

FOLLA KING

- TOMI ADESINA



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...an Adaptation of the widely read blog series; **FOLA KING**

Thank you,

- Fola David (Celebrity Speed Artist)
- Woworx
- You (My amazing audience.)
- Ayo (I miss you. Rest easy.)
- And...George.

CHAPTER 1

“I am not cocky. I am just repulsed by people who can’t compete with me and this happens to me every time. Again, I am not cocky. They are not just good enough; and who are these ‘they’? The agglomeration of lawyers who come up against me. I must say I find my learned colleagues quite fascinating...especially the ones who start their pitch voraciously as though they could stage an upset only to water down when I rise. I enjoy seeing people squirm at my presence in court or during settlement simply because they know I won’t lose. They give me...what’s it called again? Satisfaction. Hmmm....needless to say...I get that a lot.”

Fola King stopped the self-idolatry going on in his head for a moment and waited for the Judge’s verdict. Recess was almost over and he believed the ruling could only go in his favour. This was one of those cases where his guts and instincts told him his client was guilty. His client had the eyes of a killer. Fola thought he looked dangerous but then looks could be very deceptive. The man was said to have killed his wife for having an affair with his friend. All the reasons did point to his client but Fola knew there were loopholes in that case and he did exploit them carefully. He enjoyed being a defence counsel, even though it left him largely controversial. Heck! Fola lived for the controversies. Now, he had the herculean task of proving his client not-guilty and so far, he had done an excellent job. The money coming to his firm was good, and the publicity was great. Two of his favourite things – Money and Fame.

Fola King liked to think that they came hand-in-hand. He graced style magazines week-in-week-out and was living the life that could only be accrued

to a famous sport star in some European elite league. Flashy cars. Posh apartment. Good bank account...and then, ladies. He was blessed with the good looks and athletic physique needed to get any lady. But then his charm did him a whole lot of good. He waited for the Judge's verdict but not anxiously. He just wanted to get out of his wig and robe which he really didn't like being seen in. He was one of the lawyers who felt his suit trimmings went to waste once he had the robe on. The robe covered the beauty of any of his many three-piece suits which he constantly adorned on his work days. The only thing that could conveniently surface in the court room in his dressing were his shoes; hence he spared no penny on buying the best. Again he was sure he wasn't vain or cocky like others liked to think...he just loved to look good. It had not killed anyone. Had it?

A bang on the door signalled the return of the Judge to the court room and Fola King, as well as the rest of the court, rose on to their feet and waited for the Judge until he took his seat. Fola shot a smug smile at the prosecuting counsel before taking his seat. She eyeballed him coldly before drumming her fingers on the table. Fola smiled at this and then focused on the Judge who was about to proclaim the verdict.

The Judge cleared his throat and then looked into the court. "In the case of the State versus Mr. Umar Abubakar. Having considered the arguments of the prosecution, the testimonies of the witnesses and the exhibits tendered before this honourable court, the court does not find substantial reasons to convict the defendant in the murder of his late wife, Hajjia Fatima Abubakar...The prosecution has not been able to prove the guilt of the accused person. The law is trite that it is the duty of the prosecution to prove the guilt of the accused. Having failed to discharge this burden upon

them, I have no choice than to return a finding 'not guilty' for the accused. Hence, Mr. Umar Abubakar is hereby discharged and acquitted. This is my judgment."

Fola King flashed a smirk at Mr. Umar as he joined him. "Thank you so much, Fola King. You are really something else."

"I don't lose, Sir." Fola replied.

Mr. Umar nodded. "You should stop by the house this evening."

"I can't make it. The office?" Fola asked, checking his wristwatch.

Mr. Umar was fine with that. He wasn't sure he wanted too many people visiting after such a tiring trial anyway. "See me at the office on Monday." He replied and walked away to his group of friends.

"You do know he killed her, right?"

Fola turned around to his opposing counsel and took a deep breath. "I actually think you are stalking me."

She scoffed. "I am upset. No. I am livid. Outraged. Angry. Mad at you!"

Fola stared around to be sure all eyes were not on them...at least not yet. "Yemi, it was just one night...why are you taking this thing so serious?"

She swallowed. "I agree I was shameless enough to jump into bed with you on a first date." She started, through clenched teeth, trying not to be heard. "And maybe I let my guard down and was foolish."

"It was good sex, Yemi. Stop making light of your feelings." He replied, cutting her off. He understood women and their logic. Give them one

minute and they would start guilt tripping you. They were experts at reverse psychology. He was not about to fall for it.

She shook her head. "I believe your client killed that woman."

"He did not." He replied, sternly.

She stared at him. "Look at him! Umar Abubakar is all shades of evil. I must have missed something but there is no way he did not kill his wife."

"You cannot approach the law on sentiments." Fola replied, grabbing his briefcase. "Besides, he has just been acquitted by the Judge. If you feel violated by that ruling, feel free to appeal and I need not remind you how Judge Osaro feels about people challenging him. For that night's sake." He said. "You have yourself a good day." He added and walked away from her, approaching the exit.

He stopped on seeing Sarah. She had her arms akimbo and cast a stern gaze at him. He exhaled and rolled his eyes. She must have seen him talking to Yemi. He smiled at her and mouthed. "I won."

Sarah stared coldly at him before stepping out of the court. He exhaled and looked around him before heading out of the court.

"You told me there was nothing between you and that Yemi chic, right?"

Fola stared at Sarah who was standing by his door and walked over to her. "You know I like the door shut." He said, closing the door.

Sarah followed him into the room, taking her seat opposite him. "You swore to me that there was nothing."

"Sarah, there is nothing. She was an opposing counsel in this case and that is all there is to it." He replied, taking his seat. "Don't you have anything to do?" he asked.

She stared at him. "Is that a way of getting rid of me?"

"I think you spend too much time in my office for an intern. Don't you care what the other interns or your fellow corps members think of you?" he asked.

She shrugged. "Why should I? You don't care about anyone or what they think or feel and I am your understudy. Am I not meant to be that way?"

That was dicey for Fola. He stroked his beards proudly. "You learn well."

"And fast too." She replied with a smile. "I can't wait to get my permanent appointment in this Firm."

Fola smiled. "It's not that simple."

"I am serving here and more importantly, I am sleeping with you. That has to count for something." She replied.

Fola chuckled. "So, it's just about the sex?"

"And I live in your house too." She added. "That is a big deal for me."

He blinked. "I hope you haven't whispered this to any of your Corps member pals?"

“No. Your secret is safe with me.”

Fola laughed. “My secret?”

“Our secret.” She replied.

He stared at her with a smile. “I thought I did well in court today.”

She shook her head. “I thought you were too confident. That lady didn’t grind you well.”

“Do you actually think anyone could own me in a court room?” he asked, staring at her.

She adjusted her blouse. “I know why you are staring so hard. Trust me, I believe Yemi went too easy on you”. She said, sitting up. “I have heard a lot about her from the Legal Aid unit but she disappointed me all through this trial. She gave you a very easy sail. Don’t you think? Do you have anything on her? Maybe she used to be a hooker in her former life...although Yemi particularly strikes me as the prim and proper lady. So, tell me...why did she lose that case? Umar looks like a killer.”

Fola bit his lip. “That doesn’t make him a killer and if you have understudied me so well...you should have learned not to be sentimental.”

“Work in progress, Fola.” She replied. “Work in progress.” She affirmed. “Besides, we all know that this firm goes for the murky cases with a lot of money attached to them, hence, I do not expect you to go to court with your heart...not saying you have any.” She concluded and smiled.

Fola took a deep breath. “I think I have created a monster in you.”

“I need to impress my teacher every now and then.” She said, undoing her top button. “Are you impressed?”

He smiled. “I would be having drinks with the guys after work. Want to come?”

“No. I’ll go home and wait for you.” She replied, picking up a file from his desk. “I’ll study this.”

He nodded. “See you later.”

She winked and walked out.

Fola released his necktie and walked over to the giant window in his office, and stared into the city. He liked it here. It did provide him some tranquillity and a moment to think about the things that might be true. Things like Umar actually being involved in his wife’s death. But the man had an alibi and the case was already done and dusted...well, almost. He still had a fat cheque to receive from him and then it would have been dusted.

Umar wiped his eyes and stared into the mirror. “Fatima.” He called, quietly. He then burst into tears. “Fatima. Why, Fatima?” he cried.

“What are you doing, Umar?”

He turned to see his friend. “Why are you here, Yusuf?”

“Dry your tears. The transfer just came through.” He replied.

Umar took a deep breath, but the tears would not stop flowing. “Is the transfer supposed to make me feel better?”

“I guess.” Yusuf replied.

Umar walked over to the bed and took his seat. “I would have to change these sheets.”

“I thought you already did that.”

Umar nodded. “They still remind me of her.”

“It will pass.” Yusuf replied, gathering some documents by the bedside.

Umar shook his head. “No, it won’t.”

“Well, you are about to be in charge of a hefty conglomerate. This was a good sacrifice, Umar.”

Umar stared coldly at him. “I still hate you for sleeping with my wife.”

“Well, you needed a reason to kill her...and I gave you one. Move on.” Yusuf replied and handed him the files. “I don’t know how you managed to be Fatima’s next of kin, but you are a very wealthy man now, Umar. Very wealthy.”

Umar managed a smile. “How is Aaima?”

“Safe.”

Umar nodded. “I don’t like surprises.”

“Yet you still managed to act surprised when you saw me on top of your wife.” Yusuf replied with a smile. “Pass me a cigarette.”

Umar swallowed. “Don’t make me feel worse than I already do.” He replied and tossed a pack of cigarette to his friend who had now taken his seat beside him.

“You are lucky Fola King is a very good lawyer. I reckon he is the best in town. If I was the judge, I’d have convicted you based on my instincts.” He replied, fetching a beer from the bedside fridge. “Want one? It goes well with a smoke.”

Umar hated Yusuf’s guts. “You do know we are both going down for this, right?”

“I don’t remember being the one who killed her.” He replied, puffing out some smoke into Umar’s face. “Besides, did the Judge not acquit you?”

Umar nodded. “But what if anything goes wrong? I don’t like how confident you look.” He retorted.

“Aaima is the only thing that can go wrong and she is already out of here, she saw everything and she is the key witness no one knows. Be calm.” Yusuf replied and rose to his feet. “I should check on Aaima later this evening.”

“Don’t hurt her. I can’t be responsible for the death of two sisters.” Umar replied.

Yusuf laughed so loud that he accidentally hit his head on the door. With the impact of the pain, he stopped and stared at Umar. “What difference does it make?” he asked, and walked out.

Umar took a deep breath.

Fola dropped his glass and drummed on the table. “Another round!”

“Dude, you should slow down.” Obi cautioned as he watched Fola take his sixth shot of the night.

Fola turned to Obi. “Why are you always so careful? It hasn’t earned you anything, you know?”

“Your recklessness will kill you...or kill someone.” Obi replied. “By the way, I could really get used to you spoiling me every time you win a case.” He added, sipping his wine.

Fola laughed and turned to his right. “Where is that idiot?”

“He went to puke in the bathroom. His tolerance level for alcohol is not like yours.” Obi replied and tapped on his phone screen. “I can’t believe I have another shift in a couple of hours. God! I hate my job!”

Fola smiled. “You know I find it pretty awkward that you chose nursing of all professions.”

“What is so awkward about it? I love my job.” Obi replied.

Fola’s phone buzzed. He turned the screen to his face and sighed seeing ‘MOM’ on the Caller ID. He turned the phone face down and sipped some of Obi’s wine.

“Who was that?” Obi asked.

Fola shrugged. “My mom.”

“Oh...Mrs King. Dude, when last did you answer her call?”

Fola relaxed in his seat. “See...I don’t have time for her and her cliché talk of marriage. I am really exhausted.”

“Bro, but you are seeing Sarah, right?” Obi asked.

Greg clattered into an empty seat beside them. “He is just sleeping with her.” He said, joining in the conversation.

“How do you feel?” Obi asked.

Greg shook his head. “Like rubbish. And to think I have to see a client early tomorrow morning. Fola, you are the devil. Always getting me drunk.”

“I do not remember forcing the bottle down your throat.” Fola replied, staring at his wristwatch. “What case is that?”

“Femi Johnson. That land issue.”

Fola hissed. “I hate cases that drag forever.”

“How do you feel when you get the bad guys out?” Obi asked.

Fola rolled his eyes. “You are always so emotional, Obi. This is my job.”

“I think you are a good lawyer, but I just feel really sore about what you do.” Obi continued. “I mean, Umar doesn’t have good records in this society, yet he is walking away.”

“Because it can’t be proved that he killed his wife. It’s the law. You are a nurse, I don’t expect you to understand that.” Fola replied.

Greg belched. “Guys, I feel really nauseated and I want to go home.”

“I’ll call you a cab.” Obi offered, dialling on his phone.

Greg blinked. “Why don’t I just go with you?”

“Nah...heading to the hospital.” Obi replied and turned away from the other guys as he gave directions to a cab driver on the phone.

Fola stared at Greg. “You should really stop drinking.”

“You should really stop winning cases so we have nothing to celebrate about.” He retorted as he yawned.

Obi turned to them. “The driver will be here soon. And you Fola, can you drive?”

“Since when has alcohol ever owned your boy?” he asked, laughing.

Obi managed a smile. He saw Fola and Greg as two reckless boy-men that he had the responsibility of watching over. He admired Fola. Fola was everything the other two weren't. Decisive with his career...not women. Brilliant. Smart. A smooth talker and very successful. Greg struggled with his career that he often did doubt his authenticity as a lawyer. Obi had a good time at the hospital. His patients loved him but he wished he had Fola's carriage, determination and will that saw him rise faster than his peers in the society and very importantly, financially.

“Fola, I think you should decide what you want to do with Sarah.” Obi said. “She lives with you-”

“And so did every lady he had good sex with.” Greg replied, cutting in. “Remember our President's quote?” he asked, already laughing.

Fola laughed. “I am for everybody and I am for nobody.”

The trio burst into a laugh.

Aaima's head ached. She tried to open her eyes but it ached more. She groaned in pain as she forced the eyes open, panting heavily in the process. She scanned through the empty room she was kept in and took a deep breath. It was empty. Her clothes stunk. She had been wearing them for as far back as she could remember when she was abducted from her sister's house. She tried to stand but her legs failed her as she crashed back to the floor. She was injured. The men had constantly hit her legs for a moment like this...she presumed. She had never been left alone, she didn't know why she was in the room alone. Something didn't feel right. Or had the police come raiding? It didn't make any sense. They would have freed her if they came around. She had to get out of here now that she was alone. She forced herself up again and made for the exit in pains. It was dark and the coast looked clear for her. There was no one in sight. She knew the men were not foolish enough to leave her alone, but she had to take her chances. With this hope in mind, she took the first step to her freedom out of the room.

She used the walls as a support as she leaned against it and dragged herself slowly through the wall of the building. She froze in her tracks as she heard voices in a distance. She looked ahead and saw lights beaming afar. This place had to lead to the roads. If she could just run as fast as her legs could take her, she would get to the road and scream for help. That was a good idea. She took a deep breath and prayed that Allah would make it possible. She poked her head to the right side of the building and saw two men having a smoke. She blinked. Maybe that would distract them a little while she ran. There was a bush ahead of her leading to the road. She would make sounds and the men would notice. She swallowed as her fears welled up in her mind. Maybe it would be foolish to try to get away after all. Her legs were not in the

best condition, but she had quite a distance from the men. She would take her chance. She ran.

The men turned as they heard quick movement and panting across the bush. "Snake?" One asked.

The other stepped back and shone his torch into the distance. "It's the girl!" he screamed and raced through the bush. "Stop!"

Aaima looked back and saw the good distance she had left between them. She looked ahead, she was seconds away from the main road. She kept running. She heard gunshots.

Fola struggled to keep his eyes on the road. He knew he should have called a cab. The alcohol made him leery. He knew he had to make it home in time, else he'd face Sarah's rants. He stepped on the gas pedal and then he froze as a body dropped down his bonnet to the floor. "Oh my God!" he said as he panted.

He stepped out of the car into the empty road and hurried out to the body that lay on the floor in blood. He bent and touched her neck to feel for a pulse. It was still there. He gasped. "Hospital."

As he tried to lift her, she groaned in pain and grabbed his collar. "Help me...Help me." She struggled to say. She was bleeding from her leg profusely.

Fola looked around him. There was no one in sight. He couldn't stay one more second there. He would be in trouble with the law. He knew the drill and how everything worked there. He put her back to the floor and shook his head. "I am sorry." He said, stepping back slowly. Her eyes pleaded

for him to stay and help. She probably couldn't talk any more. She was in pain. He blinked in fear, ran into his car and drove off.

CHAPTER 2

Fola's car tyres screeched as he hit the brakes hard. He shut his eyes and took a deep breath before cleaning the sweat beads trickling down his face. He looked into his rear mirror. She was still there. Not like he was expecting her to have moved. He swallowed hard. "God, what have I done?" he mumbled as his hands trembled. He reversed to the spot.

Fola stared around to be sure that no one was in sight. He touched her and she grabbed his hand in fright. "It's okay...it's okay." He assured. He wasn't sure if it was, but he had to say something right at that time.

"Help me." She begged.

Fola carried her and moved as fast as he could to his car.

Sarah hated the PlayStation. It was Fola's best buddy and stress reliever, but her rival. It got all the attention Fola couldn't give her whenever he came home stressed up or tired. She would have loved him to talk to her but he'd rather go and sit with the PlayStation. She knew she didn't have his heart. Heck! Fola probably didn't have any heart. But she liked him in her own way. It was not all about the sex for her. She wanted something real with him. She wanted to be called his woman. She adored him. His success and strength couldn't be rivalled and she appreciated his drive and ambition and maybe that was what drew her close to him at first when she joined the firm as a corps member. But now, she wanted more.

She wanted his attention. His time and maybe his heart...if it could be reached. But first, she had to get rid of the little demons that did compete against her in his heart – top of that list was the PlayStation. She stared intensely at it as she rolled the hammer in her hand. Now, money wasn't Fola's problem. He would be upset and probably rant about it for a day or less, and then replace it. So maybe smashing the poor object wouldn't be smart after all. She dropped the hammer and sighed. Fola was grooming her to be the lioness in the ring as he was the lion. Wouldn't it be just perfect if they were a real couple – in love? Sarah hissed at her fantasies. Maybe she was wasting her time. Maybe she should concentrate on the time she had with him as she was sure that it wasn't going to last. With guys like Fola, it would not last. She would not fool herself and hope for more. She would just concentrate on being the one that stayed longest...and made all that she could off him. Yup! That made more sense.

The door flew open and Fola rushed in carrying a lady. Sarah gasped, dropping the hammer to the floor. "Fola, what is this?" She asked, as she watched blood drip from the body of the lady he carried to the tiles. "Oh my God, Fola. What's happening here?"

"Sarah, call Obi." He replied, frantically. "I have dialled him...tell him I am home." He added, taking off his jacket.

Sarah stared hard at the bleeding lady on the white sofa. She was breathing hard and painfully as she moved her body on the sofa.

"Don't stand there, Sarah! Call Obi!" Fola yelled as he rushed into the house.

Sarah picked his phone and dialled Obi. "Obi?"

“I am almost there. Hang on.” Obi replied hastily.

Sarah hung up and approached the lady.

Fola rushed into the living room, holding the first aid kit. “Get me some hot water.” He said, staring at the bleeding lady’s leg. “I...I have to take the bullet out.” He said, pulling out a pair of tweezers from the box.

“What are you doing, Fola? Just wait for Obi.”

Fola blinked. “Just get the hot water.”

Sarah nodded and walked into the house, carrying the hammer with her before Fola could see it.

Fola bent over the lady. “I am so sorry.” He said.

She looked away as she struggled to keep her eyes open. He was the least of her worries. She wished she had not returned to the country at the time she did. She wished she was not there to witness Umar kill her sister and then hunt her down when she tried to escape. She wished she had not done a lot of things...but they were just mere wishes. She was here now.

“Obi!” Fola called as his friend walked into the room, carrying a box. “Dude, I had to leave the hospital. What’s going on?” he asked.

Fola pointed to the lady. “I am in trouble.”

Obi walked over to her and touched her. He then stared at her leg. “Bullet wound? Fola?”

“It’s not me...but I hit her too.” He replied. “With my car.” He added.

Obi opened the box with him. "I am going to need a table and some water."

"Let's go to my bedroom." Fola said, helping the lady up into his arms.

Sarah joined them with a bucket of hot water. "What are you doing?"

"We are going upstairs." Obi replied, leading the way.

Sarah watched Obi and Fola go upstairs before going after them.

Fola drank some more water and turned off the tap. He leaned against the sink and thought about the day he just had. From winning a high profile case to almost killing a woman...or maybe, he had. Obi had asked him out of the room so he could concentrate on the lady. It had been almost thirty minutes and he had not seen either Obi or Sarah. He was getting tired of waiting for them. He buried his head in his hands and muttered "God, please."

He raised his head almost immediately as Sarah joined him by the sink. "Obi is with her."

"Is she okay?" he asked, trying to sound calm.

She shrugged. "With all those cries and screams? I doubt it."

"Oh God!" he said as he exhaled.

Sarah stared at him. "What happened?"

"I was speeding and I hit her. But, there has to be someone she was running from as she has got a bullet wound." He replied.

She nodded. "What are you going to do about her?"

"I don't understand."

She blinked. "She can't stay."

"But she can't leave either...at least not yet." He replied, quite irritated by Sarah's questioning. The timing wasn't appropriate.

She swallowed. "Fola, when is she going?"

"Babe, she is not even on her feet yet...give me a break!" he yelled.

Obi walked in. "Is everything okay?"

"Obi, what is going on?" Fola asked.

He folded his arms. "She is in a lot of pain. She has suffered a lot, but she'll live. I was able to remove the bullet, but we need to bring her in for close observation."

"How do I bring in her without drawing attention from the police?" Fola asked. "Can't you just come over to the house and treat her for me?"

Obi shrugged. "That is fine by me, but you do know that she would be under observation for quite some time. Maybe three days at least?"

"Fola, she can't stay here." Sarah protested.

Fola turned sharply to her. "Why not? It's my house."

"Then I am leaving." She replied and stormed out of the kitchen.

Fola exhaled as he leaned against the sink. "She is just being dramatic. She does that every time."

“Maybe you have given her good reasons to be insecure?” Obi asked, as he reached for a drink from the fridge. “I’ll be here in the morning to check on her and in the evening too. I suggest that you do not move her from that room.”

Fola nodded. “Hopefully, she’d come round in the morning.”

“True, by the way...is it just me or did she have a foreign accent?” Obi asked. “Like she sounded British.” He added.

Fola smirked. “Pain can make you change accent.”

Obi chuckled. “You are a jerk, Fola. I’ll see you in the morning.” He replied and walked out of the kitchen.

Fola blinked as he took a deep breath. He took a bottle of water from the fridge and gulped it. He was sure he would not be touching alcohol in a while until this issue had passed.

The rays from the sun pierced into Aaima’s eyes as she woke up. She didn’t know how long she had been sleeping but this seemed like the first decent sleep she was having in the last few weeks. She pushed herself up and took a deep breath. She could still feel pains in her body but it was not like before. For this, she was grateful.

The door opened and a man carrying a small box walked in. She was immediately cautious and kept her gaze on him till he joined her at the bed.

Obi smiled faintly as he dropped his kit on the bed. “You look better.” He said as he drew a chair close to the bed. “My name is Obi.” He said.

She stared at him carefully. “Did you treat me?” she asked in her heavy British accent.

He nodded. “Yes.” He replied and then smiled at her. “You are not from around here, are you?” he asked.

She sighed and looked away.

Obi smiled. “It’s okay if you don’t want to talk and especially to a stranger but since I am your nurse, you might as well tell me a thing or two.” He said, opening the box. “I’ll be giving you an injection and some drugs for the pain.”

Loud yelling was heard and Aaima gaped in fear. Obi turned to her. “Don’t worry about it. They’ll be calm soon.” He said with a chuckle. “Couples always have their drama.” He added. “Don’t they?” he asked.

Aaima shut her eyes and flashes of her sister came to her. She couldn’t stay in that memory. She opened her mind back to reality almost immediately and stared at the Nurse as he slipped into his gloves. “What are you giving me?”

“Painkillers.”

She cringed as the noise went up again. The female voice seemed to be doing all the talking but the occasional silence implied that someone was responding to her before she resumed screaming.

“Who are they?” she asked.

Obi fetched the injection. “Fola King. He rescued you.”

“He hit me first before rescuing me.” She corrected.

Fola sighed as Sarah dropped her bag on the sofa. "Sarah, calm down and stop yelling." He started. "This would all be over in no time." He added.

"I can't calm down." She replied. "She slept in our bed!" she yelled.

Fola took a deep breath. "My bed."

"Excuse me?"

He nodded. "I...I was just correcting you."

"Can you not be a jerk for one minute and understand what is going on around us?" she started. "Do you even know if she set you up? Think like a lawyer. Did she just crawl out of that bush and bump into your car?" she asked.

Fola sighed. "I am late for work, Sarah and I don't have the time for your theories."

"Oh really? And I don't work?" she asked, picking her bag. "I have to go."

Fola reached for her hand. "No! I need you to help me."

"I can't." she retorted. "How about you stay in and watch her?" She added.

He shook his head, "I have a meeting with high profile clients. You are just an intern at the firm. I can cover for your absence. Stay in, take care of her and watch the cleaners when they come to take care of this place and I'll be back earlier today to help out, babe."

“She is not my mess, Fola.” She replied in defiance.

He nodded. “I know...but I need a favour from you. Do this for me.”

“How long is this going to continue for, Fola?” she asked.

He shrugged. “You heard Obi. Maybe three days or more. Look, Sarah, we can’t be in a hurry. Besides, she will need some clothes and you’ll need to help her through that.” He said. “And we will just wait till she is very fine and is out of harm’s way before telling her to go.” He replied.

Sarah stared hard at him. “Fola, we can’t have a total stranger in this place and you expect me to be calm about it. No. I won’t do what you want from me.”

“You are being difficult, Sarah.” He replied.

She shrugged. “This is on you.” She replied. “I have briefs to tend to.” She added and picked up her bag before walking out.

He adjusted his jacket and sighed.

“Reasonable peace at last, right?” Obi said to Aaima who was now struggling to keep her eyes open. “You’ll wake up in a few hours.” He said.

She exhaled and let the dose kick in before shutting her eyes.

The door opened and Fola walked in. “What’s up?” he asked.

“Sarah left?” Obi asked.

Fola nodded. “How is she?”

“Doing better. She’ll wake up in maybe four hours and she’ll be very hungry.” He replied.

Fola took a deep breath. “I am meeting some clients.”

“Dude, I have patients too.” Obi replied.

Fola nodded. “Man, I really need someone to watch her.”

“That someone isn’t me. I’ll be back in the evening to administer her drugs but I can’t risk the Director being mad at me.” Obi replied.

Fola exhaled. “You are a good guy at the hospital. I am sure they can allow you this time.” He replied.

Obi shook his head. “Fola, this was not the agreement.”

