

FROM THE AUTHOR OF "GBEMI"

STORMED

A dramatic storm scene with a person walking through turbulent waters. The sky is dark and filled with multiple bright lightning bolts striking down. The water in the foreground is dark and choppy. A person is silhouetted against the bright, orange glow of the sun or moon on the horizon, walking across the water. The overall mood is one of intense struggle and resilience.

When you walk through the storm...

EMMANUELA MIKE-BAMILOYE

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to God, who inspired this story, which is not just to entertain, but to minister healing to broken hearts and homes.

Acknowledgements

My heartfelt gratitude is first and most importantly to God Almighty, who gave me this message and enabled be to birth it.

My husband, Damilola Mike-Bamiloye, who has been such a huge support and encouragement, reading through and making all the necessary corrections, I say, a big 'thank you'.

To my parents, siblings and friends, May God bless you all richly. Thank you for all that you do.

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Stormed

This powerful story reflects real life issues especially in a time like this when everyone is passing through one form of challenge, crisis or storm.

In the Bible, Jesus told the story of two houses, one was built on the rock and the other was built on the sand. They both faced storms but the house on the rock stood firm because it was standing on the rock which is Jesus while the one on the sand fell flat.

This story 'Stormed' will enable you reevaluate your life. It will bring you into the atmosphere of self reflection and make you ask the simple and most vital question “what are you standing on?”

As you read this book I pray that you will receive strength and encouragement to face the storms that you may be passing through and overcome in Jesus name. Amen

Damilola Mike-Bamiloye

Chapter ONE

Dan sat transfixed in the living room as he watched his wife carry a tray containing a plate of freshly prepared toast and a cup of tea, from the kitchen to the dining. She placed it on the table and pulled out a seat, ready to devour.

He couldn't believe his eyes. His laptop on which he was studying the Bible almost slipped off his lap because his focus and attention were completely on his wife.

Ngozi knew her husband was staring at her but could not care any less. She sat down, said a word of prayer, and dug in.

“What are you doing?” Dan finally spoke. He had to be sure he wasn't hallucinating.

She ignored the question and continued with her meal.

“You heard me, Ngozi. What are you doing?” He picked his words one after the other, emphasizing the question.

“Having breakfast.” Ngozi wasn't in the mood for a fight.

“Why?” Dan had not been more confused in his entire life.

“Why not?” She tried to curtail her anger.

“Ngozi, you know we are meant to be fasting. God led us as a church to go on a three-day fast which begins today.” He tried to explain to her in the calmest way possible.

“And the Holy Spirit asked me to eat. I can't afford to disobey Him.” She continued eating her food.

“God is not an author of confusion, Ngozi. He can't ask us to fast and at the same time, tell you to have breakfast.”

“So are you saying I don't hear God again?” Ngozi could not take it anymore.

“That's not what I'm saying. All I'm saying is...”

“That is exactly what you are saying, Dan,” she cut in rudely. “As the senior pastor of the church, you are the only one that can hear God speak. Isn't it? You are the

only one that is God's child; the rest of us are His house helps, right?" She threw the sarcastic question at him.

"What is the meaning of that statement?" Dan was getting upset.

"You tell me? Why do you act like the all-knowing, holier-than-thou pastor?"

"Ngozi?" His tone spelt out anger.

"I don't know which God is speaking through you, definitely not the God I serve. You think you can hide forever?" She pushed her food away; the feelings that raged within her numbed her appetite. "You disgust me." She stood up and left the dining, leaving Dan speechless.

Dan didn't bother calling out to her or running after her; he knew what her utterances meant. His eyes remained glued to her as she walked away. His mind drifted off for a moment. He wondered how long she had known and why she never said anything until then. Before he could conceive his next move, his phone rang, jolting him back to reality.

He looked at the caller's ID; it was his assistant pastor.

"Hello, Pastor John..."

“Good morning, Pastor Dan. How are you and Pastor Mrs doing today?”

“We are great, all glory to God.” Dan wondered if there was any truth in that reply he just gave.

“That's great; I just wanted to remind you of the pastors' prayer meeting we'll be having today towards the convention. We decided to move it to 10 am because of the quarterly workers'prayer meeting that will be holding just before service later today.”

“Oh, that is very true,” Dan looked at his watch. It was 9:30 am. “I'll be on my way now. Thank you so much, Pastor John. I appreciate you.”

“We thank God, Sir,” Pastor John replied as he ended the call.

Dan shut down his laptop and packed it into its bag. He knew better than to leave the house without informing his wife. He left the sitting room of their rented three-bedroom bungalow, opened the door leading to the master bedroom, and as he had expected, Ngozi was sitting up in bed, distracting herself from reality by browsing on her phone. She heard him come in but refused to acknowledge his presence

“I'm going to church; I have a meeting with the

pastors.”

“Okay.” Her response could not have been any colder.

He picked the keys to their black BMW on his bedside drawer and left without saying another word.

As soon as he turned to leave, Ngozi hissed. She waited till she heard the sound of the gate close before she stood up and went back to the dining to pack her plate from the table. She kept the leftover food in the fridge. She then proceeded to their fairly large sitting room and sat down on a single sofa. Her eyes strayed to their wedding picture hanging on the wall opposite where she sat. Her mind traveled years back.

She met Dan at a mutual friend's birthday party during her service year. It wasn't love at first sight for her - probably because her mind was clouded by her fiancé at the time, Richmond. Richmond was all she wanted in a man and more - a medical doctor who loved the Lord, good-looking and caring. Ngozi was so grateful to God for Richmond. She was confident he was an answer to prayers until a year into their relationship when she took a pre-employment medical test - a necessary procedure at the bank she applied to after her

service year. She took the tests like every other prospective staff, and all her results came out fine. The laboratory attendant asked her to come back the next day for her Hemoglobin Electrophoresis result, which she was sure was AA. All her life, she believed both her parents were AA. There was no chance she could be anything else. To her utmost surprise, as she opened the test result the next day, she was hit with the shock of her life.

She didn't believe it one bit. She retook the test in two different labs and got the same result: AS. She was devastated. On several occasions, Richmond had expressed his gratitude to God that she was AA. He had told her how things didn't work out in his previous relationship because of the genotype issue. Ngozi knew what this meant for herself and Richmond, but couldn't come to terms with it. She didn't even know how to tell him. For a week, she remained in denial. She fought with the reality of the situation and wished it was all a dream. With time, she had to let go and tell him about the result of the test. He was shattered but took it like a grown-up. He didn't blame her but made it clear that their relationship could not go any further.

She cried like a baby because she could not think of any man better than him. Letting go was the hardest thing she had ever done. She gradually came to terms with the fact that she could not hold on to a man who had moved on. She decided to do likewise. About two months after the breakup, she met Dan again. He came to her bank to complain to the bank's customer care which coincidentally was her unit. Her sight was no longer clouded by anyone - unlike the first time they met. On the other hand, Dan had admired her since they first met at the birthday party but got to know she had someone. Thus, he kept his distance having no idea that her status had changed.

He saw her seated at the desk; this was a pleasant surprise to him. He met three customers who were also waiting for customer care to attend to them. Dan knew he would either talk to Ngozi or her colleague, depending on whose desk was free.

“Next customer,” Ngozi said without taking her gaze off her computer.

He looked at Ngozi's colleague. Her desk was busy!

The three customers he had been attended

to, he was next.

Excitedly, Dan stood up, walked towards the service desk, and sat in front of Ngozi.

“Good morning, welcome to Talic Bank; how can I be of help to you?” She asked politely with a faint smile.

Dan couldn't stop smiling.

Ngozi got confused. She didn't understand why a stranger would smile broadly at her. “I'm sorry, have we met?” She had to ask finally.

“Yes!” His answer was resounding. “At Fola's birthday party last year.” He tried to juggle her memory. “Fola introduced us to each other, and we chatted briefly.”

“Oh my goodness, I'm so sorry.” She covered her face, a little embarrassed.

“Please don't be.”

“Can you imagine? I can't remember your name. I'm terrible with names.”

“Daniel, Daniel Bamidele, but my friends call me Dan,” he said with a smile.

It was at that moment Ngozi took in his good looks; his well starched short sleeve buba and sokoto sat

perfectly on his well-built frame.

“Nice to meet you, Daniel. I'm Ngozi.” She stretched her hand for a handshake.

“Oh, I know, I'm pretty good with names.” They shook hands and laughed.

“So, how can I be of help to you?” Her smile had swiftly graduated from faint to pleasant.

“I made a POS transaction three days ago at a mall. The transaction was not successful- however, the bank debited me.” He furrowed his brows in concern.

“Okay, fill this form.” She placed an empty form before him. The accounts department should reverse the transaction within seven working days.”

“Alright.” He began inputting his details into the form. Suddenly, he paused and looked up at Ngozi like a thought had crossed his mind. “If you don't mind, I wouldn't want us to lose touch with each other. Can we exchange numbers, please?”

Ngozi smiled. “That's fine by me.”

Dan gave her his phone to enter her number while he continued to fill the form. He had no intentions of delaying other customers. Ngozi typed her number and returned the phone to Dan, who beeped her in return

and saved her number. Upon doing this, he stood up to leave.

“It was nice seeing you again.”

“Same here.”

“Have a great day.”

Later that day, upon getting home, Dan decided to do a little surfing of the internet. His mind had been on Ngozi. He caught himself thinking countless times about the ten-minute conversation they had and deliberately had to caution himself not to get familiar, especially since she had someone. He wasn't ready to be entangled in a web of emotions with someone who didn't share a mutual affection. However, to satisfy his curiosity about getting to know her more, he thought to browse about her. The only challenge was that he didn't know her full name. 'There'll be thousands of 'Ngozis' on Facebook,' he wondered. Seeing that he didn't have a choice, he decided to give it a try. He opened the Facebook app on his phone and searched for Ngozi.

Just as he expected, different Facebook account profiles came up, but on closer observation, he recognized the profile picture of the third Ngozi on the list, and it had one mutual friend. The picture looked a

bit like the Ngozi he was searching for, but he wasn't sure. He opened the profile and had a better look at the picture. It was a younger version of Ngozi- she must have been at least ten years younger. He looked at her profile and found only two images.

'She doesn't seem to be a Facebook person,' he concluded. Though he was a little disappointed, he was glad he had discovered her surname: Uchendu.

He rushed to Instagram and searched out 'Ngozi Uchendu.' He found many accounts with that name but tried to scan through. Finally, he found her account- however, it was in private mode.

Another disappointment.

He decided to send a request and finally dropped his phone to carry out some house chores. He couldn't believe he was stalking her. From where were the feelings springing suddenly?

He took off his shoes, changed into casual clothes, and headed off to the kitchen to fix himself something to eat. He lived with a friend in a two-bedroom flat. His flatmate, Kelvin, had not returned from work. Knowing the kind of person Kelvin was, Dan dared not cook for only himself. Dan knew how much

Kelvin loved food, and he wasn't ready to hear Kelvin lament about how hungry he was. He decided to boil rice enough for the both of them. At least, Kelvin wouldn't have to bug him for not cooking for two.

Ngozi, on the other hand, had not gotten home from work. She was still on her way from work, no thanks to the infamous Lagos traffic. Not having a personal car, she either had to take public transport or tag along with her neighbor, who passed by her office every morning. Usually, her neighbor would drop her off before continuing to his place of work. After work, she either took a taxi or a bus, depending on how financially buoyant she was. While on her way back, she remembered the annoying incident she had that morning with her neighbor, Mr. Godwin. He was a married man with two kids. His wife was a caterer who worked from home. Thus, most times, he was responsible for dropping the children at school. The children would sit at the back while Ngozi would sit in front. After dropping off the children, there always seemed to be an awkward silence between them. Ngozi didn't like the awkward silence, so she always tried to start up a conversation.

Earlier that day, immediately after dropping off

his children, Mr. Godwin initiated the conversation. It appeared as if he had been eagerly waiting for them to be alone so he could say what was on his mind.

“You look good today Ngozi,” he started. He perused her and allowed his eyes to dance around her briefly. She wore what she wore every other day- the Talic Bank uniform, which comprised a white shirt tucked into a black skirt and a red jacket, placed neatly on her thighs.

