

Things

Men

Do

SHORT STORIES

BY

KUDO ERESIA-EKE

Odseme Publishers, Port Hacourt

Kudo Eresia-Eke 2000

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the copyright owner.

First Published 1995

ISBN 978-33113-6-0

Produced in Nigeria by
Taijo Wonukabe Limited, Port Harcourt

Contents

Night of the Vampire

Things Men Do

Friends

Do as I say

The pregnant Bag

The Maternity

No Rice for Nkiru

The President's Son

Gubernatorial Plea

Victory

Soft or Stout

Police Commissioner

And it Came To Pass...

Room-mates

One Night

Prof's Paradise

Mummy, My Head

After Wedding

The Ring

Passing the Ball

Grandma's Lies

With love to
Alfred and Nanu Eke,
my parents.

Foreword

Things Men Do is a slim collection of exciting short stories. It is a terse and incisive commentary on the realities of our social indiscipline, as opposed to the high moral values and ideals we proclaim but to which we pay only lip service.

This appears to be the tone of the comment on the familiar milieu of contemporary Nigerian society.

One peculiar 'trick' which Eresia-Eke employs in these slice-of-life stories is that he leaves the resolution of each of them hanging. The purpose of the technique is to allow the reader to arrive at the denouement himself. This means that the reader is invited to participate in the joy and pain of the author in the process of creating these stories, encapsuled in irony, wit and humour, is appreciated and absorbed by a sympathetic audience.

GABRIEL OKARA

Night of the Vampire

It is night as I eventually approach my house. I mean, my room in the house. Perhaps I should even hesitate to call it my room, knowing that my landlord's ultimatum expires next week. By then, even if Uncle Oyimo gave me the job of a supervisor at his newly expanded carpentry workshop, I shall not have earned my first salary to enable me pay up the six months' arrears of rent.

I decide I should not let such thoughts bother me, especially on a night like this when some hope is peeping at me. I have been too engrossed in my thought to even notice that everywhere was dark. Power Authority has done what it knows how best to. The neighbourhood has no electric light tonight. I pause at the side of the street opposite my house and wait for the cars to pass before I walk through the marsh to the other side of the street.

The traffic is particularly heavy and slow tonight as a result of the wet ground. Though my feet ache and my limbs feel like jelly from miles of trekking through the city, I still find it amusing watching the disco-dancing cars as they rock violently through the potholes. I ferry myself across, shoes in hand. My house is a typical community building. Three rows of ten rooms each. And two corridors, as wide as my shoulder. No two adults can pass freely from opposite directions. One must stop and slant to give way to the other.

I step into the house, neighbors greet. Some have spread mats on the pavement outside the house, having been forced out by the stuffiness and hotness of their small rooms. Their fans are not working because there is no power. It is usually nice on nights like

this, with everyone gathered outside to exchange gossip. Papa Tonye, the fat man who shares a room with his six grown daughters, each of whom had dropped out of school, is usually vocal about the disgrace and caricature that God has especially made of him by giving him a prostitute for a wife, who in turn gave him half a dozen prostitutes for daughters.

But it is along time now since I last enjoyed such talk. Let's say at least six months now since I lost my job as a foreman. I will never be able to explain why the manager, that man with ugly tribal marks, had picked on me as one of the officers to be retrenched. I always knew that he hated me especially since I was not his tribesman. But who cares now? After all, Uncle says I should come tomorrow for the job of supervisor. The salary may be smaller, but it will be better than nothing.

I rather direct my thought to the more pertinent problem of how to quell this hunger biting into my ribs. I dab my church trousers, for I have two, one for church, the other for work. All I have left is a five naira note. I do not think I can afford the luxury of releasing one naira to buy myself a cube of sugar to sweeten some garri soaked in water. Garri happens to be the food I have. Thanks to mother.

My mother who lives in the village always makes it appoint of duty to give me a small bag of garri each time I visit. And I do so, at least twice a month. I decide against buying the cube of sugar or even soaking the garri.

As a child my mother had always warned me to eat before going to bed, to prevent bad dreams. My mind dwells briefly on that superstition, and then I turn on my mat, stomach down. I embrace my pillow, fingering the hole through which the cotton

leaks. I shut my eyes. I cannot wait for tomorrow to start working again.

I fall asleep, but I'm awake in a most beautiful city. Tall buildings scraping the sky. Flowers. But all these at one end. At the other, stench, effluvium, gutter. Men swim through pools of faeces to climb into their houses like amphibians. Men and women clothed in rags. And they are so many! So many! So thin! So sad! All my friends are on this side of the city. Me too!

But on the beautiful side, it is different. There I see houses of the rich, the influential, traditional rulers military officers, top politicians and government officials, preachers, bishops. How fat they all look! Rosy cheeks and all.

But there is something unusual about them they are wearing black clothes, as though mourning, and are in a procession, along golden streets. From each mouth two white teeth just out, like fangs. They assemble us – those of us from the other side. And each of us has an empty bowl like one begging for alms. But before we receive anything, one after the other, we bow to them. They sink their fangs into the back of our necks and sucks through what looks like a white straw. They suck. They suck. Blood. They suck. Then they let go.

With each suck they grow fatter, we thinner. Among them I fully recognize the owner of the tailoring factory along Zarimu Street. And now I see my Uncle! He is one of them! I cannot believe it. My own Uncle is one of them! Now he perceives I recognize him. He is chasing me. I flee. But he grows wings, wings like a bird. He catches up with me. He pulls me up by my neck and sinks in his fangs. He bleeds me and bleeds me. And bleeds me. I am dizzy but I watch.

Helpless and hazy.

I notice that most of my mates have fainted from bleeding and that the vampires have started to attack each other. The weaker succumbs to the stronger. On and on.

Suddenly it is like Sunday: brilliant sunshine, restful day, no bleeding, no crying, no wailing. Everyone is dressed in their best and crowded into a house. Looks like a church. But instead of a preacher at the pulpit, I see doctors with syringes standing below a big banner that reads: "Come, be injected and forget your sorrows. Blessed are the injected, for they shall see glory."

Obediently we queue up for the doctors to expertly administer the drugs. At first I am hesitant but when I see that my friends who have taken the injections are happy, laughing, dancing and singing, I too submit. But I don't see the vampires injected. I rather find them gathered at Uncle's house for supper. Their food is most appetizing. My mouth waters. Uncle gives me a slice and I eat. And then the fangs shoot out of my own mouth! They hail me. But I scream. I shout. I curse. I rave. I cry. But they hail, excited, clapping.

My eyes are gummy with tears. It's daybreak. There is banging on my door. My neighbours.

Things Men Do

“Yes, who is on the line?”

“Me, sir. Good morning, sir.”

“Yes, yes, yes, who is it?”

“Sir, my name is Egbuna.”

“Egbuna what?”

“Egbuna Wane, sir.”

“Where from?”

“I am calling from town, sir.”

“What?”

“From Pitakwa, sir.”

“What do you want?”

“Sir, I’d like to speak with Esther.”

“What for?”

“She is my school...my school mate, sir. I want to give her a message.”

“Yes, what’s the message?”

“I’m sorry, sir, it is for her only, sir.”

‘Now, listen, this is the last time you will ever phone this house, you hear me?’