“Thanks man, I really appreciate it. There is food in the kitchen. Not cooked though. Check out the closet for one of my shirts or sweatshirts or something so she can change into.” Fola added with a smile. “Thanks, man. I owe you one.” He said, walking out.

Obi exhaled before staring at the lady. She was fast asleep now. He looked at her intensely as though he could see through her soul. She was beautiful with very lovely eyes. He could bet that her smile would be the same but he had not seen her smile yet. She sure didn’t have many reasons to be smiling. But if being alive did count, she ought to be grateful. But then, who was he to judge or think for her...she had been through a lot and that genuinely concerned him.

“Where is the girl?” Yusuf shouted as he hit one of the men with his gun. “You had just one job!” he shouted as the man crashed to the floor.

Umar paced nervously in the room. “If Aaima gets to the British embassy, we are finished. She is their citizen.”

Yusuf turned to him. “Pull yourself together, Umar.” He ordered before turning to their men. “I don’t know how you are going to do it or what you are going to do, but you must find her. Okay?” he said.

They nodded.

“Comb the streets, hotels, ask questions...don’t give yourselves away and should you be caught, kindly die alone. No one must trace it back to us, are we clear?” Yusuf asked.

They nodded.

“Good.”

Umar’s phone rang. “It’s the lawyer.” He said to Yusuf.

Yusuf nodded. “It must be for his balance. Talk to him.”

“Hello!” Umar said into the phone.

“Can I meet you in the office by lunch time?” Fola asked as he walked through the office corridor. He paused for a moment to listen to Mr Umar before continuing. “Oh? You rather send the money? Great. I’ll be expecting it today then. Bye.” He said and hung up.

“Fola, you missed the briefing this morning.” Greg said, joining him from the right. “And you are late too...it’s almost noon.”

Fola stopped and stared at him. “What did they say at the meeting?”

“Nothing special. Except that Fola King won this firm another high profile case.” He replied.

Fola smiled. “I don’t necessarily have to be there for that.”

Greg chuckled. “I think my client will lose his land.”

“Too bad.” Fola said, stopping by his office door. “I am sorry about it.”

Greg cleared his throat. “I’ll do better next time.”

“Okay.” Fola said and watched him leave. He then caught sight of Sarah talking to her colleagues. He could see her looking back at him but he would not risk the attention from other members of staff, so he slid into his office quickly.

“Thank you.” Aaima said as she handed the soup bowl to Obi.

He dropped it on the table. “Do you want anything else?”

“The pepper soup was good.” She replied. “You cook well.”

He nodded. “Thank you. But you haven’t had the pleasure of tasting from the one who cooks amazingly well. So, erm...should I cook you something else?”

She shook her head. “I have eaten twice today and it’s getting late.”

“Nah, it is erm...it’s just six...pm.” He said, staring at her.

She cleared her throat and pulled the sheet slightly over her legs. “I...I would like to get some rest.”

He nodded. “Yeah sure. I...I’ll be downstairs. If you need anything, just call me.” He said and approached the door. He stopped abruptly and turned back to get the tray. “Sorry.” He said and turned away. He stopped again and turned to her. “I...I am sorry Fola’s pants don’t fit you so you have to wear just his shirt and I am sorry you think I was staring at your legs.” He said and exhaled.

Aaima laughed.

Obi swallowed. Yes, she was beautiful and her smile was too. He took a deep breath and walked out.

Aaima laughed again. “He was looking at my legs.” She said to herself and managed a laugh. Obi had been kind to her all day and that made her feel a lot better.

Obi took a deep breath as he dropped the plates into the sink. The door opened and Sarah walked in. “Hey Sarah!” he said.

She stared at him. “How’s babysitting been?”

“Good. Please tell me you are here to relieve me.” Obi said as he ran some water over the plates.

She joined him at the sink. “I see you made her food.”

“Of course, was she meant to starve?” he asked with a soft chuckle.

Sarah stared at him. "I am not here to relieve you. I'll be spending the weekend with some of my friends so I came to get clothes."

"Are you running from her?" He asked.

Sarah swallowed. "Knowing Fola, this lady is here to stay."

"You should give him some more credit. He can't just put her out like that. Besides, some investigation might have to be done." He replied.

Sarah scoffed. "Is Fola the police? She isn't dead, so he isn't in trouble. He should take her to the Police station and let them take care of it." She retorted. "You know, I don't want to argue. I'll just go get my things." She said and walked out.

Aaima turned to her right as the door opened. She stared at Sarah and smiled. "Hi."

"Hawes and Curtis." Sarah said, staring at the shirt the lady was wearing.

Aaima was confused. "Sorry?"

"That is one of Fola's favourite shirts." Sarah replied. "I don't think he'd love to see it on you."

Aaima gaped. "Oh...but erm, Obi said it was fine?"

Sarah pulled out a bag and flung open the closet. "I'll be gone in no time."

"I am sorry if...if I am a bother to you." Aaima said.

Sarah scoffed. "I'll be back. This is my house." She replied, stuffing the bag with clothes.

Aaima swallowed.

"Okay, I am done here." She announced. "I hope for both our sakes that you are gone when I am back." She said.

Aaima took a deep breath.

"Yes, I am sorry I am being a bitch but I just like to be honest." She added and walked out.

Aaima exhaled. She didn't want to be here either. Her life had taken a downward spin since her courtesy visit to the country for the first time to see her sister. She didn't like it here and getting threatened by the 'woman of the house' wasn't going to make her feel any better.

Yusuf looked around to be sure no one was in sight before he stepped into the warehouse. He immediately pulled his gun as he surveyed the empty room.

"That was not the plan."

He turned round to see one of their men. "Don't startle me like that, you idiot."

"You were not to hit me with the gun." He replied. "We left the door open like you ordered for her to escape. Why did you hit me?"

Yusuf nodded. "I am sorry but we had to make it all look real else Umar might start to suspect something."

“Where is our balance?” The man asked.

Yusuf threw an envelope at him. “That’s the money.”

The man opened the envelope. “What’s next?”

“Did anyone keep a trail on her?” Yusuf asked.

The man frowned. “That was not the deal. You said we should let her go. End of story. We did as you ordered.”

Yusuf sighed. “I thought you’d be smart enough to know it was part of the deal.” He replied and fired shots into the man’s belly. “Idiot.” He added before going over to the man to retrieve the envelope.

CHAPTER 3

Fola turned off his engine and exhaled as he read Sarah's message for the umpteenth time. Every player had his kryptonite; he had often heard. But how could Sarah be his kryptonite? She didn't deserve a role in his life. No woman was worthy enough to be his Achilles' heel. Maybe he just paid too much attention to the cliché throttle and to her and that must have given her the balls to think she owned him. He was Fola King! No one owned him. How could she just leave for the weekend because she was not comfortable with the new lady? That was stupid. Sarah was stupid and maybe he was even more stupid to pay her any attention. He hissed as he shut his thoughts out and deleted her message from his phone before stepping out of the car.

He stopped at the door as it was half open and looked into the distance to be sure that no one was lurking. He stepped in quickly and shut the door after him. He scoffed as he watched Obi snore away on the sofa. "Obi!"

Obi woke up in fright.

"How can you sleep on my sofa?" he asked as he walked into the living room.

Obi held his head as he sat up. "I was watching football and I fell asleep."

"You are the only man I know who doesn't watch football...you probably should have come as a lady." Fola replied, gathering the plates on the table. "You should have returned these to the kitchen, man."

Obi sighed. "I fell asleep...and not watching football doesn't make me a lady."

Fola hissed. "Why was my front door open?" Fola asked as he took a seat. "Was it Sarah?"

Obi shook his head. "Nah...I shut the door after Sarah."

Fola looked in the direction of the stairs. "The girl?"

"She...She is asleep." Obi replied, yawning. "Dude, you just upset my sleep."

Fola rose to his feet. "I'll go check." He said, exiting the living room.

Obi crashed into the sofa. "I need to sleep!"

"Obi!!!"

Obi groaned. "Fola nau! I wan sleep." He replied in Pidgin English.

"Where is the girl?" Fola yelled.

Obi blinked. "The girl?"

Fola rushed into the living room. "Dude, she is gone. How did you let her go?" he shouted.

"I...I-" Obi stuttered. "She was just upstairs."

Fola shook his head. "We better find her." He said and walked out of the house. Fola knew there were a few places he could look if she had not gone far and he was hoping that she wouldn't due to her injury.

Obi joined him. "Fola, maybe we should look towards the other side of the estate, it's usually lonely there and it has a linking road out front

through which she could try to get a bus or something. If we take the car, we could maybe have a shot at finding her.” He said.

Aaima stopped walking to catch her breath. In all honesty, she had nowhere to go except her sister’s house and probably where she was running from. She had not made any new friends in the city yet and she didn’t have her documents on her to facilitate her travelling back. Worse still, she was in a shirt and saggy pants. It would take a miracle for the embassy not to treat her as a junkie with no history trying to run away. However, she’d try. She had not been lucky yet. She was too scared to flag down cars as she was sure that her late sister’s husband, Umar and his men would be on the lookout for her. The truth was, one option was better than the other and it would be to return to where she was coming from before she got herself into more trouble than she had bargained for. The fact that she was alive after her ordeals proved that maybe Allah wanted her to live for a reason, she wasn’t going to ruin the chances of survival she had by facing her uncertainty...at least not alone and not in a man’s clothes.

A car pulled up beside her. She blinked as her heart thumped hard in fear. The door opened and Obi stared at her. “Why did you run away?” he asked, joining her. “You had us worried.” He said looking in Fola’s direction. Fola didn’t seem worried as he sat in the driver’s seat texting on his phone. “Or...maybe you had me worried.” Obi corrected.

Aaima sighed. “I wasn’t going to tell the police you kidnapped me.” She replied. “I...I just wanted to get away.”

“Why? I...Did I do something? Was....was it about what I said about your...your legs? I-I was erm...I just wanted to-” Obi stuttered as he struggled to find the words to say to her.

She smiled faintly. “It’s not about you.”

“So....who? Sarah? Did she say something to you?” he asked.

Aaima shrugged. “I really don’t want to get into any trouble with anyone.”

“No, it’s nothing. If you don’t feel comfortable, you can always talk to me or Fola about it.”

Fola pushed the car horn and beckoned to them before turning to his phone.

“I think we should get into the car. It’s dangerous out here.” Obi said, leading her to the car.

“Thank you.” She said.

He nodded. “It’s fine. Come on.”

Fola stared at her through the side mirror before she settled into the back seat. “Are those my pants?” he asked, staring at the grey pants.

“Come on, man. Let her be.” Obi said, closing the door. “Let’s go.”

Fola chuckled. “Why are you being sensitive, Obi? I think she rocks the pants well.” He said, staring at her with a smile through the rear mirror. “She is looking good.” He said, chuckling.

“Guy na... Why you dey do like this?” Obi asked.

Fola smiled as he started the engine. "I think she looks good." He said with a laugh. "Grey is a nice colour, lady. I would have loved the black one on you more." He added, casting a grin at her.

Aaima avoided his gaze as she looked out through the mirror.

"You can still have my bed while I fix up the guest room for you over the weekend." Fola started as he pulled his pyjamas out of the wardrobe. "Don't get too comfortable in that bed. It's specially designed for my back." He said as he stared at Aaima. "Are you comfortable sleeping in that shirt?"

"I know it is a corporate shirt and very expensive and important to-

Fola cut her off with a laugh. "Far be it from me that I value a shirt over a human's warmth. You can sleep in them...only for tonight." He added and approached the door. "Goodnight..."

She stared at him.

"You do have a name, right?" he asked. "Like you haven't told me your name yet and you have been in my house for more than a day." He said.

She nodded. "Aaima."

"Aaima. Hmmm....unusual name." he said. "It's a lovely name." he added and walked out.

Aaima took a deep sigh of relief as she slid into the bed.

Fola frowned as he looked through his files. "Sarah, what did you do?" he groaned as he picked up his phone and dialled Sarah. "Hey!"

"I thought you were never going to call." She cooed from the other end of the line. "Isn't your British babe good enough?"

Fola hissed as he sank into the chair. "Just stop right there, Sarah. Why did you steal my files?"

"I didn't steal them. I took them." She replied.

"Stole? Took? Hijacked? Kidnapped? I don't care! I want those files back and I want them now." He said.

"I'll return them on Monday." She replied.

He scoffed. "Listen to me, lady, those are confidential files and you have no right to be snooping through my stuff."

"Really? I don't? Don't get me started tonight, Fola. I'll return them on Monday. Good night." She replied and hung up.

Fola gaped as he stared at his phone. "She did not just hang up on me. She did not."

Sarah looked through the files. "There is a lot in this case that I think Fola missed."

"Curb your enthusiasm, babe. Fola King doesn't miss anything...except of course this thing going on between us." Her companion replied with a nasty laugh.

She turned to Greg. "Is that supposed to be funny?"

"No." he replied. "Look, babe, I take this as an achievement as this is the closest I have to come to Fola King in any respect." He said and sipped his drink. "We shag the same lady." He said with a smile.

Sarah hissed. "I thought you had potential."

"I have potential. But, I am just telling you that Fola King never misses anything and if this case is already closed up, it is what it is." He replied.

She flipped through the pages. "I didn't join the firm to be second fiddle to Fola King. I am going to make my own name. You'll see."

Greg laughed. "Let me correct you. One, you are second fiddle to everyone at the firm. You are a corps member. Two, you are no match for Fola King. I reckon that very soon he'll get tired of the pet project he has with you which has provided him extra benefits and you'll be nobody at the firm. That, my dear, is if your NYSC term doesn't expire at the firm."

"Greg, you are petty. You have no ambition and you'll eventually play second fiddle to me because all do is kiss Fola King's behind. I don't think you have any goals of your own and that, my darling, is disgusting." She replied and walked in with the file.

Greg gaped as he sank into his seat. "Seriously?"

Aaima cringed from the noise as she stepped into the kitchen. Fola turned off the blender as soon as she walked in. "Don't you sleep?" he asked.

“If that thing wasn’t making so much noise, I probably would still be sleeping.” She replied, taking her seat. “What are you doing?”

“Making breakfast. Food. Basic necessity for growth and development.” He replied as he turned down the heat from the cooker.

“You cook?” she asked and then managed a smirk. “That’s interesting.”

He stared at her. “What is interesting about it?”

“That you cook is interesting. You don’t particularly strike me as the guy that cooks.” She replied.

He smiled. “You’d be surprised. Good, of course.”

“So what are you cooking?” she asked.

He stepped away from the cooker. “Basmati Rice. Fish stew, I am using Tuna. Grilling some chicken and I’ll make pepper soup too.”

“Wait! Are you a chef? Obi called you a Lawyer.” she asked, staring at the ingredients arranged on his board. “I mean, this is a lot of cooking if you ask me.”

Fola smiled. “I like to cook.”

“You are kidding me?”

He shrugged. “Nope. It is one way I get women into my bed, so I do it well.”

Aaima smiled. “Class-A Pervert.”

He bowed. “Proudly.”

“So, let me guess, you collect food recipes off the internet and do what? Try them? Foodie?” she asked.

He smiled. “Yes, I research new and foreign dishes as I am proudly an expert in most traditional dishes which I promise to make for you if you stick around a little longer, but yes, I have also made a lot of friends down at the best restaurants in Lagos. Most of them are Chefs. So, we usually have a show-off once in a while, I get to test my skills and learn from them. Italian dudes, French, Lebanese, amazing guys...skilful in the kitchen. So when I am not in the court tearing someone down, I am tearing some dish down.”

“Wow! I am impressed.”

He smiled as he placed a wooden spoon before her with some broth in it. “That’s the chicken pepper soup, have a taste.”

She sipped from the spoon. “Wow!”

“You are impressed.” He said and turned towards the gas. “Mind you, I don’t do this every time. Work is a quite a lot so I get really busy.” He said.

She smiled. “If you did this every time, I’d suggest you change your profession.”

“So, tell me Aaima, what were you doing out that night?” he asked as he turned to her.

The doorbell went. She blinked. “Unh?!”

“Please, excuse me.” He said and walked out of the kitchen.

Aaima took a deep breath. She felt she was safe here and didn’t need to tell her story to him. It would just complicate matters and she would be

back where she did not want – running from Umar. This place looked safe enough for her. She wasn't going to jinx the momentary happiness she had just found. She rubbed her palms together and thought of what to tell him once he returned.

“Look who I found.” Fola said as he walked into the kitchen with Obi. “This brother is a busy Nurse but all of a sudden, he can comfortably frequent my house more than his loo. Obi, how have you suddenly become less busy?” he asked with a smile.

Obi smiled. “Hi, Aaima.”

“Hi, Obi.” She replied with a smile.

Obi looked around. “I see Fola has hooked you up on his cooking. This is the guy who cooks amazingly well.”

Fola grinned. “He is my son. I taught him all he knows.”

Aaima laughed. “That's really cute.”

“I know.” He replied and returned to his cooking.

Obi stared at Aaima. “So err...how was your night?”

“Slept well, thank you.”

Fola turned to them. “Bro, she slept in my bed. She sure slept well.”

Obi smiled. “I...I just came over to see if you needed anything.” He said.

“No, she is in good hands.” Fola replied.

Aaima chuckled. “Can you let him hit on me in peace?”

Fola gaped. "Dude!!! She just helped you!" he shouted. "Obi, you are a loser!"

Obi smiled as he looked away.

"You guys could go and chat in the living room. I work faster without distractions anyway." Fola said with a smile.

Obi pointed to the Kitchen's exit as he led Aaima out.

"Thanks for coming around, Obi." She said as they took their seats.

She smiled. "Thank you."

Obi leaned towards her. "What's your story? I...You were in a bad shape and I still might have to pull you into the hospital for a couple of check-ups but I would like to know what happened to you that night."

She blinked. "I...I was running from...from my husband."

Obi gaped. "You...you are married?"

"Yeah, but...not to a good man and I... I can almost say I was married."

He cleared his throat. "Did he put a bullet in your leg? What kind of a man does that?"

"My husband."

He shook his head. "That is unacceptable."

"Right now I want to be as far away from him as possible." She replied. "I am happy here but I know I can't stay here forever, so I have to think of what I need to do and where I could go and start all over...maybe Abuja."

Obi relaxed in his seat. "You can come and stay at mine. It's not like this place, I mean like Fola's wonderful place but it is really decent and you are going to feel safe there too. I am going to protect you. You'd have nothing to worry about. I promise you." He offered.

She smiled faintly. "I really appreciate it, but I think I want to go somewhere far...not stay around here. I just want to limit every possible opportunity of running into him."

"Maybe you could go back to Britain?" he suggested.

She sighed. "I would need my passport and I can't get it."

"I could go with you to your house. He would not dare touch you." Obi replied.

Aaima laughed. "That is a very amateurish plan, my dear."

"I need to talk to Fola about this case." Sarah started.

Greg groaned as he turned in the bed. "Are we still on this obsession of yours? The case is gone. Once discharged and acquitted, it's over. Plus, it was a victory for Fola. Why talk to him?"

"This is my angle. Umar was accused of killing his wife for infidelity. The motive was there."

Greg groaned. "But he was found innocent, lady. What is your point?"

"Umar is not necessarily Nigeria's favourite man. Very controversial personality. Always affiliated with the negative happenings in this country."

He hissed. "Separate the man from the crime, Sarah. This is no way to be a lawyer."

"Yemi did not have enough evidence. I strongly believe something or someone is the missing link. There has to be someone I can talk to. Maybe a maid in the house or someone who can give me something on this case." She started.

Greg exhaled. "May I remind you what firm you work for? Us? We won this case...you have no need or reason to go around snooping on what is probably not even there. If you were this interested, you should have worked with Fola during the case."

"Greg, I don't study Fola's cases until after they are tied up. This case is particularly important as it sort of ended on an ambiguous note even though Umar walked and I think it is because Yemi didn't get enough evidence and I'll find it for her."

"So what are you? Defender of the defenceless? Oh wait...I have an original one. Are you the justice bearer?" he asked.

She smiled. "I am just someone who is smarter than you at the firm and who is coming for your office once I complete my service programme."

Greg clenched his teeth. "Inasmuch as I find your attitude very sexy, I think you should tone it down a little. You are starting to piss me off."

"Owww....is that your ego taking a hurt? I am surprised you have some left." She said with a grin.

Greg slipped into his trousers. "I need to get to the mall. Want anything?"

“No. I’ll be going to see Yemi at the Department of Public Prosecution, might be back late. I am going to get something solid on this case. You’ll see.” She replied.

“It’s Saturday.” He replied. “Check her house. But, I don’t see where you are going with a closed case. You are going to get on Mr. Peterside’s nerve, not to talk of Fola King’s bad side if you associate the firm to any subsequent suit that might arise from this.” He said.

She smiled. “Let me worry about Fola.”

Greg shook his head as he watched her walk out.

Fola stared at Obi. “Her husband did that to her?”

“Yes! The Dirt bag!” Obi replied, angrily. “I could put my fist into his jaw and scatter everything in his dentition if he let me.”

Fola picked out a shirt. “I don’t believe her.”

“Why not?” Obi asked.

He shrugged. “Husband put a bullet in his wife’s leg, roughs her up like that. Aaima looks like a good girl. Why would any guy want to do that to her?”

Obi scoffed. “Dude, why do you date several ladies?”

“These are completely different scenarios.” Fola replied, showing Obi a shirt. “She’d like this.” He said, dumping it in the trolley. “I can’t believe we are shopping for her.”

Obi blinked. "Fola, she can't go back to him."

"That's if she is running from him." He replied. "Obi, I know you are a little excited by a pretty lady but trust me, I'll get to the root of it and I can promise you...Aaima is not married."

Obi eyed him. "How are you so sure?"

Fola shrugged. "I just know it."

"Let's get going." Obi said.

Fola nodded. "I'll meet you at the counter." He said, returning into the store.

Fola checked his wristwatch as he wrapped up his brief. He hoped to get off work in good time so that he could stop by at Obi's and pick up Aaima. Obi had offered to host her during his off period at home while Fola went to work. Fola was desperate to know more about Aaima and he had made up his mind to have a discussion with her after work today.

The door opened and Sarah walked in with a file.

"I see you finally decided to show up." Fola said, as he closed his laptop. "Are you tired of the file you stole from me?" he asked. "It's a murder case. Those things can be chilly." He added with a smile.

She smiled as she took a seat. "How was your weekend, babe?"

"Great. I cooked." He replied with a smile. "I finally decided to use the Basmati rice you got from shopping. Pros of the rice; its special length and

cooking time...well, maybe my recipe made it a lot more amazing...It was a great dish. I loved it. Obi did too...and she did."

She swallowed. "Really?"

He nodded. "Yes. Really."

She dropped the file on the table. "You missed something."

"I never miss anything." Fola replied. "Never."

She relaxed in her seat. "I knew you'd say that. I spent my weekend with Yemi. Yemi...DPP."

Fola stared at her. "I thought you saw Yemi as my side squeeze, why are you frolicking with her? Are you not worried?"

"What could I possibly be worried about?" she asked, showing some defiance.

Fola picked up the file and glanced through it. "Umar has been acquitted. What is your problem?"

"Yemi and I think that Umar lied to you. From what Yemi found out from one of the maids that ran away from the house after the death of Hajjia Fatima Abubakar. Hajjia had a sister who came visiting around that period, but nothing was mentioned about the sister in any stage of that trial. The sister has gone missing." She said.

Fola stared at Sarah, unperturbed. "What is your point?"

"Fola King, your client lied to you and because of you, a criminal walked."

Fola smiled. "It's my job to keep criminals out of jail."

"I know...but Yemi doesn't think so and a new suit might be coming up on Hajjia's missing sister."

"Missing sister?" Fola asked.

Sarah smiled. "We think Umar kidnapped the late Hajjia's sister."

CHAPTER 4

Fola blinked as Sarah shut the door on her way out. She came in, dropped a bomb that left him impressed rather than ruffled and walked out in a classy way. He had to admit that the girl had learnt and had now become a woman. In the midst of his worries, his face formed a smile that acknowledged Sarah's last few ruthless minutes. Was he proud of whom she had become? Yes. Was he ashamed of who he had turned a once quiet shy ornery gal to? No. In all honesty, he knew he was only a fraction of Sarah's transformation. The girl had always had it in her, she just needed the right push...he gave her that. His mind went back to the day Sarah arrived at the Law firm with three other corps members fresh from the NYSC Orientation camp. They had just been posted to their office but he was sure that the girls didn't get posted to their law chamber without assistance.

They were the best and most successful legal chamber in the country; Fola knew their success could be attributed to his hard work. It would be anyone's pride and joy to serve coffee at the firm. Fola had stepped into the reception from the elevator after winning a case with his 'game face' – smug, cocky smile and waved his hand to acknowledge the cheers that followed when he turned to his left and caught sight of Sarah who had her eyes firmly on him. He, of course, shot her a smile and walked away. Sarah was always inquisitive, perking into cases, showing up in court with the senior counsels she was attached to and taking down notes. Fola took note of this and in no time, he had asked her to lunch. Dinner followed at his house...precisely, on his bed.

He knew what Sarah wanted, he was just a tool to helping her achieve her goals. He wasn't sure if he wanted the managing partner to retain Sarah after her NYSC programme, but he might have a firm say on that when he finally made managing partner with Mr. Peterside who was bent on keeping it solo. Fola King had his own ambitions, but for now...he would make all the money and fame he could under one of Nigeria's biggest Legal Practitioners.

Now, he was slightly ruffled. He didn't like the fact that there might be a slight possibility that Umar might have lied to him. What made the situation distasteful to him was that Sarah and Yemi were ahead of him on this one. If Yemi was snooping around and indeed Umar had played foul, they might be up for another case. Maybe one that still traced back to the old suit. He didn't particularly like the idea of having to face Yemi again, especially now that the scorned pill might have sunk into her system. The saying 'Hell hath no fury like a scorned woman' would be applicable in their situation as he knew Yemi had 'caught feelings' for him. That didn't bother him...he would have been worried if she didn't start to like him a little more. He won ladies over effortlessly – his smile, his charm, his appearance and his appeal...the only thing missing in his life was the fact that he was yet to lose himself to any woman. He was the orthodox lover, but that was not for the random women in his life to figure. It mattered to only one woman – Mrs King. Maybe he just had not met her yet.

Obi passed Aaima a glass of juice. "I must say I am impressed by your appetite." He said as he joined her on the sofa in the living room.

“Is that a subtle way for saying, ‘you eat too much?’” she asked with a smile. “Thank you for the juice.” She added quickly before taking a sip.

He smiled as he watched her take and return the glass to the table. “What are you going to do?”

“What about?” she asked.

He cleared his throat. “Your husband. He can’t be the reason you don’t live life.”

She smiled. “I am living. I just had dinner.”

“Yeah, I know...but you know what I mean. I go to work, Fola does too...and whether we like it or not, Fola’s girlfriend would be back from weekend and I don’t know how that’s going to make you feel at his place.” He replied.

She knew he was right. She didn’t get positive vibes from Fola’s girlfriend and she would not risk putting herself under more pressure, but she did have some problems that she couldn’t sort out on her own. She had no means of identification on her or any of her credit cards, if she left...she was going to be stranded. It was only wise for her to stay while she worked out her next move. She needed one. Obi was right. She couldn’t stay here forever.