On noticing his roving eyes, Ngozi felt uncomfortable. “Thank... thank you, Sir,” She stammered.

The middle-aged man smiled, revealing his uneven dentition. “You are welcome, my dear.”

Ngozi knew something was wrong with what was going on and could quickly figure out the conversation's direction.

“Would you like me to pick you up during your lunch break to take you out for a treat?” He offered with a rather irritating smile.

Ngozi let out an uncomfortable chuckle. “That won't be necessary, Sir.” She tried to fake a smile.

“You can drop the 'Sir' and just call me Godwin.”

He placed his hand on her shoulder.

She looked at his hand and slowly allowed her eyes to scan him from his bald head to his potbelly. The man filled her with disgust. Good enough, he got the message and removed his hand.

“I’ll take you anywhere you want. You name it”.

Ngozi couldn't take it anymore; she was obviously fed up. She decided to ask him to drop her off immediately, even though she had not arrived at her workstation. She preferred to walk to the bank than to spend another minute with Godwin and his flirtatious ways.

“I’m fine here, Sir,” she replied firmly.

“You don't want me to take you to work?” He acted as if he didn't understand what was going on.

“No, Sir, not today, not any other day.” She came down from the car immediately it came to a halt. “Maybe you should consider taking your wife for a treat,” she added, fuming as she slammed the door and started walking.

“If you change your mind, I'm always available.” Mr. Godwin had fast become the most annoying man she ever met.

She ignored him and continued walking. When she saw him drive off, she brought out her phone from her bag and ordered a taxi. The delay of about fifteen minutes made her get to work some minutes late. She didn't like being late. Mr. Godwin's flirtatious advances succeeded in delaying her arrival at work. She vowed never to have anything to do with him again.

The evening traffic had begun to clear up. Ngozi checked the time on her wristwatch; she had spent the last thirty-five minutes in traffic. To kill boredom, she brought out her phone from her bag. There were some notifications on her homepage. She saw a Facebook friend request from a 'Daniel Bamidele' and an Instagram request from a 'DanOBam.' She guessed it was the same Daniel she met earlier today at the bank. Being more frequent on Instagram, she opened it first and saw his profile.

He wasn't the picture-taking type. Most of his posts were either Biblical or inspirational quotes. He seemed to like talking about topics on righteousness, pleasing God, and following Jesus Christ. Ngozi admired his dedication to his faith. She agreed with all his posts, and her spirit was lifted, reading them. She caught

herself liking them then realized she hadn't even accepted his request. She did so and hoped to hear from him soon.

She loved God and wanted nothing short of a man who lived for Him. She had various suitors vying for her attention- however, by merely engaging in conversations with them, she could pick the signals of their lack of interest in things of God. They either cut God out of the equation, or didn't seem to match her spiritual zeal. The only exception was Richmond, her ex. Her unfortunate break-up with Richmond helped her realize two things- the fact that one has peace or is led by God to be in a relationship with someone doesn't mean the relationship won't have hitches or can't end in a break-up. The second is that a breakup is not the end of the world. Though her break-up with Richmond was painful, Ngozi knew that in the end, she'd look back and smile. Her confidence was in God's promise to give her a future and hope, according to Jeremiah 29:11.

When she got home, she said a word of prayer to God, thanking Him for how her day went, and committing the rest of the day unto His hands. She changed into something lighter and freer before going

into the kitchen to scout for what to eat.

She lived in a three-bedroom twin bungalow with her aunty and cousins. A fence separated the neighboring building which belonged to Mr. Godwin's family. Their paths only crossed outside the compound.

Her Aunty, a middle-aged Igbo woman in her late fifties, who was still at work, often frequented the United States (US) where her husband was based. They had three children- Chinyere, Chinwe, and Chigozie. The couple agreed to bring the children to Nigeria because they could already see traces of notorious behaviors in the children and were concerned that these children would break beyond repairs if they tarried longer in the US.

On getting to the kitchen, she met Chinyere, the oldest child. She was eighteen years.

“What are you preparing?” Ngozi could smell something delicious.

“Jollof rice. Mum phoned and asked me to prepare it before she arrives.” Chinyere still had the American accent but was now well-grounded in the Nigerian culture.

“It smells good. You are getting better with

cooking .” Ngozi could see a lot of improvement and positive changes.

“Aww, thank you.” Chinyere smiled. “Could you please help me taste if the seasoning is okay?”

Ngozi took a tablespoon and tasted the rice. “It’s just perfect. It needs a little more water, though.”

After a few minutes, the food was ready. Ngozi and her cousins ate and kept their mum’s portion in a food warmer. After the meal, Ngozi retired to her room and slept off. It was a phone call around 9 pm that woke her up. It was an unknown number – hence, her hesistance to pick. However, when the phone rang a second time, she picked up.

“Hello.” Sleep was still audible in her voice.

“Hi, I’m so sorry. Is this a bad time?” the person sounded polite.

“Who is this?” She was more concerned about who was speaking than how polite he sounded.

“It’s Daniel; we met today at the bank. We exchanged contacts.”

“Hi Daniel,” she sat up in bed, wiping sleep off her eyes. “I got so busy with other customers and forgot to save your number.” She explained.

“It's fine.”

There was an awkward moment of silence.

Daniel quickly broke it by asking, “How was your day?”

“It was okay.” She remembered the Mr. Godwin incident in the morning, then added, “I mean, I've had better days, but I'm thankful all the same.”

“Sounds like an eventful one.” Daniel seemed interested.

“Nah. Please don't let me bore you; how was yours?”

“It was great. Meeting you was the climax of it all for me.” He smiled. “Anyway, I just called to check up on you.” He didn't want the conversation to get too long, seeing as Ngozi had someone. He intended to keep things platonic.

“Thank you, I appreciate it.”

“Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.”

They ended the call.

Ngozi heard the bell ring. She was immediately jolted back from memory lane to reality.

“Who could it be?” She wondered as she stood up and walked towards the gate. “It's morning, for heavens sakes. Can't I have my day to myself?” She was not in the mood to entertain visitors.

“Who is it?” She asked as she approached the gate.

“Good morning ma, it's Veronica, Pastor's secretary from church. I've been trying to call you, but you weren't picking.” There was panic in her voice.

Ngozi opened the gate. “What is it? I hope there is no problem.”

“I'm afraid there is Ma, Pastor was involved in an accident. He is at the hospital.” She broke the news, tears streaming down her face.

“Jesus!” Ngozi exclaimed. “Accident? How? Where? Which hospital is he?” Her head was spinning, her legs almost giving way.

“Please follow me, Ma.” They both rushed into the taxi Veronica came with, and the driver drove off.

Chapter TWO

It was a sunny Monday morning. As the Medical Director of Total Care Specialist Hospital, Dr. Florence Abayomi didn't have to get to work as early as the younger doctors who worked under her. Florence was in her late fifties and had practiced medicine for eleven years.

Her ward rounds were usually at 9 am every day—except Saturdays and Sundays when she only came to work if the doctor on call couldn't handle what was on ground or if she had critically ill patients who she needed to monitor closely. She was always a phone call away from anyone who needed her at the hospital. She knew the value of lives placed in her care and did everything in her capacity to ensure no one died under her watch.

She was always punctual. It usually took her about forty-five minutes to get to the hospital. However, she had spent over two hours on the road on this

particular day, hopelessly trapped in traffic. She looked at the time on the dashboard; it was twenty-five minutes to twelve. By this time, traffic was always light, people were at work, and children in school, but today was an unfortunate exception.

The car driver behind her got down and walked to the front to see what was happening. When he returned, he was shaking his head.

“Chai!” he exclaimed as he walked past Dr. Florence's car.

“Good morning,” she popped her head out of the car window and tried to get the young man's attention.

She was successful as he turned around to look at her. “Good morning o.” He said in a typical Nigerian's manner.

“Please, what is going on in front?”

“Accident o, one cement trailer hit one black BMW. E be like say they don remove the driver from the car and take am go hospital. Na the car them dey try remove from the road”, he replied her in pidgin English.

“Oh no. I hope the man will be alright,” She said to herself. As a medical doctor, she knew from her medical experience that road traffic accidents caused

many preventable deaths in Nigeria. She had also lost her twenty-four-year-old son to the cold hands of death. He was returning from a friend's wedding one fateful Saturday evening. He had asked his mum if he could drive her car, but she had refused.

"I might need to go to the hospital to see a patient," She told him without looking up from her laptop.

"But you just might not need to."

She didn't respond. Her silence meant 'don't disturb me.'

"Okay, ma, I'll take public transport." He left.

That was the last time she saw her son alive. She got a call later that night.

"Hello, Kayode, where are you?" She shouted at the caller. "It's past 9 pm. Do you want to give me hypertension?"

"Good evening ma," a male voice which wasn't her son's, spoke.

"Good evening, please who is this, and where is my son?" Thoughts ran through her mind. "Had he been kidnapped? Is this one of his expensive pranks?"

"I'm calling from Godcares hospital. I'm afraid I

have bad news, ma'am."

"What do you mean you have bad news?" Being a doctor, she was well aware that bad news from the hospital is undoubtedly bad news. "If this is a joke or something, please stop it right now." She could feel her hands trembling and her feet about to give way.

"No, ma, I'm sorry this is not a joke. A young man that we believe is your son was involved in a motor accident and unfortunately, he was brought in dead a few minutes ago. The ID from the wallet informs that his name is Olukayode Abayomi. We searched the contacts on his phone and got your number. We'd like you to come and identify the body, ma." The man on the phone explained in the calmest way possible. Remorse was evident in his voice.

The conversation grew silent as many questions crossed Florence's mind.

Could this be true?

Is this a prank?

Words seemed stuck in her throat, as she was unable to utter any word.

"Hello ma, are you there?"

That was not what she wanted to hear. Where

was the “you have been pranked” her ears desperately craved?

“Ma, I understand that this is a shock. I'm so sorry for your loss. I'll text you the address of our hospital. We are open 24/7.”

After a few moments of silence, the man ended the call.

'Shock' did not do justice in describing how she felt. Overwhelming darkness swallowed her up immediately. She wished she could wake up from this nightmare, but all she got was further confirmation that it was real. Her phone beeped; it was the text that contained the hospital's address.

Kayode was all she had. She had divorced his father over ten years ago and had since then, poured her all into her son. She remembered her last moment with him, and for the first time, it hit her, “If I had allowed him to take my car, he'd still be alive,” she thought as tears rolled down her cheeks. She blamed herself bitterly for what happened. There was nothing anyone could say or do to appease her.

She went so deep down that lonely lane of grief and sorrow. The days and months that followed were

horrific. She wished more than anything not to wake up each time she closed her eyes to sleep. That was even if she was able to sleep. She'd have preferred to be the one dead, not him.

In those lonely moments, she began to question God's existence. All her life, she had believed in God. She had served Him the best way she could. Brought up in the way of the Lord, she saw no reason to depart from it until now. She couldn't understand why God would repay her this way.

She had experienced huge storms in the past; one major one was the heartbreaking divorce she experienced with Kayode's father, Babatunde. As a 31 year old single woman, she was a victim of societal and parental pressure because she had no suitor, neither was there any hope of her getting married soon. As a result, she got desperate to have someone and gradually lowered her Bible-based standards, hoping it would result in her getting a husband. Unfortunately for her, it did. She met Babatunde who found her attractive. He wasn't all she had hoped for in a man- despite his seeming good qualities, he did not fear God. Florence kept on making excuses for his actions and inactions just

so that she wouldn't lose him and return to being single. He proposed marriage barely after three months, and in less than six months of meeting him, they were married.

The first few years of marriage were relatively uneventful. Florence took in almost immediately after the wedding and gave birth to their first child, Kayode. Little did they know that Kayode would be their only child together. After the boy clocked two years, they both felt it was time to increase the family size, but attempts at it proved abortive; the more they tried, the more frustrated they became. After three miscarriages within the space of a year, she decided she couldn't bear the heartbreaks that the loss of her unborn children brought.

