Paralyzed?"

She laughed so hard her sides hurt. "Oh Samir, you will not change, ever dramatic. No, I didn't inject my dad with secret mind control poisons. And yes, he is dead now, but he was alive when I married Derin, and he gave his blessing. My Derin's a charmer." She said with a twinkle in her eye. Then she remembered how things were with him and she sighed deeply.

Samir was too sharp not to notice.

"Things not rosy with the husband?" he asked.

“Well, that would be normal. The ups and downs of marriage, what can we do?” Awazi said.

Samir wanted to probe, but he didn't think it wise. If it was something she was comfortable talking about, she would have mentioned it.

“So my father says I have a deadline to marry this year. Any good girls in your circle?” Samir said.

“Haba, you haven't married? Fine man like you. What have you been doing?” Awazi asked, surprised.

“Reading the plenty book I need to enter politics at the top in the north. Been in the US since,” then he switched his accent into some oyibo accent Awazi couldn't place and said “and this brother couldn't find no black sister to marry.” Then he switched back to his Nigerian accent, and said “so I'm back in Naija, wife hunting. The deal with my dad is I either find me a wife this year, or he gives me one next year.”

Awazi laughed again. “Samir, you are a case. But, I will look through my archives and see what I can do. Most of my friends are married now, abi you expect women of my age to be single ni?”

Samir rolled his eyes.

“Why are you rolling your eyes Mr.” she asked.

“See you saying things like ‘ni’. Your husband has removed all the north in you and replaced with Yoruba ngbati ngbati.” He responded incredulously.

She said in mock seriousness “Ba turenchi, Ba Yariba. Hausa ne”.

He laughed and laughed.

“I’m sure there are one or two little half-caste children wondering who is keeping their mummy now.” he said.

Awazi was silent, and a tear fell from her eye before she could control herself to catch it.

“Haaaa, Kai Awazi, Minini? What did I say to elicit tears?” Samir said frantically, worry lines appearing on his brow as he frowned.

“It’s not you Samir, it’s not you aboki”. She said, her voice shaking.

“I’m not taking that, you need to tell me,” Samir said forcefully but softly.

“I lost my only child, at six months old, two days ago,” Awazi blurted out, and then the wellsprings opened and the tears poured out without restraint.

Immediately, Samir crossed over to her side of the table and helped her to her feet. Heads turned towards them in the eatery so he quickly chaperoned her outside into his car and then went over to the driver’s side and sat down after starting the engine and running the ac.

“I’m so sorry, I couldn’t imagine, Sanu Kawa,” he said, confused as to whether it was appropriate to even say anything. The tears kept flowing, but he didn’t ask her to stop. He sensed she had been bottling it all up and would only find relief after she cried her heart out.

“Why should I lose my child? Of all the people selected by God to lose a child, he chose me, who has only one, and who searched for that one for twelve years. Samir, how can I believe there’s any purpose in this? If there’s a God, how could he allow this?”

Samir almost said something, some explanation, but then realized it was just the grief in her speaking. He allowed her continue.

“And as if losing my child is not enough, I’m losing my husband.”

“He’s dying too?” Samir said, brows drawn in surprise.

Awazi dabbed her face with her handkerchief, but it only ebbed the flow briefly.

“No, he isn’t, but I don’t know which is more painful fa, losing someone who is dead and gone, or someone who lives and sleeps with you in the same house. He’s consumed by getting justice against the hospital. I’m alone, Samir, so alone. I can’t grieve, I don’t feel loved, I feel like my child was taken because I’m not a good mother, I feel like...”

The tears drowned the words again.

After some minutes, she calmed herself down

“I’m so sorry Samir, I shouldn’t have dumped all this on you. I really should get going. It was good seeing you.”

“There’s no way I’m going to allow you drive yourself home in this state.” He took the keys in her hand from her and then led her to her car. “I’ll leave my car here and drive you home. I can take a cab and come back to get my car.”

“Haa, you don’t need to worry about that, I don’t want to bother you with my wahala,”

she protested. But he was having none of it. He was already in the car and she was too exhausted to protest really. The drive home was to Surulere was quick, most of the traffic had cleared.

“I don’t think it’s wise for me to drop you right at your gate,” Samir said, when Awazi told him they had turned into their street. “At least, I wouldn’t want strange men dropping you off in your car if was your husband.”

Awazi managed to laugh weakly. “Nagode, Samir. It was really really good seeing you, and I mean every word of that. I haven’t laughed in days, and I feel really relieved.”

He pressed his card into her hand. “here’s my number, I’m in Lagos till the year runs out, it’s the one place my old man hates coming to. Call me, if you ever need a familiar ear to talk to.”

She reached over and hugged him, and then he got down, and waited for her to get into the passenger side.

He watched her drive for the few seconds she needed to reach her gate and then turned and walked slowly the junction to get a cab back to his car.

It was Wednesday morning that Dr. Ajanaku sat with his council in his office. Derin's statement of claim had finally come in and he had hurriedly called the meeting.

"Rasheed, please break it down for us in simple, regular people English, what are his demands?"

"Well, he wants the following. First, he wants Hakeem's license withdrawn. Second, he wants the operating license of the hospital withdrawn. And finally, he wants financial compensation of fifty million naira to enable him and his wife to pursue fast-tracked conception options to ensure delivery of another child. He basically stopped short of trying to institute criminal charges against you for murder. I'm sure if it was within his power to sue you for murder, he would have."

Bintu, the head matron sighed. The boy wasn't playing at all, he wanted to shut them down patapata.

"Why isn't he being reasonable. We are offering him those fast tracked conception options, on a platter of gold, and he wants to go to court to fight for it? Isn't that plain stupid," Hakeem said with contempt.

"Listen to yourself, calling somebody stupid. A pot calling a small kettle black. Anyway,

we will come back to your own matter, abowaba” Doctor said.

“I said it before that the boy won’t negotiate. We have no choice but to fight to save ourselves in this matter. Oga Rasheed, you said something about a pretrial conference, I think that’s what we should be looking at now” Bintu said.

“Yes, that’s the next step.” Rasheed responded

“Do you possibly think we can kill this case in pretrial by any means?” Doctor inquired.

“I will attempt to. One of the new rules is that we have to do what we call front-loading for evidence. It means we have to submit our evidence before going to court. So, we will ask for the autopsy report at pretrial if he still insists on being unreasonable. Let us see how willing he will be to dig up his child from the grave.”

“Has anything about this appeared in the press yet?” Bintu asked

“No, we haven’t heard anything and I have my people monitoring,” Rasheed responded.

“I hope they are checking on blogs and social media?” Hakeem asked.

“Blogs? Social media? Which one is that again?” Bintu asked.

“You don’t know about social media? I really hope you are monitoring it, it’s the fastest way news spreads these days. One person says it, and everyone spreads it. I’m surprised it’s not one twitter yet.” Hakeem said

“Wise Hakeem, that knows about social media, you are surprised it’s not there yet or you are doing something actively to make sure it doesn’t appear there?” Doctor said and then said to no one in particular “this is sha my cross, I will carry it.”

Hakeem became hot between the ears. “I was just pointing something out, Dad, there’s no need to make me look stupid,” he retorted.

“Like you need any help with that. You cannot manage to hold on to your license abroad and at home, and you are here talking about being made to look stupid.”

Bintu saw that this would devolve into a distraction and she quickly brought the meeting back into focus.

“So Oga Rasheed, you believe this your measure would save us the court wahala?” she asked.

“He has constrained us to that choice now. I have an ace up my sleeve though, but I

don't think it is ripe for revelation just yet, I would rather keep it up that proverbial sleeve. I also need to research this his lawyer. If he or she put together stuff of this quality within the few days between now and when he or she must have been briefed, then we have one formidable opponent in our hands."

"I will trust you on that one Rasheed." Doctor said.

Derin couldn't believe how excited he was about having lunch with Ope. He could count the number of words him and Awazi had said to each other since Sunday on his fingers. The woman was being stubborn; she always wanted it to be him that would apologize first whenever they quarreled. She seemed to have gotten into that habit since he had gone after her that time she left the house, and now he saw many instances in retrospect where this was the case. Well, she wasn't having her way on this one. He would do this, and she would have to come to terms with it.

They had selected the new chic restaurant inside Osborne Estate, minutes from his office. He got there minutes to one, a little earlier than they planned to meet. He was surprised when he got there and met Ope. She had selected a corner away from the door, arranged so that they had a good degree of privacy away from most of the other customers. She was in a figure hugging black gown that hugged the contours of her

body like it was sewn onto her frame. Her hair was neatly packed and she was wearing her glasses, peering into her iPad. She looked up as he got to her.

“Ah, Derin, you came in early too. I anticipated traffic, but as God would have it, the road was sort of free, so I got here some minutes ago. You don’t look so good. Have you been eating properly?”

Wow, Derin thought. His worries were beginning to affect how he looked.

“I’m a married man, and my wife makes sure I eat jo.” He patted his belly without any enthusiasm and then sat down.

“So straight to business, what is this that you’d like to discuss about your office?” Ope said, her tone businesslike.

Derin had expected that they would banter a bit but since Ope had chosen to be all business, he decided to be that way too.

“My boss has effectively asked me to end the pursuit of the case.”

“Derin, how exactly has he done this? There’s a fine line between the legal and the illegal there, and it’s how he has framed this that would determine it.”

“Well, he didn’t say ‘Derin, if you continue with this case, you are fired’. No, he basically said that the case should not affect productivity, I should ensure that I met all deliverables and that I was not going to get any days off work to go to court.”

Ope rubbed her chin, pondering for a moment. “Your boss is one smart fox, he’s trying to get you off the case without exposing himself to the possibility of a lawsuit. Thing is, you have a duty and a right to answer court summons where it is material to a case before any court, and your employer has no right to stop that. Now, if he can prove that your appearances in court are affecting your productivity, he might have a case to disengage you, especially where the reasons for drop in productivity are not directly caused by your appearing in court, but by the pressures of pursuing the case. So, you walk a fine line here Derin. You’ll have to make sure that for the duration of the case, you do not goof on deliverables at work. And where you have to appear in court, and your boss threatens you with a sack, tell him he’ll be hearing from your lawyers. If it’s what I think it is, he will back down.”

“What do you think it is?” Derin asked.

“I don’t know for sure, so I won’t insinuate. Give me his name, and I’ll do my research. Would tell you when I’m certain my about it.”

Ope didn't say anything further and for some reason he couldn't understand, Derin ran out of things to say. There was an awkward silence between them for a few minutes before she began to pack her things. "I guess we should be going then, you do have to get back to work on time."

"Yes, yes, true." He responded.

She got up, and then as if it was an afterthought, she turned to him and said "Oh, and Derin, you should be prepared to travel either Friday or Saturday, as we'll be invited for a pretrial meeting around that time. They'll try to make you look unreasonable for wanting to go to court, in spite of their offer, and would try to convince the court to throw out the case as a waste of judicial time since they've made a compelling offer. So be ready."

Then she got up and left, smiling a knowing smile. She didn't have to look back to know that his eyes followed her to the door.

Derin got up slowly after Ope had gone. He wondered how he would be able to tell his wife he was travelling alone with Ope.

Episode 9

The tone of the text message was formal “The Case Management Conference has been fixed for Friday, that’s tomorrow. They’re playing hardball. You need to find a way to leave work that day. We can shift it to evening, giving travel time as a reason, but Friday it is. We’ll leave together at two”.

Derin read the text again and again. He had already made elaborate plans of how he would be able to escape from work on days he had to appear in court. While his employer wasn’t obliged to let him go and appear in court, he could not be denied health reasons. So he had gotten his doctor to prescribe trauma treatment with a psychiatrist along with his wife and he would carefully doctor appointments with the psychiatrist to coincide with court appearances. While he would like to threaten his boss with “my lawyer will be reaching you if you don’t let me go”, he knew it wasn’t the best way to handle the matter. His boss could conceive a thousand and one ways to relieve him of the job, so he would rather play it this way.

In another office, Arinze was reading a text message too. It was from Rasheed. “We’ve fixed pre-trial for tomorrow. Please let him come, and let’s see if we can still end this. If he doesn’t agree, the first of my strategies would start immediately.”

So when Derin asked to see him, Arinze knew what he was coming for. He wondered what the young man would resort to – brute force or subtle deception. This would be interesting.

Derin came in and handed the doctor's prescription over to Arinze silently. He watched his boss scrutinize the report for minutes that seemed like hours.

"Fair enough," Arinze finally said and he saw Derin visibly sigh in relief. He preferred the subtlety and would humor him, plus Rasheed had said to allow him anyway. "When is your first appointment with the psychiatrist," he asked.

"Tomorrow sir, at 1pm," Derin replied. He saw a glimmer in his boss' eyes he would have thought was a smile if he didn't know better.

"Okay. Make sure you turn in the sales proposal before you leave and let's review it together."

Derin could not believe his luck. As soon as he was out of earshot of his boss' office, he let out a whoop! "Cunning man die, cunning man bury am. I'm a very bad sharp nigger!"

Now to prepare for his wife.

If one had entered Ope's room without knowing what she was preparing for, confusion would have set in. But she was preparing for two things that were of equal value. One, she was going head to head with the SAN for the first time in this case, and as they say, first impressions cannot be remade. In the legal battles, the first engagements matter a great deal. So on her bed was an assortment huge law books, cases she was studying and papers scattered all over.

The second thing she was preparing for, as she hummed her favorite Whitney song was to seduce a man. And so, in the midst of all the books and papers were strewn all manner of female things. Lingerie of different shapes, most of the type that lifted the boobs and gave masculine eyes a promise they could hardly resist. Then came gowns and then her nighties. She had gleaned from Derin that he wasn't talking to his mum so he wouldn't be staying there. In fact, Ope intended to make sure he didn't stay there.

Awazi had just finished a conversation with her aunt, Aunty Jamila. She was not really a sister to any of her parents, but she was the closest thing Awazi had to an aunt.

"Aunty, he's not even eating my food, he's not even talking to me again, that woman has taken my husband!" Awazi had said, exasperated. She had chosen not to call her mum, because she knew that the only conclusion her mum would draw was to remind her that she had kicked against her marriage to a Yoruba man – "they are not

trustworthy, and their men and women are known to be promiscuous” her mum would have said. She didn’t need all that now

“Awazi, calm down. Look, men have ego, and you do not deal with issues with them by hitting that ego head on. You will only cause him to defend his ego and drive him away from you”.

“Aunty, are you blaming me for what is happening fa? Awazi said, piqued.

“No my dear, your husband is being pig headed, selfish and stubborn. But how does pointing that out to him help you? Do you want to be right, or keep your home? The choice is yours. If its right you want to be fighting for, keep doing what you’re doing. But if your home is what is important to you, you will listen to me. You still have this your temper, you this girl”

Awazi calmed herself down “Aunty I’m just at a loss. I’m also suffering here, I lost my son!”

“And you haven’t told your mother about this yet. What kind of thing is that? I’m calling her right away after this call, gaskiya. But you, you must do the difficult thing.”

“Aunty, you know she’s hypertensive, I don’t know how she will take it if I tell her. I don’t

want two casualties on my hand, plus this Derin matter, it is too much for me.”

In characteristic Auntie Jamila way, she ignored what Awazi said and continued what she had been saying, in spite of pausing to allow her speak.

“You must support your husband in this case, in spite of not agreeing with him pursuing it. You must make the decision, your home or your rights. Anyway, I’m coming into Lagos next week. We will talk.”

With that, they exchanged all the pleasantries and rounded off the call. She checked the time – ten thirty. It had become Derin’s pattern to come back home so late she would have slept. “Well, the weekend is almost here, we’ll iron this out on Saturday” she said out aloud to herself.

When she woke up the next morning, as usual, Derin was gone. it was a routine he had established to avoid talking to her – get home too late and go out too early.

It was when she stood before the mirror to brush her hair that she noticed the note under her perfume. She quickly reached for it, muttering “what is this one again o?”

The anger welled up within her as she read its contents.

She walked up and down, sucking in air noisily as she did, saying repeatedly to herself

“Calm down Awazi, calm the F down.”