“Aaima?” Obi called.

She turned to him. “Yeah?”

“Are you lost?” he asked.

She took a deep breath. “I lied to you, Obi. I am not married. I have never been.”

Obi blinked as he stared at her. “Why...why would you lie about something like that?”

“It’s complicated.” She replied.

He sighed. “So, what happened? The gunshot? What’s your story, Aaima?” he asked. He was beginning to get worried about this stranger whom he had now taken liking to. He was worried that he did not know enough about her. His heart didn’t need to know too much but he knew it was the right thing to do.

“Obi?” she called.

He stared at her. “I am listening.”

“I don’t know if I can talk about it yet.” She replied. “It is really complicated.”

He sat up. “If you are in some sort of trouble, I can help you. Fola is one of the best lawyers in town. Trust me, you’ll be fine. But, you have to talk to me. Please.”

“You can’t tell anyone about it...not even Fola.” She said.

Obi didn’t know if he could hide important information from Fola. Not like he wasn’t sure of his strength or wits, but he knew Fola had the relative calm to handle almost any kind of situation. Aaima had a gunshot wound...so it had to be serious. His heart raced as he stared into her eyes. They were waiting for an answer from him. An answer that showed not only support but loyalty. He exhaled.

“You can’t tell Fola, Obi. You have to promise me that. I can’t say anything if I am at risk.” She said.

“Fola isn’t going to put you at risk.” He replied. “On the contrary, he is going to help you if things get tense.” He added.

Aaima’s problem was not that she thought Fola as dangerous. She only felt that his profession might want to force him into digging deep into the case and inasmuch as she wanted justice for her sister whom she never really had any connection with, she wanted to be safe.

The doorbell interrupted her thoughts and Obi smiled faintly. “I guess you would tell me later?”

“I guess...” she replied as she watched Obi go to the door.

Fola walked into the room with Obi. “Hi, Aaima! How was your day?”

“Fine, thank you...and yours?” she asked.

He shrugged. “Oh well...regular. But good. Are you ready to go?”

“Is she home?” Aaima asked before she could stop herself.

Fola stared at Obi before turning to her. “You mean Sarah?”

Aaima nodded, unable to bring herself to utter another word. Sarah had issued a subtle threat to her. She wasn’t willing to risk her wrath...even though she had not really done anything to hurt the woman.

“Sarah would be happy to see you.” Fola said with a faint smile. “We should get going so we can grab dinner on the way.”

“Oh we already ate.” Obi replied.

Fola blinked. “Oh...okay. That’s fine.”

Aaima rose to her feet to indicate her readiness to leave Obi's place. "Thanks a lot for today, Obi." She said. "I appreciate it." She added.

Obi pulled out a phone from his pocket. "It's erm...it's nothing fancy but you can manage it pending the time you get one. I...I really don't use it. My phone number is stored on it, you can call me...or not?"

Fola felt a pang in his chest as he watched Obi hand Aaima his spare phone. He clenched his teeth and looked away. He wasn't meant to feel that way about Obi trying to make a pass at Aaima. It was not as though he liked Aaima...right?

"Thanks, Obi." Aaima said, taking the phone.

Fola rubbed his palms against his trousers as he stared at Aaima offer Obi a hug. He swallowed. No. He wasn't feeling comfortable. His heart palpitated on every gaze on Aaima and Obi. He started whistling to ease his unease and hurry up their new found friendship.

"Drive safely, Fola." Obi said, as they got to the car.

Fola stared at him and then grinned. "Since when did you start wishing me journey mercies?" he asked.

Aaima left them and settled into the passenger's seat. Fola gripped Obi's arm as he took him to the trunk of the car.

"Dude, why are you holding me like that?" Obi asked, releasing himself.

Fola smiled. "You like her."

Obi didn't reply.

“I...I am not saying it’s a problem. I just think you should know one or two things about her before you start tripping.” Fola continued.

Obi scoffed. “That’s rich coming from you because I don’t remember you seeing Sarah’s parents before you started seeing her.”

“I have no feelings for Sarah. We are co-existing. And that is a totally different case.” Fola replied. “Listen, man, I have no problem with who you see...I am only looking out for you. We still don’t know a lot about Aaima except that she ran away from an abusive husband.” He added.

Obi sighed. “We would know more about her in time. Don’t push it.” He replied. “You guys should get going.” He said, returning to the passenger’s seat to say his goodbye to Aaima.

Fola took a deep breath as he watched them.

Yemi handed Sarah a glass of water. “I still don’t know why you are bent on helping me.”

“Well, you know me...I am just a corps member at the firm but I have big interest in cases and it was through my help that we found that maid. I think if you keep me on your team, we can even find the sister or maybe something interesting about her.” Sarah replied.

Yemi took her seat. “I slept with Fola once.” She said, bluntly.

Sarah stopped drinking the water.

“I figured if we are going to work together you should know everything there is or was between Fola and I.” Yemi started. “Plus, I have no respect for

Fola or his emotions, so I want you to know that I am not his biggest fan right now and if by any chance he was involved in the disappearance of Hajjia's missing sister, I will make terrible noise." She added.

Sarah swallowed. "You are making me regret coming to you, Yemi."

"I like to lay my cards on the table. Here they are. I'll find the missing sister and we are coming up with a suit on kidnapping. Are you in or out?" she asked.

Sarah blinked. Yemi was a popular figure at the Department of Public Prosecution and one she was sure she could learn a lot from. But she also didn't want to hurt Fola.

"I am waiting." Yemi reiterated. "I don't enjoy waiting long."

Sarah smiled. "I don't like being threatened or rushed into decisions either."

Yemi crossed her legs. "You are interesting. I am not surprised Fola is sleeping with you. Anyway, I like you to keep your relationship babble or cackle out of our business and for the record, I am not a big sister that you come crying to when Fola breaks your heart. I hate emotional talk and girly discussions."

Sarah smiled. "Did Fola hurt you?"

"Stick to reading files and snooping around to get me important information and we'll get along just fine." Yemi replied with a forced smile.

Sarah gathered her bag. "I have to get going."

"Do you love him?" Yemi asked.

Sarah turned towards her. "I thought you didn't do emotions and stuff?"

Yemi smiled. "Fola doesn't love anyone but himself...the earlier you learn that...the faster you get out of the illusion of being the Mrs. King. I know the name sounds right; but it doesn't look good on you."

Sarah swallowed painfully and walked out.

Yemi exhaled and buried her head in her hands.

Sarah would not stop ranting. She could not stop. The lady was still in the house. Fola had not sent her on her way yet. Fola was never going to. She was here to stay. "I can't believe this is happening to us, Fola."

Fola took a deep breath. "I have a lot on my plate, not impossible to achieve...but just a lot. Why can't you just shut up and go to bed?" he asked in a calm tone.

"Because she is in this house!" Sarah yelled.

Fola turned to the other side of the bed. "Sarah, she is resting in the guest room. Let her be."

"No. This is unfair. You have got to respect my wishes. I don't want her here." She replied.

He stared at her. "Are you jealous? Aaima is not your problem. Obi is into her."

"When has that stopped you?" she asked.

Fola sighed as he got out of bed. “Sarah, go to bed.” He said as he approached the door.

“Are you going to her room?” she asked.

Fola smiled. “Your new association with Yemi must have gotten into your head. Aaima is still here because of some complicated matters and she can’t just leave. I would like to make you feel more comfortable and less uneasy but I can’t. Aaima is here. Get used to it.” He concluded and walked out.

Sarah exhaled as she watched the door shut after him. He was right. Yemi got her worked up. She might not have been faithful to Fola but she adored him. She was honoured to be associated with him. Maybe she was just being paranoid and ought to cut him some slack for doing the thing that any decent human would do to someone who needed help. She would just sleep.

Umar stormed into Yusuf’s office. “I can’t find Stone.”

Yusuf stared at him. “There are several stones outside.”

“You know what I am talking about. Stone; our guy.” He replied.

Yusuf smiled. “Your guy.”

“Look, Yusuf, Stone is missing and I can’t even find his partner. They are supposed to be looking for Aaima. We have not heard anything yet.” He said.

Yusuf took a deep breath. “Can you please sit down?”

“I can’t.” he said, taking his seat.

Yusuf smiled at this. "See...it wasn't so hard after all."

Umar exhaled. "Stone is missing. He is not answering his phone and that other guy too has gone dark."

Yusuf nodded. "It's an occupational hazard in this type of work."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

Yusuf smiled. "Stone was asking for too much. He wanted to walk...and you know what people who walk do? They talk...and you know what happens when people talk? Others ask questions and questions need answers and right now...we have no answer. So, I did the needful."

"You killed him." Umar said, quite stunned.

Yusuf nodded. "He was useless anyway."

"Why would you just kill him?"

Yusuf shrugged. "Because I don't like people nosing in my business and this business is important to both of us, so I can't have that idiot talking too much."

Umar exhaled. "I don't know what to say."

"Are you receiving money?" he asked.

He nodded. "I am going to transfer what's in her Swedish account to mine." He replied.

Yusuf smiled. "You are a rich man."

"I am worried about Aaima."

Yusuf sat back. "Since we haven't heard anything yet...maybe she is dead."

"I would not just assume." He replied.

Yusuf nodded. "You are right about that. Maybe I should just hire a private investigator and comb the city for her."

"You should do that. I need to be able to sleep in peace." He replied.

Yusuf laughed.

Umar frowned at this. "What is funny?"

"You mean who? You are funny. I am surprised you want some peace after all you have done."

Umar banged the table. "Whose side are you on?"

"I am sorry...I just think you need a reality check once in a while."

Umar swallowed. "You don't have to always make me feel terrible."

"Okay." He replied and turned on his laptop. "Transfer my share to my account in Qatar."

Umar nodded.

He fetched his game pad and sat before his Television set. In no time, he had set up the PlayStation and was ready to get his mind off the last few minutes. He knew Sarah would be down in no time to either confirm her suspicions or to continue ranting. He wondered how he got stuck with her. She was trouble. Drama. Sometimes, Magic. Woman. He knew Sarah wasn't

the woman he'd want to raise his daughter, but he just would still have her. He loved her ambitions but still thought she was quite stupid. He wouldn't be bothered by thoughts of her. There were more important things on his mind; like the talk he was meant to have with Aaima which he couldn't because Sarah arrived home right about the same time and made a scene on seeing Aaima. Fola had calmed her down and taken her upstairs while Aaima quietly retreated into the guest room. The other pending matter on his mind was how he was going to get a goal past the rigid Chelsea defence he was facing in the game.

"You should have square played that ball."

Fola paused his game immediately and turned to see Aaima.

"You...you know what football is?"

She chuckled. "I am a girl, not an idiot." She replied, settling into the sofa. "Is your mind even in this match, you seem outplayed. You thinking or something?" she asked. "If you had square played that ball, you'd pick out the defenders and give room for Giroud to do a simple tap-in which we both know is all he is good at."

He gaped as he stared at her.

"You can close your mouth now." She said with a smile.

He shut his mouth and smiled. "Do you actually play or do you only do theories?" he asked.

She frowned and shot a smug look at him. "Get the other pad."

"Sweet!!!!" he screamed, leaping towards the game console to pick the other pad. "Let me guess....Arsenal?"

She smiled. "Chelsea, bro."

He scoffed. "I hate to break it to you but I hate those rent boys and I am gonna school you on behalf of every loyal Arsenal fan out there."

Aaima grinned. "Why are you calling us rent boys?" she asked, selecting her squad. "I mean, it's not our fault we have got a great team."

"And that's because of Roman's money." He retorted. "You guys would be nothing without him."

She smiled. "I am a little surprised at that statement, especially because it is coming from you."

"I don't get." He said.

She smiled. "A little bit of sarcasm...it's for smart people."

Fola smiled as he stuttered. "You just implied I wasn't smart."

"Now, you get it." She replied with a smile.

He smiled. "Your fingers would be sore after this match."

"I'd like to do the talking on the pitch." She replied. "Let's do this boys!" she chanted.

Fola hissed. "Ya Gunners Ya!" he echoed.

She chuckled. "Are you actually rallying these things up?" she asked as she straightened her fingers in preparation for the game.

"Trust me, it works." He replied. "Now, I must warn you...Just as you females don't expect to get any favour from men based on your gender, it won't apply in this game...I'd play with pride for the whole gunner family and

disgrace you on their behalf.” He said. “Don’t beg me to stop when I start smearing your net.” He added with a laugh.

She smiled. “You know that thing they say about talk being cheap?”

“Actually, nothing. They say nothing about it.” He replied.

She shrugged. “Start. You are with the control pad.”

“Here we go, ladies and gentlemen...” Fola announced as he set the game rolling. He stole occasional glances at Aaima who was focused on the screen. “Dude, you are so serious!” he said.

“I am defending my team’s honour.” She replied, without staring at him.

He laughed. “You guys ain’t got no history. What’s there to defend?”

“How does Cech feel about that ball going in?” she asked as she turned to him.

Fola blinked. He had actually conceded a goal. “How did that go in?” he asked.

“Watch the replay.” She replied with a laugh.

Fola stopped and stared at her as he watched her laugh. A smile formed round his face as he stayed in that moment.

Sarah wiped the tear drop that ran down her cheek as she watched Fola stare at Aaima in a way she had never seen him do. She was sure that

Fola might have just found a reason to keep Aaima in his life forever and it would not be the PlayStation. It was more than that.

She should have slept.

CHAPTER 5

Fola sipped his coffee as he watched Sarah gather her bags, every last one of them. He clenched his teeth as he shook his head. He was glad she had gotten mad and decided to 'break up' with him. He didn't even consider what they had a relationship. He dropped the mug on the table and slid his hands into his pockets as he watched her wheel her box to the door and return to the dressing mirror to pull out her facial aid or was it makeup kit she called it? He thought it was a facial aid though. Sarah was really mad at him but she would not say why. He could guess. She was tired of seeing Aaima around the house, but he didn't understand why she was laying claims to what wasn't hers in the first place. Women! He sighed and took her hand. "Sarah!" he started.

"Don't touch me." She replied, yanking her hand out of his grip.

He raised his hands in surrender and stepped back. "I don't get it. You just wake up and tell me it's over. That's really classy, you know?" he said, leaning against the dressing mirror.

Sarah stared at him. "She won't go."

Fola exhaled. "Who? Aaima?" he asked and shook his head. "Sarah, you are being paranoid. I already told you that Obi is into her and Obi is my guy. That counts for something." He replied.

She laughed. "You know, if it was Obi telling me this and the story was the other way round, I might actually believe him. But you? Fola King?" she stopped and laughed. "I am sure you don't even believe yourself." She added.

“You are being dramatic.” He replied. “You nagged me out of bed last night and now you wake me up with ‘We are done’. How stupid is that? And all because of Aaima? A lady that had done you no harm? I know ladies could be all shades of jealous and stuff, but this...this is a new level of low.” He replied.

“You don’t get to tell me what is low!” she retorted and hurried over to the wardrobe pulling out a gift bag. “I found this dress. Certainly, it’s not mine. You got it for her, right?” she asked.

Fola nodded. “Yes, I bought her a dress when I went to do some shopping with Obi for her since you would not share your things.”

Sarah scoffed. “Why haven’t you given it to her? Choosing your moment? That’s not typical of you.” She cooed, dropping the dress on the bed. “It’s beautiful.”

Fola scoffed. “Look, I really don’t know where you are getting with all the tantrums and drama, but I am not sticking around for it. If you want to go, be my guest. I am not going to ask you to stay and you are free to think whatever you want to but I think that you should really grow up, Sarah.” He said, pulling his blazer from the hanger.

She rose to meet him. “Grow up? I saw you with her last night. I saw you both playing that stupid thing-”

“The lady can really play. I have told you to try it. Girls smash that pad really hard too, you know?” He replied with a smile.

She groaned. “It’s not about the stupid PlayStation and you know it. I saw you last night, Fola. I have never seen you like that before. I saw the way

you looked at her. I saw you watch her laugh. I saw you smile. Dammit! Fola, you smiled because of a woman. And I am not talking about the stupid snide smug face you give to me or other people. I am talking about something deep.”

Fola swallowed as she continued.

“Something much more than what I know you to be, something real...something inside...that’s a different Fola. And I can be great in bed till I die but I can’t compete with that. I can’t compete with Aaima. And if...just if you think I am paranoid and I can’t see what you already feel for her, then I think that you are the one who needs to grow up.” She concluded and walked out, pulling her bags along.

He exhaled as he wiped his forehead.

Fola yawned slightly as he watched his client go back and forth in a tirade with the defendant. They had resulted to a settlement in this case. On a good day, Fola enjoyed settlements out of court because it gave him the room to make a lot of money in civil cases, but today wasn’t a very good day. He had been thinking a lot about what Sarah had said to him before she left the house. Aaima. Could he really be attracted to Aaima? He thought to himself. Not that he needed Sarah to figure that out for him, but if he was getting close to Aaima...he was in trouble. He was not wired for this. He knew what worked for him. Flirt. Hurt. Bed. Repeat the cycle. He exhaled as he thought of the life he had. He was not particularly proud of it but he wasn’t ashamed either. He could sleep at night and for him, that did count. The day he lost sleep over

any matter was the day he knew he'd re-examine his values. Till then.....this case was starting to piss him off. He drummed on the table and stared at the defendant.

“Okay, woman, listen to me. This is what you will do. You are going to pay my client the sum of a hundred million naira and this whole scandal goes away.”

“You are kidding right, Fola King?” The Defendant’s lawyer asked. “There is no way we are coughing out a hundred million for this lying client of yours who had consensual sex with his boss, my client.”

Fola smiled. “You know, I actually hate when people think that I am joking over a matter I consider very serious. You see, your client here, Mrs. I-like-younger-men isn’t going to want this to blow out to the public, and you know why? My client isn’t the first staff that she has had carnal knowledge of. Yes, Carnal knowledge. I know it sounds religious and old school-ish, but there is a way I like to pick my terms. So, you can sit there and cackle about how you won’t write us a cheque of a hundred million or you can save us all the drama of a long trial which I am sure that she would not want considering the fact that she is about to cash in on her late husband’s fortune and won’t want any problems with his family when we take this to court. Please, give me that cheque before eight PM tomorrow.” He replied, gathering his documents.

The woman exhaled as she sipped her juice.

Fola smiled as he watched her do this. “Here at Peterside Chambers, we pride ourselves in very good customer service. The juice is hundred percent natural. On a normal day, we don’t give juice...it’s just water. But today is a good day. The juice is on me.”

“I was thinking you could do wine. Fancy suit lawyer.” The woman’s lawyer replied, attempting a swipe at Fola.

Fola smiled as he adjusted his jacket. “I only give wine to my friends. It was nice meeting you all.” He said as he walked out with his client.

As they stepped into the corridor he turned to his client. “Don’t forget to give some money to the other guys, okay? I still think you are a riff-raff because I know you liked sleeping with her.”

The man smiled. “Well, I just made money off it.”

“Once I cut my commission from the deal, I want evidence that you paid the other guys as we agreed, else, I am coming for you.”

The man chuckled. “Easy, Fola. I will do that.”

Fola nodded and walked away. He didn’t enjoy saying Peterside Chambers. Peterside and King was more like it. He was going to buy into the partnership. He had his money but he needed to bully his mentor into accepting his cheque. Together, they would be invincible, but Mr. Peterside was the greater player of the game...he would not even allow the competition. Fola King would not give up. Today was another day, he would try again.

He pushed the door to Mr. Peterside’s office open and walked in. The older man turned to him with a smile. “Royal Blue Suit. You sure cut your trimmings well, Fola.” He said as he shut his laptop. “Please, take a seat.”

Fola undid his blazer’s button as he sat. “Thank you, Sir.”

Mr. Peterside smiled at him. “Peterside Chambers. I like the name a lot and I know that you do not come into my office except you’d like to change the name. Am I right?”

“You taught me well, Sir.” Fola replied.

Mr. Peterside laughed. “See what you did there? Sir! Ah....so refreshing. I still like to hear that Sir tag...even if it doesn’t come from sheer respect or admiration, so I am sorry...I would have to decline your request and cheque.” He said, handing Fola a cheque leaflet. “You added some more money. Fola, it’s not always about the money...but I can always do with extra cash. Peterside King would not happen.”

Fola rose to his feet and adjusted his buttons. “Thank you for your time.” He said as he clenched his teeth.

Mr. Peterside watched him till he got to the door, “Brown Brogues. Fola, you are classic. Be contented with what you have.”

Fola turned to him with a smile. “I know what I want and I’ll get it.” He said with a nod.

“Happy birthday, Fola King. Many more years.” Mr. Peterside added. “I got the wine too.”

Fola smiled and walked out. He was disappointed yet again but he could not stop trying. No other firm would do it for him. He could easily walk into any of the competitors firm but what joy would that be? They were below them and that would not make him feel better. This was his personal fight for validation by Mr. Peterside and he had to win it.

As he approached his office, he saw Sarah lingering by the door and sighed. He walked up to her and pushed the door open, shoving her inside slightly. “What do you want?” he asked.

She smiled. “Take it easy, tiger.”

“You are confused. Three hours ago, you packed out of my house. Now, you are here and opening all your dentition. Needless to say, I am not swayed. Now, what do you want?”

She took her seat. “A little bird said to me that ‘today is your birthday’.”

Fola smiled as he took his seat. “Twitter doesn’t give birthday notifications. I know you found it on Facebook and I have not used that thing since Law school, so if you dropped me a message there, I am sorry. I would not even dignify your post with a LIKE.” He replied.

She nodded. “I thought to myself that breaking up with you on your birthday wasn’t so cool, so maybe we could make up and I could break up tomorrow. What do you say?”

“I say you should get out of my office.” He replied.

She chuckled. “I see you have been giving thoughts to what I told you about Aaima and it must have gotten to your system. Anyway, since I know you must be feeling slightly unhappy as I did see you go into Mr. Peterside’s office and return quickly too, I take it as your partnership hunt didn’t go down well.”

Fola was stunned. “How do you even know about that?”

She shrugged. “I am the Firm’s rat, remember? Snooping around your files do a lot for me. I must say you have really big balls, not like I don’t know what your balls look like, but, you sure are something! How could you even think that Mr. Peterside would let you rub shoulders with him? I am new here and I already know a lot about the boss.”

Fola relaxed in his chair. "You have made your point. What's next?"

She smiled. "So, I would be going down to Yemi's office. Do you want me to tell her anything? She has big news for me regarding that case. It seems we just might have an identity for the missing sister, so we are thinking of angling this case as a kidnap incident and open a new suit against your client. I thought you might need the heads up."

Fola blinked. "Why are you telling me this?"

"Well, I really did enjoy your company and even though I am yet to know what Yemi has for me, I think this is going to be one hell of a ride. DPP against Fola King with the help of the sneaky little Sarah." She said, standing up.

"I will make sure of it that you are not retained in this Firm." Fola said.

Sarah chuckled. "Fola...I have done enough work to deserve a stay here."

"No, you haven't. You don't want to make an enemy of me." He replied, standing up.

She smiled. "I didn't work my posting here through your help, you should know I have someone on the inside." She replied and approached the door. "By the way, I like your suit." She added with a wink and walked out.

Fola loosened his tie and sank into his chair. His day was just going from bad to worse effortlessly. He was sure that the worst was yet to come. What a birthday! Not like he had ever seen anything special about his birthday except hitting landmarks...that was special. Mr. Peterside had however made

this one impossible by declining his request to make managing partner. He had reasons to be worried. If there was really a missing sister and Yemi and Sarah had a lead on it, Umar might want to reach out to him to help with it. He would decline them. He didn't want any extra troubles. He adjusted his tie and grabbed his car keys. He had to go and take care of that possibility.

Aaima opened the door and let Obi in. "You didn't tell me that you would be coming."

"I finished my night shift and decided to stop by to know if you needed anything. Like food? Or something." He said. "I am sure Fola did not leave cooked food before leaving for work. I could just help you whip something up really quick." He said, dropping his bag on the sofa.

Aaima smiled. "I had cereals for breakfast and he already showed me where the food stuff are, I really am fine, Obi."

He nodded. "Yeah sure...I...I know. So, you know today is Fola's birthday, right?"

"Oh really? He didn't say." She replied as they walked into the kitchen. "How is work at the hospital?" she asked.

He smiled. "Great. So, I was thinking...would you like to go and see a movie? It must be pretty boring being in this house all day. I know you can watch TV if you want, but it's still pretty much boring."

She nodded. "You are right but I don't particularly want to get my face out there right now." She replied, leaning against the kitchen board. "Plus, I

really need to know what's next for me...Fola's girlfriend got angry and moved out this morning. I need to get back to London."

Obi folded his arms. "Tell me what really happened."

She exhaled. "I don't want to talk about it right now."

"Why? You are running from something or someone and I don't really think that putting yourself or Fola in danger is the best way to go about it." He replied.

She nodded. "I know, but the less you know...the better for us all."

"Really? Is that how you want to play this? Aaima, talk to me...let's help you." He started. "You can't keep hiding in here. Eventually, you'll be forced to go out...and when that time comes, what are you going to do?" he asked.

She swallowed. "I don't know."

"Aaima, talk to me. Please." He begged.

She shook her head. "It's too hard to talk about. This is my first visit to Nigeria. And, it has been good to me. I shouldn't have come here."

"You can't talk like that." He replied. "There are good and bad people everywhere in the world and you know it. Besides, we all go through stuff." He added.

She scoffed. "You are not me. Let it be, Obi." She replied.

He shook his head. "Someday you are going to have to talk."

“Someday...maybe not today.” She replied and walked out of the kitchen into the living room. Obi followed closely.

“Why not today?” he asked as they walked into the living room. “Why are you playing with me?” he asked.

She turned to him. “Bro, you are tripping. Chill.”

“You were going to tell me the other day. Why are you withholding it from me now?” he asked. “Look, I just want you to be alright.”

“I am fine. Thanks, Obi for all your help but I really don’t like being pushed.”

Obi swallowed and picked his bag.

“Come on, Obi...” she started as she watched him.

He exhaled. “You know what? You are a tease! You are playing with me...you know I like you and I care about you but you are playing with me. That’s not fair.”

“I don’t get it.” She replied as she stared at him.

He shook his head. “I am sorry.” He said and walked out.

“Sir, I told him he couldn’t come in.” The secretary shouted as Fola stepped into Umar’s office.

Umar stared at Yusuf before turning to Fola. “Mr King, I didn’t think I’d be seeing you anytime soon.”

“Me neither.” Fola replied.

The secretary walked out of the room.

“What brings you here?” Umar asked. “I sent your money.”

Fola nodded. “Well received. I am just a little curious and I would love you to answer a question for me.”

Yusuf cleared his throat. “Barrister King, you look tense...do you mind to sit?”

“No.” Fola replied and turned to Umar. “Did your late wife have a Sister visiting the country at about the time of her death?”

Umar stared at Yusuf. “Erm...”

“Just answer the question.”

Yusuf rose to his feet. “Fola King, why are you being unnecessarily rude?”