“Yes, sir”

“You know me, don’t you?”

“Yes, sir”

“And you have the guts to disturb the peace of my house?”

“I am sorry, sir.”

“Go on, sorry your father. Bastard!”

“Grrrrrrrrrrrrr.”

“The idiot won’t even let me drop the receiver before he calls again. Are you mad? I have told you, I have warned you never to call this house again!”

“Sir”

“Oh, who is it.”

“I’m Nkechi, sir”

“I’m sorry, I thought it was one riff-raff who just called.”

“I’m sorry sir.”

“No, it’s Ok.”

“I just left your house, sir. I want to call my friend Esther to tell her that...”

“You were the one who came to visit Esther about an hour ago?”

“Yes sir.”

“You visit here quite often.”

“Yes, sir.”

“You visit here quite often.”

“Yes, sir. We are good friends.”

“I see. And your name is Nkechi?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Sweet name. Hmmmm. Very nice. Esther is not at home at the moment. She accompanied her mother to the market.”

“Thank you, sir. I will...”

“Wait a minute... so how are you?”

“I’m fine, sir.”

“You know, one of the problems of you little girls nowadays is that sometimes you are talkative. Whatever you do, you tell your friends. I’m sure you have that fault too.”

“No sir. I’m quiet, sir.”

“No, not that. I mean that a girl should by nature be secretive. She should know how to keep secrets. Do you keep secrets?”

“I keep secrets, sir.”

“You do?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Hmmmm. Ok, I’m going to test you. I’ll tell you something secret. Something that should be kept strictly between both of us. Repeat, something just between us, Ok?”

“Yes, sir.”

“By the way, when are you returning to school?”

“Next tomorrow, you mean?”

“Yes sir.”

“Good. Very good. Have you ever been to England?”

“No, sir.”

‘Ha-ha-ha! What if you suddenly had a chance to?’

“Sir, I would like it very much.”

“Ha-ha-ha! That chance is here!”

“Sir?”

“You see, you are a lovely girl, you know. And each time you come here, I reconfirm that. I think you are deserving of a treat.”

“Thank you sir.”

“You see, I’m travelling in five days’ time, and you can have a ticket to come with me.”

“Sir, sir, but...”

“C’mon now. I assure you of a swell time. We will even catch a flight to Paris from London for further sight seeing.”

“Oh, I am so happy, sir.”

“My girl. Beautiful girl! Don’t worry about any damn thing and in fact, be sure of a heavy box back with you in six days.”

“All right, sir.”

“Beautiful girl! Oh, these people are back. See me in the office tomorrow afternoon, so we can wrap it all up.”

“Ok, sir.”

“Bye, sweet girl.”

“All right, sir. Bye, sir.”

“Bye. Good. Good. Good. Yes, yes. Now come here, Esther.”

“Daddy.”

“Don’t daddy me!”

“Daddy?”

“You must take your time in this house. What is the meaning of all these calls to this house from all kinds of idiots? Listen, you have to be very careful. You have to make a choice. Either go to the University and read your books, as is my wish, or mix with hoodlums, in which case we all know that you are on your own.”

“Daddy, but I did not ask...”

“Shut up! I’m warning you now in the presence of your mother. Your daughter had better be careful, otherwise next time we’ll be faced with the problem of her travelling from Lagos to London to Paris like the rest of them.”

“Oh c’mon, Claude, you know Esther is not like that.”

“To hell! That’s how you go on. Carry on, defend her. Spoil her...rubbish!”

Friends

“Enough, enough, enough.”

Oh, just look at my face.”

“I know. Enough, enough, please. It’s enough. Stop crying.”

“Oh, my entire body: pains! bruises! Just look.”

“Sorry, sorry, Eka. Eka, sorry.”

“Oh, God!”

“Stop crying. It’s enough.”

“What beast did I marry? I thought I married a man. What monster, what beast!”

“Eka, it’s enough. You mean if I didn’t come, you would have carried on and on tempting him to beat you up the more?”

“Let him come and kill me, that beast, that bastard!”

“Eka, please it is enough. Stop crying, wipe your tears. Let me clean your face.”

“Ima, is this how marriage is? What pushed me into this mess? Just what?”

“My dear, calm down.”

“What nonsense! Just what nonsense!”

“Calm down. This is certainly the kind of insult you get married life. This was precisely what my former husband was doing to me before I left him.”

“Maybe that’s my best option. To leave this fool.”

“My former husband may have killed me by now, if I had not left the idiot.”

“I will leave, Ima, this is enough. I must leave. I must divorce the fool.”

“I don’t know. Perhaps leaving may be the best thing. But tell me, what did he do? Why all this trouble?”

“Can you imagine that fool returns home early in the morning everyday? He returns home just to take his bath, change his clothes for work. And off he goes again, to return the next morning. Can you imagine that? Can you just imagine that? I am married but I never see my husband.”

“Terrible!”

“Our first baby is only six months, and it is already this bad. Every night, everyday it’s me and the crying baby. All alone.”

“Take it easy.”

“Take what easy? Take what easy?”

“I’ll talk to him.”

“You think you can change him? He is irredeemable.”

“He will listen to me. He must listen to your best friend.”

“He didn’t listen even to my mother.”

“Has she talked to him?”

“Many times! That bastard is just incorrigible.”

“I’ll talk to him. I’ll talk to him. I’ll talk to him now. Attend to the baby. I think it’s awake. I’ll be back shortly. He is in the next room? His study? Hello, Paul are you there?”

“Yes, I’m here. Come in and close the door behind you.”

“Paul, what is the matter?”

“Come here, baby, come here. Come on, give me a kiss.”

“Paul, I didn’t know she was making this much trouble. You didn’t tell me.”

“Forget the fool and let’s talk about better things. I can’t wait for the idiot to pack out.”

“You know, I just can’t move in as soon as she leaves.”

“Why not? There could be a lag but it shouldn’t be more than two weeks before you move in. she can either go to hell or jump into the lagoon. Come closer.”

“Not here now, Paul, not here...”

Do As I Say

“...We true Africans must behave like Africans. We must stage an African cultural revolution. We must truly Africanise our every sphere. Wear African clothes, bear African names, build African houses. Let us...”

“Excuse me. Excuse me, sir!” A young man shouts to interrupt the new Nigerian born African Studies professor as he thunders his sermon.

He pauses: “Ehm, who is that? What is your problem? Ask your question quickly and don’t keep the class waiting.”

“Sir, what are the names of your children?”

“Although I don’t see the relevance of your question, I will tell you all the same. My daughter’s name is Louisa Louisiana Paul and my son’s Jackson Peter Paul.”

“Thank you, sir. I know you are a true African.”

The Pregnant Bag

The room is as small as a prostitute's cubicle. But it serves its purpose as a bar.

An old black and white television set sitting on the scraggy table at one end of the room steals everybody's attention, except that of Mama Bomboy, the owner of this sordid saloon.

Inside the magic tube, a white girl is kissing a white man in the presence of a woman who looks like her mother.

"All these Oyibo people are shameless. See what she can do in front of her mother," I remark, switching my attention to Omotuyi, my drinking partner.

