

In Search Of A Groom

By

‘Wunmi Izuagie

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Chapter 1

“Deji, stay out of my business,” Tayo screamed at her brother, pummeling the table furiously with her fist.

Deji squinted and stared at his sister, who seemed more like a stranger these days.

“You came all the way from Lagos to Ijebu-Ode to ask me to stay out of your business?”

“Tell me you are kidding me right now,” Deji said as he stood up from his desk.

“Deji, I mean every word I have said. Are you the one who cursed me that I won’t marry? Why would you pay Jide to stay away from me?” She asked.

“That is because the guy is bad news! Tayo, it’s unbelievable you refuse to see through him. When I see that guy, I smell deceit a mile away,” he said.

“Why not keep your smell to yourself and let me enjoy my relationship in peace. And by the way, his name is Jide and he loves me!” She yelled.

“He loves you? Are you trying to convince me or yourself about that?” Deji asked in distaste.

“Deji,” Tayo said in an uncharacteristic shaky voice as she wagged a finger at him.

Deji looked at his sister with compassion and gently embraced her.

“T, please don’t get too desperate. A man who will love you will soon come,” he whispered to her.

She pulled back and looked at him.

“When?”

A deafening silence immediately enveloped the room. Tayo was waiting for an answer from her brother. To her, the wait felt like an eternity and when Deji refused to respond, she moved further apart from him.

“You see, you don’t know. Well, a bird in hand is worth two in the bush. Let me make do with Jide. Can’t you just be happy for me and support me like I did for you with Gloria. I am not asking for too much, Deji.”

Deji reached out to touch her but she further stepped away from him. She picked up her bag and looked at her brother.

“If you can’t do this for me then let’s just stay on our different lanes.”

“No Tayo! No one who loves you would separate you from your loved ones. Don’t let Jide do this to us,” he whispered hoarsely.

“Jide didn’t do it. You, Deji, did it. You stepped out of line when you offered to pay Jide to leave me alone,” she wailed.

She turned to leave but Deji quickly held her hands.

“Tayo, please don’t be like this. This is Deji. It’s me, your brother. Ok, I am ready to accept Jide as your fiancé but I don’t want this bad blood between us,” he said fiercely.

“Well that’s too late, Jide said we can’t trust you in our relationship,” she said as she tried to pull her hand out of his.

“You said what! That two-faced conniving liar and cheat,” Deji snapped as he released her hand and ran it through his hair.

“You can see that he is right. Why would you call him names? Bye, Deji,” she said as she looked disdainfully at her brother and opened the door.

“No, Tayo. Wait,” Deji entreated.

He ran after her and tried to stop her from getting into the car. She angrily pushed him away, climbed into the passenger’s side of her car and instructed her driver to zoom off.

#####

“Nonsense,” Tayo fumed as she entered her room after her trip to Ijebu-Ode to see her brother.

“He wants to be the only married one while I become the old bachelorette. It won’t happen!”

Tayo continued her lone tirade, undressed and headed towards the bathroom.

Her phone rang as she submerged herself under the water in the bathtub. She graciously rose up to check who the caller was. And as she suspected, so it was. She knew Deji would not let her be.

“I will just leave you to stew in your own juice, nonsense.” She hissed.

She dressed up, picked up her laptop and sat at the table in the room.

Several minutes later, Tayo had not done anything on the laptop she opened. Instead, her hands were wet with tears that were falling from her eyes.

Deji had been the ideal big brother and in her thirty three years of living, they had never had any argument as bad as this. She wanted her old brother back, the one who had always believed in her, stood by her, fought for her and supported her. She didn't want this new Deji who only wished to control her life.

She had started having boyfriends from secondary school. She had been lost because there was no mother to hold her hand and lead her through. Their father was the best but he didn't realise how much she needed to be loved. She had changed boys like clothes till her undergraduate days in the UK when she had moved with the wrong group and she had fallen into a dark place; doing drugs, alcohol, homosexuality and then at last depression had set in. This had led her to attempt suicide. She would have died that night if not for Martha.

Martha was her roommate, she was a believer and had tried severally to share the word of God with her but she had only wanted to be loved. Little did she know that no love could equate that of Jesus.

Martha had called an ambulance as she gasped and struggled for her life in the room. She had also called her dad who had flown to the UK as soon as he could.

Deji did not know anything about this because she had insisted that their father shouldn't tell him. She knew him. He wasn't as strong as he made others believed. She saw how their mother's death had left him a shadow of himself.

She had gone to rehab in the UK, deferring her admission for a year.

Martha had helped her through that one year journey in the rehab and had helped lead her to Christ at the age of eighteen.

Deji didn't know how she had always longed to get a man to love her.

Oh, the men had come but most of them had either been intimidated by her wealth and career or now by her no- sex before marriage stand. This continued to play out until Jide came on the scene.

Then Deji had gone to offer him money to stay away from her.

“The nerve of him!” She exclaimed, hitting the table hard.

She needed to marry before she stopped producing eggs. She wanted children too; she could not stop crying as she ruminated about her life.

“God, I just want to be loved. I know you love me but I need a real man to love me too,” she whispered as she abandoned her laptop and crawled into bed.

She hugged a pillow to her chest as she reflected on her life in the last fifteen years or so that she had given her life to Jesus and had been celibate.

On several occasions, she had been tempted to just get down with any man. It had been a real battle because she sometimes had the urge to just have sex even with any man she could get to do it with but God had helped her and is still helping her. But now, she was sure she was losing the battle.

“God, help me,” she whispered.

“I am losing this battle. I don’t know how long I can afford to be celibate. I am struggling,” she cried.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Yes, I can. Tayo exclaimed as this word of God dropped in her heart. She kept repeating it till the sweet arms of sleep enveloped her and called her to a place of sweet rest.

Chapter 2

“Are you serious?” Tayo giggled as she held the phone between her shoulder and ear whilst typing furiously.

“You don’t say!” She added as she paused in her typing.

“Ok then, I wish you all the best. Yes, send the letter; I will gladly sign the guarantor’s form for you. Ok bye, love you,” she added, blowing a kiss to the phone before disconnecting the call.

She smiled as she thought of how happy she was lately because of her relationship with Jide.

She stared into space as she remembered how they had met at her brother’s wedding about a year ago. He had been a guest from the bride's family and they had connected almost immediately.

They had only made it public some months ago and the only thing Deji could do was to send him packing.

That's a lie from the pit of hell, she thought as she went back to her work.

Later in the day, her new P.A had called to inform her that the team from the IT Company contracted to overhaul the company's software was around.

She quickly checked her wristwatch and realised she was running late for her lunch date with Jide. She had been engrossed in work.

"Please, take them to the accounts department and let them speak with Mr. Gabriel, he will update me. I need to be on my way for another meeting now," Tayo instructed as she closed the file she had been studying and picked her bag from the table.

She went to the toilet and retouched her makeup before calling her driver to drive to the front of the building.

It took another one hour to drive to the Chevron area of Lagos Island where the restaurant that Jide had chosen was situated. Tayo always wondered why Jide didn't like to come to the mainland or even the part of the island where her office was located.

"Hello pretty," he called before she saw him. Her smile became brighter as she doubled her steps towards the table where he sat

He stood to give her a peck on her cheeks.

Removing her designer sunglasses, she smiled at him again.

She always loved that he was openly affectionate.

“Hope you haven’t been waiting for long?” She asked apologetically.

“Not really, say about ten minutes,” he replied, checking his wrist watch.