Babatunde was however, not in agreement. He wanted more children. He believed that as an African man, having one child was not enough. Their disagreement on this matter marked the beginning of the end of their marriage. Gradually, they started becoming distant, so much that he began to use work as an excuse to be away from home. A couple of years later, he applied for, and got an international job and started traveling out of the country more frequently.

Kayode, on the other hand, was fast growing to become a young man with no father figure in his life. Every time Florence called to ask when Babatunde would be coming home, his excuse always revolved around his busy job. Florence got frustrated. She never bargained for any of these- the challenges of being a single parent, being married to a husband who was hardly home, the baggage of loneliness that came with it, and having a son grow up without his father.

She got tired of calling him. After almost three months of not speaking, she decided to call to ask the usual; when he was coming home. It rang the first time, but he didn't pick. After a few minutes, she called again, and on the second ring, someone responded.

"Hello, please, who is this?" a female voice with an American accent asked.

Florence looked at the number she was dialing, wondering if she had dialed the wrong number. It was the right one. "Errm, I'm Mrs. Florence Ayero; I'll like to speak to my husband, Babatunde Ayero".

"I'm sorry, but you have the wrong number."

"No, I'm sure..." the call ended. Florence looked at her phone in utmost surprise. "What just happened?"

She asked herself. “Maybe the network connections mixed up the lines.” She convinced herself that the problem was from the telecommunication company involved, not her husband.

She called again, and this time around, he picked up. “Hello,” he sounded in a hurry.

“I just called your number, and a woman picked up,” Florence started.

“What woman? Maybe it was the network.”

“Same thing I said.” Florence was relieved that it was all an error in network communication.

“Honey, someone called your number asking to speak to her husband.” Florence heard the same female voice speaking in the background.

“Who was that?” Florence asked.

“No one.” There was uneasiness in his voice.

“Tunde, you are hiding something from me.” She was so sure of that.

“Florence, please don't start.”

“Don't start what?” She was boiling in rage. “I keep asking you when you will come home, but you keep giving me excuses. What exactly is going on?”

“What is going on?” He echoed her question

back at her.

“Yes, tell me what is going on right now.” She demanded an explanation.

“Fine! If you must know, I am married with two children.” He spat the answer at her.

“What?!” Florence couldn't believe her ears.

“You heard me. This woman here could give me kids and not just a kid.” He rubbed it in her face.

His words pierced through her heart, shattering it into pieces. It was bad enough that he got married to a white woman while they were still married; he dared to rub it in her face that she couldn't have a second child for him. She ended the call and vowed never to forgive him for what he did. She poured all her love and attention on Kayode. She believed that he'd grow up and she'll one day eat the fruit of her labour. Despite all these, she never stopped being a Christian and kept serving God in church. Although she believed in God, she locked Him out of interfering in the issue of her forgiving her ex husband. Her made was made up on the matter.

Kayode's death, however, gravely shook her faith in God. It seemed like the straw that broke the camel's back. No storm she passed through could

compare with this. Florence maintained in her heart that there was either no God or that He was wicked and didn't care. She stopped going to church and did away with anything that represented God. The war against God had begun, and no one could stop it.

Two years later, there she was, a few meters away from an accident site. She felt a fresh surge of pain in her heart; tears welled up in her eyes, but she quickly pushed them back. She wasn't ready to breakdown, definitely not in public. She hoped whoever was involved in the accident would survive and not end up as her son did. She noticed the road protocols move the car away from the road; in minutes, the traffic cleared up, and she continued her journey to the hospital.

When Florence got to the hospital, she explained the road situation to the medical team on call, after which she went on to see the new patients. Work was her way of getting away from herself, her hurts, and her pain. She tried as much as possible to keep herself busy because she knew idleness would only send her down memory lane. Still, no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't escape the thoughts of her late son.

By the time she finished reviewing the new

patients and a few other patients, it was some minutes after three. She sat in her office and allowed her thoughts to stray. She wished her son was still here. She imagined what his wife and children would have looked like. Before she knew it, the tears came gushing down. In that moment, there was a knock on her door.

“One minute please,” she quickly reached for some tissue and wiped her face, but it didn't do justice. Her eyes were still red.

“Come in.” She tried to compose herself.

The person at the door came in. it was Dr. Ola, a man in his early thirties. He had worked as a junior colleague to Dr. Florence for the past four months. Prior to that, he had worked with a different consultant.

“Are you alright, Ma?”, he asked when he saw her tear-stained eyes and the tissue in her hand.

“I'm fine, thank you”. She always knew how to put up an act like all was well. Dr. Ola knew better than to question her further when she had said she was okay.

“There is a case I'll like to discuss with you, ma,” he began.

“How many times have I told you that patients are people, not cases?” She corrected him. “Anybody can

become a patient, even we doctors.”

“I’m sorry, Ma. There is a patient that I’ll like to discuss with you,” he corrected himself.

“Go on.” She had snapped back to work mode.

“It is Mrs. Adebowale, a 72-year-old woman- I am managing her for Hyperosmolar Hyperglycemic State. She is hypertensive, so I commenced her on antihypertensive.” Though he was the newest in the team, he seemed to know his onions.

“Okay, and how is her BP now?”

“Much better but still on the high side. It was 140/90 this morning, but is being monitored.”

“Good. How is her sugar level?”

“The fasting this morning was 140.”

“Still high, though. Keep monitoring it and let me know if anything new develops.”

“Okay ma, thank you.”

Dr. Florence turned on her laptop, which was on her desk. She noticed the young doctor was still standing in front of her.

“Anything else?” She wondered if there was something they hadn’t discussed. He seemed like he had something on his mind.

“Emm ma... Nothing ma. I'll keep you posted about her.”

“Good.”

He left the office. He wasn't pleased with himself. “Why couldn't I just speak?” He thought as he walked away from Dr. Florence's office to the doctor's call room where the other doctors stayed.

There were two doctors present: a male doctor, Dr. Shittu, and a female doctor, Dr. Davis. The medium-sized room had two tables with chairs and a bunk where the doctors rested.

Dr. Shittu was lying on the lower bunk browsing on his phone while Dr. Davis was seated by one of the tables having her lunch.

“Why the long face?” She asked just before taking a spoon of rice.

“What do you guys think of Dr. Abayomi?” Dr. Ola wondered why she had been crying.

“She's okay, but I can't say I know much about her. She doesn't allow anyone to get too close to her,” Dr. Davis answered.

“Why are you asking?” Dr. Shittu dropped his phone and turned to Dr. Ola.

He didn't think it was right to tell them he saw her crying. "I just wanted to know what's up with her," he said, brushing away the question.

"Well, she mostly keeps to herself and always likes being professional," Dr. Davis said.

"Yeah, true. But I also know Dr. Abayomi is divorced, and I heard she lost her only child some years ago. I don't know how true that is though," Dr. Shittu added before picking up his phone.

On hearing that, Dr. Ola felt so much empathy for her. "That explains why I find myself so drawn to her and feeling a burden in my spirit concerning her."

"That's so sad. It is well with her."

There was no response. The other doctors didn't seem half as concerned as he was.

"Got to go, guys, need to review a patient," he uttered as he left the room.

Chapter THREE

Ngozi and Veronica arrived at The Light hospital in the shortest possible time. The hospital was close to the accident site. Ngozi jumped down from the car and rushed to the reception without waiting for Veronica.

“Good morning,” She greeted the staff at the reception desk. “My husband was brought in here this morning. His name is Mr. Bamidele.”

“Okay, Ma, please take a seat. The doctor is attending to him. Once he is through, I will let you know.” She tried to explain to Ngozi in the calmest way possible.

“But please, how is he?” Ngozi couldn't wait to find out.

“I'm sorry, ma...”

Ngozi didn't let her finish her sentence before

exclaiming, “Jesus, why me?” She threw her hands on her head. By this time, Veronica had come in and was standing beside her.

“No Ma, what I was about to say is I'm sorry that at I don't have much information about his case. He was brought in during my colleague's shift – not mine.”

“Okay, okay,” Ngozi took in a deep breath in between sobs. “So he will be alright?”

“The doctor is doing his best, Ma. Just have a seat, please.” She pointed to the empty chairs at the reception.

“Ma,” Veronica placed her hand on her shoulder. “Let's just sit down and wait. All we can do now is pray for him.” She directed Ngozi to a seat.

After Ngozi sat down, she looked up at Veronica. Ngozi had always been the paranoid type; this time around, she had a strong feeling this wasn't mere paranoia. She suspected something was wrong as an idea had just occurred to her. “Wait, how come you are the one here? My husband was on his way to a meeting with other pastors. How come none of the pastors are here?”

“He was brought in here by a good Samaritan. I

only called Pastor to remind him about his meeting, but the good Samaritan picked up and explained the situation to me. I was so worried, so I rushed down here immediately,” Veronica explained.

“Wow! May God bless the man for us. Is he still around?”

“No, Ma. He left immediately I arrived.”

“Have you informed the pastors?”

“Yes, ma, they are on their way.”

“Oh, Jesus!” Ngozi buried her head into her palms, “please save my husband. Don't let him die.” She remembered the condition at which they left things in the morning, and fear gripped her. “My husband must not die, Lord, not like this.”

Two young men rushed into the hospital and headed straight for the receptionist desk. Ngozi still bent her head in prayers but she noticed Veronica stood up as soon as the men walked in. Ngozi looked up and saw two pastors from the church - Pastor John and Pastor Adams.

They turned as soon as Veronica called their names.

“Oh, good morning, Pastor Ngozi; we didn't even see you there. We rushed down as soon as we heard. How is he?” Pastor John asked, as they walked towards where she sat.

“They said the doctor is attending to him.”

“It is well in Jesus name,” Pastor Adams said. “Let's just say a prayer of agreement that he will be well,” he suggested as he held out his hands.

They all joined hands, and he led the prayers.

As they were rounding off, the doctor walked into the reception. He had his sleeves rolled up and his tie hanging low and tucked in between the third and fourth button space. On his neck was a loosely tied face mask which he wore while attending to Dan.

“Good afternoon,” he greeted the four of them and faced Veronica. Please can we discuss his situation in my office?”

“Me?” Veronica pointed at herself.

“Aren't you the wife?” He seemed a little confused.

“No, sir.” She was embarrassed.

“I am Mrs. Bamidele,” Ngozi spoke up and

stepped forward.

“Oh, I'm so sorry for making such an assumption. I thought this woman was the wife because she was here from the beginning,” he explained. “Please follow me.” He turned around, and Ngozi followed him.

When they got into the office, he realized he was still putting on the facemask. He quickly removed it and threw it into the bin.

The suspense was killing Ngozi. She knew one thing; the fact that he didn't come to meet them with his head downcast meant that her husband was alive. She just wasn't sure of his present state.

“Please have your seat,” he said politely just before sitting down.

“Doctor, please, how is he?” Ngozi sat at the edge of the chair.

“He was unconscious when the nurses brought him into the emergency ward this morning. He has regained consciousness, but he lost a considerable amount of blood. He also sustained some lacerations to the scalp and a fractured left femur. We have stopped the bleeding, sutured the cuts, and placed his leg in a cast.

He'll have it on for the next three months.

“Is that all, Doctor?” Ngozi raised her hands in excitement.

“I'm afraid I don't understand that question.” He seemed confused.

“My husband is fine.” She jumped to her feet. “Hallelujah, God, you are faithful.” She was almost going on her knees when the doctor stopped her.

“Mrs. Bamidele, please take it easy.”

She composed herself. “When can I see my husband?” She asked as she took her seat.

“He is still dizzy as a result of the anesthesia. Once it wears off, you'll be able to see him.”

“Thank you so much, doctor; I'm so grateful.”

“You are welcome.”

Just as she was about to get up to leave, she remembered something. “Please, can I get the name or contact of the gentleman who brought my husband in?” She wanted to appreciate him.

“There was no gentleman. It was only the young lady, Veronica, that brought him in. When she filled the form we give to all new patients, she indicated she was

the wife. That's why I thought she was his wife," he explained.

"She did that? Why?" Ngozi was beyond puzzled.