“You told me that Late Hajjia didn’t have any relatives and now I have just been told that a sister who was visiting the country about that same time...Is this true? Because if it is and that sister is somewhere missing or lurking around and a new case comes up from it...you are screwed.” He said and approached the door. He stopped and stared at them. “You don’t lie to your lawyer. Now, you are on your own.” He added and walked out.

Umar swallowed as he stared at Yusuf. “What is happening?”

“My Private Investigator is out searching for her.” He replied.

Umar shook his head aggressively. “You have to give me something better than that. How did he even know about her in the first place? He must know something.”

Yusuf nodded. "Relax. I'll take care of it."

"Yusuf, this thing is getting messy."

Yusuf nodded. "Well, occupational hazard."

"What are you going to do?" Umar asked.

Yusuf took his seat. "I'll find out what your lawyer knows and how he knows what he knows then we eliminate the possible threats."

"Yusuf, we can't go about killing people." Umar replied.

Yusuf smiled. "We need that money in her account and if anyone is going to stop us, we would take them out." He replied. "Where are we on the money by the way?"

"Ran into some complications." Umar replied, taking his seat. "It seems Fatima put Aaima as her next of kin as when I got to the bank, they told me that changes had been made, but they won't give me details." He replied.

Yusuf's eyes burned. "And you didn't think that was worth telling?"

Umar sighed. "I was getting to it."

"That's just one of the bank accounts right?" Yusuf asked.

Umar nodded. "But it has the biggest bounty."

Yusuf hissed.

Aaima didn't understand why she was doing what she was doing. She watched the oven keenly as she waited for the cake. She was baking Fola a

cake. Now this couldn't be out of appreciation for what he had done for her or maybe more like idleness. People sleep when they are idle. She liked Fola. She wanted to do something nice for him. It was his birthday and he had been good to her. Maybe this might be her sending off wrong signals but all the ingredients were his. He had them stocked in the house, it was not as though she had bothered to do the extraordinary by going out and getting all the necessities. She was just being nice.

She opened the oven and checked the cake before pulling out the cream and icing to dress it. She thought briefly about Obi and the state in which he had left the house. He was quite upset at her and with good reasons. Maybe she was a tease just like he had said. She was too scared to let anyone know her story but she did need to talk really soon to someone about it. Maybe she would talk to Fola tonight about it.

She stared at the cake and smiled. She enjoyed doing this. It had been a while since she did something that made her happy and took her mind off the gruesome murder of her sister.

As she placed the cake on the dining table, the doorbell went. She walked over to the door and let Fola in.

"Hi..." she said.

Fola smiled. "Good evening. Hope you had a nice day."

"Yes...I did." She replied, closing the door after him.

Fola walked into the house. "Sarah would not be coming back here...and do I even care? No. I just need to-" He stopped on seeing the cake. "Did...Did you bake?"

“Err...Happy birthday, Fola.” She said.

Fola stared at her. “How did you know? Obi?”

She nodded.

He swallowed as he watched her smile and point to the cake. This was not going according to his plan...not like he had any plan as regarding Aaima. His chest pounded. Aaima got him worked up. This was new for him. Nervous pangs in his chest on seeing her. Something wasn't right.

“Say something.” She said.

Fola shook his head. “No.”

“No?”

He exhaled. “Don't do this to me.” He said and walked into the house.

Aaima blinked as she stared at the cake.

Yemi smiled as she looked through the documents in her hand. “This is gold.”

Sarah watched her as she flipped through the pages. “Can I at least see what you are celebrating about?”

“The maid talked and gave me really good information. I have a name. The name of the missing sister.”

Sarah smiled. “Really? Who is she?”

“Aaima Bello.”

CHAPTER 6

Fola was warming the toilet seat for way too long...and in his suit too. This was strange. He sometimes sat on the toilet seat and locked himself in the bathroom to escape Sarah's rants when things were not going down properly, which was more often than not. Tonight, Sarah was not his problem. It was Aaima. His heart's palpitation stressed him. His thoughts were fixated on her all day and seeing her this evening just sent his blood rushing. He knew he couldn't be feeling this way...and this was not because Obi liked her. This was because he was starting to like her. And that, was a big problem. Fola King would not pay any attention to any woman's emotion...or even to his. That was the rule for him. It was not going to change now. He exhaled as he thought of the brief conversation he had with her. Could he have given her the impression that he liked her? He shook his head and hoped that the action could indeed shake the thought away. If only this wasn't pulsating from his heart. Sigh. He walked over to the sink and washed his face. "Go out there and be the man." He said, psyching himself up. He took a look at his suit and scoffed. He just sat on the toilet seat in the suit, doing absolutely nothing but thinking. He didn't even think to take the pants off. He hissed and thought of what excuse he'd give Aaima for going up in a fit and returning in another cloth. He would come up with something. He had his way with words.

In the meantime, it would just make sense for him if he did shower and probably hope that by the time he returned downstairs, she would have gone to bed. He would bank on that. Without another thought, he threw the jacket in the laundry basket.

Yemi stared at Sarah. "I really don't know why you are laughing."

"You know, it's just funny." Sarah replied, controlling herself slightly.

Yemi relaxed in her seat. "It would help both of us if you just tell me what is amusing so we could both go home."

Sarah smiled. "You know, I actually know a lady by the name Aaima and I for a second just laughed at the thought of it."

Yemi scoffed. Sarah's humour game was really weak to her. "And so? I know several people by the name Yemi or Sarah and it doesn't amuse me when the name gets called up in court or something, even though they are totally unrelated." She replied.

Sarah cleared her throat. "Yemi, you should try to loosen up a bit. I just thought it was funny that I knew someone with the name Aaima, which is quite an unusual name."

Yemi took a deep breath. "Anyway, the maid says Aaima went missing shortly around that time, but she has no idea how that happened."

"I want to talk to that maid." Sarah replied. "She might tell me more."

Yemi scoffed. "No chance."

"Why not?" Sarah asked. "We are in this together, right? I should be able to ask the maid questions too. Besides, it was my brilliant idea that we grilled her more."

“And couldn’t my dog have figured it out? It’s not rocket science, Sarah. Look, curb your enthusiasm. I can’t risk that maid being found out.” She replied.

Sarah frowned. “Your dog? Seriously? Did you just compare me to your dog?”

“I think we should focus more on finding Aaima Bello ourselves. I have contacted a friend at the embassy and I am going to run that name by him, hopefully we get a match soon enough.” She replied, ignoring Sarah’s earlier question. She was not up for any of Sarah’s tantrums. She knew Sarah was smart and very intelligent, but she also saw her as a ticking bomb that could explode any moment and most likely over the pettiest issues. Their association might have started out on a good and common ground but she was not going to risk her experience and career for an overzealous junior associate who was just starting out.

“How long do we have before your contact comes back with an identity for our lady?” Sarah asked.

Yemi shrugged. “I’ll be sending the name over tonight and maybe we would have different identities in a couple of days.”

Sarah shook her head. “Who knows how many Aaima Bello have entered into the country in the last month? It would take a lot to find her.” She replied. “I believe your witness is key to this if we want to find this missing sister, so let me talk to her and she might just tell me a lot more than she is telling you.”

“What makes you think she is not telling me enough?” Yemi asked.
“Look, Sarah, maybe you should just go home. I think I have had enough for one day.” She added.

Sarah shook her head as she grabbed her bag. “I don’t like this.”

Yemi sighed. “We would talk to the maid tomorrow. I just hope this is worth it. But I am still sending the name to my contact.”

Sarah smiled. “Thank you and good night.”

“Of course, good night.” Yemi replied as she watched Sarah approach the door.

Sarah stopped and turned to her. “There is someone else.”

“Excuse me?” Yemi asked, as she started to gather her things.

Sarah took a deep breath. “There is another woman in...in Fola’s life.”

Yemi shrugged. “How is that any of my business?”

“I...erm, I...just thought that maybe you would want to know.” She replied.

Yemi forced a smile. “Sarah, I liked Fola and that was why I had anything to do with him. There are several women in Fola’s life, in fact, Fola belongs to every woman.”

“Typical of every Yoruba guy, right?” Sarah asked, chuckling.

Yemi wore a grimace. “Are you also that deluded?”

Sarah sighed. “I was joking na. You no even get sense of humour?”

“Tasteless. Besides, I think you are taking this thing you have or had with him too seriously. Let it go...there would always be women in his life.”

Sarah exhaled. “This one is serious.”

Yemi chuckled. “My dear, that, is none of my business and I advise that you keep your marital squat out of our work. It would go a long way.”

“Of course.” Sarah replied, shutting the door after her.

Yemi took her seat with a frown. She didn’t need Sarah mentioning Fola to her. Her mind was doing that unconsciously and irking her every time. She wasn’t in love with Fola, but history with someone was also a very hard thing to deal with. It would just ease away...slowly, but surely.

Fola dropped his phone on the sofa and picked the TV’s controller to set up his evening. It was his house. He would not hide from Aaima because of how he was feeling. No way! He shook off the thoughts that plagued him, changed into a polo shirt and a pair of shorts. He would see a movie without feeling the pangs in his chest once Aaima’s thoughts crossed his mind. He was sure of this. Now, what movie to see? He ran through the stations and stopped to listen to the news. He hoped that would help him get his mind off his rough day. His phone buzzed. Mom. He exhaled before answering his phone. “Hi, Mom.”

“*Adefolarin mi.*” His mother replied from the other end of the line.

Fola rolled his eyes. Mothers. “Mrs. King.”

“*Tani Mrs. King?* (Who is Mrs. King?) Will you greet your mother properly?!” she retorted, displeased at Fola’s formalities.

Fola managed a smile. "Good evening, Mom."

"Ehen! How are you?" she asked. "Happy Birthday to you, my love. The Lord will keep you to see many more years."

He nodded in reverence. "Amen."

"Fola, when are you bringing her home?"

He frowned. This was one of the reasons he avoided her. She would not spare a moment to remind him that he was not yet married and had not provided her with her grand-daughter just yet. "Mom, can't we talk about something else?"

"What am I going to discuss with you? Is it how many cases you are yet to lose that you want us to talk about?" She retorted.

Fola smiled. "I don't lose cases, Mom."

"Don't we all know that? And I guess that is why you are yet to come and see me yet! Fola, come and say hi to your mother. I am getting older o!" she continued.

Fola smiled. Aging was not something he would associate his Mom with. Mrs. King, a paragon of beauty. "Mom, we both know you are exaggerating."

"Come on and be the judge of that." She replied.

Fola knew where she was getting at. "Mom, we can skype. I can see your pretty face from there."

"Se ko si fun e?! Who are you asking to skype with you? Fola, come home o! I don't want to die alone."

With that, she hung up. Fola laughed. He was sure he was not going home anytime soon. At least, not to be tied down by his Mother. He could have sworn that he'd never leave her side while growing up. They were best of friends as he had no father to raise him. She was his father, mother, sister and brother. She would sit with him, teach him, dare him, push him past his wits, even play his silly games with him even when she didn't have a clue. Boy! He loved her. But a lot had changed, he still loved her...but her motherly craving for a wife for him had pushed him away. He had other dreams than settling down.

"I baked you a cake."

Fola turned towards Aaima who was lingering by the door. "How long have you been standing there?"

"Long enough to know you don't want to see your Mom." She replied, approaching him.

Fola scoffed. "I never said I didn't want to see my Mom. And that, my friend, is none of your business."

"I know." She replied, taking a seat. "You know, Cakes can be a work...and to think that I hooked off a new recipe to bake you that cake."

Fola smiled. "Is this really about the cake?"

"Yes." She replied, plainly.

He nodded and rose to his feet. "I'll get us two slices." He said and walked away.

Aaima exhaled as she watched him leave. Was this really about the cake or the fact that she was trying to get to him. She ran her fingers through

her hair. She wanted to make a conversation...she didn't need to. It came easily for her, but now, this was not easy. She rose to her feet, she would just go inside before he returned with the cake.

Fola joined her as she turned to leave. "Running away?" he asked, pressing one of the plates against her stomach. "We are eating...and I am bringing wine too. It's my birthday. Indulge me." He said with a cocky grin.

She took the plate and sat down.

Fola smiled as he walked away. He was getting his groove back and slowly on top of the situation. He would be faster than her and not give any room for emotional sentiments on his part. He didn't take long to return with the bottle of wine. "Hi. I hope you like this." He said, uncorking it. "Vintage. Solid stuff." He added, taking his seat.

"So, what is the deal with you and your Mom?" she asked, as he poured her glass.

Fola smiled. "You don't see me asking personal questions, do you?"

"Why are you being rude?" she asked.

He sipped his wine. "Why are you being perky?"

"Perky? I am just asking a question." She replied.

He nodded. "And I am just not responding to your question."

"I think you are running." She replied.

"From what...or who?" he asked, chuckling.

She smiled. "Me."

Fola frowned. "And why would I?"

"I don't know, but I'll figure it out."

He shrugged. "Good luck with that." He said, as he took some part of the cake. "Nice. This is...amazing."

"The word is 'Thank you'." She said, sipping her wine.

He smiled. "Thank you."

"You know, I actually wonder why it took you forever to say 'thank you'. When someone does something nice for you, you say thank you." She replied, munching on her cake. "Damn, this is good."

Fola laughed. "Are you actually doing what I think you are doing?"

"And what is that?" she asked.

He smiled. "You are actually praising your work."

She nodded. "I mean, if you wouldn't do that for me...I might as well blow my own trumpet."

"Narcissist." He said.

She smiled. "Not really."

Fola dropped his glass and stared at her. "Aaima, tell me about you."

"Oh! Look who is getting personal now." She cooed, sipping her drink.

He stared intensely. "You are living in my house. No one has declared you missing. I want to know who you are."

She chuckled. "You are sounding really serious and I consider this act just a ploy to get to know me personally."

"Don't flatter yourself." He replied. "What's your name?"

She smiled. "Aaima."

"I am Fola King. What is your name?" he asked.

She sighed as she rolled her eyes. "Aaima Bello."

"Where do you live?" he asked.

She blinked.

"I am waiting."

She shook her head. "London."

He relaxed in his seat. "London? What were you doing on that road that night and please do not tell me that some thieves hassled you for money and you got shot."

She chuckled. "That's exactly what happened."

"Guess what? I am not buying it." He replied.

She smiled. "Do you even trust yourself?"

"Yes, I do." He replied.

She stared at him. "Why won't you see your mother?"

"Oh, come on, Aaima. We are talking about you here." He replied.

She smiled. "Why would I bare my soul out to a stranger if he won't let me know anything about him?"

“You are in my house.”

She rose to her feet. “You can ask to me leave, but I am not telling you anything about me until we know why you don’t want to talk to your Mom.”

Fola stared at her. “What’s going on here? Reverse psychology?”

She folded her arms. “Who are you, Fola? You are so bottled up, but you have a kind soul in you. Your girlfriend walked out, you would not chase her. What sort of a man are you? You want to skype with your Mom? Heck! Lots of people want to talk to theirs but they have none! It’s your birthday and even though I don’t expect you to be running around the place all stark naked, I don’t see you happy. I don’t even think you know what it is to be happy.” She ranted.

Fola stood up. “Stop it.” He said, almost inaudibly.

“What? I can’t hear you.” She replied.

Fola swallowed. “This has to stop now, Aaima.”

She stared at him. “What exactly do you want me to stop doing?”

He closed his eyes and exhaled. “Why I don’t see my Mom is quite silly and you are not going to understand, so there is no point talking about it.” He said, turning away.

She held his hand back. “Talk.”

He clenched his teeth. He was giving away. His chest pounded. This wasn’t good. He couldn’t help himself around her. No, he was not on top of this situation. His confidence had gone to hide and allowed the boy in him talk. “We had a bet.” He said.

She raised an eyebrow. "I am listening." She said, guiding him back to the chair.

"I told her I'd visit her the day I lost a case." He replied. "I know...I know, it's stupid and ridiculous. But, I can't go back on my word. She knows me."

Aaima gaped. "Fola."

"Don't judge me. I love my Mom. Who wouldn't love her? She is everything to me. My friend...father...my brother...my sister. But, I can't go back on my word. That is who I am. That is the man she raised." He replied.

Aaima blinked. She wasn't sure she was comfortable with the vulnerable Fola side she had just seen. She had gotten much more than she bargained for, and now, she wasn't sure of what to do with it. "Where is your father?" she asked, softly.

"I never knew the idiot. He left my Mom when she was pregnant with me." He replied.

Aaima swallowed.

"I hate him so much. She had to raise me all by herself. All alone." He continued, "And yes, that's why I am not with any woman. I am not so sure of this man that I am and I am not going to bring any child into this world and leave him or her alone."

"Fola."

He turned to her. "What?! That is me. You wanted to see it, right? Deal with it!" he yelled.

Aaima sat back. "Go on."

"Go on?" he asked.

She nodded. "I am listening."

He took a deep breath. "I miss my Mom. I want to go home."

"Then go home." She replied.

"You'd be surprised what you can find on Facebook." Sarah said, as she surfed the internet.

Greg yawned. "So, who or what are we looking for? There are tonnes of Aaima Bello here. This is pointless."

"Narrow down your search to the United Kingdom and maybe America. Let me know what you find." She replied as she scrolled through a Profile page. "Check their last posts too."

He hissed. "This is senseless, Sarah. People don't even use Facebook anymore. There is this thing called Twitter in case you didn't know."

She stared at him. "I don't think you know your stats on the usage of the internet properly. Anyway, I have a twitter tab opened on my browser." She replied as continued searching.

"Yemi told you she would run information by her sources. Why are you so impatient?" he asked. "We should be asleep, not surfing the internet this late."

Sarah checked her wristwatch. "I didn't get to where I am by being patient." She replied.

"I want to sleep o!" he replied.

Sarah stared at him with some disdain. "Fola doesn't sleep until one am, he gets work done. That's why he is a winner."

"No, that's why he is so cranked up. He needs a vacation." Greg replied, grumbling as he tapped on his computer. "I have like sixteen here." He said, passing her his laptop. "London."

Sarah stared at the names and widened her eyes as she spotted a familiar face. Aaima. "Aaima?"

"What?" Greg asked.

She tapped on Aaima's profile page. "She only has one picture here...boring lady. But her name is Aaima Bello. That is damn interesting."

Greg joined her. "Who is she?"

"She is Fola's new side kick."

Greg chuckled.

"What is funny?" she asked.

He smiled. "I am surprised you said 'new'. Were you the old side kick?"

Sarah hissed and focused on the Profile Page. "This lady has not updated anything. How boring can she be?"

“There is also LinkedIn. She looks like a professional to me. She is wearing a suit in her profile picture.” He replied.

Sarah nodded and opened another tab, searching Aaima Bello in an instant. “Boom!” she said as she clicked out Aaima’s profile.

“Hmmm...Clinical Psychologist. Who knew?” she said, reading the profile.

“Could she be your girl?” Greg asked.

Sarah blinked. “I don’t know. I have a strong hunch. I need to send her picture to Yemi.” She said, emailing Yemi.

Greg shook his head. “You just did.”

“I know.” She replied with a smile and picked up her phone. “Yemi is going to love me. Proactive.” She said, picking her phone and heading out of the room.

Greg swallowed. He was not half the man Fola was. He badly wanted to be the man. It was not happening for him. Sarah returned to the room, almost immediately intercepting his thought. “I just called Yemi. I am expecting news in the morning.” She replied and jumped into the bed.

“Are you no longer searching for the lady? Or is that your one and only option?” He asked.

Sarah smiled. “You know when you know.” She replied and turned off the light.

Umar hung up and turned to Yusuf angrily. “Those boys didn’t find him at home.”

Yusuf took a deep breath. "You need to be patient. My boys are very thorough. He probably stepped out. He'll be back. At least, to sleep there."

"What if he suspects that we are on to him or something?" he asked.

Yusuf hissed. "See, we just need to ask him a couple of questions and how he knew about Aaima. The boys will wait around for him, till he returns...whenever he returns." He replied, pouring his whiskey.

Obi stopped tossing and turning in his bed. Aaima was in his thoughts. He could not sleep. He wished he had something to do at the hospital, so that he could focus all the energy elsewhere, but it was not happening. He exhaled and grabbed his car keys. Maybe it was time to man up properly about his feelings.

"Are you sure about this?" Fola asked.

Aaima smiled. "Well, I don't know..." she replied and drummed on the door.

Fola closed his eyes. "Aaima, I am holding you responsible for this."

The door opened and Mrs King stood before. "Fola King."

"Hello, Mom."

CHAPTER 7

Fola thought his mother could see more than his face as she kept a smile across her face all through dinner as she focused on him. He tried avoiding her gaze by asking Aaima meaningless random questions like if the salt was appropriate in the meal. The salt was fine. It was not even about the food. It was about the fact that his mother would not wipe the grin she had on her face off and that worried him. She had ushered them into the house and straight to the dining table without asking any questions. She didn't even ask him to introduce Aaima. That was worrisome. It was unlike his mother. She could peruse the life out of anyone with questions, but this night, she was just smiling. He stared at Aaima who was more worried about dissecting her turkey than the awkwardness of their current situation. Or could he be the only one who considered the situation awkward? Aaima seemed fine. Most ladies had a time meeting a male friend's mother. Aaima didn't. But then, she wasn't 'that' woman in his life that had to be worried about a mother-in-law? Or was she? Fola wasn't having fun. He dug his fork into the turkey and cut loudly, hoping the noise would irritate either his mother or Aaima and force the awkward silence to end. None of them was fazed. They kept eating calmly. He was the only one who was irked by the noise he had generated. Okay! He had had enough! He slammed the fork and knife into the plate and stared at his mom. "I did not lose a case!"

Mrs. King and Aaima started laughing. This further agitated Fola. What was funny to them? He turned angrily to Aaima with a frown such that she quickly grabbed her wine glass and sipped from it.

“Stop scaring the girl, Fola.” Mrs. King said.

He turned to her. “What’s funny, Mom?” he asked.

“You are. I never said you lost a case. And I knew from the moment you walked in here that you did not lose a case, at least not one in the court. Maybe you lost a case with someone else and that’s why you are here. And I don’t need a soothsayer to tell me who you lost that case to. So, my son, I am happy to see you. I am elated and it’s a pleasure to meet her.”

“Her?!” Fola gaped as he turned to Aaima. “Tell her.”

Aaima stared at him. “What do you want me to tell her?”

“What you did to get me down here?” he replied.

Mrs. King smiled as she stared at Aaima. “Darling, what is your name?”

“Aaima Bello.”

Mrs. King blinked. “Aaima. That’s an unusual, yet, very lovely name.”

“Thank you, ma’am.” Aaima replied, wiping her mouth with a napkin.

Fola stared at Mrs. King and then rose to his feet. “Aaima, would you please excuse us?” he asked, leading his mom away from the dining and into the living room.

“She is very beautiful.” Mrs. King said as they settled in the living room.

Fola took his seat opposite her. “That’s not why we are here.”

“Would you deny she is the reason you are here?” she asked.

He shook his head. “No, and that is-”

“Hush, Fola! Even I couldn’t get you down here to see me. That lady counts a lot.” She said, with a smile.

Fola blinked as his heart raced in acknowledgement of his mom’s words. He drew closer to her. “Mom, what do I do?”

“Excuse me?” Mrs. King asked, stunned by the question.

Fola clenched his teeth. “Mom, you taught me to be strong. I have seen you ride me through storms and you never needed any man to do it. How did you shut them all out? I want to shut her out. I can’t let her break me.”

Mrs. King blinked. “Oh my God. Fola?”

“Mom, don’t Fola me. Love makes you weak. You said that to me several times and that’s why that bastard had the guts to leave us.” He replied. “I am not going to let anybody in.”

Mrs. King stared in the direction of the dining hall. “Let’s step outside.” She said, leading Fola out of the house.

Obi pulled up outside Fola’s gate and took a deep breath. “Hey, Fola! I know we have been best buds since we were growing up, but this is it. I love that lady living in your house. I want to be with her!” he stopped and shook his head. “That sounds foolish.” He said to himself. “Hi, Aaima, I know I overreacted earlier on, but, I have been having feelings...erm is it catching feelings? Oh boy! I hate this part.” He slammed his head on the steering, triggering the horn. “Oh boy!” he gasped. “I am not yet ready.” He said. He looked ahead of him. Fola’s gate wasn’t opening. He stared into the side

mirror and noticed two men approaching from both sides. “Who are these?” he thought as he panicked. He pushed his auto-lock and watched them as they drew close, signalling to each other. He placed his hand on the ignition and started the car in on instant, screeching away from them with all the speed he could garner. He watched as they raced after him through the side mirror, before getting into their car to continue the chase. This didn’t look good. He dialled Fola.

Sarah’s phone buzzed for the fifth time that night. Greg hated the sound of it. He couldn’t sleep. He had tried nudging her up so she could answer her phone, but she would not wake up. She was tired and needed her rest, but he needed his more. He groaned as he reached for it at the other end of the bed. Yemi! He knew Sarah would love to take the call. Maybe he could just take it for her...and maybe get her into trouble with Yemi. He smiled at the thought of that as he answered the call. “Hello.”

“Err...who is this?” Yemi asked.

Greg stared at Sarah as she slept in his bed. He sure had some rights. “Her man.”

Sarah jumped up in one instant as though the words resonated in her sleep. “What are you doing, Greg?” she asked, yanking the phone from him. She stared at the Caller ID. Yemi. “Yemi?”

“Get your body out of that bed and meet me at home! Your Aaima Bello is our missing girl.” She replied, hanging up.

Sarah gaped as she pulled the blanket around her body and hurried into the bathroom.

“Babe, it’s already midnight!” Greg shouted as he heard the shower run. He hissed. “Such an ambitious girl!”

Fola stared at his phone and replaced it in his pocket. “Mom, I don’t need you to tell me about love. I just want to know how not to love.”

She shook her head. “Son, it doesn’t work like that. I am not proud of that fact that I never gave you a father figure.”

“You raised a fine man, mom. And you did not need any man to teach you how to. You are everything to me, Mom. You bought me every silly game back then. You even played them with me. I sure didn’t need a father. Mom, I don’t want to be in love with her.”

“You can’t control the heart.” She replied.

He nodded. “I can carry these feeling to my grave but I don’t want to give into her.”

“Why?” she asked.

He shrugged. “It’s not who I am.”

She stared at him. “Who are you, Fola King? Enlighten me, please.”

He looked away.

“Look at me when I am talking to you!” she shouted. “You don’t want to give your heart to anyone? Why? Where is that little boy who would not go

to school because his friends Obi and Greg didn't have their school fees and I'd have to pay for them so my son could go to school? Where is he? Where is that kid who loved everyone? Who made people laugh? Typically, the class clown! I guess he is all bottled up in his suit and tie? Where is he, Fola?"

"He grew up." He replied.

She took a deep breath. "I never married any man after your father, not because I didn't meet anyone worth loving, but I had just decided that it was going to be me and you. I was going to channel everything I had left into you. You were all I had left anyway."

"Then let me do that for you." He replied.

She laughed. "At the expense of what? Your own happiness? Son, you are going to be bitter one day and you'll realise that while you were busy shutting everyone out, they found other people to let them in." she said. "And trust me, which is what will break you."