“The traffic was really bad. I don’t know why you don’t want to leave this area. Thank God, I didn’t have to come to Osapa London today,” she said sounding relieved.

“Are you saying you don’t like my area?” He asked brusquely and Tayo’s smile quickly disappeared from her face.

“No,” she replied, waving her hand in denial.

“I was teasing,” she added.

He huffed and turned to pick up the menu. After perusing, he dropped it angrily on the table.

“I think I just lost my appetite,” he bellowed.

Tayo was now afraid; she stretched to touch his hand, but he quickly removed it from her reach.

“I said I was teasing. I am sorry,” she pleaded.

“You can order what you wish to eat. I will just wait for you to finish eating,” he said, folding his hands on his chest defensively.

“No now, don’t do that. But I said I was only teasing. How do I come all that way and this is the way you want to treat me?” She asked.

After much pleas and persuasion, he finally agreed to eat.

As they ate, Jide brought out an envelope and placed it on the table.

“This is the guarantor’s form. I don’t want you to forget.”

“Yes, that’s true. I will just go with it and have my lawyers read through,” Tayo said as she reached for the envelope. She was however not fast enough as Jide held it down on the table with his hand.

“And why do you need to do that? Aren’t you supposed to be my fiancée? I know your brother has sown seeds of doubt in your heart towards me. No problem, it’s poor that I am poor, I haven’t killed anyone,” he said as he withdrew the envelope from the table.

“But Jide, why are you doing this? How can my brother poison my mind against you? We haven’t even spoken since I confronted him about two months ago. I only wanted to do due diligence. But don’t worry, I will just peruse and sign it now,” she said with a smile.

“Yeah, that’s Atta girl. You know once I get this contract then we can start planning our wedding,” he said and this brought a new light to Tayo’s eyes and a big smile to her lips.

“I don’t want your family to think that I am marrying you for your money,” he added as he picked at his teeth with his little finger.

Tayo beamed at him before she quickly brought out the pined sheets of paper from the envelope.

Jide's eyes dilated as he looked lovingly at Tayo.

"I love you Tayo," Jide whispered in a way that sent tingles down to her toes. Tayo felt a quick heat run through her body.

Her eyes followed the slow movement of his tongue from one end of his lips to the other.

Like a snake uncoiling, he sneaked his hand across the damask covered table to where Tayo's hand rested on the envelope.

"You are the only one who truly accepts me for me," he whispered as he ran his fingertips on her hands.

"You don't mind coming all the way to my hood. You are truly a selfless woman. The one made just for me."

He moved closer to her across the table, Tayo also drew forward towards him as if in hypnotism, he pouted his lips.

"You are the true definition of the Proverbs 31 woman. I can't stop loving you," he added.

Tayo's eyes became smoky and God knew the only thing that wasn't making her remove her clothes there and then was because they were in a public place.

Immediately the thought formed in her mind, she mentally shook herself and gently removed her hand from under his caressing hand. She pulled away and shook herself physically.

Clearing her throat loudly, she opened her bag and rummaged through for a pen.

“I should have a pen in here,” she muttered as she bent her head, searching her bag.

“Oh, I found one,” she exclaimed just as Jide pointed another one at her.

“I have one here,” he also said.

They both smiled at each other.

As she picked the sheets of paper, her phone beeped. She quickly picked it; it was her Bible Reading Plan reminder. The word for the day was displayed boldly on the screen

“Word for the day: There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is the ways of death. Proverbs 14:12.”

Tayo quickly locked the phone and put it back in her bag, shaking off the uneasy feeling that came with the Bible quote.

“So, Jide, tell me more about this contract,” Tayo said, as she scanned through the papers.

Jide rambled about the contract being for supply of diesel to a multinational and how they requested that he must have a surety.

Tayo quickly scanned through the form and nothing seemed unusual. She handed over the signed papers to Jide with a smile.

She had to excuse herself soon after as she had to meet up with some potential clients.

They hugged just before Jide opened her car door in perfect chivalry.

“Please, keep me posted on how the contract goes,” she called before he shut the door.

He nodded and waved as the driver drove off.

Chapter 3

“Please, I gave Dele a bag. It’s for Ajoke, kindly give it to Gloria,” Tayo told her dad as he was about to leave the dining room.

Otunba stood for a moment in deep thoughts. He turned around to face Tayo, who was seated at the table.

“Tayo, don’t tell me you are still not on talking terms with your brother,” Otunba said as he moved to stand beside her.

Tayo didn’t bother raising her head, she attacked the sausage on her plate with her fork as if it was her brother; this sent the sausage rolling off the plate, bouncing once on the table like a Ping-Pong before landing on the floor with a dull thud.

“I am grateful that’s not Deji you just attacked,” her dad said dryly.

“Dad, you are being unfair here,” Tayo scowled as she kept her head buried.

“Tayo!” Her dad exclaimed as he heard the hurts in her voice. He quickly pulled out a chair beside her and sat down.

Tayo looked at her dad with tears running down her eyes unashamedly. The mucus from her nose joined with the tears and ran down her upper lips.

“I...I...am thirty-three and unmarried,” she stuttered as her hands shook terribly.

“Hush, hush,” her dad soothed, pulling her into his arms where she wept as if her heart was breaking.

After a while, Otunba brought out the handkerchief in his pocket and wiped her face gently.

Tayo collected the handkerchief and cleaned her face properly.

“First, Tayo, I may not know how you feel but I understand and share in your anxiety. Secondly, being single at thirty-three is not a crime or a sin. Wait!” He exclaimed as she was about to speak.

“I am worried about your anxiety and desperation.....”

“Daddy, I am not desperate! I only want to be married like any woman my age,” Tayo interjected.

Otunba sighed deeply.

“Ok. But I haven’t heard where your brother opposed that,” Otunba said.

“Daddy, I said you are being partial. Deji actually went to pay off Jide because he said he is a fraud. How does he know who a fraud is? Was he not a fraud when he agreed to an arranged marriage?” She yelled.

“Tayo just shut up there!” Otunba shouted as he stood up and looked angrily at her.

“You go on and on about the Jide guy. He hasn’t even deemed it fit to come and meet your family and he is still the one causing a rift between you and your brother. Tayo, you and Deji’s relationship is one of the best siblings’ relationships I have seen, how did it get to this? That a total stranger will just come and alienate you from the brother you have known all your life?” Her dad finished sadly.

“You know what? I want to meet this Jide and this time, he had better come or ..”, Otunba stopped and looked at his daughter who had started crying again.

Shaking his head in exasperation, he turned away and left the room.

Tayo abandoned her meal and went to her room to freshen up.

After washing her face and reapplying her makeup, she sat on her bed and brought out her tablet, she opened her Bible plan and read from the book of 1 Kings 19, when she got to verse 10, she paused as the words hit her differently.

“And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.”

“Lord, I have kept myself these fifteen years, my friends are all married. Even Roli, who was a known flirt, got married four months ago. I am the only one left, a spinster in my father’s house,” she said as she prayed and wept.

Suddenly, she sat up and went to read the passage from the beginning.

She read from verse one to three then started praying again.

“God, you see that Deji is like Jezebel that doesn’t want me to be married.”

She sat and brooded over the first three passages.

Touching the tablet, her fingers rested on verse 3 and she read it again.

“And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there.”

“I think I have to leave this house. It’s because I am staying at my father’s house that the insult is becoming too much,” she said, thanking God for confirming what Jide had told her on several occasions through this verse.

“You are a successful lady, why must you be tied to your dad’s apron? You can afford to rent a place of your own,” he had told her on several occasions.