"I guess that she didn't understand the form. If there is no other thing, I'll have to leave now. I have a ward round." He stood up.

Ngozi wasn't convinced. She strongly suspected foul play. One of them was Veronica's lie about the good samaritan. She stood up and left the consulting room. As she walked to the reception to wait for her husband to recover from the effect of the anesthesia, she couldn't help but wonder what exactly was going on. The bright countenance she had after receiving the news of her husband's wellbeing had turned into a worrisome one.

The pastors and Veronica rushed at her as she stepped into the reception. "How is he? Hope all is well?" They all echoed.

"He is resting; the doctor said he'll be fine." She smiled to put their worried hearts to rest.

"Thank God!" they all exclaimed.

Ngozi studied Veronica's countenance. The

young lady seemed disturbed as they all sat down.

“I appreciate all your efforts and prayers, and I'm sure my husband does too. I, however, think it won't be necessary for you to stay. Why don't you return and continue with the meeting while I wait here till he wakes up?” She suggested.

“Are you sure, pastor?” Pastor John asked with concern. “We don't mind waiting.”

Ngozi knew he was sincere, but she needed to be alone. “I'm sure you don't,” she smiled, “but it won't be necessary.”

“Okay, Ma, if you insist. Our regards to him. We'll continue praying.” They all stood up.

Veronica avoided eye contact with Ngozi. “Take care, Ma.” She was the first to leave.

After they all left, Ngozi reclined in her chair. She gave a heavy sigh. She was getting fed up with the heartache her husband was bringing to her and the family. First, the friction they had not yet trashed out, and now she had a gut feeling about something else. She didn't want to believe it, so she pushed it aside. She rested her head backward then her mind gradually

drifted off.

A week after they exchanged numbers, Daniel decided to give Ngozi another call. He was intentional about not being too close or friendly since she had someone, or so he thought. While on the phone, they talked about different things, and one topic led to another. Daniel found himself about to ask Ngozi a pretty personal question.

“Speaking of Facebook,” he began, “can I ask you a personal question?” Deep within, he hoped he wasn’t crossing his boundaries.

“Hmmm,” Ngozi thought for a moment. “Only if it isn’t too personal.” She smiled.

“I don’t think it is.” He paused for a moment. “I was wondering, your relationship status says you are single, yet you have someone. Is there a reason for this?”

Ngozi burst into laughter. “Is that the personal question?”

Dan was silent; he wondered if he had said something wrong.

“Who still updates their Facebook status? It’s

been like that since I joined Facebook.”

Dan was a bit disappointed. That wasn't the reply he was hoping to hear.

“Plus, it's correct; I'm single.” She finally said it.

Dan sat up from his lying position. “Are you for real?” He exclaimed with excitement in his voice.

“I don't get?”

“I mean,” he cleared his throat and said in a lower and more solemn tone. “I'm so sorry to hear that. I had no idea.”

“It's fine, it was painful at first, but God has healed me. I believe strongly that all things work together for the good of them that love God.”

“I agree with you.” His tone was back to normal.

The conversation went on for some minutes, and they finally said their goodnights.

Day after day, they got closer. They graduated from audio calls to video calls and then hanging out. Dan, being the mature Christian he was, didn't allow things to go too far before defining the nature of their relationship.

He told her how he felt about her and how dear she was to him. He made clear his intentions to marry her

if she agreed. He crowned it all by telling her his convictions, having spoken to God about her before taking the step he took.

Ngozi sort of saw it coming. Nothing he said took her by surprise; instead, she was grateful he didn't waste time making his intentions known. She too, had prayed about it and his convictions were in sync with hers. She, however, still took her time before telling him.

After about two weeks, the relationship was official. Thankfully, Dan was AA, so genotype was not an issue for them. Like every other relationship, they had their fair share of challenges that they overcame, making them stronger and more resilient.

After two and a half years of courting, they got married. Along the line, Dan became the senior pastor of their church, and things had been going pretty well in their eleven years of marriage until some months ago when he started acting differently.

That Sunday, they both returned from church exhausted. A constant burden on their hearts that topped their prayer list was financial provision. Their first child, Segun, had just entered secondary school. He

was in a boarding school, and the principal had called the Bamideles not less than five times, reminding them they were still owing. The principal suggested that Segun shouldn't resume the second half of the term if they hadn't paid up their son's school fees by mid-term.

With mid-term being only some days away, the pressure mounted exponentially. Though they both hardly spoke about it, it was evident in all they did. Ngozi was no longer working in a bank but took a part-time job at a private firm that had not paid its workers in over four months. Dan was a full-time pastor and was paid monthly by the church. However, demands seemed to quickly outweigh supply, and things were getting more demanding and more challenging for them as a family of four.

After church that day, their second child and only girl, Seun, came down from the car. She carried her dad's Bible, journal, and whatever other item he brought back from church – which was her custom. This time around, it was a brown envelope with the church's name on it. As she picked up the three items from the back of the car where she sat, Dan scolded her and asked her to

drop them. Both Ngozi and the little girl were surprised.

Dan realized he had just created a scene and quickly became defensive in an aggressive manner. “The last few times you carried my Bible, it fell, and now the pages are tearing off. Hand it over; I’ll carry it myself.” He stretched his hand to the back and collected all the items from Seun. “Maybe when you become more careful, I’ll allow you to carry it.”

Ngozi witnessed the whole incident and felt Dan acted rather strangely. She convinced herself that it was the financial burden he carried that made him so sensitive.

As they got into the house, Dan placed his Bible on the center table but put the envelope in his pocket. Ngozi didn’t read any meaning to his actions. She knew if her husband had anything he wanted her to see, he’d show her, so she took her mind off it.

The next day, Dan returned in the evening full of smiles. “Sweetheart, God has done it!” He exclaimed to his wife, who was in the kitchen.

“What has He done?” Ngozi joined him in the sitting room with an apron hung on her neck.

“God of the 11th hour has shown up for us. I've found a way to pay Segun's school fees!”

“Hallelujah!” She jumped on her husband. “Thank You, Jesus.” She was close to tears. **We have not been put to shame, all thanks to God. .**”

“God is faithful.”

“Oh yes, He is. Tell me, how did it happen?” Ngozi was all ears.

“When God moves, you don't question him, my dear,” Dan chirped and took his seat on the three-seater.

Ngozi was not satisfied with that answer. “I'm not questioning Him, Honey; I just want to know how He did it.”

“What matters most is that He did it.” Dan was becoming aggressive again, similar to the way he acted towards their daughter the previous day.

She didn't want anything that would spoil the happy atmosphere the news had brought, so she didn't push further. She knew something was wrong but couldn't place a finger on it.

That was the first of several mysterious provisions. Any time Ngozi probed about the source,

Dan became aggressive.

One particular Sunday, an elderly woman walked up to Ngozi and greeted her warmly after church. For many years, the woman had been a committed member of their church. She appreciated Ngozi and her husband for their faithful service in God's vineyard.

She brought out a white envelope; on it was the name of the church. "I'd have loved to see the pastor and to give him this directly, but he is in a meeting. Please accept my little contribution towards the upcoming convention." She handed over the envelope to Ngozi.

Full of gratitude, Ngozi collected the envelope and said a word of prayer for the woman. She opened the envelope and saw the crisp one thousand-naira notes. Without wasting time, she gave it to Pastor John, the assistant pastor.

"Please help me hand it over to my husband. It's Mrs. Ashimolowo's contribution towards the upcoming convention."

On their way home, they branched the petrol station to buy fuel. When Dan was about to pay, he

dipped his hand into his pocket and brought out two crisp one thousand-naira notes. Ngozi didn't want to believe those notes came out of the envelope that Mrs. Ashimolowo gave to the church. She looked at Dan's pocket and saw a part of the envelope hanging out. The same envelope Mrs. Ashimolowo gave her. Her heart sank with disappointment.

“So this is where the 'provision' has been coming from,” She thought to herself. She did not address the matter there and then because their daughter and a church member were in the car. She waited for the right time; Monday morning when Seun had gone to school. She and Dan were home alone. Ngozi was fully aware that her husband had announced a three-day fast; however, she prepared herself breakfast and deliberately sat at the dining where her husband could see her. One thing led to another, and here she was at the hospital waiting for him to recover.

She stood up from the chair where she sat at the reception and walked up to the nurse. This nurse was different from the one she met when she initially arrived. “Please, can I see my husband now?”

“Hold on, Ma, let me check on him.” The nurse left her at the desk and walked inside. A minute later, she was back.

“He is awake. The second room on your left.”

“Thank you very much.” As Ngozi walked down the hall, she purposed in her mind to allow her husband to recover before addressing pending matters fully.

Dan was awake just as the nurse had said. He had a bandage around his head, a POP cast on his left lower limb, and an IV line on his right hand. His eyes brightened as soon as he saw Ngozi. He tried to sit up, but she moved closer and signalled him to take it easy.

“How are you feeling?” She asked, as she rubbed his shoulder.

“Still in pain but grateful to be alive.” He managed to speak.

Ngozi saw how much effort he put into speaking. “Try not to talk, okay? I'm right here if you need anything.”

“Thank you,” he mouthed and smiled.

Ngozi returned the smile and took a seat beside him. She was thankful to God that her husband was

alive. She began to give him updates about church and family matters because she knew him well. He tended to carry the world on his shoulder.

“Pastors John and Adams were here; they have promised to handle this evening's service and to inform the church about what happened. Although they will spare them the details.”

Dan nodded and gave a thumbs up.

“Also, sister Gbemi has offered to help pick up Seun after school. They'll be at her place together and they will attend the evening service together. I'm sure she'll have fun, especially with sister Gbemi's twins, Goodness and Mercy.” Sister Gbemi was Pastor John's wife and had always been a blessing to the family and the church at large. They got married a couple of years back and had a set of twins named Goodness and Mercy.

Dan smiled. He was grateful to everyone for their care and support.

Ngozi wanted to speak about Veronica but wasn't sure of the effect it will have on him. “If anything else comes up, I'll let you know.” She smiled.

“Thank you,” he mouthed again.

After some minutes, the nurse returned. "It's time for your medications, sir," she told him as she opened a pack of Febramol.

"He says he is in pain," Ngozi informed the nurse, concern written all over her face.

"I'm about to administer intravenous analgesics," She explained politely before hanging the bottle up and connecting it to the IV fluid giving set. "He is also receiving six-hourly intramuscular analgesics to minimize the pain."

"Thank you."

Ngozi stayed with him the rest of the day and went home when she was convinced that it was okay for her to leave. She told him she'd bring clothes and provisions the next day.

Chapter FOUR

Dr. Florence buried herself in her work till 6 pm when she decided to leave the hospital for home. She packed her bag, tidied up all loose ends, and then went to the doctor's call room. Dr. Ola was the only doctor there. He was seated on one of the chairs with his laptop in front of him.

“Are you the doctor on call today?”

“Yes, Ma.” He stood up respectfully.

“I know you are no longer new here but don't hesitate to call if anything comes up.”

“Alright, Ma.” He nodded

“I'll see you tomorrow.”

“Okay ma, goodnight Ma.”

She came out of the hospital and walked towards the car park. She placed her bags on the passenger's seat after taking her seat behind the wheel.

She had barely driven out of the hospital when her phone rang.

“Already?” She wondered why Dr. Ola would call her that soon. She reached for her phone in her bag and checked the caller's ID. It wasn't Dr. Ola but Mrs. Bankole, her close friend.

“Hello, GB.” GB was the nickname Florence gave her friend of almost twenty years. It was short for Giwa Bankole.

“Florence dear, how are you?”

“I'm okay; how are things on your end too?” Though they were good friends, they didn't talk or see each other very often. Dr. Florence's busy schedule kept her occupied, and Mrs. Bankole's lecturing job wasn't any much better. They both had careers that took a good portion of their time, but they tried as much as possible not to allow that to affect their friendship.

“Wasn't feeling too good over the weekend.”

“Aww, sorry about that. Hope it wasn't something serious?”

“It's Malaria that was worrying my enemy”. Mrs. Bankole was the typical Yoruba woman who deflected anything negative to her enemy. “I've started treatment.”