His phone buzzed again.

"Take Obi's call. I don't know why you are avoiding him." She said, taking her seat. "I get your monthly credit alerts. Thank you." She said with a smile.

Fola ignored her and stared at the caller. "I don't want to answer it."

"Why not?"

He took his seat beside her. "Obi is in love with Aaima."

Mrs. King gaped. "Oh my God."

Fola nodded. "You see why I don't want her in. Because if I let her in, I won't care about Obi or how he feels, I am not letting her go."

"But that's the problem." She said.

He stared at her. "What problem?"

"She's in." she replied.

Sarah shook her head as she read through the email on Yemi's laptop. She exhaled and then faced Yemi. "Aaima came into Fola's house the night he won the case against you. Apparently, he hit her while she was trying to get away from whosoever. She had a bullet wound too. She has been with Fola ever since then and I am dead sure that he has no idea of who she is." She said.

Yemi hissed. "Are you making a case for him?"

"No. I am only stating the facts."

Yemi sipped her whiskey. "Let the court decide that."

"What do you mean?" Sarah asked. "Don't tell me you are planning to do something stupid?"

Yemi smiled. "Relax. I won't hurt your ex-boyfriend. But you are such a bitch, Sarah. I can't believe you are with Greg too."

"Greg?" Sarah said, feigning ignorance.

Yemi smiled. "I heard you call his name before you spoke to me. You are such a woman."

Sarah shrugged. "And so? Anyway, what are we going to do?"

"I am going to leak her disappearance back to her office through my contact and we would file a missing person's report and back-date it."

"What?" Sarah gaped.

Yemi nodded. "Yeah, it's criminal, but that's our best shot. Then we would get her to step forward. I'll figure something out and then the case would get to the Department of Justice and then I'll find another way to be the Prosecutor on the case. Your ex-boyfriend would be defending his culprits as usual, and I can have my revenge. I'll definitely sink him this time."

"And where would I be when all these are happening?" Sarah asked.

Yemi smiled. "Your NYSC is almost over, right? When you are done, I'll walk you in at the department of public prosecution. You'll make one hell of a lawyer."

"And you think I want to be a prosecutor? Where is the fun in that? I want to be at Peterside Chambers and Fola won't help me, but I know you can. That's my dream." She replied.

Yemi scoffed. "How do I help you retain a spot at Peterside?"

Sarah smiled. "That's easy...and you know it."

Yemi frowned. "What do you know?"

Sarah chuckled. "I want you to tell your brother-in-law, Mr. Peterside to keep me at the firm."

"How do you even know that?" Yemi asked. "And don't tell me Fola, because he doesn't know." She added.

Yemi smiled. "Like I said, I am the firm's rat. I know everything."

"I am not helping you walk your way into his firm so you can maybe challenge him for it one day."

Sarah chuckled. "Why not? It's not your firm."

"Listen to me, Sarah. I am many things but loyalty to family is everything." Yemi replied. "So you can either take up my offer at the DPP or walk away now."

Sarah stared at her. "I don't know...but how do you think your lovely brother-in-law would feel when he finds out that you are trying to take on his firm just for sex revenge, because, stop me if I am wrong, taking on Fola is akin to taking on Peterside." She replied. "Yemi, I am not asking for much, don't let's get messy."

Yemi exhaled. "Well, there are a lot of things that come with sleeping with the devil and I am not a novice at these things. What surprises me is that you don't know how to learn. One would think that as a young lady, you'll put your head down and work your way to the top with hard work and diligence, but, you are quite something."

"Of what good is working my way to the top when I can walk there?" Sarah asked.

Yemi smiled. "Fola can't be proud of you. He created a monster. One that I think is going to bury him, someday."

"Let me be the judge of that. Now, do we have a deal or not?" Sarah asked.

Obi turned off his car engine. He was hoping he had lost the men that were chasing him. He had done them no wrong, but they wouldn't stop coming after him. He was scared. Fola wasn't answering his phone either. He dialled the phone he had given Aaima. He hoped she would answer it. His car doors were still locked and he was looking into his side mirror occasionally so he would not be caught unawares.

"Hello." Aaima's voice came up.

Obi thanked God. "Aaima, is Fola there?"

"Yeah, we are at his Mom's." she replied.

"You guys have to stay there. Some guys are over at the house and they seem really dangerous. I just escaped from there but they followed me, I think I have lost them but I can't go home because I don't want them tailing me." He replied.

"Obi, what is going on?" she asked.

He shook his head as he sensed the anxiety in her tone. "Just don't go back home. It's not safe. Tell Fola to call me." He said, and hung up. He started his engine and sped off.

Aaima hurried out to meet Fola and his mother. "I am sorry but Obi just called me, Fola. Something is wrong."

"What is going on?" he asked.

Aaima exhaled. "He didn't tell me much but he says some guys were at your house and they chased him but he says we shouldn't go back to the house and that he is also on the run."

Fola blinked. "Really?"

Mrs. King stared at them. "There is enough room in the house. You can spend the night here."

"No. I can't have anyone coming here." He said, fetching his car keys from his pocket. "Let's go, Aaima."

Mrs. King rose to her feet. "You are not going anywhere. If Obi is on the run because he went to your house. There is trouble there."

"And I have to find Obi. I can't let him get into trouble." Fola replied.

Mrs. King stared at him. "What have you gotten yourself into Fola?"

"I don't know, Mom. But, there has got to be some explanation. Maybe Obi is being paranoid." He replied.

"He didn't sound paranoid, Fola." Aaima replied.

Fola shrugged. "Well, I can't stay here. And if I am in danger, I can't risk them coming to my Mom." He said, pulling his phone out of his pocket. "I am calling Obi." He said and turned away from the ladies.

Mrs. King stared at Aaima. "It's going to be alright, okay?"

Aaima nodded. "Yeah."

"Good. Let's go in and prepare your room." She said, leading Aaima into the house.

Fola watched them as they walked in.

“Hello, Fola!”

He cleared his throat. “Obi, what’s up?”

“Man, I went to your house and I noticed some guys were there, they came after me. I lost them though while driving, but it doesn’t look good.” He replied.

Fola nodded. “I went to see Umar before coming home.”

“Umar Abubakar?” Obi asked.

Fola nodded. “Yeah. I have heard the man is dangerous. Maybe he is pissed I spoke to him in the tone I did.”

“What happened?” Obi asked.

“Long story, bro. Where are you? You need to be safe.” Fola said, looking around him. His nerves were jangling and the thought of Umar Abubakar sending men after him got him worried.

“I am at the hospital.” Obi replied. “I am hoping I am safe here. I am not sure they saw my face so the odds are I am safe here.” He replied.

Fola nodded. “Stay there. I need to call Sarah. I think she knows something about that case I won for Umar and if my instincts are correct, Sarah is also not safe.” He replied. “Take care, man and thank you.”

“Take care of Aaima, okay?” Obi said. “Promise me she’ll be safe.”

Fola clenched his teeth. "I'd never let anything happen to her." He replied, hanging up. He dialled Sarah's number. She wasn't answering her phone. He dialled again. "Come on, Sarah. Pick up!"

He stopped dealing and hurried over to the security post. He kicked the leg of the sleeping security man. "Is this why I pay you?" he yelled.

The man shook his head as he rose to his feet. "I am sorry, sir!"

"Get as many cups of coffee as you can. Don't you dare sleep off on the job!" he ordered and returned into the house.

Yusuf turned to Umar. "It seems your lawyer is on the run."

Umar stared at him. "What do you mean?"

"My men said they couldn't get him, they are still after him though." He replied. "Umar, do you understand what this means?"

Umar ignored him.

Yusuf poured himself a drink. "If Fola King knows about Aaima, we are in trouble." He said.

"I know." Umar replied. "This is all your fault. We didn't need to kidnap her in the first place. We already got what we wanted, her sister's money. Now, we have a missing lady on the run and maybe with my stupid lawyer." He replied.

Yusuf took a deep breath. "Aaima witnessed the murder of her sister. That made her a key witness in the investigation. If we had not taken her, you

would be behind bars. And it is thanks to your sensitive nature that we didn't kill her immediately."

"Whose fault is it that she escaped? Your incompetent boys couldn't keep her hostage. That, is not on me." Umar retorted as he yanked Yusuf's glass and downed the whiskey. "Give me more of that."

Yusuf obliged him.

Umar swallowed. "Call your boys, tell them to kill Fola King and whoever they find connected to him."

"Easy, Tiger. You don't just go about killing people." Yusuf replied.

Umar turned to him. "Whose side are you on?"

"Clearly yours, but, you are becoming really irrational." Yusuf replied, "We can't go about killing people."

"If Fola knows about Aaima and he came to threaten us, do you know what will happen? He can get me into trouble. Tell your men to take him out. You called me a weakling. Now I am showing you my strength." Umar replied.

Yusuf nodded. "Fine."

Mrs. King handed Fola a blanket. "I don't know why you are bent on sleeping out here, but it's your choice."

He nodded. "Thanks, Mom."

"Goodnight, love." She said and turned away.

Fola watched her walk upstairs. He couldn't bear the thought of anything happening to her because of him. Sleeping in the living room would keep him closer to the danger, if there was any looming. He relaxed on the sofa and turned on the TV.

"Are you really sleeping out here?"

He turned to Aaima. "What are you doing here? Go to bed."

She joined him on the sofa. "I might as well keep you company as we guard the house." She said, chuckling.

He stared at her. "I don't want anything to happen to you. Go upstairs."

"You are being paranoid, Fola. I am fine." She replied.

He shook his head. "You don't know these guys. I believe Umar Abubakar killed his wife, he'll kill anyone."

Aaima was stunned as she stared at him. "Did you just say Umar Abubakar?"

"Yeah...do you know him?" he asked.

She blinked as she looked away.

Fola stared at her. "What is going on?"

"What is your relationship with Umar?"

He exhaled. "I will just tell you everything. It's a long story. I was his lawyer, I am no longer his lawyer because I quit yesterday." He started, checking his wristwatch. "Yeah, yesterday." He affirmed. "I helped him in a

murder trial involving his late wife and erm, I found out that...I found out that he lied to me about something. His wife actually had a sister visiting during the time of her death and now, the sister has gone missing and my guts tell me that Umar killed his wife and maybe the sister too. I went to him, I yelled at him and stuff and maybe he is the one who came after me.” He said as he sighed. “But its fine, tomorrow morning, I’ll go to the police and try to sort this out.”

Aaima tried to stop the tears that flowed down her eyes.

Fola stared at her. “Oh my God! What did I do?” he asked, wiping her tears.

Aaima sniffed. “Fola...”

“Yeah...you think I am a bad guy. Right? I helped a criminal? So what? I am a lawyer, it’s what I do.” He retorted.

She couldn’t stop her tears. “I...I am sorry.”

“Sorry? What about?”

She sighed. “Umar is looking for me.”

“You? Why?”

She gathered herself. “My name is Aaima Bello. I am Fatima Abubakar’s sister. I am the missing sister that witnessed her death.”

CHAPTER 8

Fola King was livid. He was mad at everything. All that was left for him to express his anger was to smash his mother's TV to the floor and, maybe, hurl his phone at the door and eventually slap himself back and forth since he couldn't lash out at Aaima. He was stunned as she told him who she was. He had gaped in shock, panted heavily, paced around the living room without saying a word as he watched her cry, when it got too much for him to take, he walked away from her and stepped outside the house. This was not looking good. He hung his hands on his head and thought of how he must have unknowingly exposed Aaima to danger by going to Umar and Yusuf. He was freezing in the cold but it was better than being in the same room with Aaima at this moment.

He could not believe that he had run into the same lady that his case needed to bury his client. He could not understand the fact that she had lived with him in the same house while his client was probably looking for how to bury his last tracks. He was trying to bring himself to terms with the fact that Sarah had been on to the woman in his house without any clue and if this new revelation was anything to go by, he was sure that Sarah and Yemi had finally struck gold. They would be flying in to the Department of Justice in the morning to lobby for a case. Knowing Yemi, he was sure that she would have filed a suit for a missing person by now and started brewing a fight against him. He clenched his teeth in anger. This was a fight he wouldn't wear his gloves for. It was no longer about him, it was about Aaima.

He pulled out his phone and dialled Obi. "Hey, man."

“Hey bro! How are things there?” Obi asked.

Fola looked around him. “Sane...for now.”

“That’s good news. How is Aaima?” he asked.

Fola took a deep breath. “She is fine. But, there is something you need to know about her.” He said, standing up from his seat. “Aaima is the reason those men were at my house, Obi. They are looking for her. They want to kill her.”

“Slow down, man. I don’t understand.” Obi replied.

Fola swallowed. “The night I brought Aaima in, I brought in the principal witness in the case I had just won. She is the late Fatima’s sister and she saw my client, Umar, kill his late wife.”

“Oh my God! So that bastard hurt her because of that?”

Fola nodded. “Yes, and now, she is in grave danger. I don’t know what to do. I just need to calm down and get through this night.”

“Fola, Umar is not going to let you get through this night. You have got to run.” Obi replied.

Fola shook his head. “I can’t just start running. I need to think this through carefully.”

“Boy! You are not superman! You can’t save the world, but you can run.” Obi replied, panting. “Look, man, maybe you should take her to the hotel or something and I will phone the police on your whereabouts so that they could at least offer you some cover while we plan our next move.” He replied.

Fola wiped his forehead. "Where are you, Obi?"

"I am in the hospital. I am avoiding the wards and lobby. I didn't see their faces and even though I am not sure if they know mine, I don't want to risk bumping into them." He replied.

Fola nodded. "Be safe, brother. Love you, man."

"Love me?" Obi replied, chuckling. "The lady in you is coming out."

Fola managed a smile as a tear drop rolled down his eyes. "Obi, be safe."

"Yeah, I'll try. I love you too, man. Thank you for everything. If I die, tell Aaima I wish she had loved me." He replied.

Fola swallowed and his sniffed. "Stay alive...so you can love her." He replied with his voice breaking and immediately hung up.

"Does it matter who I love?"

Fola turned to Aaima and immediately wiped his tears. "Get into the house!"

"No. You are telling Obi to stay alive so he could love me. Do you even care who I am in love with?"

"No! I don't care about you or your stupid feelings or whosoever is the idiot that you have them for. Get into the house...now!" he ordered.

Aaima blinked as she tried to stop the tears that ran down her eyes. "That's not fair, Fola."

"I don't give a damn. Now, get into that house!"

She nodded and returned into the house.

Fola exhaled and sat back slowly into his chair. He blinked nervously as he cast his gaze on the security man at the gate who was back to snoring away their safety. He swallowed as he wiped his eyes. It seemed as though his tear glands finally swung into action for the first time in his life since he was a boy. "It's okay, Fola." He said, pinching himself as he tried to stop the tears that would not stop falling. "Fola, stop it. Men don't cry. Fola, men don't cry. They never do." He continued as he started psyching himself up. "Come on, Fola. Come on, Man." It was not helping. Men did cry and they did have emotions too. They hurt too. The thoughts of him letting Umar go scot free after what he had done kept rushing to him. He was the lawyer who set a criminal free and now karma had come back to haunt him as he was in love with the woman whom Umar had hurt and was hunting down. His best friend was also in love with her. He had to let her go. He had to be Fola King right now. He needed to keep her safe and let Obi, a better man, love her. The thoughts were getting too much for him to take in and as he cried, his throat hurt. He needed to get it all out of his stomach. No, he was not proud of the man he had become. He screamed.

"It's okay, Fola."

He turned as he stared at his Mom as she was now hugging him. "Mom, I am sorry." He said as he broke down.

"It's okay, my love. It's okay." She said as she rocked him in her hug. "It's okay..." she kept whispering to him. "It's going to be okay."

Greg watched Sarah as she struck the keys of her laptop. He exhaled as he sat up in his bed and stared at her. "What are we?" he asked.

She turned to him with a smile. "Brother and Sister."

He frowned. "This is not funny, Sarah."

"Do I look like a clown?" she asked.

He exhaled. "You have not slept. You are busy with so much work and it's getting me so angry."

Sarah chuckled. "Brother, you have no right over how I spend or do not spend my day o! See, let's just be who we are. Friends with benefits."

"I want more!" he yelled.

She paused and then laughed. "Greg, you are used to picking off Fola's crumbs, right? Maybe when Fola is done with his new babe, you might have a clean shot."

"Why are you being cynical?"

She shut her laptop. "And why are you being unreasonable? We are nothing, Greg. We are just sleeping together!"

He groaned and got off his bed, charging towards her. "Get out of my house!"

"What? Are you crazy?" she asked.

He nodded. "Yes! I want you to get out." He said, grabbing her hand, lifting her up. He handed her the laptop. "Get out!"

"Stop barking *jare!*" she said, clutching her laptop to her chest.

Greg led her to the door and opened it. He gasped as he saw Obi standing outside. "Obi?"

"Sarah?" Obi said in shock.

Sarah scoffed. "Oh well! Now you know, I am sleeping with him too."

"What?!" Obi stuttered.

Greg blinked. "Obi."

"So long, Greg." Sarah said, blowing him a kiss as she walked off into the night.

Obi stared at him. "You bastard."

Greg took a deep breath. "What are you doing here?"

"You are not Fola's friend. You are a blood sucking leech." Obi said. "Don't worry about why I am here, because I am gone. I can't trust you." He replied, turning away.

"So what?! Yes! I am a bloody back-stabbing bastard. And so?"

Obi turned to him. "You idiot! You have no remorse."

"No! I am not sorry! Fola has everything either of us could ever dream of! The looks, the physique, the charm, the money, the job, everything!"

Obi stared at him shaking his head. "You are deluded."

"Yeah...and so are you! He even has the girl. Right? Sarah told me." He said.

Obi swallowed painfully.

“Fola is in love with her and if you are too stupid to see it, shame on you. So, yes, I might hook off his exes and scrapes, but damn, I am enjoying it...and you know why? Because I get to have what he has too.”

Obi gaped. “Ah!”

“Yeah. That’s it.” Greg replied. “So, run to your idol and tell him that I had Sarah! Tell him I don’t regret anything. Tell him-”

Obi silenced Greg with a punch in the face before he could say any more word. Obi groaned in pain as his fist hurt. “You are worthless.” He replied and walked away.

Yemi smiled as she sipped her drink. Her sources at the police stations already had flyers of a missing Aaima Bello circulating. She had not had any sleep all night and she could not wait for morning to come. She was also worried about Sarah. She sure disliked the lady. What she was asking for was far more than what she was willing to give. Yemi dropped her glass and turned on the Television. She would just see a movie till she fell asleep. She thought about Fola for a minute, he would not know what hit him when she was done with him. She hated him. He had aroused her emotions and given her reasons to believe that she might love again after she had shut her heart out.

Fola had walked into their office and into her life. He wanted to see the head of the department at the office for ‘personal reasons’ as he had told her. She was sure it had to be as she knew he’d not frequent their office. Prosecutors hated the name Fola King, he got them edgy and his arrogance and confidence always made matters worse. He had invited her to have coffee with him and she instantly found someone who was ready to listen to her and

he instantly had unlocked her heart, she found herself talking to him every day, and when they did not talk, she was sad and moody. She was slowly falling for him. But then, Fola was not in love with her. She knew this. But she fought it. She wanted him to be hers and she was willing to be his woman. Boy! She was vulnerable.

The effect of the movie was slowly kicking into her system. She knocked her head back a couple of times and sighed. She sipped her drink and picked her phone as she prepared to go into the house. The phone buzzed. *FK*. Her heart skipped a beat and the sleep vanished from her eyes in one instant. Fola King. Why was he calling her? Her heart pounded nervously as she thought of a million ways to answer the call. Not the coarse voice. Yeah, the 'I don't care' voice. *Ehen? Kilode?* Hi, Fola. Fola King. Why are you calling? What do you want?

She exhaled as the phone rang a second time and she had not yet figured out what she wanted to say. She just answered. "Hello."

"Yemi."

She swallowed as she heard his voice. "What do you want?"

"I need to see you." He replied.

She stared at the wall clock. "What is this about?"

"I can't say, but it is very important. I can't do this on the phone."

She blinked. "Where?"

"I am coming to you." He replied, hanging up.

Yemi sank back into her seat.

Sarah tried to avoid the gaze of the CDS Co-ordinator as he opened the door for her. "Thank you." She said as she walked into the house.

"Big girl, why we see you for *corper's* lodge this midnight. You no dey even come CDS like that." He said.

She stared at him. "I am a corps member, I am allowed to be here."

"Barrister Sarah, I no talk say you no fit stay here, I just dey wonder *wetin* bring you come here. After all, na you dey work for Peterside Chambers. You are a big girl."

She hissed and pushed the door to a room open.

"It's occupied. Go upstairs. The lobby is free." He replied.

She stared at him. "You expect me to sleep in the lobby?"

"All the rooms are occupied. If you no wan sleep for lobby, you fit go outside." He replied.

She scoffed and cursed Greg as she turned to the exit. She had nowhere else to go. Maybe she would just spend some cash and get a room in any hotel around.

"Or you fit sleep for my room." He said, licking his tongue.

Sarah spat on the floor and walked out.

Yusuf poured Umar another shot of whiskey as their long night continued. Umar had been drinking uncontrollably. "What is the essence of

killing her if I am not going to have some peace?" Umar asked as he stared at Yusuf who had resumed staring outside the window. "Why are you so calm? You told me to kill her and I did." He yelled at him.

Yusuf turned to him with a smile. "I am calm because someone has to be mentally balanced between us...and it's obvious that you don't fit that part."

Umar slid down his seat. "Why have your boys not killed him yet?"

"Because I haven't ordered them to."

Umar hurled his glass at Yusuf. "I said kill him."

Yusuf ducked as the glass crashed into the window. "And I say no!" he replied as he approached Umar. "The next time you try something like that, I'll kill you."

"I just want to enjoy this money in peace. Is that too much to ask for?" Umar asked.

Yusuf nodded. "Yes. You didn't get the money without disrupting the peace of another person."

"I hate your cynicism." Umar replied.

Yusuf took his seat. "Think about it. Fola is better alive to us than dead. There are a few good lawyers."

"We would get the other few." Umar replied.

Yusuf nodded as he rose to his feet. "When are we shipping the biggest batch?" he asked, clearing his throat.

“I don’t want to invest so much in it just yet. I need to be sure that I can reap the fruit when it comes. There are a lot of high ranking officials looking to feed off the stash off that bounty and I won’t let them have it if I go to jail.”

“When...you mean?”

Umar scoffed. “I think I just have to deal with your worthless sarcasm.”

Yusuf smiled. “You should go home and get some sleep, Umar.” He said.

“There is no sleep for the wicked, remember?” Umar said, managing a soft chuckle.

Yusuf nodded. “I see your humour is getting better.” He said, approaching the door.

“Where are you going?”

Yusuf shrugged. “My hotel room. I need to sleep.” He replied and walked out.

He pulled out his phone as he stepped into the corridor and dialled. “Things are about to get messy. Do I abort this mission?” he asked as he approached the exit of the building.

“Umar is a drug baron. Push him till he makes his largest shipment. He is siphoning our country’s cash.”

Yusuf sighed as he got to his car. “What about his wife that we lost?”

“Collateral damage, Yusuf. The same with her sister.”

Yusuf shook his head. "I let the girl live."

"Why?! You have blown your cover!"

Yusuf started the ignition. "No, it was neat. But I don't know where she is."

"Yusuf!"

He exhaled. "Look, I think someone is on to the sister. If I am not able to get him to ship the drugs first before they nab him for the missing sister, we might have to make do with what we have. Either way, a bad man is going away."

"We shall discuss this when you come in."

Yusuf nodded as he dropped his phone and drove off.

Yemi blinked as she watched Fola walk into her house. "Hi, Yemi."

"What do you want?" she asked as she shut the door.

He took a seat. "I need your help."

"How cocky!" she replied, taking her seat.

He looked around and shook his head at the bottles that littered her apartment.

"Oh? You want to judge me for drinking too much?! Don't go there!" she said.

He managed a smile. "I am not here for that."

“So what are you here for?” she asked. “I need to sleep.”

He sat up. “I...I am sorry about the case.”

“What case?” she asked, feigning ignorance.

He blinked. “The case against my client, Umar. I am sorry.”

“Hmmm...I take it as you already know.” She said.

He nodded. “Yes. I only found out this night.”

“You could have called to apologize. You didn’t need to come here.”

She said, standing to her feet. “Apology heard.”

He swallowed as he rose to his feet. “Yemi, I am sorry for taking advantage of you. I am sorry I was a fool with your feelings. I am sorry I made you fall for me. I am sorry I didn’t stop you. I am sorry I let you down. I am sorry we stopped being friends...”

Yemi blinked as she stared at him.

“I am sorry I cannot be in love with you.” He said.

Yemi exhaled.

Fola walked up to her. “Please, forgive me, Yemi. I am sorry. I am not proud of all I have done and if there is any way I can make up for the hurt, I would, but I know I can’t.

She nodded. “You are right. You can’t. You can’t take back the pain you have caused me. You just go around breaking people’s hearts because you think you can, right? Did you ever think that all I was...was all I gave to you?”

“I am sorry.”

She shook her head. "No. You are not. You are only here because you know I am onto a big case. You are here because you know I will sink you in court when you stand to defend Umar again."

"You are wrong, Yemi."

She nodded. "Oh yeah! I forgot! You like Aaima. She is another fool like me. You can never love anyone but yourself, Fola King."

He took a deep breath. "I deserve it, Yemi. I am sorry."

"Get out, Fola! Never come back to me anymore. Never!"

He blinked. "I'll leave, but I am sorry."

"I was never going to love anyone after Mark's death and I gave it all up for you...I thought you were real. I thought you cared. You selfish egocentric animal! Get out!"

Fola nodded. "I am sorry, Yemi." He said and approached the exit.

Yemi was done venting. She took a deep breath and rolled her eyes "Wait...wait...what do you want?"

"I need your help." He replied as he turned to her.

She motioned to a seat. "How may I be of help?"

"Aaima Bello." He said. "I need to keep her safe from Umar." He replied. "Yemi, I am sure you have alerted the police by now and they are already looking for her. I will provide you with everything I can, I will work with you in the background and yes, you will take down Umar and get justice for Aaima, you would also go to the court of appeal and get the former verdict that saw me win that case upturned."

She smiled. "Why would you think I would want to do that? Why would I want to work with you? Why do you think I won't crush you?"

"Because I won't be representing Umar. I quit yesterday even before I knew about Aaima. So, if this is about you wanting to get back at me, fine. But don't do this at the expense of a lady who needs help. You know I can't be at the centre of this." He replied.

Yemi looked away.

"Would you help me, please?" he asked.

She turned to him. "You are desperate. I want something in return."

He smiled. "You want me to get Sarah off your back?"

Yemi nodded. "She wants a place at Peterside Chambers. And she wants me to make it happen. Truth be told, I initially found your girl interesting, but now she is pissing me off."

Fola chuckled. "Peterside won't hire her."

"You can never be sure of that." Yemi replied.

He smiled. "I promise you." He said as he walked towards the door.

Yemi took a deep breath. "You must really love her."