She sprang up like an athlete from the bed.

“Today is the day the Lord has made, I will rejoice and be glad in it. I will leave this house today,” she said.

“To where?” The voice of reason asked.

She paused then shrugged nonchalantly.

“At least, I can rent a room at a hotel till I get a place of my own. But which area am I looking at?” She stood, with a finger to her chin in contemplation.

“Jide stays in Lekki, I will have to stay around that area. I should get a good hotel there,” she soliloquized.

She brought out her phone and goggled for hotels in Lekki. When she finally decided on one, she started goggling again for estate agents in Lekki. After getting the contacts of some, she sat to call two and booked appointments for the following week.

She used the intercom to ask that a female staff member be sent to her.

In a few hours, she had packed several clothes and some essentials into two suitcases.

She ordered for an Uber driver as she didn’t want her driver to know where she was going.

While in the cab, she called Jide.

He sounded sleepy, Tayo reflexively checked her wristwatch and noted that it was some minutes past 1pm.

“Are you sleeping?” She asked.

Jide yawned.

“Yes, I went for a vigil yesterday and I had a stressful week,” he replied.

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear that. Guess what? I am moving to Lekki!” She exclaimed.

“What do you mean by moving to Lekki?” He asked.

“Well, I took your advice and I left home, I will lodge in a hotel but I should be able to get a place of my own by next week. I am now a Lekki babe!”

He cheered, “Atta girl!”

“That’s more like it. How can you at your age be under your dad’s roof? Let me have the address of your hotel once you get there,” he added.

Tayo quickly gave him the name of the hotel she had booked online together with the address.

When she finished the call, she sent a message to her dad informing him that she had left Ajoke’s house to start living on her own. She asked him not to fret as she was fine and now living in Lekki.

She quickly blocked his number after this.

Flaring her nostrils in anger, she muttered.

“Anyhow people, I will block their numbers. First Deji, then Daddy, let anyone say nonsense to me; they will receive the blocking of their lives.”

#####

The hotel was nice though it wasn't cheap but she could afford it and this gave her fresh air to think and plan her life.

She spread out on the bed staring at the ceiling.

She was happy because Jide was coming over for dinner that night.

She quickly got out of bed and moved to prepare for her dinner date, it was already 6pm and their date was in an hour's time. Thank God, she had come with some of her nice clothes.

They met at the lobby some few minutes past 7pm and went to the dining room together.

After dinner, they went to sit in the lobby. Jide had wanted them to sit at the bar but Tayo had refused. Jide was so sweet that they cuddled together on one of the seats in an enclave in the lobby.

When it was around 10pm, Tayo had started yawning uncontrollably.

“It seems you are sleepy,” Jide said.

As she was about to reply, another yawn escaped her mouth and she laughed.

“I believe you got your answer,” she managed to say between another yawn.

“So, you are omo get inside,” Jide teased her.

Tayo looked at him in askance.

“What does omo get inside mean?” She asked.

He laughed.

“It’s just a phrase used for well protected children. You know, those kids that are shielded from the real world,” he said with a snicker.

Tayo squirmed uncomfortably at the way he said it; it felt almost like an insult.

“Let me go to bed now,” she announced, standing up tiredly.

Jide stood, put a hand on her shoulder and whispered to her ear.

“You look really ravishing tonight. Should I come up with you to bed? I could tuck you in, you know,” he said with a cackle.

Tayo who had leaned into him quickly pulled away wearily. She was suddenly uncomfortable.

“Hmm, I don’t think that’s a good idea. I am really tired. It’s been a long day. Can you come and pick me up for church service tomorrow? We could worship together at your church,” she added.

“Yes, tomorrow is Sunday. Sure, why not?” He said with a shrug as Tayo smiled.

“It would be nice if we go to church together,” he added.

“So, what time should I be ready?” Tayo asked.

“You mean for church?” He asked and Tayo looked at him in confusion.

“Yes, now,” she said more forcefully than normal.

By now, they had gotten to the staircase.

Jide looked pointedly at her lips with smoky seductive eyes and suddenly Tayo found herself irresistibly drawn to him. Just as she moved closer towards him, a voice interrupted.

“Please, can you excuse me?”

“Oh, we are so sorry,” Tayo blurted as she pulled away from Jide who looked at the intruder with eyes that could kill.

After the person had left, he tried pulling her into his arms but the alluring moment had passed as Tayo resisted and stood her ground this time.

Finally after several failed attempts, Tayo gave him a quick peek on the cheeks. Bade him good night and gingerly climbed up to her room.

Even though she was an early riser, the toils of the day before made her stay in bed a bit later.

By the time she was through with freshening up and having breakfast, it was about 8.30am. It was then she remembered that Jide never mentioned when he would be coming to pick her up for church.

She decided to call him to let him know that she was ready.

She tried his number but it wasn't connecting. She tried several more times thinking it was probably network issues. She decided to send him an SMS message and even left him a WhatsApp message. When she waited till 9.30am and she didn't get a reply nor could reach him on the phone, she goggled for a nearby Pentecostal church, and then she ordered a cab and went there to worship.

Tayo was so disappointed that she missed out of the service that was almost halfway through by the time she got there. It would have been better if she had stayed back in the hotel.

She fumed as she dumped her bag and tablet on the bed. How could Jide stand her up when he knew she was here purely because of him.

She lay in bed without removing her church wear and slept off almost immediately.

“My phone is ringing,” were the words she mumbled before she became fully awake to pick her phone.

“Hello,” she whispered without checking the caller’s ID.

“Hello, Sister T,” Gloria’s voice called from the other side of the line.

“Gloria!” She exclaimed as she sat up, while also checking the screen of her phone.

“How are you Sister T?” Gloria asked in such a loving voice that brought tears to Tayo’s eyes.

She took a moment to get herself together before replying.

“I am ok. How are you and Ajoke?”

“We are all fine. I just want to be sure you are ok ma,” Gloria said.

Tayo nodded severally before she realized that Gloria couldn’t see her.

“Yes, I am,” she said quickly.

“Thank you for the gifts for Ajoke. They are all beautiful,” Gloria added.

Tayo told her it was nothing and just before they ended the call, Gloria said, “You are always in my prayers.”

This made a sob escape her mouth. She took a moment to swallow and wipe the lone tear that had escaped from her eye.

“Thank you, Gloria. You don’t know what that means to me. Bye,” she added and quickly cut the call.

She sat, lost and lonely as she gazed at the wall.

“Lord, all I want is to be loved,” she whispered.

“I love you,” she heard in her spirit.

She threw away the pillows like a child throwing tantrums would.

“I just need someone, Lord a real person to love me and hold me and also marry me. Yes, God,” she said, looking at the ceiling as if God was right there.

“That too is on the list, someone to marry me. Can’t I at least have that, dear God?” she finished and broke down in tears.

As she wept, her phone beeped, announcing an SMS message.

She quickly wiped her face and took the phone to check who it was. The message was from Jide.

“Hey babes. I am so sorry I couldn’t make it to church today. I purged throughout the night and had to be taken to the hospital. I am currently on admission. I can’t talk much now but will get in touch once I am strong enough. I love you forever.”

Tayo was a bit relieved and at the same time worried.

“But he could just have left the address of the hospital and I would have visited him. But why is Jide behaving like this?” She asked no one in particular as she tried his number and his phone was switched off.

“Could it be the food we ate yesterday? But I didn’t purge,” she thought as she stood and paced the room agitatedly.

She took a cab to work the following day after a restless night of tossing and worrying about Jide whose phone number wasn’t still going through.