“Hope you are better now?”

“Yes, but it will get much better when I see my friend.”

Dr. Florence burst into laughter. “That is what you should have said since.”

“At least I have said it now.” Mrs. Bankole joined in the laughter.

“Anyway, I'm just leaving work,” she informed her friend.

“That's perfect; you could branch my house and have dinner here.”

Dr. Florence knew that a bit of company wouldn't hurt. After all, going back to her lonely duplex was not very exciting. “Alright, I guess a visit won't be a bad idea.” She smiled.

“That's why I like you,” Mrs. Bankole teased.

“After all these years, you only like me?”

She quickly corrected herself. “Did I say 'like'? You know I love you.”

“Better.” Dr. Florence hadn't smiled like that in a while. “I'll be at your place soon.”

“Alright, see you soon.”

“You too. Bye.”

Dr. Florence recalled how they met. The Bankoles had just relocated from Port Harcourt, where Arch Bankole, GB's husband, had established his architectural firm. The business thrived, and Arch Bankole was able to birth a Lagos branch, where he relocated his family to give them his full attention.

His wife and two daughters, who were six and eight years, moved into the flat beneath while Dr. Florence and Kayode lived upstairs. Dr. Florence had always prayed for good neighbors, and when the Bankoles arrived, she was so eager to welcome them warmly.

She and GB kicked off friendship from the very first time their paths crossed and had not stopped being friends since then. Even after they both moved to their own houses, they kept in touch. GB was a friend that stuck closer than a sister- she was there when Kayode's father left and when Kayode died.

Florence didn't want to visit her friend empty-handed, so she decided to stop by a supermarket and bought GB's favorites - a bottle of wine and a jar of groundnut.

In another twenty-five minutes, she arrived at

the Bankoles. The gateman opened the gate for her, and she drove inside the fairly large compound. The young man greeted her politely and helped her carry the gift items. As soon as she stepped into the beautifully furnished five-bedroom duplex, she heard her friend shout her name from inside.

“Florence, Florence, so good to see you,” GB approached with her arms wide open.

“See the person that wasn't feeling fine.” Dr. Florence was equally happy to see her friend. She hugged her warmly. “Are you sure you have malaria or just wanted to see me?” She teased.

“The two the both of them were doing me. Seeing you now, I feel so much better.”

“GeeeeBeeee” Dr. Florence dragged the nickname. “You are something else.” She giggled.

“Thank you; I'm so happy to see you. Come inside.” She dragged her friend by the hand like two children in kindergarten. “The family is at the table.”

Dr. Florence had thought it would just be GB and her husband at home since the two daughters were now married.

When she got to the dining room, she met a full

house- the Bankole daughters, Dabira and Dara, were seated with their husbands and three grandchildren that refused to stay put on their seats.

The children greeted her respectfully. “Good evening Ma, it's been a long time. How are you doing, Ma?” Dabira, the older daughter, asked as she tried to catch her little toddler, who was running around.

“Dabira, it's so good to see you. I'm fine, thank you.” Dr. Florence felt happy to be among such pleasant people but gradually felt the enormous void she had tucked away resurfacing. She loved the sight of the family eating together in harmony, but sadness wrestled with whatever happiness this brought.

GB had saved the chair to her right for her friend. Arch Bankole sat at one end of the eight-seater dining table. Dabira's husband sat at the other end. GB sat to her husband's right while Dara and her husband sat opposite. The three grandchildren sat on tiny plastic chairs by a plastic table where they had littered food all over.

“Doc, it's always a pleasure to see you. You met us well,” Arch Bankole said with his baritone voice. “Giwa has not allowed me to rest since morning; she kept

saying how much she misses you, so I told her to invite you for dinner,” He chuckled.

GB gently brushed her elbow against her husband. “You had to take the glory, didn't you?”

“Me? Who am I to take any glory when Baba God is seated on His throne?” Arch Bankole was a very cheerful and God-fearing man.

Dr. Florence was beginning to feel uncomfortable. Her friend had everything she didn't have. She tried to push the thoughts away.

“The feeling was mutual; it's just that work keeps me occupied most times. I'm glad you pushed her to call. It's great being here again.” She forced a smile.

“Thanks for the gift; you know my love for groundnut is undying.” GB gave her a side hug.

“I know; that's why I got it.” She smiled.

“Please serve yourself. There is more,” GB pointed to the bowls of food at the center of the table.

“Kayode,” she called out the cook's name.

Dr. Florence was about to dish her food when she heard the name that brought back memories she wasn't strong enough to handle. She had, until that moment, tried to compose herself and suppress ugly

feelings that were trying to creep in, but GB's mention of her son's name was the straw that broke the camel's back.

“Please, I need to use the toilet.” She told GB and stood up without waiting for a response. She knew where the toilet was as it wasn't her first time in the house.

As she shut the door behind her, she let out the tears that had welled up. “Why God? If you are there,” she looked up into the ceiling, “why have you allowed me to suffer this way? What have I done to deserve this?” She tried not to raise her voice so that no one would hear her. The last thing she wanted was for GB or any of her family members to see her like that.

After letting it all out, she wiped her face and touched up her makeup before returning to the table. She ate little rice, had a glass of juice, and was ready to leave.

The more time she spent at GB's house, the worse she felt. She forced herself to laugh when anyone said anything funny. Although she was physically present, her mind was miles away, somewhere in the past with her dear son, Kayode.

GB noticed her friend was absent-minded. “Are

you okay, Florence?” She tapped Florence and asked in a low tone.

“I’m fine.” She plastered a smile on her face. Just as she was about to look for an excuse to leave, her phone rang. She looked at the caller’s ID and saw it was from the hospital.

“This is from the hospital, I’m sorry, but I’ll have to get going.”

“Already? This your work, it is well oh.” GB wished her friend could stay a little longer.

“Don’t worry; we will fix another time for more catching up.” Florence didn’t mean half of what she said. If anything, she would avoid any subsequent visit, especially if it involved GB’s family. She didn’t want anything reminding her of what she didn’t have.

“Alright then, if you say so.” GB hugged her. “Let me see you off.” She stood up.

Dr. Florence stood up and greeted everyone before leaving. When she got into her car, she dialed the hospital, and Dr. Ola picked up.

“Good evening Ma. The call was a mistake; my mobile phone was in my pocket; I didn’t know it accidentally dialed your number,” he explained.

“It's okay, that's fine. How is everything at the hospital?”

“Fine ma, there is no problem.”

“Alright then, bye.” She ended the call and drove out of the compound. The drive home was a lonely one. When she got home, she took a warm shower. Since she had already eaten dinner, she prepared herself a cup of green tea and sat in front of the TV.

Out of curiosity to know what was on the news, she tuned in to a local news channel. The 10 pm news was still on. Displayed on the screen was an image of a collapsed three-storey building that claimed the lives of 66 people, which included two pregnant women and twelve children.

Florence shook her head in sadness, wondering why God would allow such to happen to vulnerable people. She remained convinced that the world was a wicked place and God if at all He existed, did not care about anyone. She turned off the TV and retired for the night.

Dr. Ola lay on the lower bunk bed in the call room. There was no new patient, and all the patients currently on admission were stable. His mind kept going

back to Dr. Florence. He felt so sorry for her because of the things she had gone through. He understood the intricacies of losing a loved one. Four years ago, his wife died after a brief illness, leaving him behind with their two children. He was devastated. Her demise shook him and his entire family. They were married for four years, and they had the prospects of a bright future together. They loved each other, did everything together, were both fervent church workers, and were God-lovers. Her death shattered his heart into a million pieces. He had lost a part of him forever. He didn't know where to draw strength from and found himself crying like a baby. Her death caused a verse from the Bible to become real to him. 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints: Psalm 116:15

He knew that even though he wouldn't see his wife on Earth again, she was now with Jesus, and one day, they'd all be together in Heaven. He was comforted by more scriptures that continued to drop in his heart; for instance, Matthew 5:4: 'Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted. He held God to His Word, and as time went on, he began to heal. He still felt the absence of his wife, but it didn't bring as much pain. His

younger sister, Ruth, started living with him to help take care of his children - Ayomide and Ayobami, who were now seven and five years.

He said a word of prayer for Dr. Florence and prayed for God to allow him to have a conversation with her. She seemed like a tough person on the outside, but he believed it was all a front to shield her tender, hurting heart.

Chapter FIVE

The next day, Ngozi got to her husband's hospital room and met Veronica, seated and talking with him. He was sitting up in bed, looking stronger and brighter than he did the previous day. Veronica had brought food for him and had served him.

Ngozi couldn't comprehend what her eyes were seeing. "What is going on?" She asked, bewildered.

"Good morning," Veronica said without standing up. "I brought food for Pastor."

"I can see that, but what I don't understand is why. Is it your duty to do that?" She dropped the bag in her hand, which contained all the things she brought for her husband, including his breakfast.

"Honey, please take it easy with her. She asked if I had eaten. I told her no. You didn't say you'll be bringing food, so I decided to eat hers," Dan explained. He didn't

see a reason for Ngozi's foul mood.

"I didn't say I would bring food?" Ngozi's tone gradually got harsher as she echoed what he said. "Do I have to mention it, or since when do I have to announce that I will prepare food for my husband?" She was angry with both of them- especially with her husband for taking sides with Veronica.

"Can you please excuse us?" She turned to Veronica, her tone, stern.

Veronica stood and patted Dan on the shoulder. "I'll be outside if you need anything." Slowly, she walked out, sizing Ngozi up from head to toe. There was a drastic difference between the lady she saw the previous day- who could barely maintain eye contact with her, and the one she just met in her husband's hospital ward. The audacity with which Veronica spoke to her was unbelievable.

"My dear, I've told you there is no reason to be upset." Dan tried placating his wife.

"Did you see how she looked at me?" Ngozi was still in shock. "I'm not comfortable with that girl being around you. There is something about her that is

disturbing.”

“She's my secretary, and that's all.” Dan didn't seem to be on the same page with her.

“What kind of secretary does this?” She pointed at the food. Without waiting for his reply, she continued. “You know what? Never mind, this conversation is not for you. I know what I'm going to do.”

“Whatever you do, please take it easy with Veronica,” Dan was almost pleading for her.

“What is wrong with you, Dan? What has come over you? Is that all you have to say? That I should take it easy with her? Have you seen yourself lately? You are the one hurting.” She pointed at the cast and the bandage on his head. “You are lucky to be alive. Have you asked yourself how the accident happened?”

Dan was silent. His face mirrored confusion. There were a lot of blanks in his memory of this incident that almost claimed his life.

Suddenly, someone knocked. Dan and Ngozi looked in the direction of the knock and saw it was the doctor.

“Good morning,” he smiled. “I hope I'm not

disturbing; I came to check on my patient, Mr. Bamidele.”

“Not at all doctor, good morning,” Ngozi smiled. “Thank you so much for yesterday.”

“We thank God. I didn't mean to eavesdrop, but I heard you ask your husband about the accident. With head injuries similar to the one your husband had, he may experience some degree of memory loss. With time, he will have a more vivid image of what happened. Try not to push him too hard; give him time to recover fully. Is that okay?” the doctor explained as he moved closer to Dan to examine him and assess his vitals.

“Thank you very much, doctor.” Ngozi felt terrible for her actions. She stepped aside and waited for the doctor to finish with Dan.

“He is making remarkable improvement. We'll still keep him for observation, and when he is fit for discharge, we will release him into your care,” he smiled.

“Alright, doctor, I'm grateful.”

As soon as the doctor left, Ngozi moved close to Dan. She felt so much pity for him. “I'm so sorry for speaking to you in that manner; please forgive me.” She

held his hand.

“It's okay, dear; God is going to see us through this.”

“I believe He will. Let's say a word of prayer” Ngozi was about to begin the prayer when Veronica barged in.

“Pastor, I just wanted to know if you have finished your meal so I can pack up the dishes?” She paid no attention to Ngozi or the fact that they were about to pray.

“Yes, thank you,” Dan responded as if Veronica had just given him a million dollars.

“But you can see that we were busy.” Ngozi tried calling her to order, putting in every effort not to lose her temper again.