After a couple of minutes, she felt calmer. She unfolded the note again.

“Off to Ibadan, issues with the case. Didn’t want another row, so didn’t bother to tell you beforehand.”

Well, if he didn’t want a row, he wasn’t going to get one. She would ignore him.

Derin had been expecting a deluge of phone calls from Awazi, so when he didn’t get a single call, he began to wonder if she had seen his not at all. Well, if she hadn’t noticed it, all the better for him. At least he had tried to tell her.

The day flew past and as it approached 1pm, his nerves began to fray. He kept half-expecting his boss to call him in and tell him he couldn’t go again. At about 12:30, he got an email from the MD. He had been sent in the sales presentation earlier and hadn’t been called in yet. He thought that would be it, and patted himself on the back for allowing an hour buffer between when Ope told him to meet her up, and when he told his boss he had to leave. When he opened the email, he let out a long hiss. The man had even travelled. It was only then he went to the MD’s secretary to inquire about him.

“Oga didn’t come in today, he had to go to Abuja on urgent business,” the foolish girl said with an air of importance that nearly got him laughing. Oga was probably rendezvousing with another omoge in Abuja and this one was here forming territory.

He quickly dialed Ope’s number.

“Can I pick you up thirty minutes earlier? I have to escape from the office now now,” he said once she picked up.

“No hello or good afternoon from you, Mr.” she responded coolly.

“Wo, sorry, oya good afternoon, her Excellency,” he responded, rolling his eyes.

“Yes, I’ll be ready, but you’ll have to pick me up at home.” She responded.

“Okay fine.” He said. There was no danger of anything happening in her house when they’d be in a hurry to leave for Ibadan anyway, so yes, he could pick her at home.

He left the office almost immediately, and there wasn’t traffic getting to her Ikeja G.R.A residence. It took him forty five minutes and he decided to chill in the car for the fifteen minutes it would take to reach 1:30 before he called her that he had gotten there. While

he waited, he put his favorite Yanni on repeat and allowed the AC caress his body.

Five minutes later, his phone rang. It was Ope. The moment he picked it up, she said with a chuckle “Derin, you look ridiculous sitting in your car. I can see you from my window and if you were in the UK, people would have called the police on you for loitering. Oya, come inside, I’m nearly done.”

He laughed and cut the call. Her mallam was already opening the gate and so he just drove the car in. He still remembered her flat, so he didn’t need any directions even though the mallam still pointed it out to him.

He knocked lightly and her voice called from inside “come in, the door is opened and I’ve locked the dogs up.” He laughed at the joke. She knew he couldn’t stand dogs and when he used to visit her in their school days in U.I, he always insisted the dogs were locked up before he stepped into the compound or out of her flat in into the compound.

He let himself in, and went through the small hallway into her sitting room. Many things in the flat brought back memories. She now had more money and so had indulged in her love for sculpture. Beautiful pieces of different sizes were arranged all over the living room. The room itself was decorated for one thing – cozy comfort. From the chairs, to the deep soft rug, and even the collapsible chair in the corner. Arranged along the walls were Ope’s pictures at different ages, right from when she was a baby till date, showing

how she had grown. He was looking at these when she cooed from the doorway to her room “do you like what you see?”

He didn't turn back immediately. He knew she was playing on words, asking about the pictures, but asking about something else. She was particularly gifted at double entendres and one of the reasons they bonded initially was the same gift in him.

“Yes,” he said and then he slowly turned around.

“And Yes,” he said, answering the second question she had asked. His voice was huskier this time. She looked gorgeous. For a few moments, they didn't say anything, as if any movement would cause them to end up in each others' arms. All that was said was said with the eyes, interlocked for those minutes. Then she laughed softly and threw her head back. “Derin, let's go o” she said. She picked up her handbag and then another bigger bag. He guessed that would have clothes and her laptop in it.

“I hope you have at least made my sleeping arrangements o. Even if you no dey pay me, you will sha not make me do sufferhead to Ibadan and come back today at this time?” Ope said.

Derin went to her and helped her with the bigger bag. “Madam, rub it in o, you hear? Where you will sleep is not an issue. And no, it is not my mother's house.”

He waited as she turned off all the electrical appliances in the house and then they went into the small passage. That passage. Memories of sexcapades in the place flooded his head, mixed with her fragrance filling the place. It gave him a heady feeling.

She fiddled with her keys at the door and said without looking back “we sure made some memories here, en Mr. Banwo?”

An alarm went off in Derin’s head, and he knew they had to get out of the flat and fast. Standing behind her and looking at the outline of her booty in the gown she was wearing, he could feel the blood flowing from his head, and in its place, pictures of memories she just referred to found a place.

Ope didn’t need to look back to feel him tense up. She suddenly turned around and with the movement said “damn, I forgot my notes...” and then ran smack into him in the same movement. His free arm swung around her to balance her in an involuntary movement and she allowed herself linger in his arms for a while longer than necessary. She felt his hardness against her and she smiled. She made a half hearted attempt to pull away but his arm tightened around her. He kissed her full on the lips with a raw hunger that took her breath away for some moments. He had dropped the bag he was carrying and his free hand reached for her boobs. She got carried away in the moment and then her senses returned with clarity. The plan, she thought to herself, the plan.

With some force, she pulled herself away from his grip and shook her head. "Derin, no!" she said.

Derin would have gone red if he was white. He was the married one, the one who was supposed to be fleeing from Ope and keeping his wits together, and here he was, with the slightest of provocation, almost devouring her. And it had been her and not him that had come to her senses and called them to order. "I'm sorry," he said sheepishly.

"It's hard for me Derin, but I want to keep this strictly professional, helping a friend. Help me here," she said.

"I'm sorry," he muttered again.

"No worries," she said, and then went past him into the living room to get the documents. The moment she went past him, the smile she had been struggling to suppress filled her face. She knew Derin, and she knew she had him now.

"You are not going to be at this thing today, and that is final," Doctor Ajanaku thundered. He was exasperated by this boy. How his son couldn't get it into his thick skull that Derin would be aggravated by his presence and therefore he should stay away, the doctor could not understand. His final outburst had ended it, but he knew Hakeem would be seething somewhere. He sometimes dreaded when the time would come and

he would be too old to have his way like this. This boy would be the end of him.

Rasheed came in with the judge he had carefully gotten to moderate this meeting. Even though the man was a judge, it seemed he was Rasheed's junior at the bar and he respected the SAN.

"Is everything set?" Rasheed asked.

"Yes my friend, be ni" Doctor answered.

"And Hakeem?" Rasheed asked further.

"He won't be attending. While there is some hope of resolving this matter without going to court, I would like to explore it and won't have Hakeem be the reason we eventually still go to court, even if he started it."

"Good," Rasheed said. "we wait. If I read this his lawyer well, they will be on time."

They arrived at Omega Clinic about five minutes before five. There had been some traffic, but it had been light as he had anticipated. He fought back the memories of almost a week ago when they had run up this driveway with a living, kicking Isaac in their arms. He growled, more to himself than anything else "I will get justice for my son."

“Ah, your first words since we left Lagos have been spoken, finally. Now let’s get on with it, shall we?” Ope said and got out of the car.

Derin turned off the ignition and also got out and then they made their way to the reception. The two killer nurses were no longer there, and in their place were a smiling pair. Apart from that, the place was much the same as he remembered, all manner of people sitting down, waiting for their names to be called out aloud by one of the nurses so they could see the almighty doctors.

Ope had a few words with one of the nurses and the lady’s eyes lit up and then she quickly rushed out from behind their table and led them up a flight of stairs and then through a winding passage. Suddenly, as if out of nowhere, they came before a huge mahogany door. The lady told them to wait and then went in. seconds after, she was out and right behind her was an old distinguished looking gentleman in an impeccable white shirt and tailor made grey suit. Ope stretched her hands forward and said formally “Barrister Sanda sir.”

He took her hand and shook it firmly. “Pleased to meet you, Barrister Ope. I prefer to be called Rasheed though, my father owns that Sanda name too much, and I don’t want to be confused with my father at my age,” he responded with a benign looking smile. Still smiling, he turned to face Derin “and you must be Mr. Derin. Accept my sincerest apologies for your loss.” Derin did not smile back.

He turned around and led them into the conference room. Seated already were three people. He led them to each person and did the introductions. Ope had whispered to Derin as they went in “shake their hands, you knucklehead.” So when Rasheed said “you must have met Dr. Ajanaku,” to him, he shook the old man’s hand when he was offered. Then they went on to meet a simple looking lady who was introduced as the chief matron. Ope was not fooled by her simple look. She was probably the real brains behind the running of the hospital. She would not be here if it were not so. Finally, Rasheed introduced them to another distinguished looking gentleman. “Judge Jinadu will be moderating this meeting,” he said. Ope noted the slight bow the judge gave as Rasheed passed him. Old boys’ association things, she thought. She made a mental note to make sure that if by any chance they got Judge Jinadu when they went to court, she would write to request that the case be transferred to another judge.

After all the introductions, they all took their seats, Derin and Ope on one side, the hospital’s team on the other.

“Shall we begin, ladies and gentlemen,” Judge Jinadu said.

The door opened and all the heads in the room turned towards the door. Ope noticed the slight panic that ran through the Doctor, the matron and the lawyer. They must have thought it was someone they had not wanted to come. It was then she realized that

Hakeem was not here. She smiled, realizing he had come against his father's wish.

Good for her. Then she saw who it was and cursed beneath her breath.

"I'll be joining the proceedings," Awazi said from the doorway.

Episode 10

Awazi had taken time to groom herself and she glowed. Rasheed observed the unspoken questions in the room. It was obvious that neither Derin nor his attorney was expecting the woman. This might just turn out interesting.

Derin got up to go and meet Awazi at the door and whispered to her “what are you doing here? Do you mock me?”

“You wanted my support? Well, now you have it all,” she responded with a smirk on her face. She floated past Derin and took her seat beside Ope. Once seated, she turned to Ope and extended her hand “good day, attorney. Thank you for taking our case on such generous terms.”

Her politeness riled Ope and her eyes shot daggers at Awazi. But she produced a smile and took Awazi’s outstretched hand “my pleasure, Mrs. Banwo.” She replied curtly. By now Derin had sat beside Ope, and she seethed at how Awazi had cleverly placed herself between them.

“Shall we begin?” Judge Jinadu said, in a rather shrill voice.

There was a rustling of papers as the two attorneys gathered themselves together and everyone stopped talking.

The judge continued when he was certain he had gotten everyone’s attention “what we want to do here today is to find a middle ground between both parties. Life, they say is give and take, and I hope that we can find something that you are willing to give, he pointed to the doctor’s party, and then turning slightly and pointing to Derin’s party, he said “and that you will be willing to take so that this case does not take up judiciary time, cost both parties huge legal fees and difficult situations. So in a concise and clear manner, devoid of all our legal jargon, claimant’s counsel, please state your grievances and claims”

“Thank you my Lord. My client seeks damages to compensate for the heart wrenching loss of his only son due to the negligence and callousness of members of staff of Omega Clinic, one of which is the Chief Medical Officer, the highest authority in the hospital. In view of this irreversible loss, we want the following: One, that the hospital pays a compensation of Fifty Million Naira to cover medical costs of therapy to have another child in the U.S. Second, that the license of the parties involved, parties being Dr. Hakeem Ajanaku, the doctor involved, the two nurses, the hospital and the owner of the hospital Dr. Haruna Ajanaku be revoked. Third, that the hospital will bear all the

legal expenses that my client may incur in the course of pursuing this case. If these demands are met now, there will be no need to go to court.”

Rasheed watched as the young lawyer spoke with a straight face.

“Defendant’s counsel?” the judge said, signaling that he should speak

“We have said before, will say in this forum and continue to say that we are deeply sorry for the loss suffered by the Banwos. No parent prays for such and only someone who has gone through such a loss truly understands the pain. But, we must also be reasonable in our demands. My client had earlier made it clear that the first demand involving footing medical bills would be taken care of in its entirety, even without solicitation from the claimant. It shows the sense of responsibility that we feel. The third demand would not be necessary, if as we hope these negotiations are successful. Parts of the second demand have been met already. Dr. Hakeem is no longer the CMO of Omega Clinic. The two nurses involved have also been dismissed. It would however be overreaching to demand that the license of a corporate entity like the hospital should be revoked due to acts of some errant officers which it did not sanction. The counsel will agree with me on this matter.”

“The submissions of the defendant’s counsel seem reasonable to me. They have agreed on most of your demands and the separation between a corporate and its

officers are a valid point to note. What say ye?” the judge opined, directing his question at Ope.

“Where the hospital however willfully and knowingly employs doctors of questionable record, and not only employs them, but puts them in positions of leadership, should they not be held liable if the actions of these same doctors result in death? You would agree with me that both the officers and the corporate entity are liable in this kind of scenario”

“None of my staff have a questionable record to the best of my knowledge,” Doctor Ajanaku said indignantly.

“Sir, if this was in court, I would have taken you up on that statement,” Ope said, with mock politeness.

“You will at least substantiate this claim if you indeed believe there is some substance to it? So we can iron it out here.” Rasheed said, touching the doctor lightly to restrain him from barging in again.

“In this forum, I’m under no obligation to substantiate this claim. But as a hint, it is impossible for the doctor here to be unaware of the record of his own son, the former Chief Medical Officer and the one who has primary responsibility for the death of my client’s son, Dr. Hakeem Ajanaku.”

She knew. Rasheed knew without a doubt that she knew about Hakeem. He would not let her age fool him, she was clearly a fighter and she would fight with everything.

“So you would ask a father not to give his son a means of livelihood because of one mistake?” Rasheed asked.

“No, but I would not expect that son is given ultimate responsibility for the lives of many people because of parental love. And when this is done, it means that if the son is again irresponsible, everyone is ready to bear the consequences.”

“Your point is taken. Included in all we are offering, we will offer you the revocation of Dr. Hakeem’s license. But leave the hospital, an institution of impeccable character and with a history that even involves giving care to your client when he was growing up. And also, the good doctor here. Why would you want an illustrious career to end that way?”

“But ending my son’s life that way was thinkable?” Derin said in a low growl.

“Mr. Banwo, I assure you, we don’t think it’s thinkable, but as much as we would wish, we cannot reverse what has happened. We are trying to work out a solution that everyone would find agreeable here, the path of least destruction, if you may. We will extend our offer, beyond which we will not make extensions. Doctor Hakeem will no

longer practice. But the hospital has to be a going concern to pay the bills and fund the reproductive therapy you want it to, so do not kill public confidence in it by your actions. You will achieve nothing. And note, once we go to court, all offers are off the table. So this is a take it or leave it offer. Our cards are on the table now.”

Rasheed observed as the wife tried to keep calm, but he saw through it. She was hoping her husband would take the offer. He turned to her, “and madam, we would like to hear you on this too. In your shoes, I would take the offer and you look like a wise woman.” He emphasized the “wise” and then pointedly looked from her to Ope and back and continued “I’m sure you can prevail on your husband to see reason.”

Awazi almost jumped at the old lawyer’s prompting but caught herself just in time. If she said anything to support the opposition now, Ope would pounce on it and she would lose the other battle she was fighting here. She decidedly rested further in the comfy chair and refused to respond to the prodding.

Ope had hoped Awazi would take the bait and she even paused momentarily to give her an opportunity to speak. When Awazi said nothing, she bit her lip and rolled her eyes internally and then responded to their demand

“My client had made it clear to me prior to this meeting that anything short of a total compliance with our claims would be unacceptable to him,” she paused and looked at

Derin who nodded in the affirmative. Awazi's heart sank. Ope continued

“therefore, I think we should prepare to meet in court. And sir, with all due respect, I would rather a different judge presides on this matter.”

“What are you insinuating, counsel?” the judge asked.

“Well, except my knowledge of legal procedures is fuzzy, case management conferences do not hold outside court. So holding it here suggests things I would rather not be troubled by when we actually go to court.”

The judge was about to say something when Rasheed restrained him. “Very well then,” Rasheed responded. “Have it your way. But I hope you are ready, I want this started quickly and done with, so I will get us first hearing next week. Since your knowledge of legal procedure is so strikingly clear, you will be aware that we need to do front loading of our evidence now.”