Around 10am, her father barged into her office.

“Young lady, please excuse us,” he ordered in his bellowing and no-nonsense voice.

Tayo’s PA scurried out of the office.

Tayo sat back, folded her hands on her chest and looked defiantly at her father.

“Tayo, do you want to be the one to send me to my grave?” He said in a voice that sounded almost like an appealing whisper.

Tayo didn’t bother replying. She just continued to stare at her father.

“Ok, please come back home. Whatever the issue is, it can surely be resolved amicably. Please,” her father pleaded.

“Daddy, I am thirty three, I am an adult and can stay anywhere I like.” She replied.

“But it doesn’t have to be like this. Moreover, I need you. You know you are the one that has been helping me to manage my health for a long time now,” her dad said with a smile as he moved closer to her chair.

“Is that why you have hindered me from getting married?” She blurted.

Her father stood still in mid-stride with his mouth agape in shock.

They both stared at each other. Otunba looked at his favourite daughter who loved him to bits and wondered where that statement had come from. In that moment that their gazes locked, he saw a confused and sad young woman.

He sighed deeply.

“No Tayo. I will and can never hinder you from getting married because apart from how much you long to be married, it is also the desire of every parent to see their children settle down.”

Tayo looked away in shame from the pains in her father’s eyes.

“I will allow you to do as you wish. Don’t ever forget that I love you eternally and will always be here for you.” He finished.

Tayo who thought he would turn to leave was surprised to feel his presence and his hand run down her braided hair.

“Adetayo omo oba. We humans count life by calendars, God doesn’t. He works in times and seasons. The time that a man wakes up is his own morning; it may be 12 noon, 6pm or even 11pm. And when he wakes, things will fall in line because his season has come and so time and chance will begin to happen to him for good.”

He looked at her for some time before suddenly turning away. He quietly shut the door behind him.

She felt bad as she watched her tall father’s shoulders stooped as if it carried all the weight of the world.

“Were all these even worth it?” She thought as she felt terrible that she was hurting her loved ones. First, it was her brother and now her father.

Her phone rang at that point and when she picked it, she realised the caller was Jide. She was filled with excitement and relief, momentarily forgetting about her dad and brother.

They spoke for the first time in days and made plans to have dinner that evening.

Chapter 4

Two months later, Tayo had settled in a nice two bedroom flat in the Oniru area of Lagos Island. Even though she didn’t allow Jide to sleep over, he had a spare key.

It was just worrisome that at times, his phone number would be unreachable but that wasn't a big deal as they were already planning their wedding. Though he had requested they had a small wedding, Tayo had however insisted that he needed to meet her dad first.

One Saturday morning, her friend Korede visited her at her apartment.

They were talking and catching up when the key turned in the door.

Tayo smiled at her friend, "finally, you will get to meet my sweetheart, Jide," she said happily.

The door opened and a dark, tall guy entered.

Tayo stood up from where she was sitting and rushed to hug him.

"I didn't know you had company," he said, looking at the fair lady who was already on her feet.

Korede stood with a smile as Tayo dragged Jide towards her for introductions.

The three sat and made some small conversations. Tayo seemed to talk more as she tried to make her friend and fiancé become acquainted.

"What food do you have?" Jide asked after some minutes.

"I didn't know you were coming. We just finished the rice Korede made," Tayo replied.

“Even if you didn’t know I was coming, shouldn’t you have left some food just in case,” he blurted.

Korede was taken aback.

“I...I...didn’t know,” Tayo stuttered.

“I will just leave you and your friend since you don’t want to be bothered,” he replied, picking up the keys he had dropped on the table.

“Wait,” Tayo exclaimed, rushing after him.

“Please, don’t leave Mr. Jide, I was just about to leave before you came,” Korede said, standing up and picking her discarded wig and handbag.

“Are you leaving too?” A confused Tayo asked.

“Yes, you know I told you I want to check on my sister-in-law?” Korede replied.

“Yes, you did but you didn’t say it was today. You told me you were spending the better part of the day with me,” Tayo added quietly.

“The lady says she needs to leave, do you want to go with her?” Jide asked irritably as he went back to take a seat on the couch, crossing his legs.

Korede gave him a dirty look which he also instantly reciprocated. It was so brief that even Tayo didn’t notice the eye battle between the two.

As Tayo was about to see Korede off, Jide instructed her not to go too far.

Immediately, the door shut behind them, Korede held Tayo's arms.

"Tayo! Is this the person you want to marry?" She asked frightfully.

"Yes, why do you ask? Oh, is it because of what he just did?" She continued before Korede could speak.

"He is not usually that foul mannered, he must be very hungry," she said with a smile.

"Tayo, I don't believe this is the best that God has for you o," Korede whispered.

Tayo yanked her arms away from Korede's.

"And who do you know that God has for me? It's easy for you to say that, after all you are married with a child. Why don't you leave me and God alone?" Tayo replied fiercely.

Korede, whose mouth had been opened as her friend lashed out, slowly placed her two palms on her mouth. She sighed gently.

"Ok, it is well," she said.

"Yes, it is well," Tayo shrieked.

Korede shook her head.

“Is he the reason you left home? Well, I should tell you the truth. Impatience can get you so hooked on the future that you may totally miss out on the joy of the present. You have cut off from your brother and father because of him,” she said pointing at the door.

“Who is next? Is it me, Roli, Martha?” Korede asked sadly.

“No man who loves you will cut you off from your loved one,” Korede added.

“You see how you people just say what’s not right? Jide wasn’t the one who made me cut off from anyone. It was all my decision,” she yelled.

Sighing again, Korede adjusted the strap of her handbag on her shoulder.

“Let me leave now. You are in my prayers, Tayo. If you have some free time, read Psalm 37, may God’s light lighten your path,” Korede said before giving her a tight hug.

Tayo didn’t return the hug but stood stiffly.

“Bye, Tayo,” Korede said before rushing down the stairs.

Tayo stood for some minutes looking at nothing. Korede’s words kept playing in her ears.

As she was about to enter her flat, she heard footsteps ascending. She waited, thinking it was Korede who had probably forgotten something.

It was a delivery man.

Tayo turned away, moving towards her door as she thought the package was for her neighbour in the other wing.

“Good afternoon ma’am. Please someone ordered food ma,” he interrupted her.

“Ok but I didn’t. Maybe, it’s my neighbour over there,” Tayo said, pointing her finger to the door opposite.

“No, ma, the gateman described this apartment when the person who ordered called the gate to grant me access,” the delivery guy insisted.

“Really?” She asked before asking him to wait. She opened the door to her flat and saw Jide sprawled out on the couch.

“Did you place an order for food?” She asked.

He didn’t bother to get up but nodded saying that he had ordered pounded yam and efo riro.

“Please pay and collect the meal, after all you were the one who didn’t make food for me,” he ordered.

Tayo turned back to do as instructed.

As Jide ate, Tayo stretched to take a piece of meat from his plate but he quickly held her hand.

“You didn’t deem it fit to make food for me. I then ordered food and now you want to take my meat. No,” he said even with food in his mouth.

“Ahh, but I didn’t know you were coming. I even paid for the food and you could have ordered for two,” Tayo wailed.

Jide quickly removed his hand from the food.

“What’s it with you and money? Every time, you will say it’s me that paid for this, it’s me that paid for that, I know how much it will cost me, yen yen yen,” he said crossly.

Tayo looked at him dumbstruck.

“You obviously are not ready for marriage if we can’t even have one purse,” Jide continued.