Veronica went on to pack the plates ignoring Ngozi. For all she cared, no one had spoken to her.

Ngozi watched, dumbfounded. She couldn't believe her eyes, not just at Veronica's rudeness but her husband's silence. The Dan she knew dared not allow anyone to insult his wife the way Veronica just did. Something was wrong, and she was going to get to the

bottom of it.

After Veronica left, she didn't feel like proceeding with the prayer but knowing better than to let her feelings take charge; she forced herself to pray.

She needed some space, so she allowed Dan to rest while she stepped out of the hospital and went to her car. She sat in the driver's seat, wondering what exactly was going on.

“Is Dan acting this way as a result of the accident, or is there more to it?” She wondered. Something in her told her to begin speaking in tongues and interceding for her husband, but she just didn't feel like it. She picked her phone and placed a call to her good friend, Sharon. She and Sharon met in their first year in the university both as coursemates and roommates. They did almost everything together, from praying to studying to shopping and lots more. Their bond grew stronger as the years went by. Upon graduation, no distance could separate them. Sharon was posted to Benue state for her NYSC and came home only for Christmas throughout the year. Shortly after service, Sharon traveled for her masters in the UK and returned to get married to her

childhood friend. Fortunately for Ngozi, the couple settled in the same city as she. Despite their geographical proximity, they didn't see often, but whenever they did, it was like they were never apart.

Ngozi desperately needed someone to talk to, and no one could offer the listening ears she desired like Sharon. Unfortunately for Ngozi, her dear friend didn't pick the call. She tried her number a second time, still no response. Ngozi dropped the phone, disappointed, and rested her head on the steering. Just as she was about to break down in tears, her phone rang. It was Sharon. Ngozi could not have been more grateful.

"Hello," Ngozi said eagerly, longing to hear her friend's voice.

"Ngozi, I'm sorry I missed your calls. I was attending to a customer. How are you?"

"Not so good. Where are you?"

"I'm at the office. Are you okay? Do you want to come over so we can talk?" Sharon sounded so concerned.

"Yeah, maybe I'll do that. I'll be there soon."

"Alright, dear, I'll be expecting you."

Ngozi started the car and drove out of the hospital. She didn't bother going back to tell Dan where she was going. She was too upset.

Sharon owned a cake-making business. She had a pretty big factory where customers came to buy cake and place orders for special events. Her company had grown, and Sharon had staff working under her. Orders kept coming in, and she never disappointed her customers.

Ngozi arrived at her office about forty-five minutes after the call. Compared to the last time she visited Sharon's company, the office was expanded and better equipped. Different cake images hung on the wall. Ngozi was impressed with what she saw.

She went straight to Sharon's office, which was the first room on the left. Sharon, who was happy to see her stood up and hugged her. "It's so good to see you, dear."

"Same here, dear." Ngozi took in her friend's warm embrace.

"How are you doing?" Sharon searched her friend's face for answers.

“I’m okay, dear.” Ngozi’s countenance, however, said otherwise.

“You look so worried. What’s the problem?” They both took their seat on the couch at a corner of the relatively large office.

Ngozi opened up to Sharon about all that had been going on. First, from her husband stealing from the church money to his strange behavior after the accident.

“See your beautiful office Sharon; your business is booming. Things have been tough for me.” Tears were on the verge of dropping from her eyes.

Sharon placed her hand on her friend’s shoulder and drew her closer to herself. “We all face different challenges in life; what matters most is the way we handle it.”

Ngozi allowed the tears to flow. She searched her friend’s eyes for clarity on what she meant.

Sharon stood up and got her a box of tissue paper. “Stop crying, dear,” she dabbed her tears. “You remember when I, too, would call you and cry to you about how miserable it was being married for years without a child?”

Ngozi could remember every detail. She'd pray with Sharon, comfort her and do everything possible to cheer her up. They'd even fast together for days. She believed so strongly that God would give her children, and He did, or so Ngozi thought.

“Those were trying times for me. I held on to the promises of God. The doctor carried out several tests and said my husband and I were fine. This trying time went on for seven difficult years until finally, I had to act. Remember the Bible says faith without works is dead?”

Ngozi knew that scripture quite alright but wasn't sure where her friend was going with it. She nodded her head and listened to what Sharon had to say.

“My pastor's wife told me about this pastor who God called to pray for people looking for the fruit of the womb and financial breakthrough. She told me testimonies of people he prayed for and how God blessed them with twins and even triplets. My pastor's wife asked me if I wanted him to pray for me, and I told her I'd love that. She organized a prayer session with him. She told me that it would be a vigil and that it would hold in his house.”

Ngozi's eyebrow furrowed. "In his house?"

"Yes, I was initially not comfortable with the arrangement, but I chose to trust my pastor's wife and her intentions. She told me not to tell my husband, and I obeyed."

"Really?" Ngozi felt something wasn't right.

"Yes oh, wisdom is profitable to direct. My pastor's wife was the one who took me to his house and did the formal introduction. The pastor was happy to see me. He greeted me with a warm hug and welcomed me into his home. My pastor's wife didn't follow me in but told me she would pick me the following day. The young man told me to feel comfortable, he said he could feel the presence of God already in our midst. He took me to his prayer room, and we began to pray; we prayed for about an hour; after which he told me about the final stage.

"The final stage?" Ngozi asked, with curiosity written all over her face.

"Yes. The pastor told me to bathe in his bathroom and that from there, God would wash away everything hindering me from getting pregnant. I did,

and the next month, I was pregnant. Aside from that, my business also started booming and has not stopped expanding since then. Why am I telling you all this, Ngozi?” She paused. “When you've tried and tried all you know how to, and God is offering you help, don't turn your back on Him.”

“I don't understand what you are saying, Sharon? What help?” Ngozi looked confused. She was trying to process all she had just heard.

“If I were to take you to this pastor, would you be willing to go?”

Ngozi was silent.

“All your problems will disappear in the twinkle of an eye, and your husband will come right to his senses.” She convinced Ngozi further.

“Please, can you give me time to think about it?” Ngozi felt something off about this pastor, but she didn't want her friend to see her as ungrateful or judgmental.

“No problem, take your time and let me know when you are ready.”

“Thank you.”

“Haba, why are we sisters if we cannot help and

support each other? In the meantime, take this and use it to pay off whatever bill it can handle.” Sharon brought out a bundle of a thousand naira notes and handed it over to Ngozi.

“Sharon!” Ngozi face lit up with surprise. “All this for me?”

“It's nothing, my dear. Just manage it, and I'll be in touch.”

Something within Ngozi didn't feel it was right collecting the money, especially because she wasn't sure of its source. Still, on second thought, having weighed the financial needs she had, she took the money and thanked her friend.

As they stepped out of the office into the reception, Ngozi saw the back view of a lady speaking to the receptionist. The lady looked familiar, but she couldn't tell who it was. The lady handed the receptionist money, turned to leave, and almost immediately, Ngozi recognized her. It was Veronica.

She tapped Sharon. “That's the lady I told you about, the one getting awkwardly close to my husband.”

“Really? Let me find out what she came for.”

Sharon walked up to the receptionist, and Ngozi followed behind.

“Good afternoon, Ma,” the receptionist stood up to greet Sharon.

“Afternoon Bimpe, what did that woman want?” She pointed at the door, referring to the lady who had just stepped out.

“She placed an order for a cake, Ma, ” the receptionist replied, still on her feet.

“What kind of cake?”

“A 10-inch butter icing red velvet and chocolate cake with the note 'Get Well Soon Dear Pastor.' She said she would be back tomorrow to pick it up.”

“Ehen (Really)? Okay, thank you.” Sharon turned to her friend. “You need to act fast before she snatches your husband before your very eyes.”

Ngozi was boiling in anger. She felt like strangling Veronica. “That girl is crossing her boundaries big time.”

“I'm here whenever you are ready; the sooner, the better.”

“Thanks, dear,” They hugged, and Ngozi left.

As soon as Ngozi left, Sharon went back into her office, picked her phone, and quickly dialed a number.

“Hello Ma,” a female voice at the other end of the line responded.

“You need to up your game. Dan's wife knows you are up to something. She just saw you leave the bakery.”

“No problem, ma, I'm on top of this,” Veronica replied.

“Good. I'll keep in touch.” Sharon ended the call.

As Ngozi drove back to the hospital, she kept thinking about all her friend had said. It didn't sit well within her spirit, but she brushed away any thought that tried discouraging her. She was getting desperate; Veronica was fast becoming a thorn in her flesh. She needed help as she felt she was fast drowning in a well of problems. She remembered the money that Sharon gave her. It was nothing less than a hundred thousand naira.

“At least that will clear the hospital bills,” she told herself. “Didn't the Bible say He gives us the power to make wealth?” She started preaching to herself. “More so, it was a pastor that Sharon consulted, not an herbalist

or native doctor.”

Before getting to the hospital, Ngozi decided to stop at a fast-food joint to get lunch for Dan. She looked at the time on the dashboard; it was 3:30 pm. She knew Dan would have been hungry, and going home to prepare food for him would take time. She bought him a plate of pounded yam with vegetable soup and fried fish accompanied with a pack of fruit juice.

On getting to the hospital, she met Dan awake, and as she had predicted, he was hungry.

“I hope I didn't take too long,” she brought out the food and placed it beside him.

“Well, you took a while.” He looked at the food and then spoke. “You didn't go home?”

“No, I didn't; I went to visit Sharon.” She hoped he wouldn't ask any further questions. Although she hardly kept anything away from him, she had no plans on telling him what Sharon told her.

“Really, how is she?” He opened the food Ngozi brought and was ready to dig in.

“She is fine; she sends her regards.” Changing the subject of discussion, she asked, “Did Veronica come?”

“She called to ask if she should bring lunch, but I told her not to bother. I didn't want a repeat of what happened this morning.”

“What is wrong with that girl? She should not try me.” Ngozi was getting upset at the mere thought of Veronica.

“It's okay, Ngozi,” Dan said in a calm tone. “How is Seun? Have you seen her today?”

“No, I haven't, but I spoke to her when I called sister Gbemi this morning; I'll be going to their house as soon as I leave the hospital.”

Ngozi stayed with him till evening before leaving. As she drove to Gbemi's house, she couldn't stop thinking about all Sharon said. It initially made her uncomfortable, but the more she thought about it and all the results it could bring to her, the more excited she became. She caught herself smiling and decided she would give Sharon a call at night.

She arrived at Pastor John's compound almost immediately after they drove in. They had just returned from church, having attended the second-day prayer meeting towards the upcoming convention. Ngozi alighted from the car, looking around for her daughter.

Seun was seated with Goodness and Mercy at the backseat of Pastor John's vehicle. Upon seeing her mum, Seun alighted immediately and ran to hug her mother.

“How are you, my darling?” Ngozi hugged her back.

“I'm fine mummy, how is daddy?”

“He is getting better. He said I should greet you. How was school today?”

“School was fine; mummy, do you know that my teacher beat everybody in the class - except me, of course- because they did not do their homework?” Seun was an outspoken child. She would keep talking if she had the chance.

“Really? See why it is good to do your homework? Have you said thank you to aunty Gbemi for helping with the homework?”

She shook her head and walked towards Gbemi. Ngozi also walked towards the young couple and seized the opportunity to thank both of them for taking care of her daughter.

“Please don't mention Ma, it's a privilege. We thank God that Pastor is recovering well. God is indeed faithful,” Pastor John chirped.

“Yes, He is.” A part of Ngozi was almost questioning that statement.

“Goodness and Mercy, have you greeted Pastor Mrs?” Gbemi said to her children, who were still in the car.”

They came down and greeted Ngozi. After exchanging pleasantries, they all went inside.

“I won't be staying long; I just came to pick Seun. I'll still be going back to the hospital to give my husband his dinner,” she explained.

“I won't mind following you, Pastor,” Pastor John offered. “I wasn't able to see him today.”

“Okay then, why don't I go home to fix his dinner, then I'll come back to pick Seun, and we can go together?” She suggested.