Ope sensed danger in this line of talk, but she also knew she couldn't back down now “yes,” she responded tersely, wondering where the old man was going.

“Well, we need to ascertain the circumstances of death, since it will be very instructive in our argument,” Rasheed said.

“But this hospital issued a death certificate, stating clearly the cause of death, as...” she tried to recall the term she had read in the death certificate, but couldn’t. Awazi helped her “febrile convulsion” she put in.

“Yes!” Ope said, “that’s it. What else would you like to ascertain then?”

Rasheed maintained an even voice as he responded “the doctor is the expert in these matters and he will explain.”

Ope saw the doctor sit up on cue as if they had rehearsed the move and her growing concern grew into dread. He began to explain “there are details that the cursory observation that the doctor carried out to write the cause of death cannot produce and which might be material to this. A specialist, a pathologist needs to perform an autopsy on the baby to establish these facts. The normal procedure when you intend to pursue a case that concerns a death, you delay burial of the deceased to have the autopsy performed.”

Derin cut in angrily “are you suggesting that I should not have buried my six month old son immediately?”

“Mr. Banwo, I am not suggesting anything, I am only explaining procedure, procedure

you should have found out since you are so bent on destroying me. If you have buried the baby, which I assume you have, in order to go ahead with this case, we will require you to dig up the baby and have a pathologist perform an autopsy.”

“Never! I will not dig up my baby! It’s an abomination!” Derin exclaimed, banging his fist on the table with each phrase.

Rasheed took it up from there “ah, Mr. Banwo, I’m afraid we cannot progress with the case if this vital piece of evidence is not provided, as we can argue that you are withholding vital evidence that is material to the case.”

Judge Jinadu said “the defendant’s counsel is correct. Any judge would strike the case out if such an argument is presented.”

Derin jumped to his feet, shouting “so this was your plan all along! You want to get away with killing my baby and so connived with this judge! Never!”

“Calm the fuck down!” Ope shouted.

“Decorum people,” Rasheed said, more amused at their theatrics than annoyed.

Ope composed herself and spoke to them “I need to speak with my client for a few

minutes alone.”

“Derin! Outside! Now!” she ordered.

She went outside and Derin followed suit. Awazi got up quietly and followed the duo.

Ope was saying in a low voice “Derin, what the hell is wrong with you? those kinds of outbursts make us look like a stupid juvenile bunch. I won’t be made a fool of in front of a senior colleague.” She took virtually no notice of Awazi.

“And,” Derin responded “I should take their suggestion of digging my child up lying low?”

“This your foolish foolish anger hasn’t left you! Couldn’t you see that they had planned that move already? It would have been obvious to a two year old! Damn!”

“So is there any truth in what they say? If we don’t let them do an autopsy on Isaac, we don’t have a case?” Derin asked.

“Sadly, they do. It’s either that or we drop the case. And from this position, they have taken away their deal from the table, so we get nothing, absolutely NOTHING if we back down now.” Ope said.

Awazi stepped up. "I'd like to talk to my husband, ALONE" she said.

Ope was riled. "Look, madam, I understand you want to play you're my husband is mine games, but right now is not the time for that. We are in a battle here and we must have all our wits about us."

Awazi sniggered "and who is playing any games with you? I don't have to do anything to make it a fact that he's my husband ma. And while he might have engaged you, it is WE that are your clients as a couple, and we'd like to agree now and give you our position, thank you."

Without waiting for whatever response Ope was concocting Awazi pulled Derin aside. Ope felt like punching her black face. The nerve that she had, making her stand there alone like that.

Awazi was saying to Derin "look, dear, these people obviously had these plans, and our lawyer didn't foresee their moves. We need to do what is best for us, and not for her bruised ego."

"they cannot just get away with this Awazi, I can't just let them get away with it."

"But honey, are you going to let them dig Isaac up?" Awazi asked, putting an arm on his

back.

“No, I couldn’t possibly want that. It’s an abomination,” he responded.

“And it would break my heart. Let’s go back in and try to get them to reconsider that offer. Are we together on this?”

“Yes,” he responded.

The moment Derin turned and Ope saw his face, she knew what he was going to say.

When they entered, Rasheed noticed a visibly annoyed Ope sit down. He smiled, his plan was working. It would seem the wife had prevailed on the husband and the lawyer would be forced to eat her words.

“After serious deliberations, my clients have decided to reconsider and take your offer.”

She said with a straight face.

Rasheed noticed she said clients, rather than client this time. Wife was winning big time.

“Well, that is the understanding we were hoping you would come to. We however would only be willing to give our original offer, sans the revocation of Dr. Hakeem’s license at this point,” Rasheed responded, rubbing his hands.

Ope looked to Derin and he looked to Awazi. Awazi nodded and Ope didn’t wait to get Derin’s response. How did she ever love this imp? “We will be willing to take your offer as it is...”

Suddenly, the door opened. “Now who in God’s heaven is that,” Bintu spoke for the first time. Every head in the room turned. Derin shouted, “You!” and got up on his feet in anger.

Dr. Ajanaku held his head in his hands and said “this boy will be the end of me. You this foolish boy, iwo omokomo yi, what the hell are you doing here?”

Ope smiled.

Episode 11

Derin felt the heat rise in his ears as the killer of his son sauntered in languidly. He turned on the older Ajanaku and raked “and this is how you take him out of the hospital system abi? I thought you said he was no longer a staff of this hospital? What then is he doing here, dressed like a doctor on duty!”

“I assure you, Mr. Banwo that this is not as it seems.” Rasheed responded, as his friend was too flustered to say anything. The foolish boy had not only chosen to come after all the stern warnings and repeated explanations, he had decided to dress in doctor’s overalls and even hung a stethoscope on to complete the look.

“What is not as it looks?” Hakeem’s voice was grating, and he spoke with a slur as lazy as his movement. “I’m not good enough to show to the world, en, daddy?”

“If you were any good, any good whatsoever,” Dr. Ajanaku said in exasperation, “wouldn’t you have the common sense to stay away from here?”

“Oh, because I’m not you precious good son, I’m the one you wish died abi? Those

years ago, you wish it was me that took the car out, that had the accident. Then you would have had all your problems solved by a single fatal accident. Me, your disgrace of a son would have been out of your hair forever, six feet below somewhere, with grass growing over, while Sule, your star child would have been alive and you would be happy. Well, I have news for you; I didn't die like you would have hoped!"

Bintu sprang up and spoke to him sharply. "shut up, you this omo radarada! Why would you say such nonsense to your father in the presence of strangers?"

Hakeem looked at her with a mixture of emotions showing through his eyes – envy, anger and disdain. "Oh, so you are not content with stealing my position beside my father, you now tell me how to talk to him? the truth is bitter abi or you tell me, am I lying? Did I speak one single lie? It is because of the likes of you and Sule that I would never be good enough in his eyes, no matter what I do!"

He came into the light now, and Ope was quick to observe what she had suspected the moment he spoke. His eyes were glazed over, and his movements were not as coordinated as they should have been. For someone who hadn't been looking out for it, they might have passed it off, but all the signs were clear.

She was genial when she spoke "Dr. Hakeem, please have your seat. We were about to get to the crux of today's meeting when you came in"

Derin spun around and looked at her inquiringly, but her eyes told him not to say anything.

Awazi suddenly got up and raced round the table towards Hakeem as he sat down. She had kicked off her heels and was upon him in no time, before anyone could react. The sight of him for the first time since that day, looking so unflustered a mere week after he had practically killed Isaac unhinged something in her. She began to hit him wildly, shouting, clawing, and scratching. “Baby Killer,” she shouted, in the midst of tears, “Son of the devil!” she shouted again, hitting him some more. Hakeem did not defend himself; there was just something off about him. The much smaller woman stood over him, hitting and screaming away as he fell into a chair.

Bintu quickly got up and moved to restrain the woman. She had seen this kind of thing before and she knew that if the woman wasn't restrained, she would end up killing somebody. It was some repressed kind of anger that tethered at the edge of madness, and only the object of the anger could trigger it, she couldn't remember what the journal she had seen it in called it now. The woman was not seeing or hearing anything now, and they needed to act fast.

She dragged the screaming Awazi away from the cowering Hakeem. “Foolish boy,” she muttered under her breath.

Derin watched the drama unfolding before his eyes. His wife had suddenly gone berserk. He had never ever seen her that way in twelve years of marriage and fourteen years of knowing her.

Still breathing heavily, Awazi came back to their own side of the table and then sat down. She looked around the table slowly and then rested her eyes on Ope. "we may continue," she said in a measured tone. No one saw her hands trembling under the table.

But one person's trembling hands were not under the table. Hakeem's hands trembled on the table.

Ope took the cue from Awazi, as calm settled in the room. She noticed that Bintu had positioned herself between Awazi and Hakeem. The woman wasn't taking any chances.

"Whilst my client was about to make an announcement, I would like to bring something up which is material to this matter." Ope began.

Through the clouds of her anger, Awazi could sense that Ope had found something to latch on to that would change Derin's mind. She blamed her display of a lack of self control silently for this. She looked at Derin, willing him to abide by their decision. When

she reached to take his hand, he withdrew his hand unconsciously.

Across the table, Rasheed sensed that the lawyer was on to something.

“Dr. Ajanaku,” she was addressing him directly now “were you aware that Hakeem here is a drug addict when you employed him as a doctor in your hospital, and then went a step further to name him as your Chief Medical Officer?”

The room fell silent for a moment. Everyone had been caught unawares by Ope’s question.

Rasheed spoke quietly, his eyes dark embers of malice as he responded “counsel, your tenses are wrong. There is a difference between was and is. Dr. Hakeem had had drug issues in the past, but by the time he returned to Nigeria and started practicing at Omega Clinic, he had been clean for two years. You cannot discriminate against a man for a past he had left behind and been totally rehabilitated from.”

Derin exploded! “You put the life of thousands in the hands of a druggie! You put the life of Isaac in the hands of an unstable drug addict!”

Rasheed again responded with measured restraint “Mr. Banwo, I would like to point out to you again that Dr. Hakeem was not addicted to any drugs at the point of employing

him in Omega clinic in both capacities.”

Ope went in for the kill “you are then aware, that Dr. Hakeem was involved in a matter in the hospital he was working in the U.S and he had his license revoked. He had caused a patient to lose a baby, and investigations had revealed that he had taken drugs that night, before he had been called in for the emergency. He narrowly escaped jail term, but lost his license, before fleeing to Nigeria.”

“That still doesn’t mean he was on drugs while working in Nigeria. That event is therefore not going to be material to this case.” Rasheed shot back.

“Counsel, have you taken a close look at Dr. Hakeem this evening?” Ope asked.

Rasheed turned to look at Hakeem. The eyes. The trembling hands. The fool had been using and then brought himself here.

He slowly turned back to Ope and said nothing.

“I thought so,” Ope said. “Derin,” she said without looking at him.

Derin’s voice was even. “I will see you all in court, there is no deal, can never be any deal!”

Awazi turned Derin around. "Derin please," was all she could muster.

Derin said nothing in response.

"They will dig Isaac up!" Awazi said more earnestly. The tears flooded her eyes now, but she could see that Derin was unmoved. He shrugged her hands off his shoulder and glanced at Hakeem.

"Then so be it, so help me God," he responded.

Awazi began to shake, the words tumbling out of her "is it because of what I did now? Derin please, don't punish me this way. Let it go, please."

"You think this is about you? Let me ask you something, were you rational when you hit him? No you weren't. But you did it anyway. No one held you back when you expressed your anger. Do not hold me back, woman, when I pursue my justice."

Awazi began to mechanically pack her things, mumbling to herself "it's all my fault, this is all my fault. If I hadn't, then he wouldn't." she walked out of the room, unescorted.

"Mr. Banwo, I beg you to reconsider." Dr. Ajanaku beseeched Derin. "Look beyond my

son, and myself. Look at your wife, and look at your home. it is tearing you apart, take it from a man that has lost an adult beloved son before.”

“I can take care of myself, thank you,” Derin responded curtly.

Bintu stood up and looked straight into Derin’s eyes. “You are supposed to protect that woman you just allowed leave here in that state of mind. Are you any better than Hakeem?”

Derin did not respond. All the responses that formed in his head seemed inadequate.

“That will be all, thank you,” Ope quickly stepped in. She turned to Derin. “We were taking our leave.”

They gathered their things and slowly left the room. Derin look back at Hakeem on more time, and then at Bintu’s unyielding eyes. Those eyes, and the words its owner spoke to him seconds ago haunted him. He moved Ope quickly along, and they left.

He had thought Awazi would be waiting outside, but she was nowhere to be found.

They went to the carpark, and he looked around but couldn’t find her car. “Where has this woman gone now,” he sighed under his breath. He called both her numbers, and they both rang out. Ope placed a hand on his shoulder. “She will be fine, maybe she

just needs some time alone.”

His phone rang and he thought it was Awazi. He quickly picked the phone until he heard another familiar voice.

“Derin, you came to Ibadan and you didn’t tell me your mother?”

The doctor had probably called his mum.

“Maami, I came for the case, and since I know how you feel about it, I didn’t think...”

“Shut up you this boy! Even if we have differences, I am still your mother. Where are you now?” she asked

“Almost out of Ibadan ma. I’m headed back to Lagos now, I have something to work on for my boss tomorrow,” he lied.

“Derin, you are lying to me, your mother? You are still in Ibadan, is it not now that you finished the meeting you came for?”

Derin was annoyed. “Maami, so you are in cahoots with the doctor abi? Against your own son? Abi how else would you know we just finished if he didn’t call you? You are

now in my enemy's camp, talking to them, and you wonder why I'm not talking to you about the case."

"What is wrong with him asking me to talk some sense into you, Derin? In spite of all I have told you, you still want to go ahead with this case? Is it that your Hausa wife that is pushing you?"

"Maami, leave Awazi alone! You think I don't have a mind of my own? Oh, and so you can know, your friendly doctor put his drug addict son there to kill your grandson!"

She was silent for a moment. The drug addict angle was news to her, apparently. When she recovered from the shock of that, she responded "Derin, it your interest I have at heart. I'm coming now to meet you," she said.

"Mama, don't bother. I'm leaving now, and no to whatever you want to come and say, if it's against going for this case. Good night ma."

"Derin, I am still talking to you!" She shouted.

"Maami, o daaro. I have to go." He responded and cut the connection.

"Are we really going to Lagos this late?" Ope asked.

“No,” Derin responded, “just didn’t want Maami’s wahala tonight”

Ope smiled again.

Awazi drove through the haze of her own tears on the deathtrap that the Lagos-Ibadan expressway was at night. Fortunately, it was a Friday night, and the traffic was on the other side of the road, going to Ibadan. She raced past Ofada, Ibafo and Mowe and in no time Berger was in sight. It had taken a little less than an hour to make the trip at speeds that made her little Honda, Derin’s old car feel light on the road. Thoughts coursed through her mind during the journey recurrently “Derin chose what she wanted over what I wanted. He chose to dig Isaac. She played him so well. Do I even deserve to have him as my husband, seeing how well she knows him and how I fail at reaching him every time I try?”

Suddenly, the little car stuttered and pattered. She had the presence of mind to maneuver it to the side of the road before it stopped finally. “Oh my God, not now, not here,” she said, hitting the steering.

She knew next to nothing about cars, but she guessed she had pushed the car over its

limit in her race to Lagos. She dialed their mechanic's number. Switched off. She tried Kamal's number but it just rang out.

Finally, she called Samir.

Samir heard his phone ring on the dining table he was charging it on. He dillydallied about tearing himself away from the football he was watching to pick it up. Barcelona, his team was uncharacteristically behind and they had been piling the pressure on their opponents for the past ten minutes now without a goal. He knew it was only a matter of time before the goal came and he didn't want to miss it. He allowed the phone ring out, but the caller called again.

"Damn it, I should have bought that extension box," he said, referring to the one that would have allowed him charge his phone right beside his sofa.

"Hello," he said sharply.