“Jide, why are you talking like that? I have always been willing to part with my money. When have you ever brought money to do anything or why are you saying I don’t want us to have one purse?” Tayo asked in annoyance.

“You surely have some nerves speaking to me like that. I told you before that I equally need to be financially empowered as you are before I can contribute anything,” he replied.

“And I have helped you as much as I can. I signed the guarantor’s form when you bought the contract form. I gave you the two million naira mobilisation fee you needed for the contract. Do not forget the other things I do like paying the bills for the repair of your vehicle for instance. At least you should be appreciative instead of making me look like a nagger,” she replied, looking at him eyeball to eyeball.

“I am tired, please,” Tayo said after some moments of both staring at each other.

She turned to leave, telling him to shut the door behind him.

She had not gone more than three steps when he pulled her by her arm.

“Are you now angry?” Jide said in a placating voice.

“Tayo, your blood too dey hot anyhow. Come and sit jo,” he said, playfully leading her to the couch in the sitting room.

“Open your mouth, open now. I will eat the meat o,” he said as he held the meat that started the quarrel close to her mouth.

After some moments of resistance, Tayo eventually opened her mouth and bit off some meat.

“Ajebutter like you,” he teased her.

“Ehhn, don’t start that,” Tayo replied.

“Hmm, when I came to tell you that my sister is going to be in town, you decided to pick a quarrel with me.”

Tayo turned swiftly to face him.

“Really, your younger sister is coming to Lagos?” She asked in excitement.

He nodded as he chewed the meat that Tayo had bitten from.

“I told you that you are too impatient.”

Tayo squirmed at the word, impatient, being used for her again.

“If we can’t go to Kogi to see my family, it’s not because I am hiding you from them as you think. At least you have spoken with my parents on the phone. Well, my sister will be here,” he added.

An excited Tayo rubbed her hands together as she said that she was looking forward to it.

“That’s good then, I hope she can use the spare room while she is in Lagos,” he said as he rinsed his hand in the bowl of water Tayo had brought for him.

“Stay here?” Tayo asked in surprise.

“Yes, where else will she stay?”

“Why not let’s start with your own place?” She replied testily.

“But you know that my own place is too small and my friends do pop in anytime.”

“Well, I don’t know that your place is small since I haven’t been there,” Tayo replied crossly.

Jide laughed consciously.

“It’s just a small bachelor’s pad.”

After much argument, Tayo reluctantly agreed.

Even though Tayo and her dad work in the same establishment, Tayo did all to avoid seeing him except it was absolutely necessary.

She got home one afternoon to meet a young lady eating in her sitting room.

“Hello, who are you?” A bewildered Tayo asked as she entered the room.

The lady put down her spoon and stood to give Tayo a hug.

“Aunty Tayo!” She exclaimed.

When Tayo continued to stare at her still confused, she said, “Don’t you know me? I am your sister in law, Bunmi. Jide’s sister.”

“Oh, how are you?” Tayo asked, returning the hug.

“Jide didn’t tell me you were coming today,” she added.

“I can see that you have fixed yourself a meal,” Tayo continued.

“I cooked for you too,” she told Tayo, who was equally famished.

“Wow, that’s great. Thanks. I will just shower and come and eat. What of Jide?”

Bunmi informed her that he dropped her and left immediately.

Two weeks later, Tayo was rushed to the hospital during working hours.

Chapter 5

When she came around, the doctor informed her that it was a case of food poisoning. As she thought about it, she recalled that she recently started getting light headed. She would get tired easily and had frequent headaches. Then today at the office she had experienced terrible stomach cramps that had made her writhe in unbearable pains.

She spent three days in the hospital and was amazed that neither Jide nor Bunmi had visited once.

Truth was that his number had not been going through so she had no way of informing him that she was hospitalized. Moreover, Bunmi who was still staying would have informed him that she didn't come home. She was able to reach Bunmi a day after and she had said she was surprised when she didn't see Tayo at home.

Tayo wondered why she had not bothered to reach out to her when she saw that she didn't come home.

Her dad had brought a bouquet of flowers for her when he visited a day after she was admitted.

Otunba had looked drained and older as he stood by her bed. Tayo felt guilty because she knew their strained relationship was most likely the reason for his sad and older look.

Tayo sat up wondering how it was that she was being discharged that day yet there was no family to come and take her home.

Deji had sent her a get- well-soon message through an unknown number and Gloria had offered to come to Lagos to nurse her but she was still nursing a baby and so Tayo had refused.

Her phone rang and she tiredly picked it up.

It was her bank manager.

“Hello ma, I would like to get approval for the transfer of twenty million naira from your account,” she said.

Tayo sat up hurriedly and immediately cried out from pains. Her eyes shut in the excruciating pain she felt from her aching head.

“I never initiated such a transfer. I am at the hospital as I speak.”

“I thought as much. The transfers done in the last two days weren’t much but I saw a trend that made me query this, so.....” the bank manager continued.

“What transfers?” Tayo yelled as she interjected.

“Ma, yesterday two million transfers were made twice. A day before that there was a transfer of one million naira,” the bank manager said anxiously.

“No! I have been fighting for my life in the last two days and couldn’t have done such transfers,” Tayo wailed as tears dropped from her eyes. Her hands became suddenly shaky and she had to support the one holding the phone with the other hand.

“Ma, the transfers were done from your phone and the OTP used were generated from your token ma,” she added.

Tayo became suddenly hot as the phone slipped from her finger. She saw stars as her head spun. With her eyes shut, she used her hand to grope on the wall till she located the bell attached to the nurses’ station. She placed her hand on it and left it there, pressing non-stop before darkness enveloped her and her hand slipped down the wall like a bar of wet soap.

When she opened her eyes again, she saw her dad sitting on a chair by her bed. His head bent in what appeared to be prayers.

“Daddy,” she called out like a little girl as she often did whenever she was afraid.

“Ah! Tayo!!” Her dad screamed her name as he lifted his head to behold his dear daughter.

He stood up and held one of her hands while stretching to press the bell on the wall with the other hand.

Sitting back gently on the chair, he stroked her hair.

“You frightened me, Tayo,” he whispered with a quavering voice and Tayo felt a drop of water on her hand. It was her father’s tears.

She could see how traumatised her father was. He now looked so old that anyone would think he was older than he actually was.

She could see his shoulders shaking as he wept. The only time she had seen him cry openly was when her mum was buried.

She tried to speak but couldn’t as her throat was badly parched. She only gently squeezed his hand that held hers in reassurance.

Her father lifted up his head again and his eyes were red from weeping.

She pointed to her throat with her other free hand.

Otunba quickly released her hand and wiped his face as he stood to his feet.

“You want water?” He asked even as he moved to the table where there were bottles of water.

A nurse and a doctor entered as he was uncorking the bottle.

The nurse collected the bottle from him and helped Tayo to sit up before giving her few spoons of water.

“Thank you,” Tayo whispered hoarsely.

After the doctor's examination, he informed Otunba that she was out of the woods and Otunba thanked him.

The doctor however asked if he could speak with Otunba in private.

Tayo looked askance at both men. Her dad patted her hand gently while informing her that he would be with her soon. Both men left but the nurse stayed back to help her clean up.

When he returned, Tayo asked what the doctor had said because he was looking very angry. Her dad told her not to worry, that they would talk later. She was too tired to argue.

The next time she opened her eyes, she saw Deji, Gloria together with her father in the room.

As she struggled to sit up, her brother's wife, Gloria rushed to help her whilst greeting her.