“Better still, I can help to prepare the meal since I was just about to fix dinner. You and my husband could take it to him, and on your way back, you can pick Seun.” Gbemi's suggestion seemed like the best.

Ngozi, however, didn't want to be a burden. “Won't that be too much? You have already done so much.”

“We can never do too much for God, Pastor. Please have your seat. Is rice and stew okay?”

“It's perfect. Are you sure you don't want me to join you in the kitchen?” Ngozi offered, she didn't feel comfortable sitting and watching TV.

“Please don't bother; I'll be out before you know it.”

True to her word, Gbemi finished cooking after about thirty minutes. She packed the food in a warmer and set it in a basket with water and some oranges.

Ngozi was overwhelmed with love. “Thank you so much, sister Gbemi. This gesture means so much to me. God bless you.” She hugged Gbemi as she collected the food.

“You are welcome Ma; it's a privilege.”

Ngozi and Pastor John left for the hospital in Ngozi's car. On their way, Ngozi continued expressing her gratitude to Pastor John.

“We thank God, Ma,” he said with a smile. “That reminds me, I wanted to share with you a word we received this evening during service.”

“Okay, I'm listening.” Ngozi gave him a brief side

glance and continued focusing on the road.

“While we were praying, God dropped a word in my heart for the congregation. I heard Him clearly say He is the Omnipresent God, ever-present in the storm and too faithful to fail.”

“Hmmm, that's very true.” Ngozi nodded her head, but deep down, she wondered if God was present with her in the storm she was going through. Even if He was, it sure didn't feel like it.

“Pastor, I want you to trust God to bring you out of this storm. Don't give up on God.” He encouraged her.

“Thank you so much, Pastor John. God bless you.”

The visit to the hospital was brief, and they prayed with Dan before leaving. They returned to Pastor John's house as they planned. Ngozi picked Seun, and they found their way home.

She prepared dinner for herself and Seun, helped her with her homework, and put her to bed. By the end of the day, it was too late to call Sharon. She decided to call her the next day. She said a brief prayer before retiring for the night.

Chapter SIX

Dr. Florence woke up in the morning with a headache. Being the hard worker that she was, she still made an effort to go to work, but the more she tried, the harder it was. Florence had to call in sick and take the day off. She had exhausted herself the past few days and needed to take things easy; after all, she wasn't getting any younger.

“Dr. Ola, good morning.” She called him, being the one on call the previous day.

“Good morning, Ma.”

“How was your call?”

“It was good. All the patients are stable. There was no new patient,” he informed her.

“How is Mrs. Adebowale's BP and glucose level?”

“BP this morning was 130/90 and fasting blood glucose was 100.”

“Okay, continue monitoring; we should start considering discharging her.”

“Yes, Ma,” he agreed with her.

“I won't be coming to work today because I'm not feeling up to it. I have called Dr. Evans to stand in for me.” Dr. Evans was also a consultant – however, with fewer years of practice.

“Oh, so sorry about that, Ma. Please try to get some rest.”

“Thank you.” She ended the call.

Dr. Ola wondered if it would be inappropriate to call her later in the day to check up on her and ask if he could visit her. She had pretty much shut everyone out of her personal life, and he didn't want to seem nosy. Dr. Ola struggled with the strong nudge he felt in his spirit. Left to him, he wouldn't bother, but he didn't have peace until he decided he'd call her in the afternoon.

By afternoon, the nudge came back. Dr. Ola knew it was the Holy Spirit, and it came with a strong, urgent push. Immediately, he took his phone and called Dr. Florence.

Dr. Florence noticed an unknown number call her and refused to pick. She usually answered every call

due to her job's nature, but she wasn't up for picking calls today due to how she felt.

Dr. Ola was discouraged and had no intentions of giving it another try, but the push from within became even stronger. He called again, and this time around, she picked.

"Hello," her tone revealed she didn't know who was on the line.

"Hello ma, good afternoon Ma." Dr. Ola wasn't sure how to begin.

"Good afternoon. Please, who is this?"

"Dr. Ola." He waited to hear her reaction.

"Oh, Dr. Ola, I wasn't expecting your call. I already instructed that all consults go to Dr. Evans."

"Yes, Ma, I wasn't calling for that," he explained. He was praying under his breath for the Holy Spirit to give him the right words.

"Oh, okay, sorry about that," she paused, waiting to hear the reason he called. They had no common ground aside from work.

"How are you feeling, Ma?"

"I'm better. I should be at work tomorrow."

"That's great. I was wondering if it would be

okay to visit you after work hours.”

Dr. Florence wasn't expecting that; she didn't know what to say. No one at work had crossed the 'professional to personal' line before. “I'm feeling much better, Dr. Ola. Thank you for your concern.” That was her way of turning down his request.

Dr. Ola got the message. “Alright, Ma, please get some rest.”

“Thank you.” She ended the call. She couldn't fathom why anyone would be interested in showing her such concern. She wasn't the nicest at work. On the contrary, she was one of the strictest. She was the kind of doctor that would send a younger doctor away from a ward round if the person didn't carry out a task exactly as she had requested. She was the kind of doctor that would add to the younger doctors' calls, irrespective of its inconvenience. She was well known for her zero tolerance for unprofessional behaviors and laziness. She didn't think anyone would have the guts to desire closeness with her.

Dr. Ola on the other end of the call was left wondering why she shut out everyone. Even though he felt disappointed, he wasn't going to give up on trying to

get closer. He knew he had something to offer her that would give her the rest she needed- not just in her body, but in her soul and her spirit.

A hurried knock on the door of the call room brought his mind back to reality.

“Come in.”

“Good afternoon Dr. Ola,” a young nurse in blue scrubs greeted him. There was urgency in her voice. The only nurses that wore blue scrubs were those at the emergency unit.

“Good afternoon, Nurse Peju.” He greeted the dark-complexioned lady of average height who must have been in her late twenties.

“There is a new patient at the emergency,” she said, holding out her case file to Dr. Ola. She had always been a charming lady, and Dr. Ola had taken note of that. She was about the only nurse with whom he had a close relationship.

“I'm not the doctor on call today; I was on call yesterday. I'm not falling into your trap again,” he chuckled and refused to collect the case file from her. He hadn't forgotten how some weeks ago, she had convinced him to attend to a patient who ended up

requiring surgery and close monitoring all through the night. He wasn't on call, but he had to stay back because of the patient.

Other doctors joked that Nurse Peju had 'busy hands' because there was always an influx of patients every time she was on duty.

"I'm aware Dr. Davis is on call, but she is in theatre. She's operating a patient that came in earlier."

"Okay." Dr. Ola stood up and collected the case file. His passion for work and his desire to save lives always gave him the strength to keep going even when his physical body was tired.

"Tell me about the patient," he asked for a summary as they left the call room.

"Grace Adeyeye, an eighteen-year-old student, presented with bleeding per vaginum of unknown duration. Estimated blood loss, one litre."

"One litre!" he exclaimed. "That's much." He hastened his pace.

Peju hurried, striving to keep up with his pace. "The patient attempted terminating a twelve-week pregnancy, but the abortion was incomplete."

"Incomplete abortion. Where is she?" he asked

as soon as he entered the emergency unit.

“Over here,” Nurse Peju pointed.

Dr. Ola found Grace on the bed in excruciating abdominal pain.

“Grace is a 200 level Law student; she was brought in here by her friend after noticing a sudden increase in the passage of blood per vaginum and abdominal pain.” Nurse Peju gave a summary to Dr. Ola.

The friend, Lara, was standing by Grace's bedside. She had worry written all over her face.

“Please, can you excuse us?” Dr. Ola asked Lara. He needed privacy as the matter on ground was a sensitive one.

“Okay, doctor.” She went outside.

“Doctor, please help me. I'm in pain; I don't want to die.” Grace cried and held on to Dr. Ola's ward coat.

“We'll do the best we can. Please help me out by being calm. Allow us to take care of you,” Dr. Ola explained. As ironic as it may seem, Dr. Ola functioned best in emergencies. Little wonder he was considering residency in emergency medicine. He just hadn't gotten a go-ahead from God.

“Okay, doctor,” she answered as she held on to

her hurting tummy.

Dr. Ola and Nurse Peju attended to her. She had a manual vacuum aspiration and was transfused with a pint of blood. Dr. Ola gave her some analgesics and antibiotics. After the procedure, she thanked them and informed Dr. Ola that she needed a favor from him. At this point, Nurse Peju was attending to another patient.

“How can I help you?” He wondered what she could need from him. Coincidentally, he had also been patiently looking for an opportunity to talk to her without sounding judgemental or too forward. He knew if no one did, she could recoil into her shell, become defensive or even go ahead to repeat such an act.

“Please don't tell my aunty,” she pleaded. “If she knows, my parents will know, and I don't want that.”

“Your aunty? I thought the lady that brought you here was your friend from school.”

“I'm not referring to her. My aunty is a doctor in this hospital. Her name is Dr. Abayomi,” she informed him.

“You are Dr. Florence's niece?” He couldn't believe it. He wasn't sure of what to think. Would Dr. Florence question his approach to patient management?

Would she be pleased with him? Different thoughts kept running through his mind all at once. He reassured himself that he gave Grace the best care he would have given anyone. He treated her just as he would his own relative.

“I would have loved to promise you that your secret is safe with me, but I can't. Dr. Florence is my boss, and I report to her. Keeping such information from her is unprofessional and isn't safe for you.” He tried to explain to her, hoping she'd understand.

“I'm doomed.” She turned her face away from him, covered it with her hands, and cried.

Dr. Ola took advantage of the situation to speak to her. “Grace...”

He paused and waited for her to respond.

She turned towards him. She didn't know which was worse- the guilt and deep sadness from taking her child's life or the pain the news would bring to her parents.

“I have a feeling you feel terrible about what you did; I'm not here to judge or condemn you. I want to talk with you if you allow me.” He knew it was a sensitive matter that he had to handle delicately. Any wrong word

or move, and she'd retreat into her shell like a snail at the sight of danger.

Grace didn't say a word, but her silence and attention meant she was listening.

"You never thought things would get to this. You saw your friends in school having fun, and you wanted a taste of it. You felt being a Christian was boring, and you wanted to explore." He knew he wasn't the one speaking; the Holy Spirit filled his mouth with the words that Grace knew were truth.

Confusion and surprise were written all over her face. She wondered who told Dr. Ola about her.

"Now, all you feel is regret and pain."

Grace broke down in more tears. "I should have been more content with who God called me to be. I wish I remained a church girl. I wish I didn't allow them to influence me. I wish I had turned down their offer to go to that party. Doctor, it was that one time it happened, and I got pregnant." She began sobbing quietly. "I was so scared, and I knew keeping it would mean shame and disgrace for my parents, who are pastors. It would also mean quitting school for a while. All these made me even more scared, so I asked my roommate how to get an

abortion. She gave me some drugs, which I took. That's how I found myself here, doctor."

Dr. Ola felt so much pity for her. He didn't know what else to do for her other than pray with her. "Can I pray with you?" He asked.

"God cannot forgive me, doctor; I'm the worst person on earth." She turned her face away from him.

"If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us of all unrighteousness."

"1 John 1:9." She had always known that scripture; it didn't mean much to her, but as he quoted it, she felt life, hope, and joy all at the same time. She turned towards him. "Please pray for me, help me tell God I'm so sorry. I want to rededicate my life to Him," she cried.

Dr. Ola held her hand and prayed with her. As soon as he finished, the call phone rang. "Sorry, I have to get this," he told her. The call phone was for the doctor on call; only the hospital's staff members had access to the number, especially if they needed to get through the doctor on call. He hadn't gotten the chance to hand it over to Dr. Davis because of how busy the day had been. "Always remember, Jesus loves you and has forgiven you, so you too must forgive yourself."

She nodded her head and smiled. “Thank you, Sir.” She was grateful to him; she felt lighter and had peace. “God bless you, Sir.”

“Amen, and you too.” He quickly picked up the call.

“Hello.”

“Hello Sir, please, your attention is needed in the ward,” a nurse informed him.