Altogether there are about seven guests in the room tonight. It's a full house, I think. MB, as we call Mama Bomboy, now has to squeeze her bouncing buttocks through the little space left between the centre table and our knees, to serve customers. I personally do not mind her disturbing me as she brushes her excess behind past me. Succulence. My thoughts rest on her lustfully for a moment before Omotuyi's hiccup draws my attention back to the story I was going to tell him.

"Six years ago, I was the driver of the famous Chief Ola Oyemade before I went back to school. I, yes, I was his driver. I drove him around in his Mercedes-Benz and he was a fat man who loved the shine of his car. If in his opinion my hands did not do a good enough job, by not scrubbing all the stains from the

screens, he insisted that I use my tongue and lips to lick and kiss them away.

“When I drove him to places, he left me to melt under the sun for hours, only to return scolding me for daring to fall asleep in his car. Usually it was his slap that jolted me back to life. ‘You idiotic baskadi fool. You know if I sell you sef your money cannot fit to buy a spoke of a bicycle, not to talk of a tyre. Yet you can fit to sleep so that tif will came to carry my obokun. You stupid?’ at such times I dared not utter a word for fear of another slap.

“Whatever his shortcoming, though, my oga was most popular with women. At every turn of the street there was a woman to wait on him. It was this peculiar popularity that I cashed in on to endear myself to madam, his wife, a law graduate from the University of Lagos. Whenever she wanted information about my oga’s extra-marital affairs, she gave me a good mound of eba-sometimes with some money to buy a soft drink. I, on my part, then told her all I knew. Sometimes even when there was nothing to tell, I fabricated a good lie to earn a meal.

“It was after a late afternoon visit to one of the women he kept that we embarked on this journey, the experience of which I am relaying today for the first time.

“We had driven out of town for an hour when he asked me to drive into a bush path, off the main road. The yellow of twilight was giving way to a foggy gray. The forest around was virgin, thick and green. Birds sang. Crickets chirped. And even though I heard the hiss of snakes. After driving on the weedy route a while, he ordered me to pull up at a point where two ferocious looking men stood. Their eyes were red like a car’s brake light. Fear drew

sweat from my face. My thought sped. Chief had finally fulfilled his threat to sell me after all, I thought.

“Do you get it? He asked the men. They grunted a yes and handed a black bag to him.

“I watched the transaction carefully through the driver’s mirror. My oga handed two fat wads of naira notes in return, and they disappeared. Then he ordered me to lock up the bag in the boot. Out of curiosity, I felt for the shape

Of the thing in the big bag. And strange enough, it was a baby figure in it! On his orders, we drove hastily back to the main road and headed farther away from town. At the few police check points the responses were usual. The officers waved us past, smiling-some even saluting. Sometimes I wondered if it was my oga that was being saluted or the mere sight of his Mercedes Benz, or the money he handed out at every check point.

“Given the direction, I had started to think that we were heading for his home town, which was along the main road, until we diverted to a dusty and bumpy road, until we diverted to a dusty and bumpy road which led to a hamlet whose first building was an unkempt mud-house tucked far into the bush and under the shelter of a huge tree. That was our destination. Carrying the bag, my oga dragged his weight into the little hut and reappeared a few minutes later accompanied by a hairy little man spotting a white wrapper and a red cap on which he stuck black feathers. As both men walked...”

Omotuyi’s snore interrupts me. Stupid drunkard! I had mistaken his silence for attention.

The Maternity

“She is coming to.”

“Oh, my daughter. Oh, God, how can I thank you?”

“Hello, you are awake?”

“Where is my baby?”

“He is fine.”

“Boy or girl?”

“He , I said. He is fine. Your mother has been dancing all over the place already. I did not know she still had such energy.”

“Trust mama.”

“My daughter, my happiness knows no bound, Oh God! Oh God! Vindicator of the innocent, the God that drives away flies from the tail-less cow. We thank you-oh. Oh, my daughter, I’m so proud of you. Since this nurse came in to tell me about a healthy bouncing baby boy, I have been in heaven.”

“Has my mother seen the baby?”

“No. You, the mother, have to see it first. But he is so lovely, so handsome! They are getting him for you to see.”

“My daughter! My daughter, God is merciful. You see now that patience pays off. It always pays. Always.”

“Nurse, how I wish you knew the hell my daughter and I had been through. Two years after she had been with her

husband without pregnancy, his relatives wanted to throw her out. In fact, the last battle was only six months ago. Nobody was even ready to hear that she was at least pregnant. What manner of calumny didn't they heap on my daughter! That she was a man. That she was wasting their brother's precious time. That she had always lied about missing her period. That her wealthy parental background would not intimidate them into keeping a man as a wife."

"Really?"

"Nurse, what didn't we hear? I begged and begged them to give my daughter some more time, to save us from disgrace. Then gradually, gradually her stomach started bulging. Yet they adopted a wait-and-see attitude, as if waiting to prove my daughter a liar. So, you see, when I dance, nurse, I know why I dance."

"Has her husband been here?"

"Certainly. Several times today. Despite his people, he loves my daughter more than even himself. Lovely-looking young man. Very dark, tall, sweet, broad nose. Full African essence. He was the one who left here just thirty minutes ago, rushing to buy drugs you didn't have. I'm sure he'll soon be here."

'Black man?"

"Yes."

"Black, tall man?"

'Sure, you saw him!"

"I saw him. Yes, I saw him. But the baby..."

“Looks like him?”

“I just wonder. The baby is clearly white. Curly hair, pointed nose. White baby. Certainly a white man’s child!”

No Rice For Nkiru

Nkiru cried until her eyes turned. Then she held on to her mother's wrapper, following like a cow-tail.

"Nkiru, what is the matter?" her mother inquired plaintively as she stopped cooking for a while. The little girl wriggled out her grip, wailing even more. As the stove smoked blindingly, mother's eyes smarted, blurred with tears. She cursed under her breath and dragged Nkiru along.

Fed up with her stove and baby, she walked angrily to her husband who was immersed in his own thought, his face a labyrinth of wrinkles, of hardship.

"Now, see all trouble you are causing, you loafer? Buy a new store. No! ok, buy rice which is the only food Nkiru enjoys. No!"

The man took his time to reply." Listen, lady, let me make it clear.

From now on, no more rice. Whether you like it or not. Your grandfather, I'm sure, never ate rice. If your father ever did, he probably did on Christmas day. Nkiru will either eat garri or dissolve in her tears!"

The President's Son

"Beze!"

"Who can that be?"

"It's me. I look like a mad man. Torn trousers and shirts. But it's me."

"Ifeanyi?"

"It's me. This is how life has kept me."

"Why? What happened? How's your mother, your sisters, Angelina and Chinwe? How are they? And what are you doing here? You left Lagos?"

"Beze, it's a long story. How's your wife?"

"She is fine. In fact, she just stepped into the stores to get some provision. I was just about to lock the car to join her when you called."

"I see."

"But Ifeanyi, you look terrible."

"My brother, it's a long story. It is just as well that your wife is not here. You see, Beze, I am not really your wife's cousin."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I have said."

"What do you mean?"

“That I am not your wife’s blood relation in any way. And that’s why I am like this today.”

“Ifeanyi!”

“Yes, I’m telling you, brother. Don’t think I am drunk or something. I am a sober man telling you painful truth. Your wife’s aunt is not my mother. And the father of Chinwe and Angelina, whom those witches, my so called sisters and mother killed in a motor accident, is also not my father. Yes! That’s the truth. You know the President?”