She sat up and looked at the concerned faces of the three people in the room and she realized that she had hurt them deeply.

"You came, Deji," she whispered in shame.

Deji, who had stood far as he didn't know what to expect, moved to sit on the bed beside his sister.

He picked up one of her hands and looked into her face.

"T, nothing could have stopped me from coming," he whispered.

They were interrupted by the nurse who came to take her vitals.

“Thank God for you, madam,” the nurse said after examining her.

“It’s time for your bath,” she added just before one of the hospital staff came inside to assist her. Tayo however declined their offer insisting her sister-in-law would help her freshen up. Gloria signaled to everyone to leave the room as she got ready to attend to Tayo, her lovely sister-in-law.

After she had dressed up, Deji and Otunba joined the ladies in the room again. Tayo asked about her niece, Ajoke. She was told that she was with her maternal grandmother.

“What’s today’s date?” She asked. She exclaimed when she was informed. She realized she had been in the hospital for ten days.

“But I was about to be discharged on the third day,” she wailed.

The other occupants in the room looked at one another

“Please tell me what happened,” she said.

Her dad cleared his throat loudly.

“Well you were about to be discharged for food poisoning when you had a minor heart attack,” her dad said.

“Heart attack?! How?!” She exclaimed, looking at Deji who nodded in agreement.

Her dad moved to sit beside her on the bed.

“I don’t know. I was just told that you had suffered a minor heart attack but I think they said you got a call,” her dad informed her.

Suddenly, it all came back like a flash of light.

“Wait!” She exclaimed, raising her hand.

“I was sitting here and I got a call from my bank manager that there had been series of heavy funds transfers from one of my bank accounts. The recent one that had made her call was a request for funds transfer to the tune of twenty million naira.”

Everyone in the room except Otunba exclaimed at the mention of the amount.

“What day is today?” She asked as she searched frantically for something on her bed.

“Today is Saturday. Why do you want to know?” Her dad asked.

“I want to call my account manager. I don’t understand who could have done such transfers. He even mentioned that my OTPs were generated from my token,” she wailed.

“Where is my phone, where is my phone,” she asked agitatedly.

“Relax Tayo. Please relax. You have been in a coma for days, please just relax,” her dad said gently.

But she would have none of it.

“I spoke with your account manager. She called back, and you see, I was with your phone and she told me what happened when I said you were at the hospital,” he added when Tayo insisted on standing up from the bed.

Tayo paused and looked at her father.

“Yes, the accounts the monies were transferred to have been traced,” Otunba added.

“Really? Who did that terrible thing to me,” she wailed.

“There is an investigation going on, we should know soon enough,” her dad said.

“But how could they have been able to generate OTPs from my token,” she thought out loud.

“Please don’t worry about that for now. I am only glad we have you with us,” her dad said, placing a placating hand on her agitated body.

Tayo sighed, bowed her head and used her free hand to rub her brows as she muttered under her breath.

After some more seconds of gently rubbing her forehead, she raised up her head.

“Please, someone should pass me my phone,” she whispered.

Deji picked up the phone from the table and passed it to her.

Tayo removed her hand from beneath her dad's, unlocked her phone and scrolled through.

"Not even a missed call from him," she said to herself.

"What's that?" Her dad asked.

Tayo ignored him as she dialed a number on her phone.

It rang severally but there was no response.

"What's happening?" She yelled.

"Tayo, what is it now?" Deji, who was now standing asked.

Tayo shook her head severally, shaking her legs in a habit that showed she was very agitated.

"Tayo, please don't get yourself worked up. Tell us what the problem is. Remember you are just recovering," Otunba Adegboye said in concern.

Looking at her brother and father, she whispered, "I haven't heard from Jide."

"Was he not here with you at any time since you were brought in?" Deji asked.

Tayo, who had tears pooled in her eyes, shook her head vigorously, too emotionally distraught to speak.

Otunba looked shocked before asking if she meant what she said. Tayo answered in the affirmative.

There was total silence as everyone was lost in thoughts. The silence was broken by the arrival of the doctor who came to check up on her and declared that she could leave the hospital the next day to the cheers of the whole family.

When the doctor left, Deji asked why she wasn't excited about leaving.

"I can't stay alone in my apartment as Jide's sister who has been staying with me isn't picking up also," she said.

"Jide's sister stays with you?" Her dad asked.

She nodded.

"It's not a permanent arrangement and she has only stayed for two weeks," she added.

"Two weeks ago?" Her dad asked again as all three pairs of eyes in the room fell on him.

He cleared his throat loudly.

"Hmm, I don't know if you are ready to hear this," Otunba said, looking worried.

“What now?”

“Daddy, speak.”

Deji and Tayo said in unison.

“The doctors ran further tests and the results of your food poisoning showed that you have been fed a deadly substance for weeks which was supposed to lead to your eventual death...” Otunba said brokenly.

Everyone in the room yelled.

Tayo broke down in tears.

Her dad and brother quickly took positions beside her.

They rocked her in between as she wept uncontrollably. Both men had tears in their eyes as they both thought of what could have happened if she had not gotten quick medical attention.

Gloria stood watching them with tears running down her face. And even though she was in the room, she allowed them to be as she realised that the trio needed one another at this point in time.

Chapter 6

When Tayo finally became composed, she looked at her dad with fearful eyes and with a trembling voice, she spoke.

“Bunmi fed me every night. Even when I said I was full, she would insist that I drink a beverage or some other drink. So, she was trying to kill me?”

“T, it’s ok,” Deji said.

“I have done nothing but be kind to her and her brother,” she continued.

“Are you sure she didn’t steal my token and made those transfers? She probably was watching me whenever I made online payments,” Tayo continued.

“Tayo, please it’s ok. Everything will be sorted out. Like I told you, investigation is underway,” her dad said in his no-nonsense manner.

“Sister T, it’s ok,” Gloria said as she moved closer.

Tayo decided she will not go back to Ajoke’s house in her state but her dad and brother insisted that she could not stay alone in her apartment either. Her dad pleaded and cajoled her to come home with him but she was adamant.

Gloria then suggested that she should come with them to Ijebu-Ode.

“That’s true. T, come and recuperate at Ijebu-Ode,” Deji added.

She refused at first but her dad and Gloria prevailed on her and she finally agreed.

Deji and his wife left not too long after because of their baby who was with her maternal grandparents.

After their departure, Tayo lay in bed, looking at the ceiling.

“I am sorry Dad, I hurt you and Deji,” she said after long moments of silence.

“Tayo, don’t beat yourself up over that. We both don’t hold it against you. We are only glad we can be with you at such a time like this in your life and grateful that you are still here with us,” her dad replied emotionally.

She continued as if her dad had not spoken.

“I opened up myself to be exploited. He hasn’t even called or sent me a message in the last ten days. Not even a text message. I thought we had a real thing like Deji and Gloria do. I prayed and fasted that God would make it work. I gave it my all, I bent back over. I accommodated his sister and I gave him money. Daddy, I did all that but he didn’t think I deserved even a phone call when he didn’t hear from me in ten whole days,” she said mournfully as tears slipped from the corner of her eyes as she lay on her back looking at the ceiling.

She had both hands tucked under her head and so all her father could do was stroke her hair.

“After my episode in the UK and rehab, you know I gave my life to God and I kept waiting on Him to bring a godly man my way. Daddy, I waited and I have been waiting for over ten years but obviously, it’s not going to happen for me,” she said brokenly as a big sob escaped her mouth.

Her dad couldn't help himself as he left his chair and sat on the bed beside her.