Fola blinked as he stared at her. "Yemi..."

Yemi smiled. "Fola, it's fine."

He took a deep breath.

"At least, it shows there's some human side to you after all."

Fola chuckled. “Thank you, Yemi.”

“I got your back.” She replied.

He nodded and walked out.

CHAPTER 9

Fola pulled up at the nearest bus stop and checked his wristwatch. It was turning out to be longest night of his life. His birthday had been more of a revealing day for him. Break up with Sarah. Peterside returning his cheque. Finding out about Aaima and now being on the run for his life. He dialled Obi's number. Obi was meant to meet him here. No response. He checked his car locks as he relaxed in his seat. He thought about Aaima. Yelling at her was not his wish but it was necessary to keep her safe and far away from him. He was bad news. Obi would be a better man for Aaima. He adored her too. Fola knew life didn't work that way. He might not have been a direct recipient of love and emotions but he knew they didn't always come the way we did want them. If only Aaima would see Obi...and of course, if only he could stop feeling so strongly about her. He looked into his side mirror as a figure approached in the distance. His heart palpitated at the thought of one of the men sent after him catching up with him. He placed his hand on the ignition ready to push it but smart enough not to whine the engines. As the figure drew closer, he knew it was Obi, he pushed the ignition and released the locks for him to get into the car.

Fola moved the car as soon as Obi settled in. "What happened? I thought you said you were going to Greg's? Didn't the ambulance drop you there?"

"I left the hospital in the ambulance just like I told you, but I don't want to talk about Greg now. Just drive." He replied.

Fola blinked. "I am driving and I am listening. What happened at Greg's?"

"Fola, drop this matter. We go talk am later." Obi replied. "How is Aaima?"

Fola clenched his teeth, "She is fine. She is with my mother."

Obi nodded. "What are we going to do? If it's Umar coming after you, we are in trouble."

"I just want to get through this night, Obi. It's the longest night of my life." He replied.

Obi exhaled. "So...have you heard anything from Sarah? Is she safe?"

"She should be. I don't know. I called her, she didn't answer. Anyway, I have other plans and she can't even be let in on any of them because it involves screwing her over." He replied.

Obi blinked. "I don't understand."

"I am going to work with Yemi to help Aaima get out of this mess. And that doesn't favour Sarah at all and knowing the sneaky little girl she is, I am afraid she could do something really stupid." Fola replied.

Obi cleared his throat.

Fola stared at him. "What is it?"

"Nothing."

Fola focused on the road. "That is not nothing. What is it?"

“Look, Fola, I just want to sleep. You have started with second-guessing everything everyone says. Fola, its fine.”

Fola nodded. He knew it wasn't fine. There had to be a reason Obi didn't stay at Greg's. He had risked his safety to leave the hospital in an ambulance so he wouldn't be spotted by anyone, only for him to change his mind. He couldn't understand why Obi would not want to tell him the reason for his change of plans.

Yemi struggled to stay awake as she struck away on her keyboard and sipped her coffee. She was preparing for her day which would see her do a lot, maybe much more than she had done in the previous weeks. Her door bell went off. Fola couldn't be at her door. And of course, not Sarah. She panicked. She took a deep breath and turned to her phone as it vibrated. Sarah. She frowned. Why was Sarah coming to her house at this time? She hurried to the door and peeked through the hole before opening the door. “What are you doing here?”

“I am sorry. I had nowhere else to go.” Sarah replied, stepping into the house.

Yemi locked her door after her. “Like I told you, I am not big sister that you can come running to whenever you have issues.”

Sarah nodded. “I can sleep on the couch, I'll be gone in the morning.”

“Sure you would.” Yemi replied.

Sarah stared at Yemi's laptop. “What are you doing?”

Yemi closed the laptop. “None of your business.”

“Oh, come on, Yemi!” Sarah groaned. “For how long are you going to keep treating me like this? We are a team!”

Yemi smiled. “Team? When did I ever give you that liberty?”

“Yemi, I know this whole behaviour works for you, but it doesn’t for me...and I am getting really pi—”

“Shut it!” Yemi said, cutting her off. “I make the rules around here, lady. You should be glad I am giving you somewhere to lay your head. I advise you sleep and be gone tomorrow morning. I am not your mate and I am not Fola who has given you the liberty to hatch your eggs and grow into a bird. I will cut your wings down and I won’t even bat an eye. So, watch how you talk to me.” She concluded, carrying her laptop.

Sarah clenched her teeth. “Goodnight, Yemi.”

Yemi smiled. “Goodnight.” She replied, leaving for her bedroom.

Mrs. King stared at Aaima with a smile. “You know, when Fola’s dad left, I almost thought that I couldn’t raise him alone. I was young, scared and alone.” She started. “But then, every day I spent with my son made me stronger. I didn’t see the need to have anyone in my life but my son and I raised him that way. Emotions made us weak, so we fought through the tides alone. We had each other and that was just enough.” She said, hesitating a little. “For me.”

Aaima stared at the glass of water in her hand to avoid Mrs. King’s gaze. The woman’s beautiful large eyeballs did more than just look at her. They were piercing through her, coming with a subtle plea. Aaima knew this

phase pretty much. She knew how the human mind worked. It might have not been the older woman's direct motive, but she was selling her son to Aaima. Oh well, selling the fact that he was loveable. But, Aaima didn't need her help to figure that out, she was already swooned by him.

"Aaima?"

Aaima looked up.

Mrs. King smiled. "Where are you?"

"Here."

The woman shuddered. "As I was saying, Fola is not a monster and even though he must have helped the man who murdered your sister walk, he regrets it. You see, Aaima, the way life is set up, we never know who we would meet and what impact they'll have on us."

"I don't resent him for that." Aaima said.

Mrs. King stared at her. "Oh? You don't."

"I can't blame a man for doing his job." She replied.

Mrs. King sat back. "Even when it did involve your life?"

Aaima exhaled. "I don't know, ma'am. Fola has made some mistakes in his life just like we all have. I made one when I came to Nigeria to visit my sister and that is what has brought this fear upon you. We don't even know if they are coming to get me here and hurt you in the process."

Mrs. King smiled. "Aaima. That was not a mistake. That was fate."

“Fate? Fate is not when you are on the verge of dying.” Aaima replied. “You are at risk because of me, this is not fate.”

Mrs. King chuckled. “I sure can do with some excitement at this stage of my life. It’s been boring and lonely. I can do with some hiding from bad guys and trying to jump into a moving car and maybe break my teeth in the process, or maybe just die. Just die. You know?” She said, laughing. She stopped for a while and stared at the younger lady who had so much fear in her eyes. Her life had only just started, she didn’t need this now. Not like Aaima was the only worried one but someone had to keep the balance. They were both worried for their lives and for Fola who had gone out ‘to find help’ as he had told them. Mrs. King smiled and reached for Aaima’s hand. “Fola has not been to see me in many years. I get monthly allowances that are enough for some families to live on for a year from my son who would not see me because of a silly bet that we both did. I told him the day he was called to bar that he’d lose his first case. I was only kidding. Fola looked me right in the eye and said, ‘Mother, you did not raise a loser. The day I lose my first case is the next time you’ll see.’ I was shocked, I laughed about it but still agreed to the bet because I thought he’d get beaten someday, I mean, even the best do fall. Aaima, Fola is yet to lose a case, the only reason why he is here to see me is because of you...and if that is not fate, I don’t know what else is.”

Aaima swallowed. “I don’t know what to say.”

“Give yourself room to be happy. I know it’s all chaotic right now, but it will be alright and if it’s not alright...it’s not over yet.” Mrs. King replied, smiling. “You know, sometimes I wonder why I never loved another man after Fola’s biological father jilted me. I get so mad at myself whenever I think of my lonely days and nights. I just sit at home, read, write, stare at the

Television, sometimes, I drive around...alone. I eat in cafés alone. Alone. I didn't see the need for friends either, it has always been Fola and I. I regret not allowing my son have so much fun. He didn't grow up how the normal kid would. He was always there for me...even when I ought to be there for him. These streets toughened him up too early. I would give anything to see Fola happy. I want him to have a normal life. I want him to have a family...to be a good Dad."

Aaima stared at her. "Fola is his own man."

Mrs. King nodded. "I know. And that is my fear. But I think he is broken...I hope he is."

The door opened and Fola walked in with Obi. Aaima smiled as soon as she saw Obi. He was safe. Obi walked over to meet her and she met him in a bear hug. Fola shared a glance with his Mom at this before going into the house.

"Thank God you are fine." Obi said, releasing her from the hug. "I am so happy to see you, Aaima."

Aaima managed a chuckle. "Come on, Obi. You are the one who was out there." She said. "It's good to see you are safe."

Aaima looked around but neither Fola nor his Mom was in sight. Her smile faded as she took a seat. Obi took his seat beside her. "Did you see their faces? I mean the men who came after you? I could help identify them if they are the same men that took me."

“Now I understand why you would not tell me the truth about you. But, I am going to do everything in my power to protect you, okay?” he said, assuring her.

Aaima stared at him. She didn’t deem it fair to him. “Obi...”

He swallowed. “Yeah?”

“I...” she started and stopped almost immediately. “Obi?”

He blinked. “What is it?”

“It’s not you.” She said.

He nodded as he struggled to keep his gaze on her. “Okay...”

She exhaled. “I wish I had these feelings for you. I am sorry.”

He looked away.

“I know the timing is not right, but, I hope you’d understand that you are a great guy and you deserve-”

“Don’t start.” Obi said, cutting her off. “You are about to start the ‘you deserve the best in world speech and what’s not...and I know it’s meant to make me feel better, but it will only make me feel worse.” He said, forcing a smile.

Aaima smiled back. “I am sorry.”

“It’s fine. Maybe I’ll meet her someday.” He said. “Fola is a lucky guy.”

Aaima swallowed.

Obi nodded with a smile. "Yeah, I could figure that out. Fola is a great guy. He just doesn't know it." He said. "You know, we have been friends forever and I'd never want to lose him."

"Are you giving up for him?" Aaima asked.

Obi shook his head. "You are not even in love with me. There is nothing to fight for. I already lost the fight before having the opportunity to get into the ring."

Aaima took a deep breath. "Obi, I really wish..."

Obi smiled. "Come on, Aaima...stop wishing. It's never going to happen. I know when to break my own heart before you can."

Aaima exhaled. "Come here." She said, hugging him.

"Yeah, that's the friend-zone hug." He said, chuckling.

Fola stared at them as he approached from upstairs. He clenched his teeth in anger and returned upstairs, unnoticed.

Mrs. King's heart skipped a beat as Fola slammed the door after him. "Fola..."

Fola took his seat. "They are happy together. Mom, just leave me alone."

"Adefolarin." His mother started as she took her seat beside him. "You might just be overreacting, you know?"

Fola stared at her. "Oh really? Did you see them together?"

Mrs. King managed a smile. "You are jealous."

"I am not jealous." He replied.

Mrs. King drew closer to him with a smile. "You are jealous, Fola."

Fola stared at her as she made faces at him. "Mom, stop it."

"Admit it, Fola." She said, wriggling her fingers.

Fola stared at the fingers, he knew what was next. "Mom....don't."

Mrs. King ignored him as she tickled him.

"Fine! Fine! I...am...am—jealous!" Fola replied, to break free from his Mom. "Mom!" he groaned. "Are you happy now?"

"Yes, I am." She replied with a smile. "It's going to be alright, Fola."

Fola shrugged. "I don't know, Mom. It's been one hell of a night. I just want to sleep. Tomorrow is going to be longer."

"It's a good new year for you, Fola. I am the proud of the man you have become." She said, standing up. "I'll just let you sleep. Is Obi sleeping in here too?"

Fola frowned. "He can sleep in Aaima's room for all I care." He retorted.

Mrs. King chuckled. "I'll get him up here soon." She said, heading for the exit.

"Thanks, Mom."

Mrs. King nodded. "Sleep well."

Umar dropped his phone onto his lap and fell back into his bed. He had struggled with finding some sleep in the last hour and so he decided to call his boys to know if they had found Fola King. They had negative answers for him. He was going to kill someone in the morning with the pace at which things were moving. He was further irked by the fact that Yusuf was not returning his call. The idiot must have been asleep. He sighed as he thought of how to ship in his new consignment. Things were not going well for him with the government hot on his trails, looking for any opportunity to nab him. This situation with Aaima looming made things more uncomfortable for him. Umar had some friends in the Police department, he would talk to them in the morning to help alert him if his missing sister-in-law surfaced. This time, he would finish off what he should have done when he had the chance. He was foolish enough to keep her alive and now he wished that he didn't. He couldn't be worrying about a stray girl and drugs at the same time. The drugs were his priority. He needed to sort that out first. He sat up and picked up his phone. 'Someone at Customs should be able to help me.' He thought to himself before checking his wristwatch. "Normal people are asleep by this time, Umar. Find some sleep." He urged himself, before dropping back into his bed.

"The deal was for you to get up early enough and be gone before I step out here." Yemi said, standing over Sarah with a cup of coffee in her hand. "But then, I have gone out and returned. Look at you! Sleeping away precious work time. How do you want Peterside to retain you after your service if you don't even get up to go to work on time?" she asked.

Sarah groaned as she tried to get up from the couch. "I am not used to sleeping on the couch."

Yemi chuckled. "Oh Princess! I forgot Fola let you lay in his royal bed." She said, laughing. "How do you like your new reality?"

Sarah ignored her as she sat up. "What time is it?"

"Eleven AM. Do you know how productive this morning has been for me and for every other serious person in Lagos?" Yemi asked, taking a seat.

Sarah sighed. "I'll just take a shower and we can be on our way to the Police station."

Yemi laughed. "Did you not hear anything I said? I have already done my early morning errands while you were sleeping away your legal career."

Sarah exhaled. "Okay, so what's the status at the police station?"

"Same as yesterday. They should start circulating Aaima's missing photos by the end of the week." Yemi replied.

Sarah stared at Yemi intensely. "I thought you said that they would already have done that."

Yemi smiled. "Are you not familiar with the Police system in Nigeria?"

"Rubbish! I know how persuasive you can be, Yemi." Sarah replied.

Yemi sat back. "I don't sleep with people for favours. You do better at that."

Sarah groaned as she rose to her feet. "Show me some respect!"

“People earn respect! And you my dear, you can’t earn any.” Yemi replied and picked up her bag. “I am heading to the office to see if there is any progress from the Police. They could be proactive too.” She said, rising to her feet. “Gather your things, I’ll love to lock my door.”

Sarah took a deep breath. “Can I just shower?”

“No. Please leave.” Yemi replied.

Sarah shook her head. “You are unbelievable.”

“My house. My rules.” Yemi said with a smile.

“Good morning.” Aaima said as she walked into the kitchen with her plate from breakfast. “Why didn’t you join us for breakfast? And you disappeared last night too...”

Fola ignored her as he washed the plates.

Aaima dropped her plates by the sink. “Can I clean my plates?”

He stepped away from the sink handing her the sponge.

“I see we are not talking.” She continued as she started washing her plates. “Your Mom said you made breakfast?”

He rolled his eyes.

Aaima rinsed the plate and dropped it to dry. “You know you can at least say good morning too?”

Fola returned to the sink and continued with the other dishes.

“What do you want from me, Fola?” she asked.

He continued with the dishes.

Aaima was done. She exhaled and walked out of the kitchen.

Fola's phone rang. He dried his hands and pulled it out. Yemi. He answered. "Hey!"

"Fola, get your girl down to the station to file her statement." She replied.

Fola shook his head. "I...I can't be there. I am trying to stay totally disconnected from the case."

"Ah yes! I forgot that part. I am coming for her." She replied. "Are you home? I can be there in five minutes."

"No. My mother's. I'll send you the address." He replied. "Thank you, Yemi." He said, hanging up.

Sarah stormed into Greg's office. "Listen to me, you underachiever!"

Greg stared at her. "What has come over you?"

"You threw me out of your house in the dead of the night and I am going to get back at you for it." She started.

He hissed. "You are late to work and Peterside has asked of you. That would worry me more if I was you." He replied and focused on the brief before him.

"Did he...he ask of me?" she asked.

He scoffed. "Don't you have friends that you have probably slept with for favours around here? They can confirm that."

She blinked. Peterside was stern. She was in trouble if he was asking of her regarding her lateness...but what if Yemi had already done the needful? A smile lurked round her face as she turned to Greg. "See you later."

Sarah adjusted her button as she got to Mr. Peterside's office. This was her closest shot at glory. She was going to claim it. "Good day Sir, you sent for me."

"I understand you are a corps member here, right?" he asked as he shut his laptop.

She nodded. "Yes, Sir."

"I pick certain days to do my rounds, so as to know the commitment level of my staff. You have been found wanting." He said.

She swallowed. "I...I don't understand."

"You were late to work today. In fact, I hear you clocked in after noon." He said.

Sarah stepped forward. "I had a serious emergency that I had to attend to."

"I often find emergencies more believable when you are maybe in the emergency room. I have called your Local Government Inspector and reported this incident. You are suspended for the next one week."

"Sir?!" Sarah said as she gaped.

Mr. Peterside nodded. "If you have any complaints, speak to your Local Government Inspector." He said. "Have a good day."

Sarah exhaled as she walked out.

Mr. Peterside stared at his phone and dialled. "Hey, Yemi, it's done."

Fola walked into the living room. "Are you ready?" he asked. "Yemi would be here to pick you. She is your attorney. Is that clear?"

Aaima stayed quiet.

Fola cleared his throat. "Do you remember everything I have briefed you about? Is there anything that is unclear to you?"

She ignored him.

Fola frowned. "Aaima!"

She rose to her feet and stared at him. "Are you angry? I hope you are, because this is how it feels to be ignored." She said and turned away to leave.

Fola pulled her back and close to him. He stared at her as he could feel her chest pounding against his. He leaned into her and kissed her.

CHAPTER 10

Fola was the first to break away from the kiss. "I am sorry." He said, avoiding her gaze. "Yemi would be here anytime from now. You might want to get ready." He said, clearing his throat. He slipped his hands into his pockets. He had kissed her on impulse and was now unable to move any intended discussion further. It was right to just halt it here before things got more complicated than they were. They were already complicated in his mind. He could feel his heart racing faster than normal. He couldn't say he wished the last few seconds had not happened right now. He was glad it did. Aaima kept staring at him. That made him uncomfortable. He blinked as he stared at her.

"Are you not going to say anything?" Aaima asked, breaking the silence.

Arrrggghhhhh!!!!!! Fola hated this!!!! Aaima was messing with his mind. Why did she have to talk? What did she expect him to say? Can't a man just kiss a woman he had been meaning to make out with in peace? He blinked as he thought of the next thing to say. "I...errr-"

"Fola King. Lost for words? Is this a first? I must say I find it quite fascinating." Aaima started as she approached him with a coy smile. "You do know that it's not very proper to force a kiss on a woman, right?"

Fola swallowed. "Did...I-"

Then the doorbell went.

Fola exhaled as he thanked God in his heart for small miracles like the doorbell saving you from almost goofing. He turned away from her and hurried to the door.

Aaima's smile brimmed from ear to ear as she watched Fola hit his leg against the sofa as he hurried away from her. For some awkward reasons, she was enjoying this. She was however not playing with Fola's feelings, which were pretty obvious to her. Except of course, she had tripped on the wrong signals. He was Fola King. She could expect almost anything with him. She hoped for her sake that she did not pick the playboy version of Fola King. She was skilled at analysing people as a profession. But now, she needed someone to analyse her and maybe Fola too. She hoped that this was real. It felt good. She smiled.

Fola returned into the living room with Yemi. "Aaima, meet Yemi. Yemi, Aaima." He said, introducing both ladies.

Yemi smiled as she stretched forth her hand to Aaima. "It's a pleasure to meet you."

"Nice to meet you too." Aaima replied, taking the hand confidently. "Thank you for doing this." She added.

Yemi shrugged as she stared at Fola. "Anything for an old crush."

Fola's smile faded and his eyes bulged in shock as he stared at her angrily.

Yemi chuckled. "Oh! I am sorry. You thought I'd miss the opportunity to see you pissed for anything in the world?" she asked, and then turned to

Aaima. "I am sorry, but I just enjoyed rubbing it in his face...and maybe yours too."

Aaima smiled. "No offence taken."

"Good. Now let's get down to the station." Yemi replied, heading for the exit.

Aaima took one glance at Fola before going after Yemi. Fola exhaled before sinking into the sofa.

"She loves you, you know?"

Fola turned to see Obi. He blinked. This was his moment of truth. Obi took his seat, opposite him.

"She really does love you." He re-echoed.

Fola searched for the words. Obi was in love with Aaima. He was too. What was he going to say to his friend that would sound right? He blinked and clenched his teeth as he looked away.

"We can talk about it, you know?"

Fola turned to him. "Really? What do you want us to talk about, Obi?"

Obi took a deep breath. "You are my friend."

"And so?" Fola replied, defensively.

Obi nodded. "I know you, Fola. You are not going to love Aaima back."

Fola looked away.

“Fola, I am no longer that kid who didn’t have money to go to school back then that you had to stay at home for.” Obi started.

Fola turned to him. “What are you saying?” He asked in a soft tone.

Obi swallowed. “All I am saying is, don’t hurt Aaima for me. It’s pointless because she’ll never see me and I know that well enough.”

Fola rose to his feet. “I don’t know what you are talking about.”

“Damn it, Fola! Can you just stop and listen!” Obi said, rising to meet him. “I know this Fola! This is the dude who is going to act as though Aaima doesn’t exist so as just to satisfy someone else. You are on your superman mission and I can see you want to do right by me and deny how you feel, but I don’t need your help.” He replied.

Fola hissed. “I have more pressing matters to attend to than this.”

“Pressing matters like?” Obi asked.

Fola shrugged. “I have to call Greg and let him know that I am not coming in today.”

Obi clenched his teeth. “Is that all?”

“Yes.” Fola replied.

Obi blinked. “You don’t have to tell him what’s going on with you and Umar, you know?”

Fola stared at him. “I feel Umar would visit the firm to ask about me under a stupid guise and if I don’t cover my tracks well. They’ll give Umar my Mom’s address. She is my next of kin.” He replied, pulling out his phone.

“Why not call Peterside directly?” Obi suggested. “Umar would not go to Greg for a high profile case like yours.” he said.

Fola nodded. “I know. But Greg is our friend too. We have to warn him.” He replied, turning away from Obi.

Greg stared at Sarah. “You are distracting me.”

“All I need is the keys to your apartment so I can gather my things.” She replied.

He shook his head. “No. I don’t want you setting foot in my house in my absence.” He said. “Go and camp wherever you like. You can come over around eight to gather your stuff.”

Sarah exhaled. “I can’t believe this is happening to me.”

“I know right?” He cooed, typing on his laptop. “Karma is a female dog.”

Sarah stared at him. “You are doing this because I don’t like you?”

“No.” he said, staring at her. “Not liking me is okay. Treating me like shit is not okay. You can’t have the best of both worlds.” He added.

She scoffed. “You are really bitter.”

Greg nodded. “At least, you are right about emotions.”

Sarah undid her top button and loosened her shirt.

Greg chuckled. “That’s a waste of your time. I am not interested.”

“Who said anything about you being interested?” she asked as she approached him.

Greg stared at her. “What are you doing?”

“You have five seconds to give me your keys...or I’ll scream. I have nothing to lose in this firm.” She said.

Greg blinked as his heart raced. “You are kidding me.”

“Watch your dream job fly out of the window in the next second. Keys?”

Greg pulled out the keys from his drawer and handed them to her. “You are a bitch.”

She nodded with a smile as she fixed her buttons. “Karma is a female dog, right?” She hissed and walked out of his office.

Greg’s phone vibrated. Fola. He shook his head. He was not sure he wanted to answer the call right now. Fola did not show up for work and he was sure that Obi must have told him something. It was pointless answering his call. Fola would probably be calling to set up a date for both of them in the gym so he could knock his teeth out. He knew he was a waste for a friend. He was not sorry. Fola had everything he could ever dream of. He didn’t want Fola as a friend. He was not going to waste his time apologizing when he wasn’t. With that, he ignored the call, pushing the red button on his phone.

Aaima felt as though one of the officers knew her. He would not take his gaze off her. She hoped the interrogation would stop and she could leave the room. Yemi spoke to the DPO in a corner of the room while some other

men took down Aaima's statement. Aaima wondered what was going on and with the officer making her feel uncomfortable with his somewhat leery eyes, the more the need to leave the room.

Finally, Yemi turned in their direction and signalled to her. It was time to leave. She followed quickly out of the station and to Yemi's car. "Sorry about the delay. I just needed to ensure that the statement would be filed today to us. I'll take it up from there." She said, buckling her seatbelt. She then turned to Aaima who seemed to be lost. "Hey!"

Aaima turned to her.

"If it's about what I said back at the house. You need to get your mind off it. I am not dating Fola." Yemi said.

Aaima blinked. "It's not about that."

"Oh good." Yemi replied, starting her engines.

Aaima stared at her. "I didn't like the way he looked at me."

"Fatso?!" Yemi laughed. "No one likes the idiot! His large bulb-like eye balls are not even a sight anyone likes to behold." She added. She then stared at Aaima. "Yours are cute."

Aaima managed a smile. "Can we just leave this place?"

"Sure. I am hoping to get a call from my boss soon enough. The good thing is your kidnapping happened in my jurisdiction, and not to sound cocky, but I am the best prosecutor in that office. The case is coming to me." She said, driving off.

Aaima sighed as they drove out of the compound. “How long would it take before we go to court?” she asked, looking through the side mirror.

Yemi shrugged. “It all depends. This looks like something we can bring in before the week is over. Well, if all goes well.”

“By going well, you mean according to your plans, right?” Aaima asked, not taking her eyes off the side mirror.

Yemi nodded. “Yes.” She then stared at Aaima. “What are you doing?”

“The black truck has been following us since we left the station.”

Yemi scoffed. “Stop being paranoid. Fatso likes women. That’s where it ends.”

“I guess you are right.” She replied.

Yemi’s phone buzzed. Mumu Pikin. Yemi smiled at the name on the caller ID and answered the phone via her Bluetooth earphones. “What can I do for you?”

“Where are you?”

Yemi scoffed. “You know how much I hate that tone, right?”

“Peterside suspended me. I need a place to crash. And I am choosing yours.”

Yemi laughed. “What is wrong with you? Are you high on something? Look here, young lady, if I see you anywhere near my apartment, you’ll be crashing with some inmates tonight. Are we clear?” She asked, and hung up.

Aaima blinked. “That...that sounded harsh.” She said, staring at Yemi.

“That’s what she deserves. Are you hungry?” she asked.

Aaima shook her head. “Am I not meant to be hiding or something? What if Umar finds me?” she asked as she checked to see if the truck was still behind them.

“I didn’t know Umar had eyes everywhere in town. It’s just food. I am hungry and I need to satisfy that want before I proceed with the madness of this day.” She said, staring at the eatery ahead of them. She took one glance into her side mirror and noticed the truck. She stepped on the gas pedal a little and watched the truck as it seemed to be closing up on them. “I think you are right.”

Aaima stared at her. “About?”

“That truck. We are being followed.” She replied.