“Of course, everyone knows the President.”

“That is my father.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I say that is my father.”

“Ifeanyi!”

“Believe me. I was in his private house at the weekend. Of course, the security guards did not let me in. But they delivered my message to him, that his son, his long lost son, was waiting for him outside his gates. I know they delivered the message because I was given a notebook to write the details leading to the calm. He must have read it for him to have asked me to come back next week. Can’t you see I look like him?”

“Ummm...”

“well, I need a little money. About five hundred naira, if you can help. If I add that to the one hundred naira on me, at least I can live until my appointment with him next week.”

“You are meeting the President next week?”

“Yes. And let me explain to you why I look like this. Beze, believe it or not, only last week I broke out of an asylum. My sister and my mother had conspired to put me there. They say I am mad. Me Ifeanyi, mad? Do I talk like a madman?”

“No.”

“I may look like one. But I’m not one. My troubles started six months ago when a friend of my mother called me aside and gave me the shock of my life. He started by explaining why I now walk with a limp. He said the woman I call my mother was responsible: that she threw me into a well, making it look like an accident, that it was a miracle I survived, because I was only eighteen months old when it happened; that my father was a businessman who used to send my beautiful mother to big men in return for contracts; and that is how I was conceived outside wedlock. Later on my stepmother and my father made it look like my mother was wayward. She threatened to spill, and paid with her life. My real father was then a Minister.”

“Ifeanyi!”

“It is unbelievable. But that is the truth, my brother. Can you believe that anyone could catch a boy like me and lump me with mad men?”

“No.”

“Quite naturally. Please if you have anything, just give me. I see your wife coming. They know. They all know what is happening to me.

Thank you very much. They all know. I must run now.”

“Where are you staying?”

“Don’t bother. Thank you, Beze. Bye.”

“Ifeanyi...”

“Bye.”

“I can’t believe this.”

“Beze, who were you talking with, standing in the sun and sweating?”

“It’s Ifeanyi. Ifeanyi your cousin.”

“Ifeanyi! Where is he? Is he here now? Oh, what a disgrace! My God, see what drugs have done to Ifeanyi!”

Gubernatorial Plea

“And finally the Governor this afternoon delivered very passionate speech to the youth to desist from indulging in drugs either as takers or couriers. Most of those interviewed after the address said they had never heard a more persuasive speech. That’s the news. I’m Joseph Wulo. Have a nice weekend.

“Well, well, well. Nice, nice, nice. Good story. Good news.”

“Oh, yes, darling, your speech writers are certainly doing a job.”

“No, actually this particular one is by the Health Commissioner himself.”

“Really?”

“Nice gentlemen. It certainly was a good decision to get him on board.”

“The only thing, darling, is to keep him at arms length. You can never trust such over righteous people not to spill, if they find anything.”

“Sure, you are right. I just got the likes of him to rub some righteous aura around my government. That is all.”

“The PRINCE himself!”

“What else am I?”

“By the way, Rali wrote today.”

“How is he?”

“He is doing well, but he is not quite happy with the number of guards around him all the time.”

“Well, tell him it is necessary. It is not for nothing that he is the Governor’s son. He should keep away from the nightclubs, call girls and sniffy noses. By the way, I think I need a sniff. Please just hand me the pot.”

“Darling, they are showing the speech again.”

“Documentary?”

“Wait a minute. Why is that man eyeing you like that?”

“Who?”

“Your friend, Chief whatever.”

“Chief Abali?”

“Yes. Just watch, hopefully the camera will pan to his section again.”

“My dear, this is really good stuff.”

“Now, look. That’s it!”

“Well, maybe he was not really looking at me. He is my closest pal.”\

“So you can’t sack him?”

“No, not that. But why?”

‘Oh, you won’t act on my recommendations anymore?’

“C’mon, Ureh, I sacked the Commissioner for Works because you said so. I have sacked two Directors at your request.”

“So why not Abigail?”

“C’mon, Ureh, knowing you, there must be a more profound reason for your suggestion. Tell me, what is the real charge against him?”

“Ok, I’ll tell you. The truth is that his wife has been puffing up too much these days. At our women meetings, she would not laugh when I make a joke. She would not bend her knees when she shakes hands with me. She is probably beginning to think that her husband should be the Governor and she the...”

“C’mon.”

“I’m not joking. I know these things. I’m a woman. I know how we think. If you want to retain your Chief as Secretary to Government for whatever reason, just know that his wife may be prodding him to challenge you in the next elections.”

“Ok, I take that but, of course, you should know that Abali is the chief coordinator of my couriers. His links, like mine, are world-wide. He is even deeper into the mafia than me. If there are any two tied together, they are Abali and I.”

“But he should warn his wife.”

“Ok, I’ll talk to him. Don’t you want a sniff?”

Victory

“Just imagine the nonsense, Ayo.”

“It is plain balderdash, Editor.”

“Absolute rubbish.”

“What an incredulous judgement!”

“That a man who did not win can be declared winner?”

“It is plain robbery. A rape on democracy.”

“That is it! Ayo, that’s it. Headline for the front page-Rape on Democracy.”

“I totally agree.”

“Then lead, then, has to clearly incorporate and corroborate that statement.”

“Just leave the rest to me.”

“By the way, who is doing the story?”

“I am doing it along with the political and judicial correspondents.”

“Great. Give details, no matter how ugly. The world must know what manner of democracy we are practicing. Absolute nonsense.”

“I hear the publisher’s voice. He must be coming to see you. I’d better get cracking.”

“No, wait. I think I would need some moral support. Welcome, sir.”

“Good morning, Editor. I thought I should stop by to commiserate with you. I know how outraged you guys must be, seeing such a clear case being upturned.”

“Sir, it is incredible. That money can make a man sell his conscience, violate the very rule he has sworn to uphold. Shun the truth and uphold lies just for the sake of money?”

“It is very sad, Editor. Just too bad. I feel really bad too. But I thought I should come and persuade you not let bitterness into your story. I know how you feel, but you see, Editor, as I always say, even in being watchdogs we must be realistic that we are in the business as well.”

“Sir, I hope you don’t mean to...”

“I am not interfering. Why should I when my business interests are in no way affected. It is just that, you know, now that the verdict has been given, whether we like it or not, they are automatically in power. And you know what that means for business, for adverts, supplements and even sponsored articles from many companies that deal with the government.”

“I know, sir but I would be failing in my duty if I do not treat the story in line with journalistic principles.”

“I understand. I am just pleading that you demonstrate some moderation.”

“I am sorry, sir. But this calls for no moderation.”

“Anyway, I do not mean to interfere. I just meant to drop a word of caution and be off. See you later.”

“All right, sir. Thanks sir. Bye, sir. Ayo, get on with the story. I’ll be...”

“Ggrrrrrr.”

“Will this telephone be ringing all day? Yes, who is it?”

“It’s me, Chief Ogbi Ogbolo, the new Governor.”

“Congratulations, sir!”

“Well, I’m particularly happy to hear that from you, knowing how closely you identified with my opponent.”

“Well, well...”

“Never mind, my dear. I understand you must be terribly busy at this hour, so I guess I should not waste your time.”