“Tayo, please it’s ok. Don’t make yourself sick again. And why do you believe God won’t make it happen for you? He is God and nothing is too hard for Him to do. He did it for Deji and He will do it for you.”

She turned her face away to the wall, Otunba called her name till she turned to him again.

“Do you think God saved your life some fifteen years ago to abandon you? I am amazed at how you people who say you are born-again behave at times. It seems you like making God seem powerless. Yes, challenges will come, times that will try one’s soul but the only thing that will keep your head up is hope. And you see, hope never makes you ashamed.”

Tayo looked at him in puzzlement and her father smiled.

“Well, don’t be surprised. After you left home, I was heartbroken. While still at Ijebu-Ode, Gloria shared the word of God with me again and I gave my life to Jesus. So, your dad is now a new creature in Christ,” he said with a smile.

The statement made Tayo sit up in joy and embrace her father.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” She scolded him playfully.

“Well, now I have told you. So, you can see that God always has a plan. Maybe, if you haven’t left home the way you did, I might still be struggling with God. But see what God did. He had to touch me where it pained me most – you.”

“God knows the only reason my heart beats each day is because of my children and you are the child of my heart. Your mum left you at five years and I never forgot how you played late into the night while visitors came to pay their condolences. You didn’t even realise that your mum had died. But as the days went by, you kept asking for your mother and I did the best I could to explain that she is dead. At that moment of your vulnerability, my heart knitted with yours.”

Otunba sighed, looked away as he tried to rein in his emotions, he took a deep breath and then turned back to his daughter.

“Adetayo, you know all you ever need to do is call me. Over the years, every time you have ever called, I leave all to be there. God knew this and then he humbled me and showed me that you didn’t even need me as much as you need Him. He is the only father who can respond to that call of your heart. That your earnest desire to be married. If I could buy you a husband, I would but it doesn’t work that way. The fact that I was able to arrange for Deji to marry Gloria was just divine. I know it wasn’t just about me. So, yours too can’t be about me but I know that God says great will be the peace of my children,” Otunba added as he gently patted his daughter’s hand.

Later that night at Ajoke’s house, Deji and his dad sat in the study where they spoke at length.

“So, you believe that that Jide guy was the one who moved money from Tayo’s account?” Deji asked.

“Yes, I do. Tayo is too meticulous for anyone to get her personal information. The person that did it must be really close to her.”

Stroking his chin gently, Otunba continued.

“Immediately, I was informed by the hospital about what happened and her bank manager confirmed it, I hired an investigator and notified the police. The investigator said Jide was in Tayo’s house a day after her relapse. He said he went in alone but later drove out with a lady, obviously his sister. I had assumed he had used the place for a rendezvous with the lady. The police have been able to trace the money transferred from her account to another account owned by a lady. Of course, they have moved the funds through several accounts but it’s in an account now owned by a lady, I won’t be surprised if it’s his self-acclaimed sister,” he added.

Deji sighed deeply as he rubbed his hand through his head.

“I warned Tayo. I just knew something wasn’t right about that guy but she wouldn’t listen,” Deji said.

“I understand but please don’t rehash that, she is already feeling terrible about everything. Deji, impatience can make the wisest of us do foolish things,” Otunba added gently.

“Hmm, impatience can make the wisest of us do foolish things,” Deji repeated while nodding his head.

They spoke more before Deji went to his room to join his wife and daughter.

The next morning, Deji and his wife dropped their daughter at her grandparents’ before going to the hospital on Lagos Island. Tayo gave them the description and the keys to her house. They rushed down to get some of her personal effects. By the time they got to the hospital, their dad was already with Tayo.

Not too long after they got there, Tayo was discharged and left with her brother and his wife who took a detour to get their daughter from Gloria’s parents’ house.

Even though Tayo didn't get down from the car, Pastor and Mrs Dejure came to see and prayed with her in the car.

She was excited to see her niece who had grown very much in the last four months they had last seen each other.

She held and played with her niece, Ajoke as they were at the back seat with Gloria. Gloria took the baby from her when she noticed that she, Tayo was barely staying awake.

A little over an hour later, Deji gently stirred his sister awake. She looked so gaunt and his heart ached at the sight of his usually bubbly and beautiful sister who had suddenly looked aged and drained.

He helped her inside and settled her in a room before fetching her bags.

Tayo was sitting in bed staring into space when he entered with her bag. She didn't even notice that he had come in.

"Tayo, Tayo," he called out before she shook visibly and looked at her brother.

He sat beside her on the bed and no words were needed between the two siblings. She moved into his arms and wept like her heart would break.

Tayo had been in Ijebu-Ode for the past four days now after she had been discharged from the hospital. She was excited that her dad would be visiting them the following day and would stay for the weekend.

Deji and Gloria had made her extremely comfortable and taken such good care of her that she sometimes felt ashamed that she had cut them off one time in her life for someone as

ridiculous as Jide who had still not contacted her. She never stopped trying his number which was always unreachable.

Tayo sighed as she held Ajoke who had just been fed by her mum. She blew air into her face as she giggled. She was such an adorable and happy baby.

Tayo smiled as she lifted the smiling baby close to her face so she could kiss her neck, which was her ticklish spot. Suddenly, Ajoke poured out some of the pent up milk in her mouth on her lace top, barely escaping her face. Tayo froze in shock and then she heard the gentle voice that had stopped speaking to her for some months now.

“Do you no longer love her?”

Tayo looked at the innocent looking face of her precious niece and in that moment she knew nothing could make her stop loving her.

Holding Ajoke in the crook of her arm which was free from the mess, she looked into her face.

“I love her endlessly,” she whispered.

“And I love you eternally. When your members were yet unformed and you were being formed in your mother’s womb, I loved you. When you missed your way and ran with the wrong crowd, I loved you. When you turned your back on my love. I still loved you. My thoughts for you are precious,” the gentle voice replied.

“And I love you more than you love or could ever love Ajoke. Why did you ever doubt my love?”

Tears slipped down her face. A lone tear dropped on Ajoke's hand and she looked up at her aunt as if she was shocked.

Right there, all she saw in Ajoke's eyes was love and trust and in that moment, Tayo understood what true love meant.

It was as if her niece knew what she was thinking as she gave her aunt the sweetest and biggest smile she had ever seen.

"Oh! I love you so much Ajoke," she whispered as she raised the smiling girl to her face for a peck.

Gloria came in and saw them that way. Her smile fell off her face when Tayo pulled Ajoke away from her face and she saw Tayo's stained shirt.

"Oh no, she poured on you?" Gloria said in shock as she called Ajoke's nanny almost immediately, asking her to bring a napkin.

"What?" Tayo asked, looking at Gloria in feign anger.

"Is she not my child also? Please leave the ceremony, I will go and clean up now. Ok, Ajoke, go to Mummy, let me clean up," she told the smiling baby as she handed her over to her mum.

Chapter 7

When Tayo got back to her room, she didn't change instantly, though she had cleaned the mess on the shirt. She rather sat on the edge of the bed.

The smell of the baby's milk that Ajoke had spilled on her dress mixed with the unique powdery baby smell teased her nostrils as she sat on the bed. She shut her eyes as she inhaled the smell.

"The smell of my son is the smell of the field that the Lord has blessed," dropped into her heart.

She knew it was in the bible and as she recited the scripture to herself, the Holy Spirit whispered to her heart.

"That's how I love you. When I perceive your smell, it's not the smell of your mess that I perceive but the smell of my grace poured on you by the righteousness of my son, Jesus Christ. Yes, the smell of Jesus's righteousness has covered the smell of your mess."