Aaima exhaled. “I’ll call Fola.” She said, fetching her phone.

Yemi focused on the traffic light ahead of them which was turning red. “Hold tight.” She ordered and stepped on her pedal.

Obi dropped Fola’s phone on the sofa. “Let’s talk. Outside. No distractions. Just you and me. I want you to talk to me. Tell me why you don’t want to love her.”

Fola picked up his phone. “You are being silly, and I am not having this conversation with you. It’s best you drop it.” He replied, walking away.

“I am going to fight for her.”

Fola stopped.

“If you keep putting up a front like you always do about not caring about her. I am going to fight for her, and I am going to make her fall in love with me.”

Fola turned towards him. “Good for you.” He replied.

“Fola, what is your problem?!” Obi shouted.

Fola’s phone buzzed. Aaima. He stared at Obi. “She is calling. Do you want to answer the phone?” he asked, cynically.

“Why don’t you do that? It’s your phone called. Not mine.” Obi replied.

Fola dropped the phone on the sofa. “You know what? I want to have that conversation now.”

“Okay...where do you want to start from?” Obi asked.

Fola approached him. “How about we talk about the fact that you have always been attracted to her and then you fell for her? How about we focus on the fact that I am also in love with her and I am doing what is right for both of us here?”

“Who asked for your sympathy? Fola, I am telling you this because you are not going to find a better woman and you are eventually going to regret this decision and I don’t want you to grunt about it in the future.” Obi replied.

The phone buzzed again. Fola took a glance at it before turning to Obi. “No lady has ever owned me. It won’t start now.” He said.

Obi hissed. "Is this about me, or Aaima or your foolishness?" Obi asked. "Look, bro, if you want to mess up your life because you want to, fine. But please, I don't want you to ever think or to ever say that you did not love Aaima because of me. I am not asking you to and I would never waste my time chasing her, not when I know where her heart lies. There'll be someone out there for me. But you have found yours, don't waste it." He concluded.

"Are you done?" Fola asked.

Obi nodded. "Yes, I am."

"I'll go and take a nap." He said. "Maybe when I wake up, you'll tell me what is going on with you and Greg and why he is not returning my calls." He added, approaching the stairway.

Obi's phone buzzed. "Aaima is calling."

Fola clenched his teeth in anger "Answer it. She couldn't even wait for me to call back. There's something there for you. She must love-

"Shut it!" Obi said, and picked the call. "Hey, Aaima."

Fola swallowed as he watched Obi take her call.

"Oh my God! Where are you?!" Obi called out.

Fola hurried down to meet him. "What's going on?"

"They are being followed." Obi replied as the line went dead.

Umar lifted the receiver. “Good of you to finally return my call, Yusuf!” he said, angrily. He paused to listen to what Yusuf had to say. “I see! Busy with what?”

“Look, Umar, you know I hate being yelled at. So, I suggest you calm down. I had to go and buy some goods for the guys at the port. That way, our goods come in without any hassles.” Yusuf replied.

Umar smiled. He finally had some good news. Proactive Yusuf. “Okay...how far with that?”

“Loading my trunk as we speak.” He replied.

Umar nodded. “I need you to get down here as soon as possible. Gather some boys too. We must smoke out Aaima and Fola as soon as possible.”

“I hear you. Stop ordering me though.” Yusuf replied, hanging up.

Umar took a deep breath and dialled another number on his phone.

Yusuf dropped his binoculars in his lap and checked his wristwatch. He had given up on chasing Aaima’s car. He was sure they picked up his trail and went so fast that he lost them. He just hoped that he’d get to them before Umar did. Umar seemed to be firing all cylinders and bringing out his strong will these days. Yusuf chuckled at the thought. He had been sent to infiltrate him by the National Security Unit. Yusuf thought of all the evil he had led Umar into doing and relaxed in his seat. He was ruthless. That was why they hired him.

He was, however, sorry about collateral damages like Hajjia Fatima and that was why he set off to find Aaima before Umar or any of his boys got to her. She, however, was on the run and right now, he had to head back to Umar before he would suspect anything.

Yemi bolted the door after them. "We should be safe here."

"Are you sure?" Aaima asked, taking her seat.

Yemi smiled. "You have taken a seat. You feel safe."

"I feel tired." Aaima replied.

Yemi took a seat. "We are not drawing the curtains back and we are staying put until Fola gets here." She said. "Hopefully the police get here before him." She added.

Aaima bowed her head and prayed silently.

Yemi shook her head as she saw this. Maybe she was just too worried about going to court that she didn't bother about the fact that they had just been chased by an unknown truck. She exhaled and hoped that they lost the truck for good.

Aaima sat back. "You know, I had no business coming to Nigeria."

"I hope you are not about to start a farewell speech? You know those types folks do before they die?" Yemi said, taking her seat beside Aaima.

Aaima chuckled. "You have a queer sense of humour."

“It’s what keeps me going. I would probably be dead by now without it.” Yemi replied with a smile.

Aaima took a deep breath. “Fatima and I never got along. I was born and bred in London. Our parents only brought Fatima for the holidays while they left me in London with a nanny. I was not close to her. I knew nothing about her. Except that I thought she was really smart. My mother told me that Fatima was going to be in charge of the family business someday. I couldn’t care less, all I loved was my job. When our parents died, Fatima told me to come home.” She stopped and turned to Yemi. “Right now, I almost wish I never did.”

Yemi stared at her. “Fola.”

Aaima managed a smile. “That’s the only good I have got from my trip here.”

Yemi nodded. “Then, that’s enough good.”

“You think so?” Aaima asked.

Yemi rolled her eyes. “I am not the one who is in love.”

Aaima chuckled. “I just want all these to be over.”

“Soon.” Yemi replied.

The doorbell went.

“Fola.” Aaima said.

Yemi stared at the door. “Sit still, okay? And if I scream, you run as fast as you can. Go out through my window. Try not to die while jumping.” She added and rose to her feet.

Aaima's heart pounded as she watched Yemi approach the door.

Yemi opened the door and Sarah pushed her out of the way. "Call whoever you like, but I am staying here!" she ranted. She gaped as she saw Aaima in the living room. She turned to Yemi. "What is going on here?"

Yemi stared at her. "You intruded on my privacy. That's what is going on here."

"What are you doing with Aaima, Yemi?" Sarah yelled. "You bastard. You screwed me over!"

Yemi scoffed. "Screw? I don't particularly like that word as I don't have a stud, okay?"

"I am going to deal with you. All of you!" Sarah yelled. "Now I know why Peterside suspended me. You dirty greedy,-"

Yemi slapped Sarah in the face before she could conclude her sentence. "Now, get out of my house." She ordered, pushing Sarah out.

Aaima joined Yemi. "That's Sarah."

"Yeah." Yemi replied, locking the door. "Call Fola. They are taking too long."

Sarah knew where she was. She knew what she was doing. She was not numb or drugged but she was here. She was ready to damn the rest of the words that had been drummed into her mind as a child. Not like she cared for those words anymore. But the rest of it was about to go out of the window. They drove her nuts.

“He will see you now.” The lady in a red gown announced.

She nodded and walked into the office. You could mentally smell minted one thousand Naira notes as you stepped into the office. There was no way she would not cart away with hers.

“What do you want?”

She took a deep breath. “Fifteen million naira and I will tell you where Aaima Bello is.”

Umar turned to Yusuf.

“You have five minutes.” Sarah said. “Make up your minds.”

CHAPTER 11

Umar cleared his throat. "Are you not stupid? How dare you come here and demand anything from us?"

"Because I know you both are pigs and your mud just got dirtier." She replied.

Yusuf swallowed. "What are you talking about?"

"I can give you Aaima's location if you wire the money into my account. This minute!"

Umar frowned. "Are you mad? Who goes around with fifteen million naira?"

"I said 'wire' it. You sure would be able to afford that to keep your mess away." She replied.

Yusuf stared at her. "How do we know that you would give us the correct location?"

She smiled. "Do you think I took the trip all the way down here to joke around? I mean business."

She watched as Umar leaned over to discuss with Yusuf. They were not audible.

"Just in case you are thinking of the cheap option which is to torture me till I tell you, don't waste your time." She said. Umar and Yusuf turned to her. "I have nothing to lose. No money. No location. I don't mind if you kill me." She added.

Yusuf clenched his teeth. "I think you talk too much."

She smiled back. "I can't help it."

"Let me have your account details." Umar said, fetching a paper from his table.

Yusuf stopped him. "Umar, there is no need to make a very hasty decision."

"Do you have a better idea?" Umar asked. "From where I am, she seems to be proffering us the best solution here, and I have run out of patience waiting for your grand idea." He concluded, handing Sarah the paper. "I'll wire it."

Sarah smiled as she started to scribble down in the paper. "There's no need to argue over who has a better scouting prowess." She started, as she flashed a grin at Umar and Yusuf. "I just want the money and I am out of your faces for good." She concluded and returned the paper to Umar who immediately got behind the computer.

"You are making me fifteen million naira poorer." He started. "I hope you are happy."

She nodded. "It's for a good cause."

Yusuf stared at her. She was a huge distraction to his mapped out plans and was of more good to the anxious Umar than himself. He knew Umar would send a team out for Aaima's head once he got the location. He wished he could stop it. However, Aaima was not his primary responsibility. The country's secret unit was paying him to bring Umar in. All he needed was for Umar's goods to get into the country and he'd lead him into an ambush to

clear it. Frankly, no one cared about the backlash that formed from Fatima's death, fixing Aaima in the equation. She was simply "collateral damage" as they liked to call it.

Who was this lady? He thought to himself as he stared at Sarah angrily. He was dying to snap her thin neck off. It pissed him off staring at it. He took one glance at Umar who was busy on his laptop. The man was desperate to find Aaima and put an end to all his sleepless nights. Yusuf smiled faintly at the thought. Umar deserved no sleep. He couldn't reckon why Umar was desperately after peace with all the evil he had done. But then, Yusuf felt some sympathy for the man. He was the 'devil' that infiltrated Umar's life and thickened him up for his evil acts. Yusuf waved the thought off. He couldn't feel any pity for Umar. He only acted as a catalyst. Umar surely had it in him.

"Money sent. You should get it any moment from now." Umar announced.

Sarah nodded with a stern look. Her inner face was smiling so much it could crack open to the outside. Fifteen million!!! Oh boy! She was going to get herself an apartment somewhere far away. Maybe she'd go on a vacation to the Caribbean and enjoy the hot sun with a smoothie in her hand or maybe some prawns or any sea food. She could mentally smell the money in her bank account but as long as the beep had not come to her phone, she had to curtail her excitement.

"Where is Aaima Bello?" Umar asked.

She exhaled. "I am yet to get the alert."

Umar groaned. "Listen to me, young lady! I am not one to play games and I suggest you stop risking your sanity and that of your family by telling me the exact location of Aaima Bello."

"I already told you that I came here with nothing to lose." She replied, defiantly.

Yusuf clenched his teeth. "That, my dear, is not true." He started. "We always have something to lose. And trust me, your greed for fifteen million that you are willing to share the location of a lady tells a lot about you even without saying and you might try to convince yourself that it means nothing, but you would not walk out of this room alive if we sniff any foul play here."

Umar slammed the table. "Damn this network! Do you think I sat behind my laptop playing solitaire?" he asked angrily. He pulled out a revolver from his drawer. "I sent the money already!"

Sarah kept a firm face in the face of the impending danger. She would not be broken. If she was selling out, she was going to earn big for it. After all, Yemi snitched on her and placed her on suspension. Aaima took away the only thing that mattered to her after her ambition, Fola. And Fola, Fola! He threw her under the bus by forming an alliance with Yemi. She hated all of them and they all had to pay for how she was feeling. She didn't deserve the treatment they had given to her. She was going to have her pound of flesh, and she was going to gain big time from it. "Just the alert and we are good." She said.

Yusuf joined her. "When I said you'll not walk out of this room alive, I did not mean putting a bullet through your head, because, that would be very easy. I have more special plans. They include mutilation." He said, staring at

her eyes. "The worst kind of mutilation. Severing of your body parts bit by bit until you beg to die, and I would not listen to you because it is who I am, so when you think you can come up here and be a bad bitch, keep it in mind that you did not come here to meet a bunch of amateurs." He concluded and gave her a cheesy peck on the forehead.

Sarah was scared as she stared at Yusuf. His eyes were cold, but she was determined. She knew what she was getting herself into when she stepped into the building. She was certainly not going to turn back at this point. "I just need the alert to drop." She replied, confidently. She had to muster the remaining strength in her to match these guys. They were not here to play.

Her phone beeped. She tapped on it. Credit Alert. The fifteen million naira was real. She was fulfilled. "Aaima Bello is currently in the custody of Prosecuting counsel, Barrister Yemi." She said.

Yusuf swallowed as Umar reached for his phone. "What are you doing?"

"Changing the boys' direction." Umar replied.

Yusuf shook his head. "I am going there myself."

Umar stared at him. "Oh...okay..."

"I want this to be as clean as possible." Yusuf replied, fetching his car keys.

Umar turned to Sarah. "Give us the address."

"Of course." She replied, as she started to scribble in a paper. Umar placed his revolver firmly on her head. "Bad idea." She said.

Umar stared at Yusuf and then back at her. "Give me one good reason why I should not kill you right now."

She smiled. "You are never getting your fifteen million naira back. We both know that you are only hurt because of the money."

"Wrong answer." He replied. "The only reason I am letting you live is because if you have something against Aaima such that you are willing to kill her, I would love to see how all these end for you...and it's certainly on a grand scale. I wouldn't cheapen your death with a bullet. Moreover, it's a waste of my bullet." He concluded, taking the paper from her hand. He handed it to Yusuf as he dropped the gun on his table. "You'd better get going."

Yusuf nodded and turned to Sarah. "Do you need a ride?"

She shook her head. "I am fine."

"He could give you a lift, maybe he could even take you to the place so you can witness how he puts the bullet through their heads. What do you think?" Umar asked.

Sarah shook her head and rose to her feet. "I'll pass. My work is done here." She said. "So long." She added and walked out.

Yusuf turned to Umar. "I'll call you." He said and walked out.

Umar waited till Yusuf had gone before picking his phone. "Hello, I want you to follow Yusuf, ensure that he kills Aaima and whosoever stands in his way...and if he does stand in yours, kill him." He said, ending the call.

Obi paced around the living room while Yemi stayed on the phone. She was engrossed in the conversation with her boss. "It's my jurisdiction, Sir. I can take this case." She replied. "I am not emotional about losing the first berth and trust me, I just need you to assign it to me, and the rest is history." She added as she paused to listen. "Sir, I am not worried about Fola King representing Umar Abubakar." She stressed.

Fola stared at Obi who would not stop pacing around the living room. Aaima tried to be calm as she sipped some tea. She had not said a word to him since they got there. Yemi was the one who gave them the full load down on Sarah's drama when she came over. He thought sitting beside Aaima would initiate a natural conversation but she didn't seem to be in the mood for that. He sighed and joined Obi who was now standing by the window. "Dude, you need to chill."

"I have been receiving calls from the hospital. I told them I had an emergency to deal with, I am not used to being away from my patients and I am worried that going to the hospital might endanger someone or myself." He replied. "I don't even think we are safe here."

Fola looked around. "Why not? I think this building is really protected. And they pay a lot for their security levy, if that counts for anything." He said, chuckling.

"Yes!!!" Yemi exhaled as she got off the phone. She smiled at Aaima. "Guess who is representing you now, lady?" she said and continued almost immediately. "Of course, you don't need to guess." She added and then turned to Fola and Obi. "Umar is going to be served his invite in the morning, and you might be called by your darling client."

“I quit.” He replied.

She nodded. “Oh well, he needs a new lawyer. This thing is about to get real. I am all fired up for it.”

“Do you live for these things?” Obi asked.

She smiled. “Why not?”

He exhaled. “You are just so excited about it. It’s a good thing you love your job.”

“Well, I enjoy this.” She said and then turned to Fola. “Anybody hungry? I haven’t eaten just yet.”

Fola stared at her. “Need help in the kitchen?”

Yemi stared at him. “Really? I can do it on my own, you know?”

“I would love to help. We don’t want to burden you so much.” Fola said, joining her.

She smiled. “Ain’t you so sweet, Fola?” she asked. She tiptoed to his ears. “Are you trying to make her jealous? It’s not working.” She said, through clenched teeth.

“Let’s go and cook.” He said, leading her out of the living room.

Yusuf stared at his phone. He expected his friend to have sent him an update on the phone number he requested. He frowned as he noticed the black salon car that had been following him for over five minutes. “Distrustful bastard.” He said as he took another turn, off the route to Yemi’s house. He

knew he needed her number as soon as possible else Umar's urchins would phone their boss that they had been tailing him for too long and Umar would sense foul play. If only the silly tech nerd at the security agency knew when to up his agility when necessary. Yusuf knew he couldn't put pressure on him so as not to alert his boss that he had slightly deviated from his mission.

His phone buzzed. Yemi's number had been traced from the telecommunication agency. He dialled her immediately.

Sarah arrived at the ATM and slotted in her card. She made some withdrawals and hailed a cab. "Local Government Council." She said.

The driver nodded and drove her down there. She hurried into the office and met with the Local Government Inspector.

The large old man stared at her. "Barrister Sarah, what are you doing here? You have been suspended."

"Sir, NYSC is almost over and my passing out is close. I won't get my certificate and my name is part of the processed list for suspended corps members." She said.

He yawned. "There is nothing I can do about it. The order came directly from your Place of Primary assignment and this shows that you have been a bad ambassador of the NYSC. Besides, you are one of those girls that pencil your khaki trouser and use unauthorized belts when we don't ask you to, so...this is your punishment. In fact, I am glad you will have to wait extra months and serve with another batch."

Sarah stared at him with some disgust. “*Oga, na wetin na? Which one be all this wash because of ordinary NYSC?*”

“*Na you sabi. You sha no fit carry me go court on this matter, abi?*” he said, as he picked the corn on his desk and continued eating.

Sarah fetched a stack of bills from her purse and started to count. The old man stared at her. “Sarah, what are you doing?” he asked.

She stopped at twenty thousand naira and dropped it on his desk. “Please, take my name off that list.”

He stared at the money and then at the stack in her hand. “Sarah? You are bribing a government official.”

“Yes, and you just agreed to it.” She replied.

He frowned. “How?”

“You didn’t call it an attempt to bribe, you said I am bribing you, and so, yes, I am. Take that money and take my name off the list.” She replied, counting ten more notes. “This is a total of thirty thousand Naira.”

He blinked as he reached for the money and slid it into his drawer. He fetched a paper from his drawer and gave it to Sarah.

She stared at it. It read “NYSC Defaulters List”. She frowned as the list was empty. “What is this?”

“You suppose no say I no dey hold any *corper* back for this my Local Government. There are no names on that list.” He said, laughing.

She frowned. “You just swindled me of thirty thousand naira!”

“Consider it a gift to a man you have been rude to.” He replied, laughing.

She grabbed her bag and walked out angrily.

Fola stared at Yemi’s ringing phone. “Are you not going to answer it?” he asked as he sliced some onions.

“No. I don’t have the person in my contact list.” She replied.

Fola frowned. “And so?”

“Fola, is it your phone? Why are you taking it personal?” she asked.

He chuckled. “I feel he is an ex and you know his number and you don’t want to pick his call.”

“Very funny, Fola. Very funny. I still have all my exes’ phone numbers. I don’t burn bridges, because you never know when you’ll need them.” She replied and picked her phone which was ringing for the third consecutive time. “And just in case you are right and maybe one of the exes has gotten a new number...” she said and answered the phone. “Yemi speaking. Who is this?”

“Listen to me very carefully, I don’t have much time. Some people are on the way to your house to kill you and Aaima Bello, I advise you leave that place now. You have only five minutes.” The voice said and the line went dead.

Fola stared at her. “Why are you so stunned? Did your ex propose to you?”

“They are on their way to kill us.” She said.

Fola took the phone from her. “What are you saying?”

“We have five minutes.” She said and turned off the gas. “Move, Fola!”

Fola hurried out of the kitchen into the living room. “Guys, grab your things we have to move.”

“What’s going on?” Aaima asked, rising from her seat.

Yemi closed her laptop and fixed it into a bag with some case files. “Our cover just got blown!” she said, leading the way.

Yusuf pulled up outside Yemi’s house. He watched as Yemi and Aaima got into a car and gaped upon seeing Fola and another man in their company. He looked at his side mirror to gauge the distance of Umar’s men. They had not yet gotten to him, but they had to be somewhere. He heaved a sigh of relief as the Yemi’s car moved before the black salon car got to into the street. He stepped out of the car, sure that they had seen him and moved into the building.

Fola turned his Bluetooth earphones off. “My mom is at the airport. She’ll be going to Calabar. She’s fine.” He said as he stepped on the gas pedal.

“Now, where are we going?” Yemi asked. “I could call to report that we are in danger and the police would relocate Aaima and I until the trial is over.” She said.

Fola shook his head. "I don't know how smart that is right now. Umar probably has guys everywhere."

"We can't keep driving and suspecting every car in the side mirror." Obi said, looking through the window.

Fola stared into the rear mirror. "Aaima? Are you alright?"

Yemi stared at him. "Let her be, Fola. People get nervous when their lives are being threatened."

He exhaled as he took another turn and gauged the cars that turned with him. "There are about five cars that have still been following us."

"Should I call the police?" Obi asked.

"No." Fola replied. "Just hold tight, we are going faster." He replied.

Yusuf stood behind the door as he watched Umar's men walk into the apartment. He adjusted the silencer on his revolver and fired at both men. He scoffed as the blood stained the sofa. "What a mess!" he said and touched them for pulse. None. He pulled out his phone and dialled.

Yemi stared at her ringing phone. "That number."

"Answer it. Loudspeaker." Fola instructed.

She answered the call. "Look, if you are-

"I don't have time to chat, Yemi. I know you are with Fola King and you need to meet me somewhere so this stops being awkward for us all."

Fola stared at her. "What do you want?" he shouted.

"Easy man, this is not the time to shout. I am sending you an address now." He replied and hung up.

Aaima spoke up for the first time. "Don't take the bait."

Yemi turned to her. "What is it?"

"I know that voice." She replied.

Yemi's phone buzzed. "There's an address, Fola. Not too far from here." She replied.

Fola blinked. "Give me directions."

Aaima was sure she had heard the voice before and it was not good news. She got the déjà vu feeling that it was all coming right back at her.

Moments later, Fola pulled up and turned to Yemi with a frown. "Is this the place?"

She nodded.

"I know this place." He said.

Aaima exhaled. "I told you not to come here."

Fola pushed the car's auto lock as he looked around him. Familiar terrain. This was the exact spot he hit Aaima. He stared at Aaima. She was in tears.

There was a knock on the window.

Fola turned to see Yusuf. He stared at him and rolled the glass down. "You?"

“Get out of the car.” Yusuf said, pointing a gun at them.

CHAPTER 12

“Slow and steady.” Yusuf ordered as Fola, Aaima, Yemi and Obi fell in line. He took a deep breath. “I hate doing things the hard way, trust me. It’s not my style.”

“Really? I remember suffering when you held me in here.” Aaima retorted.

Yusuf smiled. “I am sorry about that.”

“Just know that the police will get you.” Fola said to Yusuf.

He nodded. “That would have been cute, except that I am the police.” He replied, strapping his gun against his belt. “I am sorry I had to accost you the way I did, but I did not expect you guys to want to talk to me, knowing my association with Umar but I don’t work for Umar.”

Fola stared at him. “Yeah, you work for yourself.”

“Something like that. Anyway, this is top secret and I should not be sharing this with you guys but for your own safety, I think you should know that I am an undercover Government agent.” He started. “I was sent to infiltrate Umar and so far, that’s what I have been doing.” He added, before turning to Aaima. “I am sorry for any discomfort you might have experienced in the process of my carrying out my work.” He added.

Yemi stared at him. “Where is your badge?”

“Do you even believe this phoney? He can create a badge if need be.” Fola replied.

Yusuf stared at Obi. "You look calm. How are you associated with this annoying lawyer?" he asked.

Obi smiled. "Annoying people have friends."

Yusuf nodded. "True." He replied, pulling out his badge. He tossed it to Fola. "Hakeem. That's my real name and that's my badge. Now, I don't have much time for pleasantries and autographs. I think you guys have an enemy in a lady called Sarah."

Fola was stunned. "Sarah?"

"Yes, she sold your location out and Umar sent some men after you. She got fifteen million for it. She should be riding off into the sunset by now. Anyway, I took care of that, but there are more and they would be ruthless and vile. Seeing that you're all in alliance, I want to believe that this case is already processed to court?"

Yemi nodded. "Yes. Very soon."

"You guys can stay here." Yusuf said.

Aaima interrupted. "No way!"

Yusuf nodded. "I understand your decision, but it's either you are here or you are close to Umar's reach. This is the last place he'll search for you." He replied. "Fola King, this is your call. I cannot protect you while doubling for Umar if you are out of reach. I can't continue mopping up the loose ends by killing every man he sends after you. I have my own mission and time is not on my side."

"Then why are you doing this for us?" Aaima asked. "You can't sleep at night? You punched me in the face several times, is it haunting you? Do you

feel bad for all your crimes even while you claimed to be a double agent? My sister died. Was she collateral damage?" she replied.

Fola stared at Aaima as she ranted to Yusuf.

"Tell me something, Yusuf or Hakeem or whatever you are." She yelled in his face.

Yusuf sighed. "Yusuf. The name is Yusuf. Honey, I am not sentimental. I sleep well at night, and yes, I asked the guys to release you because I didn't see the need for your pretty face to go to waste. That's all."

Fola grabbed him by the collar. "Apologize to her."

Yusuf smiled. "Ohhh...someone likes someone."

Fola hit him in the face.

Yusuf shook his head. "The only reason I am letting this punch slide is because I probably deserve it, but not from you, Fola...from her."

Aaima took the initiative and slapped him.

"Okay! Party is over." Yusuf yelled at them, fetching his gun. "No more hitting or slapping."

Yemi chuckled. "I, for one, enjoyed, that."

"I am sure you did." Yusuf retorted. "Now, what's the plan?"

Obi stared at the others. "I think we should stay here, guys." He suggested. "I am tired of running."

Yusuf's phone rang. "Umar is calling." He announced and stepped away from them. "Hello!"

“Are they dead?” Umar asked.

Yusuf stared at Fola and the others. “No.”

“What do you mean by no?!” he asked.

Yusuf took a deep breath, “I have been looking for them. I think they got tipped off. Maybe Sarah double-crossed us to make some money?”

“What?”

Yusuf nodded. “Yes, she has disappeared off into thin air. I think she played us.”

“I am going to find her and I am going to kill her.”

Yusuf exhaled. “I am more worried about finding Aaima.”

“Good. Get back to me as soon as possible.” Umar replied as the line went dead.

Fola stared at him. “You just made Sarah his target! He is going to send people after her.”

Yusuf shrugged. “And so? Didn’t she make you his target? Why are you being so nice?” he asked, turning away. “I need to get some of my boys down here to look after you.” He added, dialling on his phone.