"Hello," the vaguely familiar female voice said. "Am I on to Samir," she inquired.

"Yes, and who am I speaking with please?" he responded gruffly.

“It’s me, Awazi,” she responded.

He smiled and scrambled to recover “sorry I didn’t quite get your voice. Let me turn down my TV.”

He quickly turned the volume down. “I’m here.” He said.

“It’s okay. I would like to banter, but I’m in dire straits now. I need your help.”

The tone of her voice was so earnest that Samir got worried. “What exactly is the problem, Awaz? He queried.

“I’m on my way back from Ibadan, and my car just stopped working now now. I’m stranded just after Berger. Mechanic is unreachable and Derin is in Ibadan.”

“You said you are in around Berger?” he asked.

“Yes, further down the road from where you’ll see people selling bread and co.”

“Okay, I know the place. I’m in Omole Phase 2, so I’m not that far away. I’ll be with you in some minutes.”

“Oh, Samir, thank you, thank you so much!” she gushed.

“Okay dear, see ya shortly,” he said.

He hung the call up. Well, she had called him eventually, even if he had not been the first she called. That was a starting point. He wore the jersey he had on but changed from his shorts to a pair of jeans and left the house.

Ope lay in the cozy hotel bed, wrapped in nothing but the big hotel towel. She had taken time to scrub every inch of herself clean from all the grit of the day and right now, she couldn't be bothered to wear anything. Two rooms away, she wondered what Derin would be doing now. she had ordered a bottle of wine earlier and put it in the small tabletop fridge in the room. She began to piece together her ensemble. The bra. The g-string. The silk nightwear which was decent enough to wear in the hallway but still moved with her and gave the faintest hints of what was under.

She dialed his room number on her extension. “Awake?” she cooed the moment he picked the call.

Episode 12

“Now you are happy abi?” Dr. Ajanaku shouted at Hakeem.

“Doctor, please take it easy, you know your condition,” Bintu said, placing a hand on his shoulder.

Rasheed spoke sternly to Hakeem “do you want to kill your father? You know his condition, and yet you do everything possible to increase his blood pressure. You really should leave.”

“I should leave? A place that is my inheritance? What gives any of you the right to tell me to leave here?” Hakeem shot back.

“It is not yet yours! And I am convinced now it should never become yours.” Dr. Ajanaku said, obviously pained. “I tried my best to raise you properly, but you just refused to take training.”

“By sending me to a different school from your precious son so I wouldn’t taint him? By allowing him do what he wanted, political science, while I was forced to be what you wanted, a doctor? By treating my mother without respect for years?” Hakeem responded mockingly.

“What! I respected and loved your mother until her death. What is this drug induced nonsense that you are spewing? Rasheed! Get the security to come and take this omo buruku out of my sight before I do something I will regret forever.” Dr. Ajanaku’s nostril flared as he spoke.

“Hakeem, you heard your father, come and start going, instead of bringing disgrace on yourself by being bundled out before all the staff who have called you sir!” Rasheed said.

“Hakeem, for once, be reasonable. Don’t drive your father into another stroke!” Bintu said, her voice betraying the anger she felt for the first time.

“Shut up, you this hypocritical woman! You are afraid that I will speak the truth abi. You think we didn’t know how you became the second only to my father in this hospital? You think we didn’t know that you have been sleeping with him all these years? Really? My mother knew, but she kept quiet and hurt every day. You both didn’t even bother to be

discreet. You rubbed it in her face! And you are here talking proper, looking proper, talking about loving and respecting her until death. Oh please!”

Bintu’s eyes flashed like lightning. “How dare you, you this small boy? What do you know?” She turned to Dr. Ajanaku “Haruna, caution this your boy. Abi is it because we are referring to him as a son? It is true what our people say – the house is peaceful, only because the bastard is yet to reach maturity.”

“Woman, will you control yourself!” Dr. Ajanaku thundered.

“What is she saying dad? What does she mean by that?” Hakeem asked, the import of what Bintu had said hitting him like a cudgel.

“What I am saying,” Bintu responded for herself “is that no true Ajanaku behaves like you. You should ask that saintly mother of yours if she was alive if you were truly one!”

“Bintu!” Rasheed shouted.

Hakeem turned to his father, “Dad, is it true,” he asked in a low voice, the most sober he had been all evening.

Dr. Ajanaku turned away, without answering. Hakeem had his answer. He simply turned

around and left the room without another word.

“inu e ti dun, you are happy now abi? Even if he was behaving like a child, you had to forget your age and join him?” Doctor Ajanaku said to Bintu in anger.

“So, I should keep quiet and allow the bastard talk to me anyhow abi? Is that..”

That was all she had said before they heard the loud bang. Rasheed ran in the direction of the office it had come from. Dr. Ajanaku was right behind him. The sound had come from his office. The smell of gunpowder hung in the room and hit him the moment he entered. In the Chief Medical Officer’s official chair, Hakeem sat down. The thought corrected itself in Rasheed’s head, Hakeem’s body sat down. There was a huge gaping hole in his head where the antique Colt M1911 11mm bullet had hit. Behind him, Rasheed heard a thumping sound. When he turned around, Dr. Ajanaku was on the ground, his face contorted in anguish. Bintu rushed in and knelt over him. “Oh no,” Rasheed cried, slapping his forehead. “Damn that Derin for being so stubborn!”

Samir reached Awazi twenty minutes after he left home. It was one of those incidental strokes of luck that her car had happened to break down right in his backyard. He could see immediately she had been crying. “Sorry it took that long, there was slight traffic

getting out of the estate. Let's get out of here, and then you can tell me what happened." She merely nodded and he set about tying her car to his own. When he was done, he told her "You'll need to get in your car to control its movement as I pull it in. Thankfully, the road in is free so we should have little or no wahala getting in. hope you'll be able to do that."

Again she nodded and then got into the car. Samir got into his own car and started the engine. He had decided to bring the jeep for this one. Slowly, they inched along and thirty minutes later, they were safely in front of his house.

"Would I still be able to get a cab home from your estate at this time?" Awazi asked as soon as they parked.

"Why don't you call your hubby to come pick you up?" he asked.

"He's not in Lagos, so he can't. I left him back in Ibadan," she said flatly.

"What! How could he allow you leave and drive to Lagos at that time? Was there an emergency or something?" Samir queried.

"You aren't listening to me. I said I left him there. It had nothing with him allowing me or not."

“I don’t know what has happened, but I’m not your husband. I think I have more sense than to let you leave here in this condition. Let’s go in, before the neighbors begin to wonder what’s going on.”

“Samir, I have to go home...” she responded stubbornly.

“And who exactly are you in such a hurry to go home to meet?” Samir asked with a raised eyebrow. Awazi’s eyes dropped and she didn’t answer. “I thought so,” Samir said. “Now, let’s go inside, madam.” He said firmly.

With that, he opened the small pedestrian portion of his gate and they went inside. The house itself was a big bungalow. The compound grounds were laid with interlocking stones, and the lawn was in pristine conditions, well taken care of. Everything spoke of comfort and restrained affluence.

“You live all alone here, Samir?” Awazi asked.

“You’re astonished at how neat and orderly the place is? Don’t worry, it’s not about me that’s responsible for it, that’s paid help. But yes, I live here all alone.”

“You are not serious, have you ever done anything for yourself all your life? Of course I

knew it was paid help.” She chuckled a bit, in spite of herself.

They got to the dark brown front door and he let them in. The living room was spacious, with plush colorful beanbags arranged all over, in vantage positions to view the huge TV that dominated one of the walls.”Fulani boy,” she said teasingly, “there are no chairs in your house.”

He bowed low and then went into the kitchen. He returned with a glass of water, and Awazi gulped it down greedily. “Thanks, I actually really needed that,” she said.

They settled into separate beanbags, and when they had fully relaxed, Samir asked earnestly “so are you going to tell me what all this is about?”

“If I said I wasn’t wake, saying so would be a lie, wouldn’t it? My mum always told me the only question you could never truthfully answer as yes would be if you were asleep or dead,” Derin responded to Ope’s question, laughing softly.

“Alright, Mr. Banwo, now that we’ve established the fact that you are awake, and I am awake too, may I request your company, seeing that I’m in Ibadan because of your matter and sleep has chosen to go on a vacation right now.”

“Ope, I don’t know if that would be a good idea, considering what happened this afternoon at your place...” Derin said

She cut in “except you plan to rape me, Mr. Banwo, I seem to have been able to stop you this afternoon. Now cut the chatter, wear your clothes, I’m coming over.” He was trying to say something but she hung up.

She swung her long legs over the side of the bed and retrieved the wine and the two complementary glasses from the fridge. She stood briefly before the almost full length mirror and surveyed her reflection. She pulled the nightwear over her cleavage to hide the lace that was peeking out from under it. Subtlety and his imagination must do the trick. “Nice Opeyemi!” she said to herself, and then waltzed into the hallway. The reaction of the man she passed confirmed what her mirror had just told her – she was looking hot like that. She turned back, and sure enough, he had turned back to look at her. She winked at him, laughed and continued walking.

She knocked lightly on the door. There was no answer, so she knocked again, this time somewhat harder. Derin’s voice came from inside “coming,” and then the door opened moments later. She savored the look on Derin’s face for a few seconds before she gently shoved him aside and went into the room. In typical Derin fashion, the room was well arranged and none of his clothes were in sight. He was wearing one of those

moslem embroidered kaftans which she guessed his wife must have gotten him.

“Would you be kind enough to shut the door sir,” she said as she sat down, chuckling.

“Haha,” was his response as he did just that. “I see you plan to get me drunk before you leave here tonight,” he said, eyeing the wine in her hands.

“Well, I’m certain the Derin I know won’t get drunk over one bottle of wine,” she retorted, the challenge in her eyes. He took the challenge and sat opposite her as she opened the bottle and poured the wine.

They were halfway through the bottle when they kissed.

Awazi found herself crying for the second time that week to Samir. He joked “it would seem I have the crying effect on you dear,” as he offered her napkins to clean her tears off.

“Samir, you know it isn’t you, but I just don’t know anymore. Every time I try to do something right about this whole matter, my temper just gets in the way, and it all goes wrong, and that Ope seems to win without even trying.” She sighed heavily.

“It’s not about you Awazi. I’m a man and I can tell you categorically that your husband isn’t doing right here. How could he want to dig his own son up? Leave his wife to drive to Lagos in the frame of mind you were? Appointing his ex, with whom he had an affair while married to you as lawyer? My dear, you are even more patient than most of the women I’ve dated.”

“It’s just painful; my home is falling apart before my eyes, Samir. And it would seem I’m grabbing at straws with each attempt to save it.” She sobbed lightly

Samir got up and joined her on the beanbag she was seated on. He put an arm around her, speaking softly to her “it’s not about you dear, it is so not about you.”

Her head told her to get up from the beanbag and leave immediately, but she found herself melding into Samir’s embrace and allowing herself to be cuddled. They stayed this way quietly for what seemed like a long time, but was in fact less than ten minutes. It felt as if any movement, any attempt to do anything beyond cuddling would shatter the magic. Gently, Samir began to kiss her in places that were both safe and tantalizing at the same time. He kissed her forehead, then her eyes and then her earlobes. Still, she didn’t listen to her head, she rested in his arms. Then he kissed her on her lips, and she kissed him back. Her head stopped speaking to her and she abandoned herself to his touch.

Bintu had gone into automaton mode since Doctor Ajanaku had a recurrence of stroke. All his vitals had skyrocketed but she had worked extremely hard, marshalling doctors as if she was one. They followed her instructions without question until the specialist that she called came. Once he took charge, she went back to the doctor's office where the police Rasheed had called were already at work. He had used his contacts to get a full homicide team there in record time, and already, he was managing them. Police could be tricky and they didn't need them looking at this matter beyond what it was – an unfortunate suicide. She quietly retreated into the conference room, and then the floodgate of tears opened.

For thirty minutes, they had huffed and puffed. An exasperated lingerie clad Ope stood over a naked Derin. "What is this about?"

Derin could not understand what was happening to him. It seemed his mind was somehow affecting his body. The kiss had led to other things and he lay naked in no time. And then unusually, he noticed he wasn't erect yet. His heart began to race, and the more he worried about it, the more they tried, the more stubbornly his member

stayed flaccid. Ope tried everything she knew in the books until thirty minutes later, she got off him, and asked that question in exasperation. He still hadn't gotten it up.

"I don't understand what this is about," he said. Even saying anything felt awkward in the situation.

"Maybe it's the stress of the whole day, the case and all. I guess I'll just let you be then. Wake me up when you do, so I can get ready for the Lagos trip."

With that, she left an ashen faced Derin in the room.

Samir cursed whichever of his American friends had chosen now to call him. It was as if the sound of the ringing phone had jarred Awazi from lala land. She had suddenly pushed him off and told him shakily, "Samir, you will take me home tonight. I cannot trust myself to remain here all night, dan Allah."

She got up and went to his guest bathroom. Almost as if on cue, the moment the door to the bathroom was shut, her phone rang. Samir glanced at the caller ID and a cloud formed over his face. He picked the call. "Hello," he said coldly.

On the other end of the phone, Derin was stunned that a male voice said hello when the call with his wife connected.

“Who is this, and what are you doing with my wife’s phone at this time of the night?” he asked, confused.

“My name is Samir, a friend, who drove onto the express to rescue her from a broken down vehicle when you were unavailable, Mr. Banwo. I think you should do a better job looking out for your wife, honestly,” Samir added the last line with a tongue dripping with sarcasm.

“Mr. Samir, I don’t take kindly to men answering my wife’s mobile phone by 11pm and telling me how to do my job as a husband. Where is she?”

“Oh, I should have left her with a broken down car on the express?” Samir asked in anger. This guy was so selfish in his thinking. “You should be thanking me for doing what you should have been doing, or should not even have happened Mr.”

“Hand the damn phone to Awazi!” Derin shouted.

“I’ll tell her you called when she comes out of the bathroom,” Samir said, and hung up before Derin could respond.

In Ibadan, Derin sat up, fuming on his hotel bed, waiting for Awazi's call.

Episode 13

Samir navigated to the network connections of the phone and unchecked the mobile network option. Awazi would not be receiving any further calls from Derin tonight. He heard her fiddling with the toilet door and quickly dumped the phone, face down. She would not even know he had called.

She came out of the bathroom and looked at him so intensely, his skin crawled. He felt for a moment that she knew what he had done, and was about to begin to explain himself when she said "I don't think it's wise for me to stay here tonight. I don't know what I was thinking, but it's just 11:30. I'm sure I can get home, whether you decide to drop me off or not. I'll send the mechanic down here tomorrow morning to come fix the car and bring it down home."

"Haba, gaskiya Awazi, how would I allow you to leave here for home this late? No, I insist..."

"Samir, you are not allowing or disallowing anything. I am not asking for permission from

you to go home, except this is a kidnap, abi? I am telling you that I'm going home tonight, because I don't trust myself to stop a second time." Awazi said firmly.

Samir got up, and went beside Awazi. He attempted to put an arm on her shoulder but she quickly put distance between them.

"Samir! I said I do not trust myself. Please!" Awazi said.

"Okay, okay, okay..." Samir mumbled, raising his hands in the air. "The house is big enough, I'll stay in the living room, you can stay in any of the rooms and lock it from inside, if that makes you feel better..."

"Samir! Menene? You are not hearing me! Even if I left the door open, you would not touch me without my consent except I'm mistaken, in which case I should flee. Locked doors cannot stop what I'm afraid of – the fact that if we talked for long enough, my resolve will fail me. You know what, the more we talk about this, the later it gets. This is Lagos, even 1AM isn't too late to move around."

With that she began gathering her things. Samir saw she was truly serious about leaving, and he quickly offered "I can't let you start finding your way yourself at this time, and I see that you're bent on going. Let me drop you off."

Awazi considered it for a moment. She had been planning on calling her cab guy and hoping he'd still be working at this time. Well, if Samir was willing to go and drop her off, then it was fine.

“Nagode Samir, I appreciate so much, and really sorry for the inconvenience.” She said.

Samir mumbled something about not being an issue and they made their way to the car.”