“It is Ok, sir.’

“Fine. I just meant to ask if you could pick up your gift, next week. Just a token brand new Toyota.”

“Me? I’m shocked, Your Excellency.”

“Don’t be. It’s just an indication of more things to come. We must begin to work together. See you later then.”

‘Thanks, sir. I mean thanks, Your Excellency. God, I can’t believe this. Let someone call me the News Editor, immediately! My God! This is simply too much. Me? Brand new Toyota? Me?’

“Editor, you want me?”

“Oh good. Ayo, listen. I feel a bit feverish. I need to be heading home right away. Take care of things. If you have any

problems, just call me at home. And about that story, the headline has to change.”

“To what, sir?”

“VICTORY FOR DEMOCRACY.”

“What!”

“I’ve told you. See you tomorrow.”

Soft or Stout

After a whole year, two old friends met at a club.

“Hey, Eguma, I didn’t ever imagine we would meet again.”

“Neither did I. Oh, it’s so nice to see you again.”

“So you now take minerals? I never knew you to be a jedijedi consumer.”

“You see, I soon found out those stout drinks were too bitter. Take a Coke on me now...”

“No, don’t worry. It is my pleasure to pay for both of us.”

“You will pay? Well...eeem...in that case, let them give me stout, big bottle.”

Police Commissioner

“You should not send that girl again.”

“Wetin, Oga! You sef.”

“No, I’m serious.”

“But na di girl that comes to see you, every time.”

“I told you that she is becoming too noticed. Some of my officers are beginning to know her.”

“Ok. I go send another persons.”

“So what do you want?”

“Oga, I don’t like the way you are speaking today. What happen?”

“Boyo, I don’t like how you are beginning to order me around. I told you that I had a meeting this evening but you insisted I had to come.”

“Oga, no vex.”

“What do you mean no vex?”

“Ok, vex now!”

“You are telling me that?”

“I say vex! Vex! Na wetin sef? As if na only me dey chop am. Na wetin sef.”

“Ok,Ok. Boyo, let’s get serious so I can get on with other things.”

“Oga, if you want talks as man, make we talk.”

“Ok, what is so urgent?”

“Oga, we needs ammunition.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I say we needs ammunition. The one you gives us don dey finishes.”

“They trouble is really not the ammunition. I can give you as much as you want, but you must stop killing people. You must warn your boys to stop firing at unarmed people. Why spill blood unnecessarily? Why? Why?”

“Anyway, oga, the operation wey we do last week was very successful. Come see money!”

“Have you shared it? Where is my own?”

“Na one of the thing I dey wants to talks and you say I dey order you.

Na im full that carton so.”

“Boyo!”

“No worry. We just dey starts. No mind that former Commissioner wey say him be Jesus. I tells him make he chop money, he say na troubles him wants to makes with me? I just press one, two buttons for him na him dem throw the bloody man comot. But as you come so, we go dey operate together. No worry, if you no be billionaire, call me fool.”

“Boyo!”

“Oga Commissioner, it will be goods. And Oga you know say that girl wey I dey sends to you say she likes you.”

“Get away, stupid boy. But Boyo, seriously, minimize as much as possible bloodletting. Try not to kill people, but keep up the good job. You should get new supplies of ammunition later tonight.”

“All correct, sir.”

And It Came To Pass.

“Brother, you must help me.”

“Brother, why not? If I can’t help you, or rather, if we cannot help one another, what would we be preaching?”

“Thank you, my brother. There are two confidential problems I would like you to advise me on.”

“Feel free, brother.”

“Please, brother. Let us keep this strictly between us.”

“Of course. Just a second, I’ll call my wife. Mary, Mary, please come.

I’d just give her a message.”

“Mike, I was just about getting both of you something to drink.’

“That’s really why I called. Please hold the entertainment, we have a few confidential things to discuss, and please let whoever comes to see me sit there and wait. We should not be disturbed until we finish.”

“Ok, Mike.”

“Sorry, brother, please continue.”

“I know, Reverend Mike, that you are a young man and I have been in this business for years before you, but I have to seek your advice nevertheless. Reverend, please take a close look at the collar of my shirt. You see how torn? That is a metaphor for

the state of my finances. I am just sick and tired of the poverty. Now I have decided to leave my church employment as a pastor and start off a mission of my own. You will not believe that my salary has remained static in the past six years, despite the inflation. It is just getting unbearable for me. That is why I am here to seek your advice because straight from school you started off, becoming so successful, so quickly. Now you are a proud owner of a fleet of cars and an impressive number of mansions.'

"Just the grace of God, Father."

"I know, but my dear Mike, please let me in. please let me have some advice and be able to establish a little thing that may be even half as successful as your own. I know this is like asking for a trade secret, but please help. I have already resigned. There is no going back. I must start on my own. Please, my son."

"Father, but there is really nothing so secret to tell. You can see for yourself why, as you say, I am successful. I thought it was obvious."

"Well, Reverend, it is not so obvious. After all the good book says wisdom will be revealed to the babes and suckling, and those like me who think we are wise will know nothing. We think we know, but I believe I also need you young ones to talk to me. That is why I have come, Reverend."

"Father, I will do as you wish. Perhaps it would have been easier for you to ask me direct questions about specific areas. But I'd try. Now since you say you are breaking out on your own, it means you have to form your own organization."

"Correct."

“That is actually where many make grievous mistakes. In filling out papers, make sure you are the sole owner of the organization. If any other names must come in at all, they must have nothing to do with cheque book. Now, that is the most important secret. That way all the assets that accrue to the organization are automatically yours, including the church building itself. You get my point?”

“Very much. Very much, Reverend.”

“Now, that is one. Two, I’m sure that after many years of practice, you must know the scriptures inside out. But look at them closely again. This time take special care to pick out all those areas which address riches, prosperity, material blessings. That is what the people want to hear. Like you, they are experiencing financial drought, and they need someone to give them succor, to give them hope, to fire them on to acquire, to address their poverty. The people want riches. The point is that no matter which passage you choose at any time twist it to suit this need. That is the real miracle. Do that and the millions will be there for you. Brother, I tell you these things because I love you.”

“I know, Reverend, I know.”

“Now, that’s the second trick. Let me add this, just in case. As you urge them on to acquire, have no qualms about milking them. They are your cows use all available opportunities to milk them. Increase the numbers of worshippers, increase the number of offerings. Always keep the money objective in mind. There should be at least one event for each day, at the end of which they must make donations for one reason or the other. Be clever about it. You can even have four services on each worship day. Also, and this is important, dress to kill. To believe in you they

must see the glory of God in you. You must wear the very best suits available.”

“Wouldn’t one expend too much money doing that?”

“That is the very trick you are looking for, Reverend. Consider it part of the investment. And I tell you, there is nothing like it. Lastly, Father, let your words be tailored to address the middle class of today, the up-and-coming nouveaux rich. Use their slang if necessary, and for God’s sake, let the ladies wear whatever they wish to. All of them are fashion conscious. If you don’t allow the fashion, you lose the men also because, believe it or not, most of the men come just to be in the company of the pretty ladies. I’m serious, Father. In fact, although your wife is slightly advanced, let her get fashionable let her be in the vanguard of fashion for the women. The First Lady, if you know what I mean.”