Obi turned to Aaima. “How are you doing?”

“I just want to leave this place.” She replied.

He smiled. “It’s going to be alright. Yemi would win this case in court and you’ll be fine.” He said.

She took a gaze at Yusuf who was still on the phone and another at Fola and Yemi who seemed to be engrossed in some matter, before turning to Obi. “Do you really think Yemi would win the case?”

Obi nodded with some optimism. “I believe so. All the evidence is gathered against him.”

Aaima hoped that this one would be successful. Umar made her disappear before the previous trial. She was sure he could do anything. The only difference now was Yusuf.

Yemi stared at Obi and Aaima with a snicker. She goaded Fola. “Don’t they just look perfect together?”

Fola ignored her. He was not exactly pleased to see Aaima talking to Obi when she was finding it hard to say a few words to him. Women! Yemi, on the other hand, was enjoying all this.

Yemi’s phone buzzed. “Hello, Sir?” She stopped to listen. She exhaled and then turned to Fola. “They are going in for Umar tonight.”

“Who are you? I asked for Fola King.” Umar shouted as he stared at the lawyer. “I don’t know you and I don’t need you.” He replied.

The lawyer turned to leave.

“Wait!” Umar shouted.

The man stopped, dropping his briefcase on the table. “I see you are now ready to get out of here.”

“I want you to help me send a mail to Fola King that I need him here.” Umar replied.

The lawyer frowned. “It’s like you enjoy this room.”

“It’s temporary. Get me Fola King and I’ll pay you in full as though you represented me. Does that make you happy?” Umar asked.

The lawyer stared at him. He hated Fola King. This was his chance to handle a high profile case and the client won’t ‘allow him be great’, he was seeking Fola King. Fola King!

Umar stared at the lawyer who seemed to be thinking too much about a good deal. Not like he had no respect for other lawyers, but Fola naturally intimidated his opposing counsel. He needed that. If Aaima had gotten the court to charge him, he had to be double ready and he would not be if his lawyer could not even frighten any of the guys from the department of public prosecution.

The door opened and a police officer stepped in with Yusuf. Umar smiled. At least, one familiar face. Umar waited until the Police officer had stepped out before turning to Yusuf. “What is going on, Yusuf? Those rats came over to my house and arrested me. Where is Fola King?”

Yusuf signalled the lawyer. “Please, wait outside for us. I will call you.”

“No! We won’t be calling you.” Umar retorted.

The lawyer frowned and walked out.

Umar stared at Yusuf. “Where did you get that pot from?”

“Do you have any intention of leaving this place, Umar?” Yusuf asked.

Umar nodded. "Yes, I do."

Yusuf sighed. "Then I suggest you let the man do his job."

"I want Fola King."

Yusuf scoffed. "Fola is done with you."

"No! Tell him no one is done with me! I am going to blackmail him. I am going to tell everyone that he knew Aaima was my hostage." Umar groaned. "And I am serious!"

"But he did not." Yusuf replied.

Umar smiled. "Yes, I know...but that is my strategy. You better tell him to come here and get me out or he is going down with us."

Yusuf cleared his throat. "Us?"

"Oh yeah! Do you think you get an exemption clause now? No, Yusuf, we are in this together." Umar replied.

Yusuf took his seat. "Umar, you are not going to jail for a kidnapping case. Don't fret. I brought you a change of clothes for court tomorrow."

Umar sighed. "Get me Fola King."

"I'll relay your message to him." Yusuf replied, standing up.

Umar stared at him. "Any update?"

"On what?"

Umar cleared his throats. "My containers?"

“Oh! That? I don’t think you should be worried about that right now.” Yusuf replied. “There are more pressing matters like getting out of here.”

“Do you know how much funds are stashed away in those containers? Those are more pressing matters, Yusuf.” He replied.

Yusuf nodded. “I’ll let you know what I find.” He said, approaching the door. He turned to Umar. “Get comfortable, Umar.”

“My friend, shut up!” Umar replied and rubbed his forehead.

Yusuf smiled and walked out of the room.

Umar stared around him. He was in an interrogation room not in the cell. He couldn’t stay here for long. He was starting to get worried as he thought of the possibilities of losing his stash of drugs coming into the country. He was sure that he could trust Yusuf to get him through this tide.

Yemi joined Fola and Obi in the living room. “Fancy I say that Obi has a nice place?”

Obi smiled. “Thank you.”

Fola stared at her, expecting some news. “Yemi...”

Yemi smiled. “Oh! I am done with the first phase of prepping her. She needs to get some rest and then we would be doing the long haul later on. You guys can rest.” She said, sinking into a chair.

“And what about you?” Fola asked. “Shouldn’t you be resting?”

She smiled. "I know what you are trying to do...you want to channel the feelings you wish you could show Aaima to me." She said. Fola frowned. "It's not working." She added with a grin.

"You know you are really annoying, right?" Fola said.

Yemi nodded. "I have always known that." She replied, rising. "I don't enjoy seeing the police men that are lurking around the building, but then...I have to enjoy this celebrity feeling." She added with a smile, leading for the bedroom.

Obi stared at Fola. "Don't you want to talk to Aaima?"

"She is the one who isn't talking to me!" he replied. "Look, man, I am just tired of all these." He added, relaxing in the chair.

Obi knew his friend better than to push him once he started getting defensive on an issue. Aaima's silence was hurting Fola. He knew this, but there was little he could do to help Fola at this stage. Aaima was going to confront Umar, surely her emotions were expended elsewhere.

Fola stared at Obi who seemed not to be here anymore. "And you? Why are you not telling me the thing with you and Greg?"

Obi did not see the need to go down that lane. "Look, Fola, drop it."

"Why?" Fola asked. "Say something! Why don't you want to talk about it? Why are you keeping it to yourself? Is this what friendship is all about? Is this it?"

Obi rose to his feet. "I should just sleep."

Fola rushed after him. "What is it?"

“Fola, chill. You can’t take out your anger from Aaima’s silence out on everyone!” Obi replied.

Fola stared at him. “What are you not telling me?”

Obi exhaled. “Greg has been sleeping with Sarah.”

Fola blinked as he stepped back. “Greg?”

“Yes. You wanted to hear it so bad. There you have it! I don’t know how long it has been going on between them, but that’s what I found out.” Obi confirmed.

Fola exhaled and ran his hand through his hair. “Greg?”

“Fola, I know how you feel. Greg is like a brother to us. I am sorry.” Obi said.

Fola nodded. “Not anymore. I don’t know him anymore.”

Obi clenched his teeth. He feared this and that was why he tried to hide the information from Fola. But he was getting so angry, he needed to channel his emotions elsewhere.

Fola knew what he was going to do. He was going to relieve himself of this anger and of the fact that he would not be in court tomorrow with Aaima. He had to distract himself. Greg was just perfect. “Thanks, Obi.” He said, approaching the door.

“Where are you going?” Obi asked.

Fola shrugged. “To take a walk.”

Obi smiled. “Does that walk involve you taking out Greg’s teeth?”

Fola nodded. "Something like that."

"I'll drive." Obi replied.

Fola led the way out and Obi followed.

Sarah zipped her box. She checked her wristwatch. Her flight was due in a couple of hours. She did not know where she was going in Australia, but she was sure it was going to be a long time before any of her family member heard from her. Her taxi had arrived and was waiting outside the hotel. She had also settled some officials at the Service corps to help with her certificate on the passing out day. She had her bases covered. She had sent some money to her parents. There was no way she'd forget them.

She knew they would have tonnes of questions about how they received such kitty from her, so she did not bother visiting them. No time for story. She spared a thought for Fola King – ultimately the man of her dreams. She always knew she was not going to have his heart, but she was comfortable with playing in the winds, in the hope that someday, he'd be able to love her. But then, his heart found someone else and she was useless to him. She hated him for letting go of her so easily. She learnt a lot from him...enough to last her ambitious mite for a lifetime. She had no regrets that he would be killed. If she could not have him...no one else should.

She had spared more than a thought for him. She thought as she approached the Taxi. She opened the door and stepped in, pushing her bag in. "International Airport."

"Yes, ma'am."

She smiled as the AC flustered through the cab. She deserved this life. The baby girl life. She thought.

“I hope you are having a nice evening.”

She stared at the Cabbie. Was he flirting with her? Such filth.

Yusuf turned to her. “I sent your cab man on an extended leave.”

Sarah gaped. “Let me out!” she ordered, trying to force the door open.

“Auto-lock, madam.” He replied with a smile.

She started banging the glass. “I am going to scream.”

“Scream away, ma’am! I am in the mood for so much fun tonight.” He replied and stepped on the gas pedal.

Sarah was in trouble. Why did Umar send his man after her? Could Fola, Aaima and Yemi have gotten away? She pulled out her cell phone and started dealing.

“That’s not a very smart idea.” Yusuf said, swerving to the right, causing her head to hit the glass. “So, I decided to take you for a spin, just for my own personal amusement. Please take no offence. I was feeling bored.”

Sarah rubbed her head as she stared at the rear mirror. Yusuf smiled at her. “You are a cynic!”

“I know. So, tell me what I want to know. Why did you sell your ex-boyfriend out?” he asked, swerving as he watched her tap on the phone. The phone dropped to the floor, rolling under the passenger’s seat. “Sarah?”

“What do you want from me?!” she yelled.

He smiled. "Answers."

"Well, you have them. He is an ex, he met Aaima. I am pissed about that." She replied.

He laughed. "Isn't that petty? I think Fola indulged you too much. Unfortunately, I am not in that business." He said.

"What do you mean?"

He smiled. "I have a surprise for you." He said. "Hang on and enjoy the ride."

Sarah could not hang on for much longer. The ride was upsetting her stomach. Yusuf drove too fast, she was getting nauseated. She wanted to throw up.

He screeched, stopping the car. He then turned to her with a gun. "I have a job for you and you can't say no."

"What?" she said, with teary eyes.

He smiled. "You are Umar's defence attorney in court tomorrow."

"What?!" She gaped.

He nodded. "Think of it as a chance to blow Yemi away, and inadvertently, crush Fola. What say you?"

She blinked. "Why are you doing this?"

"Think of it as a gift." He said with a smile. "From a special person to you."

Fola watched Aaima as she stepped out of the room with Yemi the next morning. “Hi.” He said.

Aaima stared at the bandage around his hand. “You went fighting?”

Obi cleared his throat. “No, just an exercise in the gym.”

Yemi blinked. “I am not buying the story. Anyway, we are off to court.”

“I’ll join you guys in an hour.” Obi said.

Aaima stared at Fola. “I wish you could come.”

He exhaled. “I am sorry.”

“Okay, people, save the emotions for later. It’s Yemi time! Let’s do this.” She said, leading Aaima out of the room.

Fola swallowed as he watched them leave.

Obi stared at him. “It’s okay, bro.”

“Yeah, I know. Do you think Greg is alright?” Fola asked, turning to Obi with some seriousness.

Obi chuckled. “You didn’t think about that when you knocked him out last night. Well, he is a tough guy, he’ll live. But, I sincerely do not care.” He replied.

“Do you think Yusuf or Hakeem would do what we asked of him?” Fola asked.

Obi nodded. “The guy seems to enjoy trouble.”

Yemi was enjoying seeing Sarah unnerved. She lived for moments like this. The little firm rat deserved it. She was willing to have her killed, she would show no mercy. Sarah jumped up at every possible chance to object Yemi and this was boring the old judge.

The judge banged the gavel. "Counsels, would you please approach the bench." He said, interrupting Sarah's latest objection.

Umar shot a glance at Aaima. He was losing his mind. Aaima had spoken confidently against him and Sarah was terrible at defending him. He wondered why Yusuf had gotten him someone who seemed to be off her game. Speaking of Yusuf, he had not seen him in court. His circle was getting thinner as fear loomed,

"My Lord, the defence counsel is trying to unnerve my client with her ceaseless objections." Yemi started.

The Judge stared at her. "Do I not know that? Or did I call you both here to serve tea?" He asked.

Sarah snickered at that jab.

"Defence counsel, what are you doing? I am getting tired of your objections." He started. "If you have a case, put it forth before I lose my mind." He added.

Sarah nodded. "Yes, my Lord." Her confidence level grew as they returned to their seat.

"Objection allowed." The judge said, continuing the case.

Yemi gaped, unable to believe what had just happened. Fair play by the judge, though. She was trampling all over Sarah.

Sarah nodded. "My Lord, the claimant here has reiterated without possible evidence that she was kidnapped by my client who unfortunately was mourning the loss of his late wife at that time. This, my Lord, is false. Aaima Bello is a sheer case of a lady who came into the country to inherit some of her sister's funds and since she wasn't given any share of it, she has become scorned. This, my Lord, is a simple bait to make some money off my client."

Yemi smiled. Sarah had hit a new level of low.

"Can you prove this?" The Judge asked.

Sarah cleared her throat. "My Lord, the claimant came into the country precisely some weeks before the death of a sister whom we have no record of close ties with and this is an evidence that she had other interests. We have documents from the airport to highlight Aaima's arrival into the country. They were submitted as exhibits." She said. "I would ask this court to please dispute this case against my client as it is about the money she can make off him. He is a man who is still mourning his late wife, we should not subject him to this." She said, taking her seat.

The judge nodded.

Umar smiled, on seeing this, Sarah was interesting. He sure was keeping this one.

Yemi rose to her feet. "My Lord, I would like to call my last witness who places the defendant at the scene of the kidnap amongst other crimes."

The judge nodded.

"Special Agent Hakeem Dan Foster." She said.

Umar couldn't place the name. He gaped as he watched Yusuf walk into the room. Yusuf flashed a coy grin at Umar and Sarah.

Sarah gaped. Yusuf had tricked her down her to deal her the final blow. First, Fola got to choose Aaima over her and then Yemi used her, finally they all played her. She bowed her head as she knew she had lost this case.

Yemi smiled as Yusuf stepped into the witness stand.

CHAPTER 13

Fola rushed out of the bathroom and picked his ringing phone from the bed. “Yemi?”

“Guess who is going to the court of appeal with an application to file additional evidence and upturn the ruling you previously won?”

He smiled. That was the cocky Yemi speaking. They had won the case. “Congratulations.” He said.

“Aww! You sound like a loser, Fola. And I pretty much like that.”

He took his seat. “How is Aaima?”

“She is happy, and most importantly, she is in Obi’s arms. Boy, you need to see them hugging.”

Fola frowned. Yemi was tormenting him on purpose. Well, he didn’t have to listen to all that. “Alright, Yemi, I have got to get back into the shower.”

“So soon? I was just getting to the juicy part. I really did think that Obi was squeezing too—”

Fola hissed as he hung up. “Did I ask for the details?” he said to himself.

He tapped on his phone and dialled his mother.

Yemi grinned to herself as the line went dead. She sure was enjoying the moment. Even though she couldn't see Fola's facial expression, she was sure she had pissed him off...even if it was a little. Well, Fola not the only one she had pissed off.

"Did you have to do that?"

Yemi turned to Sarah with a smile. "Do what?"

"Force me to take this case so I could lose?"

Yemi nodded. "Yes, I had to do it."

"Why?" Sarah asked, approaching her.

Yemi stared at Sarah. "I thought you had potentials, I decided to give you an opportunity to level in my playing ground."

"Crap! You set me up!" Sarah retorted. "You had all the cards, how would I have won this?"

Yemi smiled. "You tried to kill me. You don't expect me to play fair after that, Sarah. Besides, how did you enjoy being fooled? I guess it was horrible. But trust me, I found your melt down in court more interesting."

"You are annoying." Sarah replied.

Yemi grabbed her bags. "It was a pleasure making your acquaintance. You are fifteen million naira richer, spend it wisely." She said and turned away from her.

"Why are you letting me go?" Sarah asked, stopping Yemi. "You know what I did, why didn't you bring it up in your case?"

Yemi sighed. "One, I am not as petty as you think. And no, my life is not a trivial matter, but I just prefer to deal with some matters out of court. Right now, I have to prepare for an appeal and I really can't care about you. And two, you owe me."

"I owe you?" Sarah asked, approaching her.

Yemi nodded. "I don't want to go the bar and get you disbarred. Of what good will that do me? You are now my puppet. That's one of the problems you face when you mess with me and I find out. I am gladly going to use you, until I get bored. You have potential, win some cases while you can."

"You are a dirty lawyer, Yemi." Sarah said, clenching her teeth.

Yemi shrugged. "Better than a murderer."

"I did not kill anyone!" she retorted.

Yemi nodded. "Well, you connived to attempt a murder. Let's just call you a murderer-in-the-making. Sounds good?"

Sarah blinked as she watched Yemi walk away from her to join up with Obi and Aaima. Her eyes were wet. This was not the dream she had. She had always wanted to start off her career with a win, but it was not losing that hurt her the most. It was the realization of how low and dirty she had sunk. She sure was not proud of this life. She clasped her bag in her arm as she stared at Yemi laughing with Obi and Aaima. She longed to have this moment. An honest moment with people who genuinely did care about her. She was not sure she was ever going to have anything like this. She would not sulk too much about it. She already chose her path...now it was time to walk down that lane...alone. With that, she stepped out of the court room.

Yemi watched Sarah leave and then turned to Obi and Aaima.

"Inasmuch as I would have loved to spend some more time with you guys, I have to be on my way to see a friend."

"By friend, you mean your boss?" Aaima asked.

Yemi nodded. "Yes, the court of appeal process would be in a couple of days, maybe a week at most, I need to get everything ready. Witnesses are not needed in the court of appeal, so you don't have to go through that phase. Take care guys. See you later in the evening." She replied, walking away from them.

Obi turned to Aaima. "So, what's next?"

"Yemi said they'll be retrieving my passport and papers from Umar's house and sending it over to me. I can go back home." She replied.

He blinked. "Really?"

She nodded. "There is nothing here for me."

Obi raised an eyebrow. "Seriously?"

"I don't know exactly where Fola and I stand, and I don't want to assume things, knowing who Fola is." She replied.

Obi scoffed. "Come on! The brother is in love with you."

"Is he?" she asked, sounding uninterested. "When you love someone, you show it."

Obi stared at her. Women are such complicated beings! How else was Fola going to display his emotions to Aaima, when she was the one not willing to talk in the first place! He managed a smile. "Let's get you home." He said,

waving thoughts of Aaima and Fola from his head. It was not as if he was completely over her. It was a work in progress. He could not suffer a setback in this.

She nodded and followed him.

Fola stared at his Mom as she sipped her juice. “Mom, you do know that my data is running, right?”

Mrs. King drew closer to the camera. “Is mine not wasting too?” she retorted.

Fola frowned. Why did he even decide to skype with her rather than call? Mrs. King had insisted on seeing his face and he had no choice than to put that call through to her. “Mom, there is free Wi-Fi in your hotel o!” he complained. “Obi doesn’t have Wi-Fi here.”

“*Ehen! Pele o!* (Sorry o!) So, what are you going to do now? Case won! The girl would be back. Are you going to man up and put your emotions to correct use?” she asked.

He took a deep breath. “I really don’t know, Mom. I am scared of all these. Aaima’s hold on me is not something I am used to. I’d do anything for her. That’s not me, Mom.”

“That’s the man in you. Look, Fola, I am proud of you and more proud of this man you are becoming. We don’t have to go through this a thousand times. All she needs to hear from you is, I am in love with you, Aaima. Man, you have got to make the official move. I think you have all the signs you need, Fola.” She replied.

He exhaled. "What about Obi, Mom?"

"What about Fola? What about Aaima?" she asked.

He looked away. "I don't think I can do this. There are a lot of things I am yet to achieve."

"Here we go again." Mrs. King interrupted with a groan. "Fola, you are running."

He nodded. "Yes, Mom. I don't deserve her. There is no point forcing myself into a life. Sometimes, a man has got to do what is best for the other person. Meanwhile, I haven't made partner at Peterside yet. I haven't"

"Fola! This is not about making partner, and you know it! Son, why do you think you don't deserve her? Don't go down that lane, Fola. Don't shut out love, you are always going to regret it."

Fola exhaled. "I have to go now, Mom. The dust has settled. When are you returning?" he asked.

Mrs. King knew he had bottled up. She wasn't ready to push him. "I don't know. I am enjoying this place much more than I would have thought. I have a spa appointment in about an hour, when I am done, I'll call you. Is that alright?"

He chuckled. "You are beautiful, Mom."

"I have always known that. I need to stay that." She replied. "Bye, Fola." She said and stopped the call.

Fola sighed. He knew what the first step to giving Aaima a chaos free life did entail. It was getting away from her. That, he would do.

Umar dropped his blanket on the bed as the warden shut the door and walked away from him. He found it hard to believe that Yusuf had betrayed him. He was still in shock. This was like one huge joke and he needed reality to pinch him back to life.

“Hi, Umar.”

He rushed to the door as Yusuf joined him. “You bastard.”

Yusuf smiled. “No. It’s Special Agent Hakeem Dan Foster.”

“How could you?” Umar asked. “I trusted you! You made me kill her.”

Yusuf cleared his throat. “Did I? We didn’t have enough time to chat in court before the judge kicked you down here, so I decided to come say hello to an old friend.”

“I am going to get you for this.” Umar replied.

Yusuf smiled. “Normally I’d be worried, but Umar, you are going to be locked up for a long time. You are going to get convicted for murder too.”

“Bullshit. I won that case!” he replied.

Yusuf nodded. “Except that it would be upturned in the court of appeal and your sentence is going to change. Life imprisonment, Umar. Life.”

Umar banged the gates. “You animal!”

“You have not heard the best part. Your goods came in and as we speak, the government is doing the needful with them. So, my good friend,

your investment is burned. You are in here and you need to get comfortable.” Yusuf said.

Umar clenched his teeth in anger. “I am going to make you pay.”

“I suggest you make friends with the guys once they relocate you to maximum prison. The mosquitoes in there are bad and boy, you will wish the judge sentenced you to death instead.” Yusuf replied.

Umar stared at him. “What about all the money I paid you? Is it not a crime for you to have that money?”

Yusuf laughed. “Me? My name is Hakeem. You paid a certain Yusuf. I don’t know him.” He replied. “So long, Umar. So long.” He added, walking away.

Umar slammed the gates heavily.

“*You dey mad????*” The warden screamed.

Obi returned to the living room. “Fola is not here.”

“He is not answering his phone either.” Aaima replied, dropping Obi’s phone on the table.

Obi took his seat. “We could go and check on him at his place.”

“Why? This is Fola’s statement.” She replied.

He nodded. “Yes, it is...but what are you going to do about it? Are you just going to let him go?”

“Fola doesn’t want to be chased.” She replied.

He scoffed. "Everybody wants to be chased, Aaima. If he is not coming to you, go to him. You guys shouldn't waste this. It's not fair on either of you."

She knew Obi was right but maybe Fola wasn't there yet. She knew she loved him, but he had to meet her somewhere. Fola wasn't doing this. Instead, he was withdrawing. This made no sense.

Obi handed her his keys. "Go to his house."

"I don't know about this." She replied.

He nodded. "We never know."

"What if..."

Obi exhaled. "What if? What if not? Aaima, your documents are here. Talk to Fola, you have nothing to lose. Give Fola another chance and if he doesn't come around, he is the fool and you can return 'home', wherever that is for you."

She folded her palms. "Thank you, Obi,"

Aaima pushed the doorbell tirelessly. She stared at the dark clouds that were gathering. It was going to rain anytime soon. She kept pressing the doorbell. No response. She sighed as she dialled Fola's phone. No response. He was doing this on purpose. She didn't need anyone to tell her that. She pulled out the note she had written to him and slid it under the door. She had been out there for thirty minutes and she did not see the need to continue. She had done her best.

“Goodbye, Fola.” She said and walked away.

Fola picked the note from the other end of the door and looked through the window as he watched her drive off. He opened it.

“Hi, Fola,

You know this is silly, right? But my heart is on the floor for all to see...and I know where it wants to be. I hope you realize someday the girl you let walk away...well, I am walking really slow...hoping you'd catch up someday. But, I am not going to walk slow forever.

Bye, Fola.”

He folded the letter and exhaled. He opened the door, her car was no longer in sight. She did not deserve him. He was sure of this.

A week gone.

Yemi hugged Aaima. “Fola is a douche bag, never forget that.” She said.

Aaima chuckled. “I’ll keep that in mind. Thank you for everything.” She replied. “I am glad to have met you.”

Yemi nodded. “It was my pleasure.”

Obi checked his wristwatch. “It’s time. Safe journey.”

“Thank you, Obi.” Aaima said, hugging him. “Don’t forget what I asked.”

He nodded. "Of course."

Aaima pulled her bag and walked away from them.

Yemi stared at Obi. "Fola really did not show up! You know I was actually thinking he was going to pull some stunt, maybe ride a horse through this place and stop Aaima."

Obi laughed. "Fola? Ride a horse? I have no words for that guy."

"Well, I guess it's time to go." She said. "See you around, Obi." She said, walking away.

He nodded. "See you around, Yemi."

Mr. Peterside stared at Fola. "You are back here again with another cheque." He said, staring at the envelope. "I would have thought you'd wait another month or something."

Fola managed a smile. "Just check my offer."

Mr. Peterside opened the envelope. It was a letter. He smiled. "Resignation letter, Fola? Are you threatening me into making you partner? Foul move."

Fola rose to his feet. "I have spent a long time here making Peterside what it is. Fola King has come of age. I am done here." He said. "Thank you for everything, Sir." He added, approaching the door.

"Peterside King."

Fola turned to Mr. Peterside. "I am sorry. It has stopped being my dream." He replied and walked out.

"Look who is here!" Fola said as he walked into his office.

Obi smiled. "Aaima is gone."

Fola cleared his throat. "Oh well, I hope you don't feel too bad."

"No. Not at all."

Fola nodded with a smile. "That's good."

Obi stared at him. "I sent you several messages, but you did not show up."

"Obi, I have been really busy getting my life in order and rearranging my priorities. One of which, I don't work here anymore." Fola replied, taking his seat beside Obi. "I have been doing a lot of thinking and I know I should have at least said sorry to Aaima, but-

Obi silenced him with a punch in the face. "I am sorry. Aaima asked me to do that!" he said, stepping away from Fola.

Fola frowned. "She could have just done it herself." He said, groaning.

"What do you mean?!" Obi asked, slightly confused.

2 days later

The doorbell chimed endlessly. Aaima's neighbour, Claire, was going to give her a ride to the office and she was running late. Aaima rushed

downstairs and grabbed her coat from the hanger as she opened the door. “I am so—” she stopped and gaped.

Fola smiled. “Hi, Aaima.”

THE END

“...there’s a place called home; it finds you. – Tomi Adesina”



Tomi Adesina is a screenwriter, fiction series blogger and filmmaker.

She is the writer of the popular blog series, “Dear Future Husband”, “All Fun and Games”.

She also wrote the cancer themed series “Beautiful Stranger” and “Two weeks to go” and other blog series.

She also authored the viral Novella “Hearts and Homes” written as a tribute to the missing Chibok girls (Nigeria) and all the fallen soldiers in the battle against the deadly insurgency, Boko Haram.

She has TV credits to her name including screenplays for Bedlam, Broadway, Her Lines, The Other Me and other TV shows.

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