Rasheed shook the head of the police team as they made their way to the morgue with the body. The office was sealed and he was finally able to see the specialist who had concluded his examination of Dr. Ajanaku.

“How is he?” he asked the bespectacled doctor.

“I’m afraid this is not good at all,” he responded, running a hand across the bald center of his head. “His body was not fully recovered from the first stroke, and this one was much more severe. I don’t mean to be alarmist, but most people that have strokes this close lose the use of at least some parts of their body. I doubt if Dr. Omega will be able to walk properly again, and he might become paralyzed on one side of his body. I’m

sorry.”

“Ha! What are you saying doctor! An active man like Haruna, that would be like a death sentence for him.” Rasheed said.

“I can imagine sir. It’s really unfortunate. I will do all I can do for him.”

“Okay doctor. Thank you very much for responding to us this late.” Rasheed said and shook him.

With that, he left for the conference room to be alone. He needed to think.

Bintu scrambled to dry her eyes as the big doors of the conference room creaked open, the quiet amplifying the sound.

“Bintu, you are here?” Rasheed said flatly, more of a query, than a statement. She didn’t respond to that, but asked, “have you spoken with the consultant?”

“The doctor is unsure of many things now, but he said his preliminaries tell him that Haruna will be fine, just like the first time. We don’t have much to worry about,” he lied.

“Rasheed, you’re not a great liar, for a lawyer,” she said. “I’m a nurse and I know that

two strokes in such a short space is very much to worry about. Come out clean to me please. How is he?"

Rasheed sighed. "The doctor says he might not walk again or have use of one of the sides of his body..."

She burst into hysterical tears. "Ha! What have I done! Me and my big mouth, why couldn't I keep it shut! Now, I've turned him into a vegetable, for what?"

"Bintu, it's not you!" Rasheed said emphatically. "it's a lot of people, not you. Haruna who married a woman he didn't love and ended up beating her into another man's arms. His wife, who brought a bastard into the house. The bastard, who, in spite of love and care who chose to behave exactly like what he was, a bastard!"

"Rasheed, don't talk about Haruna like that, because he cannot defend himself!" Bintu shot at him.

"Iwo lo mo, na you know. But the boy had it coming. And yes," his tone darkened "while at the matter of all these foolish children that don't think of consequences, that other boy has it coming for him now."

"Who?" Bintu asked, a quizzical look on her face.

“Who else? Derin of course. He’s the one whose stubbornness let us here. If only he had been reasonable, listened to the doctor, his mother, even his wife, we would not be here in the first place.”

“Yes, that impudent boy. It’s because of him that my Haruna lies there now. What are you thinking?” Bintu’s voice was filled with the malice of a woman who had been in possession of something she couldn’t show proudly and even that had been taken from her now.

Before Rasheed could answer, she continued “shebi he was trying to take away Haruna’s livelihood from him by shutting the hospital down without thinking? Well, his livelihood should be taken away first and let him see how that feels.”

“I’m already thinking of that. This time, Arinze has no choice but to do what I want. And that’s just the first thing. I will finish that boy.”

Agatha had been unable to sleep. She had given Derin time to get to Lagos from Ibadan and had been trying his number since. Her anxiety had been heightened when she had been unable to reach him. She had decided to call his wife’s number but that had been

unreachable too. She was in the living room, watching a movie on TV when her phone rang beside her. She speedily reached for the phone, hoping it was Derin. "Unknown number," she mumbled. "who is this one at this ungodly hour," she said to herself and was going to ignore the call, when it occurred to her that it might be Derin. She pressed the green button and held the phone to her ear, waiting for the caller to speak, rather than say hello.

"Mrs. Banwo, my name is Bintu," a female voice said.

She sighed. It wasn't Derin calling. "yes, how may I help you?" she asked.

"I'm the chief matron of Omega Hospital." Bintu said, in the same cold voice she had learnt to use with her nurses when they were being silly.

"Ha, hope there is nothing wrong with Derin abi why are you calling me at this time?"

Agatha's curiosity was piqued.

"No, as far as I know, nothing is wrong with Derin." And then after a brief pause, Bintu added with meaning "yet".

"Madam, what are you trying to say? Are you calling to threaten me or my son?" Agatha asked aggressively.

“Mrs. Banwo, your son, your stubborn, heady, impertinent son has caused me great pain. Doctor Ajanaku’s only surviving son committed suicide today, a shot to his head, after your son insisted on ruining us. Immediately that happened, the doctor had a stroke again, and is about to be reduced to a vegetable.” At that, her voice broke, and the pain came through when she continued. “I will ruin your son. I will make sure he loses everything, just as he has made me lose everything I hold dear.”

“Look, Bintu, I’m sorry for your loss, but Derin too was mourning for his son in his own way. You should understand that now, and I’ve been trying to get him to drop this case. He will listen to me...”

It was then that Agatha realized that the line was dead, and she had been talking to herself. The utter raw panic that had been brewing beneath clawed to the surface. She dialed Derin’s number again. This time, it rang.

Derin had been waiting for Awazi’s call hence when his phone rang, he reached for it immediately. That woman had some serious explaining to do this night. He had picked the call when it registered in his head that the ringtone had been Asa’s Iya and not Tosin Martins’ Olo Mi.

“Hello maami, how are you?” he asked, his disappointment evident. He would try to achieve the impossible task of making this call short so that he could leave his line free for Awazi’s call.

“Derin, now you should be proud of yourself.” Agatha began.

“Maami, please don’t let’s start this again,” Derin responded, trying to cut short what he believed was going to be a long lengthy lecture.

“Derin, keep quiet and listen to someone else that isn’t yourself for once!” She said forcefully.

Satisfied that he was listening, Agatha continued “Doctor Ajanaku’s son shot himself in the head as soon as you left them today. And to cap it, Doctor Ajanaku himself had another stroke as a result of the shock from that. He’s in coma now, and will be paralyzed. So now, let us see who you want to do case with!”

“It’s a lie!” Derin exclaimed. “I don’t believe it. They’re just attempting to deceive us in order to throw us off the case.”

“Just listen to yourself. And they would get your own mother to lie to you about

something this important, just for their own gain? That's how little this your precious case has made you think of your mother.”

“Maami it is not like that. It is just that this is so sudden and so convenient”

“Don't maami me if you will disrespect me like this. The death of a man and the other becoming invalid is convenient abi? Because they are trying to escape the great case of Derin Banwo? Child get out of your world! The world does not begin and end with you. And let me tell you, if you love yourself, you will find a way to make amends with them. A Bintu called me, and she has vowed to make sure you feel their pain. I spoke with her, and I am a woman. She meant every word she said, I know for sure.”

“I need to find out for myself if this is true.” Derin said.

“So you cannot take my word for it abi? I am lying abi?” Agatha said, wondering how her son could be so blinded by one single thing like this.

“I'll go to the hospital now to find out for myself tonight,” Derin said.

Agatha was silent for a moment.

“Maami, are you there?” Derin asked.

“So you are not in Lagos, Aderinsola?” Agatha asked.

“Maami, I had to...” Derin stuttered an answer.

Agatha cut the call.

Arinze answered his phone. He answered it at this time, because the people that had this number could call him at any time of the day, they were only his kids, really close family and business contacts critical to him in the corridors of power. It was Rasheed. Rasheed would not call at this time except it was exceptionally important.

“Rasheed, kilode? What are you chasing or what is chasing you that you are calling at this ungodly hour? Your Ibadan women have left you and you want to disturb me this night?”

“Arinze, cut the jokes, I’m calling on a very serious matter. You remember Ajanaku, my friend I told you I was handling a case for?”

“Yes, the good doctor,” Arinze answered, sitting up to listen to Rasheed.

“Your boy, that your headstrong Derin was here, like we hoped he would and we thought he would agree to be reasonable. He chose not to be and wants to go to court. And now, Hakeem, Ajanaku’s foolish son who caused this whole drama went to shoot himself in the head out of guilt. Hakeem is Ajanaku’s only surviving son, and the shock was too much. He had another stroke and Ajanaku is just a little better than a vegetable now.”

“What! Ha! This one is not good o.” Arinze exclaimed.

“Look, Arinze, that Derin must pay. I have other things planned for him, but the first is for him to lose his livelihood, like he was bent on making my friend lose his hospital. Let him know how that feels first. And look, omo Ibo, I am not making a request, I am family, and you are doing this for me,” Rasheed said.

“I can’t say no to you Rasheed, and this boy has really outdone himself this time. The person that eats gbi will die gbi.”

Minutes earlier, just as Rasheed began to speak with Arinze, Derin had arrived at the hospital. He had decided to come alone; he didn’t want to face Ope again tonight. He

made his way past hospital staff, all scurrying up and down. He could sense urgency in their movements, but he kept convincing himself that it was just a busy night. His brain told him that the reception area was scanty, and that it was midnight and so the hospital shouldn't be this busy. But he forcefully thrust the thought aside, and continued to the only place he remembered, the conference room. He was hoping he would find someone there. At the door, he was hearing voices and he opened the door to see who it was.

The moment he entered, he knew that it was true. The Bintu lady was sitting down, hair scattered, face strewn with tear paths. The elderly lawyer was talking earnestly on the phone, and it was obvious it was a very serious call he was making.

The moment he entered, they both froze and he heard the lawyer saying into the phone "the idiot just walked in now, the effrontery. Kuku inform him now, and let him know!"

Derin wondered what was going on, when the man gave him a contemptuous look and handed him the phone. The look the woman gave him, his mind couldn't find the words to describe. With raised eyebrows, he took the phone and held it to his ears.

"Hello, who is this?" he said

"Derin," a familiar voice said and he unconsciously bent over and responded "good

evening sir, this is a huge surprise” looking from the lawyer to the woman. He definitely didn't like the surprise.

“Young man,” Arinze said “first, you lied to me that you had some bogus therapy to go to Ibadan for this your case, after I had warned you strongly about it.”

“Sir, I can explain,” Derin tried to salvage the situation.

“So your explanations will bring back the dead boy? Or my friend who you have brought this stroke upon? I advised you to desist from this path. I know your wife did. I have been told your best friend and your mother did. Rasheed, the lawyer who tells me you forgot your manners when you talked to him at the meetings is my elder brother. The doctor is my friend, a close, well respected friend. I think I'm talking too much. The crux of this conversation is that your appointment is terminated. You can have all the time to fight your case against dead people and paralyzed people. But you will not do it on my company's time, deceiving this organization. You can come in on Monday, and the security will supervise you taking your things out of the office. After that, they will be instructed to deal ruthlessly with you if you attempt to come in.

“But sir, you can't do this to me,” Derin said, his mind racing, his heart beating.

“I can't? You always did think too much of yourself. Now give the phone back to its

owner, young man!” Arinze said angrily.

An ashen faced Derin handed the phone over to Rasheed.

A few mumbled words and he cut the call.

“You came to see if your aim has been achieved? Follow me,” Bintu said. She calmly got up, and led Derin to the executive ward where the doctor was.

The strength was gone from the man’s face. The age was clearer, the lines were deeper, and the skin hung loser. He seemed gaunter than Derin remembered him in the afternoon, and he could see the effect of the waste that had racked his body. “You can look at him all you want,” Bintu said, and then walked away.

Rasheed then added “young man, all deals are off the table. This is war, and we have only just begun. We will reduce you to what you have reduced my friend to.” Then he left a still dumbfounded Derin where he stood and walked away, Bintu’s question echoing continually in his head “how are you different from Hakeem, Mr. Banwo”.

“Let me see you safely in,” Samir said as he parked in front of Awazi’s house.

“I do not think that would be necessary,” she responded, and briskly got down. She brought out her phone from her bag to call the gateman to come and open the gate. She dialed the number but got a “no network coverage” message on her attempt. When she checked the phone, she noticed the network of the phone was turned off. She hissed, “All these touchscreen phones sef,” she said.

She turned the network on, and almost immediately, pings hit her phone. She ignored them and pressed the button to bring up her dialed numbers. It was then she saw Derin’s call. It was not a missed called. She quickly opened the call history, and realized that the call had been picked and had lasted for a little less than a minute. She checked the time, even as she began to fear the worst. She had been in Samir’s house at the time. She turned around and went over to the driver’s side of his car, fuming furiously.

Episode 14

Samir wondered why Awazi was coming towards the car. He glanced around the car and did a quick scan to see if she had forgotten something, but didn't see anything that looked like her own. It occurred to him that maybe she had been unable to rouse their mai-guard to come and open the gate for her. He smiled, pleased at that thought.

As she reached his side, he wound down and said with a cocky grin "having troubles getting in? It would seem you are stuck with me this night. I had said the time was too late..."

Her response caught him totally unawares "Why the hell did you pick my husband's call, chose not to inform me that he had called and then turned off the network on my phone? What exactly were you planning on achieving by doing that?"

"Awazi what are you talking about? I don't like all these accusations. Is it your husband that said he called you? You husband that didn't care enough to stop you from..."

“Oh please. Samir, stop being coy! As smart as you were, you forgot to erase the call records. Someone took a call from my husband while I was at your house, and it was not me. And I’m certain that even if there are spirits living with you, they don’t take mobile phone calls.”

Samir banged his fists on the steering wheel in anger. Awazi took two steps back, startled

“So he called, so what?” In the reflection light of the dashboard, Samir’s face had transformed into a mask of anger. “He called and rather than being grateful that I was available to do what he was supposed to be doing, he began to cuss out at me. Dan iskanchi!” He got down from the car and tried to get close to Awazi. Again, she took a few steps back and put some distance between them

“Look Awazi darling,” his voice was considerably softer and his expression tender “all I was trying to do was to protect you from more emotional turmoil this night. And from the way he was sounding, that was all you were going to get by talking to him. It was like he was angry at something and wanted to take out that anger on you. I was having none of it, I would not let him hurt you,” he said.

“And that decision should have been mine to make Samir, not yours. If you were my husband, and we were having issues, and then tried to call me and another man picked

the call at the time I was in your house, would you really be civil?”

“Awazi,” Samir said, sounding exasperated “I might have been wrong in picking your phone, I admit, but my intentions were pure, couldn’t you see that?”

“I don’t know what to think again Samir,” Awazi said. There was an awkward silence, all the more awkward as they were on the road, in the middle of the night. Thoughts of whether Samir had done what he did with the hopes that she would still spend the night, which she would not have if she had spoken with Derin, ran through her head. She caught herself just in time before she voiced those thoughts. Samir didn’t plan any of this, she reminded herself. She was the one that dragged him out of his house impromptu at night today with all her troubles. When she spoke next, her voice was considerably softer.

“Samir, please don’t get me wrong. I’m grateful for all you’ve done for me tonight, and for being honorable and all. It’s just that things are rather complicated in my life right now, and I don’t want them to get even more complicated.”

“The reason for those complications is that your husband! Awazi, he doesn’t deserve you. What have you gotten from him for the past twelve years? Grief from his mother, infidelity from him, no child, now he’s hell bent on pursuing a case with the woman he was unfaithful with as his lawyer, utterly disrespectful to you, not concerned about how

that would affect you. Is that what you are holding on to? Is that what you are protecting? Twelve years of?”

“So, Samir, this is what you chose to do with what I’ve told you? Because I opened up to you as a dear friend and told you about my troubles, you decided to turn it into a knife and cruelly drive it into my wounds?” She began to sob, because, cruel as his words were, her brain told her he had summed things up well.

“Awazi, I’m sorry if I was rather blunt. But sometimes, it is necessary for clarity’s sake to speak like that. And I intend to make you see things as they really are.”

Awazi tried to speak but Samir hushed her up “please listen to what I have to say to the end as I might not have the courage to say it again. We are meant for each other, you and I. Our parents allowed archaic tribal sentiments drive us apart all those years ago and we have both tried all sorts – you, marriage, me, other women and travel to exotic places. But look at us now, we are back here. This is our opportunity to right the wrong of those years, to make their mistake and our helplessness of then of no effect. Leave him now, and come to me. He doesn't deserve you; he can have his lawyer lover for as long as he wants.”

“Stop, Samir, stop. How can you say this? That I should leave my husband. No!” Awazi shook her head to emphasize each word as she spoke.