“But Reverend is it not possible it can be overdone? I mean some women can come, you know, almost...”

“Naked?”

“Yes, something like that.”

“So what is wrong with that? Can’t you do with some fun yourself? Let’s not deceive ourselves, we all do these things. Are you not a Man. Man of God or not, but you are a man.”

“It’s true, Reverend. I agree with you. Oh thank you. Thanks so very much. You have made. You have led me into the kingdom. God bless you, brother.”

“Mary, Mary-y-y. Let’s have the drinks now.”

Room Mates

“Grace, please switch off the light when you finish.”

“Aah-ah, what is the matter?”

“Switch off the light when you finish.”

“But it is only 8pm. What is all this talk about switching off the light?”

“I have a test tomorrow and I want to sleep early so I can wake up in the night.”

“Well that is your business.”

“Please, I am begging you, I want to catch some sleep. I beg you in the name of God. My test is important. It carries forty per cent.”

“Again, I tell you, that is your business. I have several things to do, and in any case, I am expecting some visitors.”

“Well, whatever it is, consider me. I need some quiet. I need to...”

“Hello, everyone!”

“Hey! Raky Jay, where have you been?”

“Take it easy, mama.”

“Raky Jay!”

“Small matter.”

“How was the gold mine? That your catch is simply wucked. When did you catch him? You know, but for your hair I could not have recognized you in the car.”

“Small matter.”

“Raky Jay! Where did you meet him? What does he do?”

“Cool down, baby. Just look at my purse.”

“Chinekeeeeeeeeeeeeh! Dollars! Raky, all this in only a few hours of meeting him? Girl, you’ve made it. Raky Jay!”

“Please, please, what is all this? Can’t I sleep? Please, can’t I sleep?”

“What is wrong with that one?”

“Don’t mind the fool. When you are praying here disturbing everyone, nobody hushes you-oh.”

“Please, I have a test, just let me sleep.”

“You can go to hell! Raky Jay, give me gist, don’t mind the dummy.”

“You must stop abusing me, bloody prostitute.”

“Who are you calling prostitute? Who are you calling prostitute? You are a bastard!”

“God forgive you.”

“I just don’t know is eating you up. Poverty! Did I make you poor?”

“I’d rather be poor than be a whore.”

“Wretched pauper!”

“Are you really better?”

“Raky, ignore the idiot. Just give me gist. Did you stop at the Chinese?”

“Prostitute talking about Chinese. Girls, whose parents cannot afford basic meals a day talking big. I just pity men.”

“Pity yourself, ugly duckling.”

One Night

“Hi!”

“Hello, sweetheart!”

“Did you sleep well?”

“Perfectly. You were incredible. I had never had it so good.”

“Thank you.”

“And you are so polished.”

“Thank you.’

“You don’t look like a usual. You seem too polished for what you’re doing.”

“You guys amuse me. What do you mean by being polished?”

“I mean you...”

“How do you think I manage to look so polished? Simply because I get good customers like you. And I guess I’m lucky too.”

“Lucky with clients?”

“Sure, they pay well. But I must confess, I’m not here all the time. I’m only here during vacations.”

“You are a student?”

“Yeah”

“What school?”

“What’s all the interrogation for? Do you intend to marry me?”

“No. I’m just interested.”

“Well, show your interest with your purse. That’s the interest I appreciate.’

“Of course, that is taken for granted. I just want to know more. You know, I could visit you in school or something like that.’

“Well, that sounds perfect. My name is Barbara.”

“Surname?”

“Just Barbara. My room number is D206, main campus, UNILOKA. That’s the address until the end of next semester.”

“When does the semester end?”

“In two months. After that is should be at large again.”

“Barbara, I’m sorry but believe me, I feel unusually attracted to you. I mean, you don’t strike me like a whore. How much do you charge normally?”

“Five thousand naira.”

“For a night?”

“Yeah.”

“I’d double that.”

“Oh, thank you, darling.”

“Will you tell me your surname now?”

“You keep coming back to this name issue. What do you want it for?”

“I explained all that earlier, didn’t I? Ok let me be honest. It’s just that, I mean, I feel particularly guilty for sleeping with you.”

“Why? You are going to tell your wife or something? Or you think your church will find out? What really?”

“No, nothing of the sort.”

“You are getting me curious. Tell me what’s the matter?”

“Ok, let’s put it this way: I’m ill. Really ill.”

“You ill? After that superb performance you put up last night?”

“No, not that. I mean, I feel awful. I shouldn’t be doing...”

“Doing what?”

“No, let’s forget it. Can I order for breakfast, room service?”

“Sure, great idea, but let’s have some brandy first.”

“This morning?”

“Why not? But tell me, what do you say is wrong with you?”

“I have a disease.”

“What could it be? AIDS?”

“What if it was?”

“You think if I were afraid of that I’d be in this business?”

“No need for all the worries, then, let’s get the brandy.”

Prof's Paradise

"How did you come?"

"By taxi."

"I mean, did you come alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is just that I have this uncanny feeling you might try to be funny, going by how long it took you to make up your mind. Sit down. Relax.

Are you afraid?"

"Nn-no, sir."

"You must realize you are a big girl. Just take me as your boyfriend. Or man friend, if you like. Ha-ha! What we are doing is no new thing. That is how the other girls in your class survive. I have always thought you would have gotten smart before now. You may have been allowed to get to this your last year, but I am sorry we just have to before you pass the comprehensives."

"But, sir, try and understand. Please, sir, I have a fiancé."

"Who is your fiancé?"

"One of your student, sir. A doctoral student."

"What's his name? In which department is he?"

“I cannot say that, sir.”

“Why not?”

“He has always warned me that telling would mean that he would not graduate.”

“No, tell me. I would not harm him. It’s just for me to know, that’s all.”

“No, sir. Let’s forget about him, sir.”

“All right. You want anything to eat or drink?”

“No, sir.”

“Why don’t you come closer? Come and sit on the bed with me. Come. By love, you are such a smashing beauty! Come now.”

“Sir, I’m afraid.”

“Afraid of what? I promise you that no one will know about this. It is just between you and me.”

“Sir, what if somebody sees us and goes to report to him?”

“How can somebody notice us? This is a small hotel far away from town where we can spend the whole night and nobody will know. Come baby.”

“Sir, please, please.”

“Please what?”

“Isn’t there something else I can give outside this? Can’t I give some money and buy you shirts as I see the boys do? Please sir.”

“Of course, you are welcome to do all that. But in addition to this one. This is the primary one. Once you have let me reach your kingdom of heaven, everything else can now be added. That is the order. Hah, hah, hah! Is that all right? Now come, come, sweet girl. Will it help you if you take some shots? The bottle is right beside you. Have a glass.”

“No, sir, I don’t drink.”

“At all?”

“Only mineral water, sir.”

“You must be a real spoilt girl. But I’m really surprised that a girl like you from a rich home, going by what I hear, can be acting like a village girl.”

“Sir, it’s just that I’m faithful to my boyfriend. He is my first, and I have promised that he will be the last. I vowed, sir.”

“Nonsense! Just what is all this nonsense? Are you the first girl to be engaged in that school? Do you want me to count the number of married women in that school that have come here with me?”

“Students?”