Tayo wept quietly as she looked at her stained shirt and reflected on what the Holy Spirit had whispered to her heart.

After a while, she brought out her phone to check where the scripture she had heard in the sitting room was in the Bible. She was sure it was in the Bible.

She quickly typed, "while my members were yet unformed in the search browser and it brought up Psalm 139.

She read the whole Psalm but verse 17 struck out to her.

"How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God? How great is the sum of them!"

Psalms 139:17 NKJV.

As she meditated on this verse, another one dropped in her heart.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

She checked and found it in Romans 8:39.

“Nothing can separate me from the love of God. Not even my self-worthlessness,” she whispered as she finished reading the two verses from the Bible.

“Yes Tayo. I love you enough so why don’t you love yourself?” She heard.

She slipped off her stained blouse and proceeded to undress. She practically ran to the bathroom and stood under the shower with her braided hair and all. She allowed the water to run over her as she kept saying, “God loves me and I love myself.”

The water from the shower mixing with the tears falling freely from her eyes.

After spending a considerable amount of time in the bathroom, a refreshed Tayo dressed and sat down to write out what she had been saying in the bathroom, “God loves me and I love myself.”

She wrote it on several sheets of paper, snapped one and used it as her screensaver. Then tuck the written out sheets in several places in her handbag, her purse, under her pillows, on the table in her room, she even used magnet to hold another on the vanity in the bathroom. If it was her house, she would have pasted them on the walls but she was sure this would suffice.

After a long time of doing this, she resumed her Bible reading plan.

As she read and meditated, several thoughts came to her mind. One of the most striking thought was how she so needed others to love her for her to feel loved.

All her life, she had suffered from a self-love deficit. She knew the death of her mum had caused this as she had gone all out to seek love – from friends to drugs to parties till she found Jesus. But because she felt marriage was what she needed to be complete, she had allowed a lowlife to feast on her like lice.

She knelt, prayed and wept.

All her life she had fought voices in her head that told her she was never enough. That she needed others to love you.

“God, I am done fighting. Your love makes me measure up. I have realized that my worth and identity is in you, o Lord. I made you small, I believed the evil voices and all the lies of the accuser but now I have decided to shut my ears and mind to it. I only believe what you have told me. And that is the fact that I am loved.”

“Yes, you are loved. I have loved you with an everlasting love,” the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit whispered to her heart.

Sitting down and wiping her face, Tayo continued her soliloquy.

“I know there will be times when I won’t be able to feel your love but help me to always trust your loving heart, Father.”

“Lord, I failed this time but thank you for using the failure to save my father. Now Lord, you can have all my desires, dreams, failures, my excesses, my joy, my pains even my marriage. Have them, Lord, take them. All I want is my identity in Christ and I have it already. You love me and I love myself unconditionally based on your love for me.”

After some more time alone. She stood up and picked her phone.

She searched and deleted Jide’s numbers and that of his sister, Bunmi.

“I deserve better than him,” she whispered.

Then she placed a call through to her friend, Korede.

Korede sounded shocked when she heard her voice.

“I am sorry, Ko. I know I hurt you but please forgive me,” Tayo muttered.

Korede told her she wasn’t offended and she was only glad to have her friend back. When she asked where she was, Tayo went on to inform her about her illness, Korede was surprised as she had not been aware of it. The phone conversation took almost thirty minutes as the two friends caught up.

“Will you ever stop being Daddy’s girl?” Deji asked as he looked at his sister snuggled with their dad on the couch.

“You better leave me alone,” she replied childishly and this generated laughter from the occupants of the room.

“I will ask you in some years if Ajoke will ever stop being a daddy’s girl,” she added as she pointed at her niece who was sitting on her brother’s laps.

“Ahh, she is a daddy’s girl for life o,” Deji said as he embraced his daughter lovingly.

“Oh, is that how it is? You want your daughter to be your own girl for life but want mine to outgrow being one?” Otunba asked laughingly.

After a while, Gloria took Ajoke who had become cranky inside because it was past her bedtime.

When they had both left, Otunba gently sat up. Tayo whose head was on her father’s shoulder also quickly did the same.

He cleared his throat loudly and Deji asked what the issue was.

Their father looked at Tayo in disquietude.

“What is it, Daddy?” Tayo asked as she looked at her father.

He picked one of her hands and looking at it, he said, “I have some news but it’s not so nice.”

“I hope it’s not about your health?” She whispered fearfully.

He looked up, first at Tayo and then his son, Deji.

“No. At least as at my last visit after the surgery, everything is good,” he replied.

Their dad had been diagnosed with a heart condition that had made Tayo relocate from the US back to Nigeria. It became necessary for him to undergo a surgery which he had done less than a year ago.

“Then what is it?” Deji asked impatiently.

“It’s about the transfers from Tayo’s account and those involved,” Otunba said.

Both Tayo and Deji sat forward asking who those involved were.

Otunba looked from Deji to Tayo.

“It was Jide,” he replied.

Tayo was momentarily thrown off balance. Then she sighed heavily and asked her father to continue.

“Obviously, that is what he does for a living. Befriending rich ladies and swindling them. Bunmi is not his sister but his wife. She lives in Ibadan and they have a child together.”

“It’s a lie!” Deji exclaimed in disbelief.

Tayo, displaying no emotion gazed into space.

When her dad stopped talking, without turning to look at him, she asked, “Is that all?”

“No, they have both been apprehended by the police and the lady confessed that Jide gave her the substance she added to your food. That she was made to believe that it was sleeping pills so they could access your laptop and phone whenever you are fast asleep. She said she didn’t know it was a deadly substance.”

“And Jide?” She asked, still staring into space.

“He was a difficult one to crack but he confessed that you were too smart and getting impatient with him, so he had to go all out to get you out of the way. He said he didn’t know the drug would work that fast.”

Laughing mirthlessly, Otunba said Jide confessed that he and his wife had resolved not to be involved in such practices again as they planned to relocate. They were actually picked up on their way to the airport.

“But how can people be so evil minded?” Deji exclaimed.

“It is more absurd that both of them are husband and wife,” Otunba rejoined.

Tayo looked at her father.

“Thank you, Daddy,” she whispered.

“Anything for you, Adetayo,” he replied.

“Let the law take its course. It’s an unfortunate incident that is now in my past. The most important thing is that I have made peace with God, my family and friends,” she added.

Her dad patted her affectionately on the shoulder.

Tayo looked intently at her brother Deji. After some uncomfortable moments, Deji asked, “Tayo, what is it now?”

“Isn’t it at this point that you say, I told you?” She said in self-mockery.

Deji stood and moved to sit on the edge of the couch she shared with their dad. He pulled her close as he placed an arm around her shoulder.

“No T. There will never be a point where I will mock your desire and dreams,” Deji said.

When Tayo pulled away to look at him in bemusement, Deji continued.

“Yes, your desire is to have a good man to love and marry you. And that desire is very valid. Now, you may not have met the right guy but that doesn’t invalidate your dreams and desire. If I tell you now that, ‘oh but I warned you, Tayo,’ then I will be mocking your desires.”

“The only thing I want you to know is that I will always be your big bro and what big brothers do is to watch out for their little sis. So, be rest assured that you have not seen the last of my meddling in your affairs,” he added cheekily and this brought a protest from Tayo and laughter from their dad.

Thanks for reading this mini version of IN SEARCH OF A GROOM, you can get the whole book on my website @www.wunmiizuagie.com for just #500 or @Selar.co

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