“How are you sure that right now, he is not curled up in her arms as you’ve left them in Ibadan? En, Awazi?” he asked, a cruel light coming into his eyes.

Awazi looked up through eyes that were glistening with tears that had not yet begun to flow. “Goodnight Samir!”

“Awazi, I didn’t mean to...” he began to say, but she had already turned to go towards the gate. He raced to her side and tried to stop her “Awazi, please, I’m sorry I said that. Please listen,”

“Good night,” she repeated, her voice so cold it sent a chill down his spine even though he had been standing outside in the cold for minutes now. Dejected, he let her go and walked back to his car. That last statement had been the straw that broke the camel’s back.

Ope got up at six the Saturday morning. She brushed, bathed, ate, made up and got dressed. All that took another two hours, and she had hoped that in those two hours Derin would have called to tell her it was time to go. She was still incensed at what had happened yesterday night. How could he? She had never felt so foolish in her life, as

she huffed and puffed without any result. "Ope, you are more than this," she had told herself in the room when she was alone, through quiet tears. She had decided on a few things yesterday night, as the scales fell from her eyes. This was a brand new Ope.

When he didn't call, she walked up to his room and knocked impatiently.

"Who is it?" his voice came from inside, deep and gruff.

"Derin, its Ope," she said simply. So he had been awake. She hissed.

"Come in, the door is open," he said.

He was seated on the edge of the bed, looking disheveled. There were rings around his eyes and he didn't look like he had slept at all. He looked ten years older than his age.

In spite of her resolve, concern for him flooded over her

"Derin, what happened to you? You look terrible," she said, squatting in front of him.

He responded in a monotonous voice like a bad newscaster "Doctor Ajanaku had a stroke and is unconscious. His son is dead. And I lost my job."

Ope shook him. "What are you saying Derin? This is totally confusing. How and when

did all these things happen between when we left them and today and how are they even related events? How do you even know any of this, I recall I left you lying naked in this room some minutes to midnight yesterday. Have you been drinking?”

He laughed, a mirthless, humorless sound. “I wish.”

“Derin, you are not making any sense. You need to tell me what has happened,”

By the time he had finished relating the events of the previous night, Ope’s mouth was wide open. “All that in one night!” she exclaimed. “But why didn’t you call me? Your boss has no right to sack you over a personal matter that isn’t an issue of professional competence or violation of your job contract. Do you have a copy of this contract?”

“Ope,” Derin said quietly “he warned me about leaving work for the case. I lied and he has proof I did. The case will fall apart. And which judge in Nigeria would give judgment in my favor in such a case? And what would the judgment be? That he should reemploy me? Or compensate me? And how long would that take?”

“So you are just going to take it lying low? Why are you sounding so defeated Derin, this is not the Derin I know!” Ope said loudly. There was a tinge of disgust in her voice, and she knew it was not totally because of this conversation. Last night’s episode between them had something to do with it.

“There’s nothing I can do Ope.” He said with finality.

“Oh yes, there’s much you can do! And I just outlined it for you. Men like that don’t want public scandals, and we will give him one until he stops this madness.” Ope said, exasperated. She badly wanted to shake some resolve into Derin.

“Rasheed is his brother. And he is ready for whatever scandal we want to whip up. Ope, Hakeem died. The doctor is paralyzed, I saw him with own eyes yesterday. Even my son’s case we came here to negotiate is dead. Abi, who do we want to take to court for the court to take away their license? The dead man or the paralyzed man?”

“Derin what are you saying? This is not about the men; it’s about getting justice for Isaac and serving as a deterrent to others. The two of them are not the main defendants in this case, it’s the hospital and the hospital is a separate legal entity from them. I can amend the statement of claim to remove the other defendants, while pursuing the license revocation and the compensation from the hospital. We need to set the legal precedence. We might save some future souls in doing this, think about that.”

“And in saving the future souls, we should lose ours? Is that what you are saying Ope? One man died already and another is dead for all practical purposes. And you expect us to keep fighting?”

“Have they stopped fighting? Didn’t they threaten you that your job loss was only the beginning? Man up Derin!” she said the last phrase stamping her feet indignantly.

“Ope, you always want to have your way! Why can’t you see reason with me and let us end this. Yes, they promised to fight, but if they see I’m not fighting again, won’t we all cut our losses and move on?”

“It’s this your simplistic, naïve outlook that caused us to breakup that first time. I totally forgot, thank you for reminding me so vividly. You always lose heart, fail to follow through with things you start and fear taking risks all the way. And when I forge ahead to grab things with both hands and urge you to do the same, you begin to complain that I don’t listen and that I’m too independent. You would always find someone to say it’s because of them that you are being considerate, but we both know the real reason; you are just not a risk taker. When it was about traveling, you hung your consideration on your mother. Now, you hang it on your wife or the dead and infirm. Pulease! Hell, if I had married you, I would probably not have been allowed to achieve what I have, in the name of not being independent. You would have limited me!”

“And you have succeeded in getting another man abi? Keep on doing exactly how you have been doing and become old and still being a Miss!” Derin shot back.

“You know what, Mr. Banwo, since you are not interested in pursuing any cases, you do not require a lawyer’s services. I will take my leave now. I can find my own way to Lagos, I won’t be needing you!” with that, she stormed out of the room.”

Derin sat on the bed for a few moments, immobile. Then he mechanically began to pack his things.

Awazi had been trying both Derin’s phones all morning, immediately she woke up. But both numbers he had were switched off. She went about cleaning the house, trying his number intermittently, hoping for a different response and sighing in disappointment each time she heard the female voice say “the number you have called is switched off...”

It was about ten and she was in the kitchen when she heard the rattling of the door that she knew was Derin coming in. A chill crept up her spine and she developed goose pimples.

She didn’t have to turn around; she could feel his eyes on her. She turned around and their eyes met. He was standing in the doorway of the kitchen.

“Hi,” was all she managed to say.

She noticed the bags around his eyes and how bloodshot his eyes were.

“Derin what happened to you? You don’t look okay,” she said, concern filling her voice.

“And how is that important?” he growled angrily. “Who the hell was that man that picked your phone yesterday night, at that time of the night?”

“I can explain Derin...” she began.

He interrupted her, cutting her off abruptly with a wave of hand “explain what? That you, a married woman, left your husband when he needed your support and ran straight into the arms of your Hausa lover?”

“Will you let me speak Derin? You are misunderstanding things here, and imagining untruths. When I left Ibadan, my car broke down at Berger. I tried your number, but didn’t get through. I tried Kamal and it rang out. I tried the mechanic and didn’t get through too. So I called my friend Samir...”

“Which Samir?” he growled.

“The same Samir,” she responded.

“So you were in Samir’s house yesterday night? Your former lover, Samir! You could not call any other person, it had to be him. And you had to follow him home.” Derin shouted.

“So I should have stayed out in that dangerous spot on the express rather than called Samir?” she asked, feeling the anger she was trying to rein in rising fast.

Derin turned away, without an answer.

“Answer me, Derin Banwo! Samir helped me, when you were nowhere to be found!”

“Oh, so you put those words in his mouth abi? No wonder he said them so confidently. What gives your ‘friend’ the audacity to pick your phone and talk to your husband anyhow if you didn’t give him permission?”

“Oh Derin, please! Stop being dramatic. You can call your Ope to be your lawyer, in spite of my protestations and expect me to understand. But I cannot call Samir in a potentially life threatening situation where I was stranded at ten in the night on an expressway? Stop being a bloody hypocrite Derin!” The floodgates of her anger were open now and Awazi let it all out.

“So that’s what this is about? You were trying to get back to me because of Ope?” Derin asked

“No, they are two different situations. In your case, you premeditated picking Ope, and planned to spend the night in Ibadan with her in the same town in my absence. In my case, an impromptu situation came up and I needed help desperately. I tried every option I had to get out of immediate danger”

“Then why didn’t you call back? I waited and waited for your call.” Derin shot back.

Awazi looked away, afraid that her eyes would give away a hint of what Samir had done.

Derin stepped into the kitchen “oh, so you don’t have an answer to that?”

“Derin, I was in the loo when you called, and didn’t know you called until I got home...”

“Oh, so innocent Samir chose not to tell you your husband called?”

“I cannot speak for Samir, but once I knew you called, I tried to call you, and I’ve been trying to call you since then. Your phones have been switched off.”

“I see,” was all Derin said.

“Derin, what are you seeing? I’ve told you what happened.” Awazi said. “You are turning all this on its head. A hint of what you’ve been doing with Ope is happening with Samir and I and you are trying to make me feel guilty like this. Yet when I spoke before, I was the unreasonable, unsupportive wife.”

“What! What have you been doing with Samir? Did you…” Derin allowed the question hang in the air

Awazi looked Derin straight in the eyes “if by doing, that is the first thing that came to your mind, then tell me, Mr. Banwo, is that what you have been doing with your lawyer?”

They squared up, locking eyes with each other, memories of times when trust was broken in the past passing silently between them. None of them spoke a word, but the silence spoke loud and clear.

The shrill sound of Awazi’s mobile phone ringing shattered the silence.

It was a welcome distraction and she quickly picked it up before the ringtone got to the second line of the song.

“Hello,” she said.

“Hello, Mrs. Banwo. My name is Bintu,” the woman said.

Awazi’s brain searched for where she had heard the name before.

“I’m the one who stopped you from murdering Dr. Hakeem in Ibadan yesterday evening,” the woman said, and realization of who she was struck Awazi immediately.

“How may I help you,” she said curtly.

“I didn’t call to be nice so I’ll go straight to the point and tell you what I know. First, Dr. Hakeem committed suicide yesterday.”

Awazi gasped at the news and Derin raised his eyebrow, wondering what the person on phone was telling her.

The woman continued “Dr. Ajanaku had a stroke because of this and is totally incapacitated till further notice. All this has been brought on us because of your husband’s stubbornness and unwillingness to listen to reason from anyone, you included. All deals are off the table.” Bintu said.

Awazi was angry “what do you mean? If Hakeem had not...”

“You will let me finish, Mrs. Banwo,” Bintu said authoritatively and Awazi kept quiet.

“Your husband is aware of all this, he came here to check for himself late in the night yesterday. Your husband has lost his job and we will make sure it is hard for him to get another one. Rasheed is working on that now. We run an account with your bank and your husband’s boss who is Rasheed’s brother does too. It will not be hard to make you lose your job too. That will be our next line of action.”

Awazi turned to Derin, the questions almost popping out of her eyes.

“And ask your husband what he was doing with that his lawyer in Room 221 of Tee Exclusive Hotel yesterday night. Adulterous man.”

The line went dead in Awazi’s ears.

“Derin, when were you going to tell me you’ve lost your job?” Awazi queried.

Derin reeled backwards. “How did you know?”

“So I’m not supposed to know?” Awazi shouted. “The same way I’m not supposed to

know that Ope was in your room all through yesterday night and that was why you turned all your phones off till now?”

Episode 15

“Babe calm down, I was going to tell you. I have not had the chance to tell you just yet. I was trying to tell you when Mr. Samir picked up yesterday” Derin said, trying to placate her.

“Tell me which exactly, Derin? That you were jobless, or that you had hurled your jobless ass into bed with that witch all night?” Awazi was on a roll now.

“If you had picked that call, none of this would have happened!” Derin said in a voice he wanted to thunder but didn’t quite turn out that way. Her words stung.

“Listen to yourself Mr. Banwo! You are saying in essence, that the reason you were fucking Ope yesterday night was because your wife didn’t pick your call. So you go around sleeping with someone each time your wife does not take your call? And by extension, should your wife have a quickie each time she calls and cannot reach you?”

Awazi responded contemptuously.

“Awazi, stop talking nonsense! I did not sleep with Ope yesterday! No, I didn’t!”

“Ow, she was merely camping in your room all through the night perhaps?” Awazi shouted.

“Madam, if we follow your logic, that by being in my room yesterday, Ope was shagging me, then, by being in Samir’s house yesterday, you were definitely humping him!”

“Oh puleasa! You as usual like to turn logic on its head. It was obvious I wasn’t doing anything with Samir and you know it! And everything you’ve said right now confirms that you were actually... damn!”

Derin turned around “You know what, this is not what I came home to hear.” He picked his key and went towards the door.

“Derin where are you going? We are still talking!” She raced to his side and held him back.

“Awazi, you will leave me alone this minute!” Derin bellowed.

Awazi refused to, maneuvering to face him and standing between him and the door.

“You are not going anywhere until you tell me what you were doing with that bitch yesterday night!” Awazi shouted, nostrils flaring.

“As much as you are attempting to draw out some physical response from me, I will not descend to pushing you out of the way. I have never hit you and today will not be the first time I’m going to.” Derin tried to free himself from Awazi’s grip and turn into the house, but she held on firm.

“Awazi, let me go!” he said forcefully, but she refused to.

“I said,” he forcefully disengaged himself from her grip and sent her reeling backwards
“let me go!”

Immediately she fell, Derin felt a wave of remorse wash all over him. He knelt beside her “Awazi, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to...”

Through teary eyes, she just gave him the “talk to the hand” and gathered herself up and went into the living room, leaving him kneeling.

He quickly got up and followed her into the living room.

“Awazi, I’m sorry, I’m so sorry,” he tried to go over and hold her but she got up and went to another end of the room, moving as he followed her around. She put the L-shaped couch in between them.

“How could you, Derin? How could you!” she shouted from behind the couch that separated them.

Derin knew she was asking both about him shoving her, and about Ope in that question. He just kept saying he was sorry, trying to get to her. But try as he did, she made sure the couch was always between them.

She had gotten herself to the door of the bedroom, and still had a couch between them. She gave him a look that pierced his heart and then dashed into the room and locked the door behind her before he could climb over the couch to go in.

He banged on the door repeatedly, but Awazi didn’t respond. Derin crumpled into a sitting position in front of the door.

Inside the room, a crying Awazi dialed Aunty Jamila. The moment Jamila picked the

phone on the other end and heard Awazi's sobs, she knew something was seriously wrong.

"Awazi, menene?"

"Aunty, my home is falling apart all around me, and I'm clutching for straws. Every other issue we've had, I at least had Derin on my side. But this time, it is different. Derin is outside the bedroom and I'm inside. I locked myself in." Awazi said.

"Calm down and tell me what is going on," Jamila responded, wondering why her niece would lock herself in except she was under some threat. If that Derin was beating her. She tried to hide the alarm in her voice.

"Aunty, I did as you asked and went to show Derin support in Ibadan over that court case. It turned out to be a disaster. When I found out that the doctor that killed Isaac was a drug addict, I lost it and went ballistic on him. Before then, Derin had agreed with me to drop the case. But that witch of a lawyer manipulated him using that incident and he decided to pursue the case, even if it meant digging Isaac up for autopsy. I mean how could he agree to anything that would involve violating Isaac like that? I left in anger." She sniffed

"Go on," Jamila urged.

“My car broke down at 11PM and I was stranded. I called everyone, but couldn’t get through. I had to call Samir.”

“Which Samir is this?” Jamila asked, trying not to believe it was who she thought it was.

“The same Samir Aunty,” Awazi said.

“The Fulani boy, Awazi! Haba, of all the people under God’s heaven, it had to be him, and at that time?” Jamila said.

“Aunty I had no choice!” Awazi said in exasperation.

“Okay, I’m listening. What now happened?” Jamila knew better than to stifle the flow

Awazi continued “he dragged my car to his house and I went in, just to rest till I could go home...”

“Kai Awazi, you went to another man’s house at that time!” Jamila could not help herself.

“Aunty, where should I have gone? Stayed on the road? Waited for Derin who was in

another woman's arms to finish with her and come for me from Ibadan?"

Jamila wasn't sure she had heard right "Derin was in which other woman's arms?"

"That his lawyer. That Ope, the same woman he went to when we had those issues. He accuses me of calling Samir in desperate need, but he chose Ope as lawyer when he wasn't desperate and went on to sleep with her."

"Awazi, are you sure about what you are saying or this your hot body is what is talking?"

"Bintu told me, and when I confronted him, he could not deny it."