“Damn it! Students, of course. How do you think even pregnant ones among them make it? You are a real small girl. But let’s stop kidding now. Come over this way, will you?”

“Gozinne, you simply kill me. Just look at those laps. Gozinne, please come.”

“Leave me, prof. I’ll come myself.”

“Ok, Ok, come now. Come. Good girl. Sweet baby. Never mind all this my gray hair. You are in for the surprise of your life. Just see how sweetly succulent you are. Hmmm. Turn, give me a kiss. Come on, baby. Let me help you with your skirt? Stop crying now. This is part of your education. Oh, baby, you are so fresh. Fresher than morning.”

“Prof, I would like to go soon.”

“Won’t you spend the night?”

“No sir.”

“Wipe your tears. I can spend the night alone. It does not matter. I had better toss my trousers off. Now take your clothes off, so you can leave early enough. Ok? Now, don’t laugh at my green underwear. Just the colour I’ve always loved. Oh, God, look at those boobs. Oh, baby, come, spread it, spread, spread it! Spread, I can’t wait. Spread.”

“Oh, God, oh, God. Please, Prof...”

“Shut up. Sssshhhh...Ooooooh...Ooooooh...Oohh...Ooh...”

“Prof, have you finished? Please can you roll over? Please, Prof. Please. Prof, can you please leave my body? Please, Prof. Sir, are you sleeping? Are you sleeping Prof? Oh, my God, he is not breathing!”

Mummy, My Head

“Umeh, we need money to buy some drugs.”

“Drugs, who for?”

“Leka.”

“What’s wrong with her?”

“She’s been feverish since yesterday. You should have noticed how quiet she has been. She would neither eat nor join her playmates. I think she has malaria again.”

“Are you a doctor?”

“Do I have to be a doctor to know? Anyway all I’m asking for is just a little money to go to the chemist!”

“I don’t have money.”

“You don’t have money?”

“You heard me right.”

“So what do you want to do? Leave the child to die?”

“Give her Oral Rehydration Therapy, ORT.”

“Is that what will cure her?”

“Mix ORT for her, I’ve told you. If you are lazy to do that, say so.”

“there must be something wrong with you.”

“Watch your tongue, woman.”

“I say there must be something wrong with you. Your child is feverish and you ask me to give her ORT?”

“But I told you there was no money. There is no money, period. You want me to steal? Can’t you buy the drugs yourself? Why do I have to be bothered for every kobo you need. Everything, me. The big, me. Of what use are you?”

“Surely there must be something wrong with you. And you had better have your head examined before it is too late.”

“Watch your mouth or I’ll slap the hell out of you this morning.”

“Go ahead and slap me. Slap me!”

“You think I don’t know what you have been doing in my absence?”

“Me? Doing what in your absence? You are an ungrateful wizard. You are an ingrate. You accuse me, in spite of my putting up with a bunch of rags like you?”

“Who do you really think you are deceiving? Me? The children! It is yourself you are deceiving. In fact, I have already sent the letter of one of your lovers to Melu. Keep thinking you are deceiving me.”

“What are you talking about? Now I know. There is no doubt about it. You are mad. Who should be talking of letters? What letter is tucked away in your coat there? What letter is there from a Gladys thanking you for paying her rent for two years?”

“I’m warning you! Watch your tongue! Watch your tongue!”

“Do your worst. Everyday no money. Every time no money. And you call yourself a husband. I have given up on your giving me anything. As for the children, that is what I will not take. How can I watch my child die at the feet of a wayward and wicked man who claims to be her father? Shame on you! And you had better know it, if you don’t change, I will leave you.”

“get out! Who needs you? Get out! Pack your load and go!”

“You know you are tempting me? You know you are really tempting me? I certainly have the good mind of going so I can at least provide for my children.”

“Go! Go! I say go and meet them.”

“Yes, I can go and meet real men. You think you are a man? A man who cannot feed his family? A man I feed? Or you sincerely believe that your miserable food money is what sustains this family for a whole month? Take my advice, go and see a psychiatrist. Last week, Melu came home demanding his school fees. You, his dad could not provide it. I had to run to my club to borrow money. You are just a useless idiot who calls himself someone’s husband. Don’t you see your mates? Look at your mates outside and look at yourself. Wretch! I pity you.”

“Mummy! Mummy, I want to vomit.’

“I’m coming, my dear. This thing here you children call daddy is certainly worse than useless.”

“Doris, I’m warning you!”

“Mummy, my head...”

After Wedding

“Oh, thank God it’s over.’

“Thank God.”

“What a glorious ceremony it was!”

“Honestly, I never thought it would turn out to be such a great success.”

“Emeka, everyone was there.”

“The chiefs, even the Deputy Governor.”

“And the presents.”

“Certainly, a lorry load.”

“It was all worth it.”

“I told you it was good business.”

“we spent only a hundred thousand naira and got gifts worth over five hundred thousand naira. Great business.”

“Now we can pay back all our debts.”

“The thanks should all go to you, my darling. Left alone, I would have invited only those my wretched friends who would only have come to drink our beer and finish our food.”

“Well, thank God you listened.”

“Now, I don’t regret that they were not even invited. People who could not even pay for aso-ebi for themselves.”

“That reminds me, I did not even add to our gains what we made from the sale of the aso-ebi.”

“You made good profit?”

“Why not? What do you think is the main motive behind selling the material myself to them?”

“So how much did you make from aso-ebi?”

“You won’t believe it. I made one hundred thousand naira on top.”

“I am truly lucky to have a wife like you: bright, intelligent. The least I can do is to love and protect you.”

“But will you really do that?”

“I swore in church today to do just that. And, of course, you know how strong I am. That’s what made me leader of a cult in school.”

“I always suspected you were one.”

“With all my guts, all my boldness, you should have known.”

“I am certainly lucky. To know especially that I married not just a handsome and lively lad but one with a lion heart. What is there to ever fear in life?”

“May be we should catch some sleep. It’s far too late.”

“Ok, darling, can I switch off the lights?”

“Certainly. Honeymoon begins today. Wait. The door. Who’s banging?”

“Open this bloody door!”

“Emeka, who can that be?”

“Switch off the light. Come this way, quick let’s hide under the bed.”

“Why?”

“Shut up. They must be robbers after our presents.”

“Are you sure?”

“Please let’s hide under the bed.”

“How can you be shaking like jelly at a mere bang! I’m going to check.”

“Evelyn, I say let’s hide under the bed!”

“No. you can hide. I’ll check. I need to see who it is. Uh, Emeka. Brave cult leader! You better roll out from under there. It is your younger brother.”

The Ring

“I ask you a simple question about your wedding ring and you begin to cry. What kind of man are you?”

“I didn’t mean to cry.”

“This is the most interesting puzzle I have ever encountered all my life. You are wooing me and I asked you a harmless question about...”

“It is all right. I’m sorry if I made a fool of myself.”

I have not reached any such conclusion.”

“No, it is all right.”

“I know it is all right, but I would like to know why. Why a macho man like you breaks down before a woman over a casual interrogation?”

“It is all right, Lali. Are you going out with me or not? This is really what I want to know. I mean, I have kept this chase for quite a while now. Why don’t I get something categorical from you? Or don’t you like me at all? Don’t you?”