"Who is this Bintu?" Jamila queried

"Aunty, she is the doctor that owns the hospital's second in command. The drug addict younger doctor I told you about committed suicide and his father, the old doctor that owns the place had a stroke as a result. Now they're blaming us for it and they are out for revenge. Their lawyer is Derin's oga's brother and they have made Derin lose his job. She called me this evening to tell me about all that happened, since Derin did not tell me himself. And she threatened to make me lose mine too, and continue to deal with us. Only if Derin had listened aunty. I'm just tired of all this," she burst into tears.

“What! After they took Isaac from you, because they suffered loss now, she made your husband lose his job? And is threatening you? And you chose to believe this woman?”

Jamila asked in quick succession.

“I didn’t believe her, but when I confronted my husband, he didn’t, couldn’t, deny it. He only accused me of doing the same with Samir.”

“How did he know you were with Samir? Did you tell him?” Jamila queried.

“No Aunty. It was that foolish Samir. Derin called my phone while I was in the loo in his house and he picked the phone and spoke with Derin.”

“What! How? And you expect your husband to be calm! Lagos has done something to you Awazi. Which Eggon man will allow that? He will be waiting for you with a machete”

“I explained...” Awazi said.

“You explained what? By going to accuse him of sleeping with another woman? Listen to yourself.”

“But aunty, I didn’t do anything wrong, and he did sleep with the woman!” Awazi felt herself getting angry again.

“I am coming to that your Lagos to talk sense into you tomorrow. But first, I need to deal with the fox and chase it away, before I chastise my chicken. You said this Bintu called you to threaten you.”

“Yes Aunty,” Awazi answered.

“Give me her number. I will deal with her myself.”

“I will text you her number now, once I get off the phone,” Awazi said.

“Good. Now, go and open the door and beg your husband!” Jamila ordered.

Awazi mumbled an inaudible response.

“I did not hear you,” Jamila pressed.

“Okay Aunty, I will do as you say,” Awazi said finally.

“Good. Now send me that number.”

“Nagode sose, aunty” Awazi said and ended the call.

She texted the number to Aunty Jamila and then walked gingerly to the door. This was going to be hard, but she would give it a shot.

When she opened the door, Derin was not there. She tore into the living room.

Bintu did not pick her phone at first. She was in no mood to talk to anyone. Since last night, she had eaten nothing, and she still hadn't regained her appetite. She had camped in the hospital room where a visibly emaciated Doctor Ajanaku lay, watching him, and sobbing deep, quiet sobs. But the caller was persistent and she eventually picked it up the fourth time the call came in.

"Hello," she said.

"Hello Bintu," a female voice responded. It had a slight northern accent but spoke with authority.

"Yes, speaking. Who is this please?" Bintu responded.

"My name is Jamila and I am Awazi's aunty. And let me be direct. I did not call to chat.

You will stop threatening my niece.” Jamila spoke with measured tones.

“She has told you of our loss. After we pleaded and pleaded, they insisted on destroying us and they are on the verge of achieving this. Let them have a taste of their own medicine,” Bintu replied, in equally measured tones.

“They first experienced loss, a needless loss shall I say, and could be expected to be headstrong. They are children. And I’m sorry about your loss, I have heard about it. And the pound of flesh you’ve taken already in Derin’s job. That is not a problem, I will concede that to you, and we will get him another job. You must stop trying to destroy the family. If you touch my niece, you have no idea what I will bring against you.”

“She destroyed my own family, so why should I hands off hers?” Bintu asked

“Family? I thought it was your boss and his son that things happened to? How did that translate to family?” Jamila asked.

“Madam, what are you driving at?” Bintu queried.

“It’s just as I suspected. There’s more involved here than mere employee loyalty. You would not go to such extremes except there was something personal. Let me state the obvious – the doctor was your ‘family’” Jamila said with obvious meaning.

“I don’t have to listen to this,” Bintu said.

“Before you cut the call, let me tell you exactly what will happen. And you will hear the first one of these on the news if you tune in to the 10am bulletins. First, the EFCC will arrest that boss who took Derin’s job. You will hear it in the news. Second, I have personally reached the MD of her bank. Except there’s someone higher in that bank to sack her, you cannot touch her job. Third, if that your lawyer doesn’t want to end up being blamed for the death of that Hakeem boy, you will back down or we will find a way to make it a murder case with the lawyer as the prime suspect. Believe me I can make it happen. My full name is Jamila Shehu, the vice chairperson of the EFCC and a policewoman. I CAN make it happen, but will do so only if you persist. I wish for nothing more than for you to nurse your lover to health. Do not push me. Good morning Bintu.”

The line went dead.

Bintu was visibly shaken, but she reasoned that it was a threat and anyone could say anything.

Rasheed came in, fresh from the night’s rest.

“How is he?” he asked.

“They say we have to fly him out on Monday. But he is stable now.”

“Better.” Rasheed tried to be cheery.

“One Jamila just called. She says she is Awazi’s aunty” Bintu said.

“We are not listening to any begging. I spoke with Arinze earlier this morning and he has given me his assurances. He will call the MD of the girl’s bank later today and make the demand. I will call him too and make a similar demand. The man will have to bend or we will begin to move funds out.”

“She did not call to beg,” Bintu said.

“Oh?” Rasheed raised his eyebrow, curious.

Bintu checked the time. It was ten o'clock. She turned the small TV in the room on and tuned to Channels TV for the news. The lady was just about to start reading the headlines.

- 20 killed in fresh attacks in Yobe by Boko Haram
- The 2013 Budget yet to be signed as faceoff between the president and the National Assembly continues

– EFCC arrests oil magnate, Arinze Kilanko over fuel subsidy probe report.

“What!” Rasheed exclaimed.

“She promised that this would happen and it has. Rasheed they’re fighting back.”

“What’s her name? Who is she?” Rasheed asked, obviously livid.

“She said her name is Jamila Shehu,” she responded.

“Jamila Shehu? Of the EFCC?” Rasheed inquired.

“Yes, she said she worked with the EFCC.”

“Haaaa! We are in trouble. What else did she say? That woman is not to be toyed with.

She has the presidency’s ears. She said she’s the girl’s aunt?”

“Yes. She threatened you, the hospital, and myself,” a visibly shaken Bintu responded.

“We have to call her back. You still have her number, yes?” Rasheed said.

Awazi had checked everywhere in the house but Derin was nowhere to be found. She felt the anger rising again and she clenched her fist, counting to ten. "Awazi, calm down," she said to herself, and took deep breaths. She had carried the fantasy of falling upon her grieving husband waiting to beg her outside the door and then begging him profusely until they both fell into each others' arms crying their sorries until they ended up making sweet love. But all that greeted her was an empty house.

She dialed Derin's number. And he had better answer this call.

The phone rang out the first time and she dialed again, angrily this time.

It was almost ringing out when someone picked it up. She was almost going to go into a tirade about why he had left and why it took him so long to pick but she breathed and calmed herself down. Her calm was shattered when a female voice said

"Hello"

Awazi answered furiously, "and who the hell are you picking my husband's phone?"

"My name is Ope."

Episode 16

Rasheed collected the phone from Bintu and dialed the last number she had spoken to. The phone merely rang once before it was picked.

“I have been expecting your call, Bintu. I take it that you watched the news, since you are calling back,” Jamila said amiably.

“Madam, this is Rasheed Sanda, SAN,” Rasheed said, trying his best to sound impressive.

“Barrister, I thought I would be speaking with Bintu. Good morning to you,” Jamila said.

Rasheed responded “I wish I could say good morning, but unfortunately, it isn’t. You know that this illegality of an arrest you have concocted and that we will fight you with all that we have if you dare...”

Jamila cut him short “Oh, Rasheed, cut the prattle. We both know what this is about. It isn’t about legality, or you would not have taken away the livelihood of my in-law and threatened to do the same to his wife. It was about power, and vindictive vengeance. So do not tell me about legality now that you taste a dose of your own medicine. Look, if this is what you want to say, I have nothing to say to you. Now good day, Mr.”

“An an, Madam, it’s not like that now” Rasheed said, trying to be conciliatory. “I’m just worried about my brother ni.”

Bintu eyed Rasheed with venom. Why the hell was he begging this woman.

“Your brother will be released temporarily in about an hour. Now, if as much as a hair on Awazi and her husband get hurt by any action or otherwise from you, I’m hurling him in. and I’m sure you know I can hurl you in, and legally too. I don’t have to tell you I mean this.”

“So Arinze will be released today?” Rasheed asked to be sure.

“Stay by your phone, I’m sure he will have a few things to say to you when he gets out. Now, for the second time, good day, Barrister Sanda.”

Once Bintu saw that the call was ended, she said to the lawyer “haba, we gave you phone to handle the issue, you were begging like a student with his headmaster.”

“Woman, shut your mouth, gbe enu e soun. You think I don’t know what I am doing? Let us first get Arinze out of this. All of them, abowaba no oro won (we will return to their matter after that is sorted).

Awazi slammed the phone on the couch in anger. “Derin!” She thought. “DERIN” the thought tore through the seams her mind.

“I know what I’m going to do,” she said out aloud. He wanted this? Then that was just what he was going to get. She went into the room and got dressed. Her car was yet to be fixed, so she simply called a cab.

It took the cab a mere twenty minutes to get to Omole Phase 2 since the Lagos roads were free of traffic on this Sunday morning.

All through the trip, Awazi kept muttering to herself and at some point the cab driver had to ask “madam, hope all is well.” Her cold “please face the road,” warned the guy not to meddle any further in this passenger’s business.

The gate looked very different in daylight but she remembered the smaller wicket gate that she had gone through the night before and so let herself into the compound.

Apparently, that gate was not locked during the day. That also told her that there was someone in the house. She saw the familiar car parked in the compound, and the sight of it strengthened her resolve.

But then, she got to the door, and stood before it. The sight of the door drained her of that resolve. Knocking on this door meant she was crossing a point of no return. Her hands trembled and she began sweating.

The door opened and Samir stood before her in nothing but shorts. He eyed her with raw lust from head to toe and then asked “were you going to just walk to my door and turn away?”

The sight of him and the way he looked at her caused her blood to race. A sense of guilt tried to creep into her heart, but she pushed it back with an effort, reminding herself that Derin had done this with Ope yesterday, and then left her in the house today to run back into her arms. She pushed Samir lightly back into the house, startling him.

“First, you are going to shut up Samir. I’m doing this for me. Do not annoy me with your jabber.”

With that, she undid the bow at the shoulder of the satin dress she was wearing and it slid off her shoulders without any help. She stood naked before Samir. A bulge rapidly formed in his shorts, but he stood there, immobile, disbelieving that this was really happening until she said “are you just going to stand there and stare, Fulani boy?”

He didn't need a second invitation. He went over and kissed her hungrily, as if to satiate the many years of hunger. This time, unlike yesterday night, there was no resistance on her part. Her hands reached for his shorts and yanked them down, freeing his erection totally.

Arinze stepped out of the Ikoyi office of the EFCC. They had detained him for only an hour and from the amount of journalists and photographers on hand, he had guessed it was all staged for the benefit of the press, for the public who condemned people as corrupt by what they saw on TV and read in the papers. So substantial damage had been done already to his public image.

They had actually treated him with courtesy once the photographers were gone. They took his handcuffs off, and then the small man who had chaperoned him since the arrest ushered him into an office where he had spoken quietly

“Mr. Kilanko, do you know why we brought you in?” the man had said.

“You are the ones that came to bring me in, so you tell me,” Arinze had retorted.

“Very well,” the man had answered, with a smile tugging at the corners of his small lips.

“I am not going to beat about the bush. You are victimizing a poor boy whom you think has no one. Derin Banwo. I’m certain you are familiar with the name.”

“What? How is Derin involved with this? Not any of the other importers? How can this be about Derin?”

“Oga, I cannot categorically tell you how, but I’ve been told to tell you that you and your cohorts at Omega Hospital had better stopped the witch-hunting of Mr. Banwo and his wife Awazi for the reasons you know, otherwise, you will be coming back to EFCC and your visit will definitely not be as pleasant as this one. And we both know that we can make this happen. The activists will feast on you.”

Arinze knew that even if the EFCC brought charges against him, he could wriggle out of it if he spent enough money. But the battle would be messy and the money would be much. He didn’t need all of that.

When they released him, they had made sure it was through a side exit, with no press.

Rasheed's phone rang and when he checked the caller ID, he heaved a sigh of relief. It was Arinze.

"Omo Ibo, thank God you o, we saw what happened on the news..."

"Rasheed, don't omo Ibo me, please! What kind of thing is all this that you have gotten me into sef? You know how delicate times like this are for my business, with all the subsidy report boys running up and down, and you drag me into an issue that has brought the EFCC on me, publicly! You want to ruin me abi? Wo, I just said I should call you to let you know that you better leave that boy alone, for your own good. And don't call me on this Derin matter again!"

"Ah ah, Kilanko, ko to be, it hasn't reached all this now," Rasheed said.

"Ko to kini? E no reach wetin? Wo, if you were not my brother ni, this conversation would not have gone like this. Do you have any idea how much I will have to spend on PR to clean this mess up and assure my partners both foreign and local that all is well? The kind of money I will spend on this en, you cannot understand."

"What are you trying to say Kilanko? You better watch your proud tongue. Me I cannot

understand money? No matter the clothes a child has, he cannot have as much rags as his elders!”

Arinze snorted. “Abegi, I have sha said my own. Don’t talk to me on this your Derin matter again! O dabo.”

With that, he cut the call.

“This one that we took from the gutter, see as he is now talking to we, the real owners of the house. It is not his fault, it is me that needed his help. It is my yam that has put my hand in the oil.”

He had stepped into the lobby to receive the call and when he re-entered the doctor’s ward, he couldn’t recognize it as where he had just left minutes ago.

Different medical personnel were hunched over him, and others were running helter-skelter.

“What is happening here,” he asked no one in particular. None of them took any notice of him, they just kept at what they had been doing. He did a quick scan of the room and saw Bintu in a corner.

He weaved through the bodies and made his way to her side with some effort. “What is happening here?” he repeated, now to Bintu.

As an answer, Bintu pointed to the ICU monitor. The green lines on its screen that had been an irregular up and down pattern had become a flat line.

Awazi had enjoyed the sex with Samir much more than she thought she could. It must have more to do with the way she channeled all her anger into energy. Now, she lay on the couch though, the nagging sense of guilt was beginning to gnaw at the edges of her mind again.

She reached into her bag and pulled out her phone. It had three missed calls. She selected the View option and the phone displayed the missed calls after a few seconds of the annoying rotating bb hanging clock. Something was not right. The phone told her that the missed calls were from her. But the more she looked at it, the less it made any sense to her. How could she have called herself? But as real as the couch she was lounging on, the number whose call she had missed was hers. The guilt began to gnaw deeper and translate into dread.

She quickly went to the home page and typed “SAM” expecting Samir’s number to pop

up, but it didn't. only a Samuel came up.

She recalled that she had not dialed Derin's number when Ope had picked his call earlier; she had used her speed dial. She held down three on the phone to speed dial. Immediately, the caller ID showed on the screen. Ope. The truth was obvious to her, from the moment she had seen the missed call, but she had struggled and hoped it wasn't. In her anger at home, she had not realized that Derin had picked her phone when leaving, thinking it was his own. And she had simply dialed Ope from Derin's phone, thinking she was dialing Derin from her phone.

"Noooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!" she screamed in anguish, sending Samir running in from the bathroom.

Agatha rushed into the ward where they had told her she would find both Bintu and the lawyer. She sensed something was amiss when she got there and saw the crowd. Derin had called her to tell her what had happened yesterday night and she knew she had to see these people today, before things got out of hand. These Ibadan lawyers were known to fight both in the physical and by spiritual means. She didn't want any strange things happening to Derin.

She asked one of the nurses if the lawyer was there and the breathless young lady pointed towards where she saw his grey head. She called out “Mr. Sanda,” in a loud enough voice for him to hear above the din.

Surprise registered in his eyes when he saw her, but he made his way out of the room to her. Agatha saw that Bintu had followed him out – the hawk.

“Mr. Sanda, sorry to bother you, it seems I have come at an inopportune time. Can we talk somewhere?”

“Sure,” Rasheed said, and led them towards the conference room.

Once they were inside and the door shut, Agatha fell on her knees and began to plead

“Please leave my son alone. You have taken his job already, but please, let it not be more than his job. It is not every chicken that turns over our medicine that we break their eggs because we ourselves might need those eggs in future. I beg of you.”

“Madam, your son didn’t tell you that your in-laws have fought for him abi. His wife’s aunty our own person arrested this morning. Please get up and stop these crocodile tears here,” Bintu said harshly.

That was news to Agatha. She hadn't suspected there was any issue between Derin and his wife, since he had called her with Awazi's number, but with this news, she couldn't help but wonder what was going on with her son and his wife. She quickly got up.

"Sorry about your person o, I did not know at all," she said, more to the doctor, for fear that if he felt backed to a wall, he would attack Derin with diabolical means.

"Agatha, Dr. Ajanaku just passed on, a few minutes before you came in.

"Wow. I'm so so sorry," Agatha managed to say.

The tears were flowing from Bintu's eyes now.

"Well, he requested that his will be read as soon as he passed on, since he survived his wife and first son. He had assumed that Hakeem would be the only audience I would read it to." Rasheed said.

"I should be on my way sir," Agatha said to Rasheed, and began to gather herself together to leave.

"Actually, you should not be going anywhere. The doctor specifically requested that you

should be at the reading of his will, in the event that he passed on while this case was on.”

“He did?” Agatha and Bintu asked simultaneously.

“Yes, and there is a copy of that will in his office, sealed by the police. But we will get in to retrieve and read it, here and now.”

Episode 17

“Calm down man,” Kamal said, even though he didn’t feel very calm himself. Derin was pacing up and down, pausing every few seconds, his eyes darting furtively around at each stop, as if expecting Awazi to emerge from the spot he looked at.

Derin had come to him that morning to ask him to help beg Awazi, and he had harangued Derin after hearing the story of what had happened. They had rushed back to the house together, but met it locked from outside. Once in the house, Derin dashed into the open bedroom and met it empty. They had gone through every room in the house, shouting for her, but she wasn’t there.

“Dude, calm down and let’s call her,” Kamal said again to the pacing Derin.

Derin reached for his phone and came up with empty air. It was only then it dawned on him he had left his phone in the house in his rush to get Kamal. He quickly scanned the

living room, but didn't find the phone.

"Kamal, can you flash my phone? I can't find it," Derin said.

Kamal attempted to dial the phone, but couldn't get through. Derin began searching methodically in the living room and when he didn't find it, he moved into the bedroom.

There on the bed was the phone.

He picked it up but immediately saw it wasn't his own. He had bought the phone for Awazi on their anniversary when she had kept whining about using an older BB than his own and his own was older than hers.

"She probably took your own phone, thinking it was hers," Kamal thought out aloud, speaking what Derin himself was thinking.

Derin dialed Awazi a couple of times but the phone rang out.

"We just have to wait, man" Kamal said to Derin.

And so, they waited. Or rather, Kamal waited, while Derin paced.

Rasheed came out of the doctor's office, with a small fireproof safe. The weight of the small item made him sweat even in the AC of the corridor. He entered the conference room, with the two women waiting, staring intently at him.

He carefully placed it on the table and then produced a strip of paper from his pocket. From it, he retrieved the safe combination and slowly dialed it. The safe opened with a crack and in it was a plain brown envelope.

By now, they were all standing, gathered around the little box. With measured movements, Rasheed extracted the document from the envelope, waved it a little and simply said "Haruna's will". When he unfolded the document, he was in for a shocker. "This is not the will I prepared," he said.

"So is it genuine?" Bintu asked, raising an eyebrow.

"It is. This combination to this safe was only known to Haruna, and it was only by following specific instructions I retrieved it. The will is dated last week Thursday, the day before that ill-fated meeting. He changed it without telling even me."

"Well, let's get on with it now, shall we?" Bintu said.

He went through all the preliminaries mechanically until he got to the meat of the matter – the sharing.

“To Bintu Mogaji, I give my 8flat house in Bodija as well as 12.5Million Naira in a fixed deposit with Wema Bank as well as the lands in Abule Egba, Lagos.

To Hakeem, I give my 5 bedroom duplex in Agodi as well as the 4 Flat house in Agungi, Lekki. A trust fund will be set up with my lawyer, Rasheed Sanda and Bintu Mogaji as the trustees. The annual yield of the fund will be paid to Hakeem for his upkeep. When he does decide to get married and have children, 20 percent of the fund will be liquidated and paid out to each of his children when they reach the age of maturity.

To my friend, Rasheed Sanda, I give all of my Ibadan land. He has been a true friend and will use them better than I could ever do anyway.

Finally, to Mr. Derin Banwo, I will my hospital, Omega Clinic. From where the elders go, I would like to see how eager Mr. Banwo would be to destroy the hospital, sack all the staff that depend on it and all the patients that have years of treatment and history with it, now that it belongs to him. Maybe he will then understand the cruelty behind his seeking to destroy all that I had worked for all my life.”

The will named Rasheed and Agatha as the executors of the will.

“Wow!” Agatha said, when Rasheed was done.

“How could Haruna name this woman an executor? And give me just one house in this Ibadan? To spite me? Rasheed, are you sure this will is real?” Bintu said indignantly.

“Woman, you better watch that your tongue. If it wasn’t for that tongue, we would still have Haruna with us, instead of being here reading his will.” Rasheed thundered.

Bintu cowered and became quiet after that. Turning to Agatha, Rasheed said “now, we need to get the grant of the Probate to execute the will properly. Congratulations to your son, for now owning the hospital he wants to destroy. My chambers will formally inform him of this development, but you can do so informally.”

With that, he gathered up all that was on the table and left, with Bintu quietly following. They were gone for a full five minutes before Agatha finally got around to calling Derin.

Awazi was all dressed and racing to stop a cab. Samir had tried to talk to her, but she had just kept pushing him away. She had to get home, and fast, before Derin. If he was already at home before she got home, she would give herself away, she was sure of

that.

Then Derin's phone rang and from the ringtone, she guessed who it was – her mother in-law. Had Derin called her? What did he say to her? Was she calling to tell her to leave her son's house? These thoughts ran through Awazi's mind as she contemplated whether to pick the call or not. "I'd rather at home than here in the taxi," she said out aloud to herself. The phone rang out.

Derin paused from his pacing at the sound of the gate opening. It happened every time he heard that sound. He was hoping it would be Awazi each time, and had been disappointed all the times so far. This time however, moments after the gate, they heard the burglary proof opening and Derin knew it was her.

The moment the door opened, he said with relief "where under God's heaven have you been Awazi? I have looked everywhere for you."

To Awazi however, Derin's relief sounded like an accusation.

She shot back "and where did you go too Derin? I came out of the room to talk to you less than ten minutes after I'd been in there, and you were nowhere to be found. You

run off every time we have an issue Derin, you always run off on me.”

“Babe, I didn’t run off. I was afraid and worried, and I thought you would listen to Kamal if you weren’t going to talk to me. So I went to get him”

“Hi Awazi,” Kamal said, and she noticed for the first time that he was also in the room.

“Oh God, I’ve been such a fool!” Awazi exclaimed.

Kamal interjected “No it’s my friend that has been foolish, but we’ve talked and he would do right now. We…”

“So it was Kamal you went to and not Ope,” Awazi said to Derin, cutting Kamal short.

“Ope? Whatever put that idea into your head that I went to her,” Derin asked.

Derin’s phone rang again in Awazi’s hand, the Sweet Mother ringtone piercing the air. She handed it over to Derin and he took the call.

The conversation was quick, and Derin’s interjections of “What!” “It cannot be!” “When did it happen?” “This morning?” “In the last twenty minutes?” and so on put both Kamal and Awazi on the edge. The moment he ended the call, Kamal asked “what was that

about?”

Awazi’s mouth went dry, believing that the only reason Derin could have been exclaiming the way he did in the conversation was because Agatha had somehow found out about what she had done and told him. She blurted out “I’m sorry Derin, it was a mistake, the greatest mistake I have ever made and one that I will regret forever. But please forgive me, I beg of you. For the sake of what we’ve had, I beg you.” She went on her knees.

“Awazi, what are you talking about?” a surprised Derin asked.

“Whatever your mother told you, at least let me say my part,” Awazi began, with tears streaming down her eyes. “I thought you had left me in the room and gone to Ope when I came out of the room and met an empty house. So I went to Samir...”

“What! You didn’t even wait for one moment, no hesitation! So you went racing back into your lover’s arms, yesterday night was too sweet, you just had to go for more abi? Kamal, shay you dey hear wetin I dey hear?”

“Kamal, please help me beg him, it’s the handiwork of the devil. I don’t know how the anger came over me. Please.”

“Derin, please...” Kamal began

“Kamal, don’t let me fight you! What are we even protecting in this marriage sef? En, what? I’ve had it, look, Awazi, it is over, you understand? Go back to you Fulani boy, shebi you people will be speaking language to each other. And look, if you do not leave this house, I will leave the house for you.”

“Derin please, I beg you, don’t do this to me.” Awazi said earnestly.

“You are leaving my house, and not one moment later than now. Your guilty conscience and my God pushed you to confess. My mother only told me about the death of Doctor Ajanaku this morning and you thought she had somehow gotten to know about what you did. My mother’s head is fighting for me.”

“Kamal,” Awazi said, turning to Kamal. But Kamal turned his back. She was alone.

“Derin,” she said “you went to this woman, Ope, years ago, and lived with her for months. I took you back. In what should have been a moment of pain and consolation for both of us after we lost precious Isaac, you went right back into her arms, I didn’t leave, I tried to keep us working. You didn’t see or share my struggles, how I was nearly running mad, how lonely I felt. Derin, I have made this one mistake, and I ask that you forgive and do not leave me alone, this one time. Please.” She tried to reach out and

touch him but he slapped her hand away.

“Listen to yourself Awazi! You are a woman! How can you compare? Look, there is no point flogging this horse, it is dead, decomposing and buried. Please go. Just go.”

Awazi saw that she could have been appealing to a rock, Derin’s mind was made up. She went inside, and began to pack a box. She would pack light, and hope to return soon.

She called her cab man, and left the house.

“Aunty Jamila,” Awazi said into the phone, “he threw me out”

“What!” Jamila said, surprised at the turn of events “What happened? I thought you were going out of the room to sort things out?”

Awazi explained all that had happened to her aunt amid tears.

“Awazi! How could you do such a thing! What has Lagos done to you? Let me speak with Derin. Do not go anywhere; I will call you back now.”

Awazi waited for Aunty Jamila to call her back. She had bought a ticket for Abuja on her phone. She needed time away from Lagos, from these southerners, from everyone. Irrespective of what her aunt was able to say to Derin now, she wasn't going back to the house. She was wrong, yes, but his hypocrisy stank to the high heavens.

Fifteen minutes later, Aunty Jamila called back.

“Awazi, he is a man, he is still angry. I will still call back and talk to him, but I want you to come here to me in Abuja, until we sort this out. I'm sure if we give it a week, he will be sufficiently calm.”

She thought about it, in the light of what had been on her mind just as the call came in.

“No, aunty,” she said. “Derin has been doing this to me for years, and even as recently as last night, and I forgave him, repeatedly. One mistake, and he throws me out, him and his friend. Aunty, I will be travelling, but won't be coming to Abuja,” she lied. She really, truly wanted to be on her own for now.

“Awazi, stop being rash. It is this your rashness that has gotten you here. And now, you are about to make an impulsive decision again. Pause and think!”

“Aunty, my mind is made up. I will keep in touch. They just announced my boarding, I have to go now,” she lied again.

“Awazi, Awazi! Where are you going, you this child?” Aunty Jamila was saying.

“Sanu, Aunty. I’m sorry.” She cut the call and turned the phone off.

“Derin, what will you do now, the hospital is yours.” Kamal asked.

“I’m confused man, I cannot lie” Derin said, running his hands over his hairless head.

“That man was just a shrewd old man. Now, will you be suing your own hospital? Won’t you just look absolutely ridiculous to the court? The two human defendants are dead, and the hospital is yours. No case, my brother.” Kamal said.

“But I can reject the hospital now. I am not compelled to take it, I’m not under any obligation.” Derin said, perplexed.

“And would you still not look stupid? It is within your power to deal with the hospital you’ve always wanted to go to court to deal with, and you refuse to. Will you now go to

court to shut the hospital down after you've refused the hospital, when you could easily have done it? Look, any path you take, you'll look bad. If you take it and shut it down, you'll leave many jobless and be seen as evil, running down such a legacy. If you take it and keep it running, you'll look like the hypocrite who always wanted to shut it down before it was yours, but now couldn't shut it down. And if you refuse it, you'll still look stupid, being handed the chance of a lifetime to have money and refusing it. Kai, these old people are terrible."

"My mum said to reject it, that it would carry a curse, since the two people who owned it died because of my actions." Derin said.

"That's pure superstition bro, and it is not your actions that killed them. Don't take guilt for what isn't yours," Kamal responded.

"So what should I do? If you were me, what would you do?"

"I'd take the hospital, and keep it running. That's the wise, pragmatic thing to do. And get an experience doctor to be the Chief Medical Officer, seeing to the day to day running. You'd retire as you are, instead of trying to get another job now."

Derin looked up at Kamal, doubt in his eyes. "You're sure?" he asked.

“You could pass the ownership to me and find out for sure,” Kamal said, smiling.

Derin attempted a smile and then shrugged his shoulders. “Very well, that’s what I will do.”

Throughout the conversation, there was not a single mention of Awazi.

17 Months Later.

Derin sat in the conference room of Omega Hospital. Around him was his team – the Chief Medical Officer of Omega Hospital, Dr. Omololu Bucknor, the lawyer, Professor Charles Acha and an ashen faced young doctor, Shem.

On the opposite side, a stone faced Korede Adams and his two lawyers sat. They were negotiating a settlement with him. Korede’s wife had come to the hospital to deliver a baby, and eventually, after two days in the hospital, with her blood pressure rising, the doctors had advised that they do a Cesarean Section. And Dr. Shem had performed the operation. The baby had been delivered successfully and the mother closed up, when she began to complain of tummy pains. It was a long time before they discovered that she had been closed up with a scalpel inside her and this had caused the bleeding.

Now, her husband was taking the hospital to court for the matter, and asking that their license, as well as that of Dr. Shem be revoked.

Try as they had, they had been unable to convince Mr. Korede Adams to let the matter be settled out of court.

“I want justice, that is all,” he had said, eyeing Shem coldly.

His lawyer had said with some respect to the professor “see you in court sir,” and the professor had told Derin things were not looking good for them. It appeared Shem had realized the scalpel was inside her while she could still be saved, but had kept mum out of fear, and that was what the other lawyers were going to court with.

He went straight from the conference room to the car. He needed to go away from this madness, from Ibadan. He had relocated to Ibadan to run the hospital a month after he had taken it over, after Kamal had finally gone to join his family.

The driver was already running the engine when he got in from the hot sun and the AC felt like heaven. He was having a splitting headache but he just wanted to get away from the hospital, its smells of drugs, its sounds of stretchers and wheelchairs, from all of it. He unlocked his blackberry and saw that he had waiting emails and a series of waiting BBM messages. The old Derin would have checked BBM before emails, but

now, he checked his email first. He opened the email. The first was from Awazi.

He had not heard from her since she left his house that day. And after the way he had spoken to Aunty Jamila, he had been unable to call her. He tried to call Awazi, but she seemed to have changed her numbers. He quickly opened the email and here's what it said;

“Dear Derin, I hope you are happy. I hear you are doing well with Omega Hospital now. The attachment should interest you. All the best in life.”

Derin opened the attachment, cursing the network for the almost one minute it took to load.

When it finally opened, it was a picture of a smiling Awazi in a definitely European background, holding a little boy to the camera, his smile revealing a toothless mouth. It took only that look for Derin to know that he was looking at his son.