“Who would not like a fine young man like you? Liking or not liking beside the question. It is the ring. To tell you the truth, that has always intrigued me. A man with a ring, a wedding ring, and who swears that he has no wife. It puzzles me. That’s why I thought I should summon courage and ask you tonight, and you begin to cry. You put me in a very difficult position.”

“I’m very sorry.”

“But would you tell me? Can you explain?”

“Let’s not go into that.”

“Can’t you see that it is absolutely necessary for me to know? As long as the puzzle remains, I can’t make up my mind. Can’t you see? Can’t you see? Omubo, do you hear me?”

“I hear you. It’s just that it is a story I’m ashamed to relate.”

“What does it matter, Omubo? What does it matter? I like you very much. But, you see, I just have to unravel the riddle. Please, come out with it once and for all.”

“Ok.”

“Now that’s better.’

“Before I moved to this town six months ago, I was married. I was married to Aminu Akilu’s daughter.”

“Aminu, the billionaire?”

“Yes, I was married to his daughter.”

“You fell in love?”

Well, well, not actually. It just happened?”

“It’s a long story.”

“So are all stories if they choose to be.”

“You’re being funny.”

“No. I just mean to say that it does not matter how long the story is, I wish to hear it.”

“Anyway, I’d cut it short. I met Aminu in one of my desperate attempts to find a job. I had gone to his company in search of a job. That was I met him. He took a liking to me and I started working as one of his personal aides. Then one day he called me and told me that he would like me to marry his daughter. Now that’s cutting the story short. I have omitted a lot of things.”

“I understand.”

“He said there was, however, a snag. And that the snag was that his daughter was seven months pregnant for one of his former houseboys. He said the shame was too much for him to bear, so he would want me to marry her immediately. He promised to make me a rich man if I did and to buy me a brand new Four Wheel Drive.”

“Now that’s something.”

“So, you see, I found it difficult to resist. I am poor boy from a poor background. I ended up marrying her.”

“How nice!”

“So you think it was nice what I did?”

“Certainly. I’ll tell you why. But let’s finish the story.”

“So we got married and lived in a posh house and he bought me the Four Wheel Drive.”

‘Oh, how nice!’

“Two months later she gave birth to a lovely baby boy.”

“Really?”

“But all the while, before she gave birth, she was visiting the father of the boy secretly. And then one day she ran to him, with the baby. She ran away.”

“What did Aminu do?”

“Little. In fact, nothing. He rather threw me out. He sacked me , chased me out of his house, took his car and everything he gave to me.”

“Everything?”

“Everything. Everything. I was so ashamed of myself I had to leave for this town to settle and begin all over again.”

“And the ring?”

“I don’t know. Maybe some attachment, some hope. I don’t know.”

“How nice!”

“What do you mean how nice?”

“I mean you are worse than an idiot. You must be far less than a man to have traded your manhood for money.”

“Don’t speak like that, Lali. Please don’t speak like that. I love you. I want you.”

“You want me. You love me. I am sorry for you. If you could sell yourself for a Four Wheel Drive, what would stop you from selling me even for a bicycle?”

Passing The Ball

“Salam! Salam! Are you deaf? Salami!” a perturbed mother was raving above the rattling of the pepper grinder beside her provision store. She is operating the machine for a customer, at the same time that another stops over to buy bread. Her son, Salami is near enough to help. But he is engrossed in a football game with his friends.

“Salami!” she screams again, her overstretched voice quaking with strain and exasperation.

“Ma...ma...ma,” reluctant replies trickle in as if in arrears of earlier calls. Still his attention is glued to the game.

“Salami, come and attend to this waiting customer. Salami! Are you ignoring me? Just where do you think the food you eat comes from?” she asks, hardly containing her anger.

The boy manages a reply without taking his eyes off the rubber ball” “Mama, I don’t understand your question. But for all I know, all the food I eat comes from the kitchen.”

Grandma's Lies

"Chei!"

"Listen, grandma. And I am dead serious. If you have come here to chei me, you had better leave."

"Chei, my son, who did this to you? Look at your ears. See puss oozing out."

"I will tell the doctors to work you out."

"In spite of everything I said, in spite of all my advice, Obodioka, you have not changed.'

"Changed to what?"

"Chei, so it is true what they tell me, that you are still like this, that you sustained all this in a fight with other secret cult members."

"Grandma, please leave. You heard me? Please, leave."

"Where to? Since you parents died, how many relatives have you apart from me? If I leave, who fends for you? I clothe you, I pay your school fees and you ask me to leave?"

"Please."

"Chei, chei, chei! What manner of children? Chei! Amadike my son, if only you were alive today to see what is becoming of your beloved son."

“Grandma, you are lucky I’m not strong enough now to push you out of this place.”

“Chei, Amadike, my son, how could a monster have come from an Angel? How could such a quiet and humble father have a son like this? I warned Amadike to check the background of his wife properly before taking the plunge. Now see...see...”

“Grandma, listen, let me tell you, I am determined not to be the failure that my father was.”

“Chei, Obodioka my son, calm down, don’t abuse your dead father.”

“Hell! He was a fool. A bloody failure. A fool. Fool, fool at forty. It is no wonder he died a wretch.”

“Chei, my grandson, that is not how to talk. Your father may not have been a rich man, but he had a good name.”

“These were the same lies that crippled man in my father and made him a woman.”

My grandson, a good name counts far more than riches.”

“To hell with you, grandma! Keep your good name. I need none of it. And if you think I am a disappointment, in spite of all the money you have expended on my schooling, you should forget it. I can leave school. Of all those who have made it, tell me, how many of them were bookworms?

“Obodiokan, what has completely possessed you?”

“You know something, go on and teach those morals to the fishes. They will benefit for them better. Not me. I have

seen the world, I have examined it. Now I know what to do to get what I want!”

“Is that why you are a cultist? Is that why you decided to join secret cults?”

“I wonder who told you all this. Anyway, forget it. All I know is that I am paving my way. And I will do all it takes. It does not matter what names people call me.”

“They are beginning to describe you as a blood sucker.”

“Does it matter, grandma? Those that make it in our society are blood drinkers but they are the same ones we all worship.”

“Obodioka!”

“Go home, grandma. Leave me alone. You have ruined too many lives with your preaching. See all my cousins who listened to you. What have they become but impoverished teachers who cannot afford to change their torn singlets. Just leave me alone.”

“Obodioka, my son.”

“Grandma, please just get out! Get out of my life! Enough of your lies!”

Congrats

The O'Level GCE results are out. Odogu mounts his motorcycle and heads for the West African Examination Council (WAEC) office.

Although this is the sixth consecutive year of checking up on his GCE results, he still feels nervous. He stops over at a nearby barber's shop to look into the mirror. He convinces himself that but for his bushy moustache, he can still pass for a fresh school leaver. He wrestles with his uncomfortable conviction which keeps popping back at him as mere self-deceit. "Gini sef. If I clear my papers this time, wetin does matter?" he consoles himself.

Now, it is his turn at the WAEC office queue.

"Next. What's your number?"

"876/007/WT"

"Ok. Take down your result. Ready?"

"I'm ready"

"English Language, 9; Economics, 9; Bible Knowledge, 9; History, 8; Biology, 9; Mathematics, 9...."

"oh no! This my younger brother has failed again."