“I’ll inform Dr. Davis; she is the one on call.” It was past working hours; he had been in the hospital since 7 am the previous day. As he was about to call Dr. Davis, she walked into the emergency unit where he was.

“Just the person I was looking for.”

Dr. Davis looked exhausted. “What a day. Just finished with a patient who presented with ruptured appendicitis.”

“How is the patient?”

“Stable, in the recovery room.”

“Great. Here is Grace. She presented with incomplete abortion, had an MVA.” It was the custom to handover patients to the doctor on call. “A nurse just called from the ward; it appears they need your attention. I would have gone, but I need to get to my

kids.” He handed over the call phone to her. He was a hard worker but didn't want his children to suffer as a result. They were his priority.

“Thank you,” she said and headed back to the ward.

Dr. Ola, although tired, had this feeling of fulfillment. He loved his job and saw his career path as a ministry, and a means to treat the body and reach out to the soul. He was done for the day and couldn't wait to be back with his children. He went back to the call room to pack his things. As he was about stepping out of the hospital, he stopped at the nurses' station to greet Nurse Peju.

“You succeeded in keeping me in the hospital till now,” he playfully remarked as he loosened his tie.

“I was only doing my job,” she smiled pleasantly. “It appears we both finished from work at the same time,” she said as she stood up to pack some things from the desk in front of her.

“Oh, so that was your plan all along.” He laughed.

She joined in the laughter. “We nurses run shifts; it's you doctors that don't have a closing time.”

“That's the uniqueness of the medical profession.” Dr. Ola always saw the positive side of things. “Are you ready to leave?”

“Yes, I'll just change and pick my things from the break room.”

“Okay, I need to write some things in Grace's case note quickly. I'll meet you outside in five minutes.”

“Alright”

When Dr. Ola finished writing, he went outside and waited by the car for Nurse Peju who was not yet out. After five minutes, he noticed Nurse Peju approaching him.

“See somebody's five minutes,” he teased her as she came closer to him.

“I'm so sorry for the delay,” she said with a beautiful smile. “Peju, you need to work on speed though,” she told herself.

“We all have something we need to work on,” he agreed with her.

He was so engrossed in the conversation that he didn't notice how beautiful she looked in her purple floral knee-length dress. She didn't alter her already styled hair but touched up her make-up. For the first

time, he was seeing her in something other than her blue scrubs.

“You look nice,” he had to blurt it out.

“Thank you.” She smiled. I don't like wearing my scrubs outside the hospital. Whatever happens in the hospital...”

“Stays in the hospital,” Dr. Ola joined in.

“You get the idea. More so, I'm on my way to Bible study.”

“That's great. Can I give you a lift at least to the junction?” He offered.

“I usually take a taxi from outside the gate, but I guess a ride to the junction will be just fine. Thank you.” She smiled.

“My pleasure.” Dr. Ola returned the smile, and they both entered the car. The ride was pretty short because the hospital was not too far from the junction. He dropped her off, and they said their goodbyes, after which he drove home.

Dr. Ola admired Nurse Peju and appreciated their friendship. Although it had just been a couple of months, they were quickly getting fond of each other. He particularly admired her love for God.

Although he loved his wife, Dr. Ola knew there was no way he would move forward if he held on to the past. He wasn't sure if Nurse Peju was the 'forward' he was supposed to move to, but he trusted God to lead him and decided to take things a step at a time.

On his way home, his mind went back to Dr. Florence; the burden he had for her was deeper than before. Something in him yearned to reach out to her and help her hurting soul. He silently prayed that God would use him to penetrate through the darkness of her heart and that God would shine His incomprehensible light. He knew she needed an encounter that would eliminate every doubt about the existence of God, one that would leave her convinced about the Father's undying love and His sovereignty over the storms of life and the affairs of men. He prayed that God would give her such an undeniable encounter.

As he approached home, he knew his children would have missed him, so he decided to branch a supermarket in the neighborhood and buy them their favorite - Maryland cookies and ice-cream. He also got some other items he felt the children needed at home.

Exhausted, he finally arrived home around 8 pm.

His children hovered around the car even before he turned off the ignition. They were so happy to see their father. The older one, Ayomide, was daddy's girl. She hugged her daddy even before he came down from the car.

Ayobami, who always imitated whatever he saw his older sister do, joined in the warm embrace.

Dr. Ola couldn't have been more grateful to God for these two blessings. He loved them dearly and did all he could to care for them and make them happy.

His younger sister, Ruth, who had been helping him take care of the children, came out of the house to welcome him. She had been of fantastic help and support to her older brother and his children. There was no way he would have survived independently, especially with his job as a doctor.

"Welcome, brother Kunle." She greeted as she collected his bag and the home essentials he bought.

"Ruth, my dear, how are you? Hope these children didn't stress you too much," he chuckled.

"They have been good children," She smiled. She was a graduate of Communication and Language Art. After her service year, she applied for a job in a couple of

places, but after repeated disappointments, she decided to put that on hold and face her passion: catering. She specialized in small chops. Anytime she had an order, she'd make it and send it via a dispatch rider to the customer. Her little business was quickly growing, and it brought her fulfillment.

Dr. Ola was holding the nylon that contained the goodies he bought for his children. "Have you been good children?" He finally got out of the car, although they were still both glued to him.

"Yes, daddy, we have," they both chorused.

"Are you sure?" He teased.

"Yes, yes," they said with such excitement. The children already sensed something good coming their way.

"I'm sure you have been. I have something for you." By this time, he had entered the house. He knew his children; anytime they were to share something, it almost always ended in a fight.

"Go and bring your plates," he was going to share it equally. He wasn't in the mood to settle any quarrel.

In a twinkle of an eye, they breezed to the kitchen and were back with their plates.

Their dad wasn't surprised; he knew how much his children loved their goodies. After sharing it with them, he went inside to freshen up and change into something more comfortable. Soon, it was time to retire for the night. They all gathered together for night devotion. After singing a few choruses, Dr. Ola read a Bible story from their Bible Story for kids- as was the custom.

Tonight's story was that of Jesus walking on water. "When Peter saw Jesus walking on water, he didn't believe it. He thought Jesus was a ghost. So to be sure it was Jesus, he asked Him to make him walk on water. Do you know what Jesus did?" He asked, looking right into his children's awe-filled eyes.

"What did Jesus say?" Ayomide asked.

Ayobami nodded his head; he, too, wanted to know what Jesus said.

"Jesus asked Peter to come. And guess what? Peter walked on water too." He widened his eyes to express himself.

"Wow! Peter walked on water?" Ayomide was amazed.

"Yes, he did. But shortly after he began walking,

something happened. He took his eyes away from Jesus and began looking at the storm around him. Do you know what happened afterward?”

“Noooooooooooo,” Ayomide screamed. “What happened? Hope he didn't die?” She desperately wanted to know.

“No, he didn't die; he began to sink. He began to sink because he allowed the fear of the storms to affect him. That is what happens when we take our eyes off Jesus and begin to look at the things around us that look like storms,” he began explaining.

“Daddy, what is a storm?” Ayobami asked with so much innocence.

“A storm is a type of powerful wind. But in our day-to-day life, a storm is anything or any situation that seems bigger than us.”

“Like Mathematics?” Ayomide didn't like the subject.

They all laughed.

“Do you know that you can ask Jesus to help you understand Maths? There is no situation too big for God to handle. There is no storm too great for Him to deliver us from.”

“Jesus, please help me in my Mathematics in Jesus name,” Ayomide prayed aloud.

“Amen,” everyone responded.

“Storms are bound to come. Jesus never said we would not face storms, but He promised to always be with us, never leave us, or forsake us. Jesus was with Peter, but Peter didn't have faith.”

“So what happened when he began to sink?” Ayomide wanted to know how the story ended.

“He did the wisest thing. He cried to Jesus to save him, and immediately Jesus did. Let me ask you a question- when it seems like the storm is too much for us to bear and it feels like we are sinking, what do we do?” He waited for them to reply

“You cry to God to save you,” Ayomide said with excitement.

Ayobami repeated his sister's words and actions. He was the typical younger sibling that mimicked what his older sibling did.

“Yes, that's correct. You cry to God to save you.” Dr. Ola realized that was what Dr. Florence needed. She was being overwhelmed by a fierce storm that was eating her up. She needed to cry to Jesus to save her. He made it a

point of duty to pray for her before sleeping.

“I hope you have learned something tonight?” He looked at his children.

“I learned to cry to God when I face storms.” Ayomide was the first to respond as expected.

“I learned too that it is good to trust God so that we will not sink like Peter,” Ayobami responded, picking his words one after the other.

That is great. Clap for yourselves.

They both gave themselves a round of applause.

“Ruth, please, can you pray for us?”

She did, and they all said their goodnights before going to their rooms.

Just before he slept, Dr. Ola went on his knees beside his bed and prayed for Dr. Florence. “You are the solution to her pain, Lord. She may not know it but please, Lord, encounter her. Heal and deliver her. Let her experience Your joy and light like she never has in Jesus name, I pray, Amen.”

Chapter SEVEN

As Ngozi got to the hospital and approached Dan's room, she heard someone from his room shouting for help. The voice sounded just like his, and it got louder as she got closer. When she realized it was her husband who had been shouting, she ran into his room and found him tied down to the bed with a chain that someone locked with a padlock.

“Daniel, what happened? Who tied you up?” She asked, trying to untie him.

“Please unlock the padlock.” He pleaded as if his life depended on it.

“I don't have the key; how do I unlock it?” Ngozi was so confused and scared. She didn't know what to do.

“The key is with you, dear. It has always been with you. Please use it and set me free.” He begged her.

“What key? I don't have the key.”

“Here, take this key.” She heard a familiar voice

from behind her. She turned to see who it was. She saw Sharon holding out a key to her, but the voice she heard was Veronica's.

“Thank you.” She collected the key and tried to unlock the padlock, all to no avail.

She woke. It was a dream. She sat up in bed, trying to wrap her head around the dream she just had. She knew it had a message buried within it, but she fixed her mind on getting to the root of what was going on, especially between her husband and Veronica. One thing she picked from the dream was that Sharon was sent to her to offer her help. The fact that Sharon had a key was a confirmation. She was now more convinced that Sharon was the answer to her prayer. Ngozi said a short prayer and quickly began her day. She had a lot on her plate, and time wasn't on her side. She hurriedly woke Seun up and got her ready for school. She prepared her breakfast and packed her lunch box.

“Eat quickly. We are running late,” Ngozi said to Seun as she packed her husband's breakfast. She decided she'd join the church in fasting that day towards the upcoming convention. She didn't want anyone tagging

her as the 'unspiritual pastor's wife.'

Ngozi dropped Seun off at school and drove to the hospital. She met Dan awake, watching TV. He looked a lot better and brighter.

"Good morning, dear," he greeted her.

"You look a lot better," she smiled at him as she offloaded the basket she brought.

"I feel much better. Hopefully, the doctor discharges me soon."

"Thank God. I hope so too. How was your night?"

"It was okay. Yours?"

"Short but not too bad." She served his food on a plate and gave him to eat.

"Thank you. Have you eaten?" He asked her as he collected the food.

"No, I'm fasting today."

"Oh, that's nice. Thank you for being such a supportive wife."

Before Ngozi could reply, she heard a knock on the door.

"Come in," she said, thinking it was either the

doctor or a nurse. She was far from right.

Veronica walked into the room with a box of cake. She ignored Ngozi and walked straight to Dan.

“Hello Pastor, how are you feeling today?” She dropped the cake on his bedside cabinet.

“I’m fine, thank you,” Dan replied with a smile, taking his glance from Veronica to the cake.

“I brought you something,” Veronica smiled as she opened the upper lid of the paper box.

Dan grinned from ear to ear. He dropped the plate of food that was in his hands, giving Veronica his full attention. “This is so thoughtful of you.” He admired the cake. “Thank you for all you do.”

Ngozi’s heart was heavy; she had seen enough. As far as she was concerned, this seemed like a lost battle, and thus, she needed a good strategy. She stood up, stepped out of the ward, got into the car, and began to weep. She also remembered the dream she had and decided to call Sharon.

“Hello dear,” Sharon picked the call after the second ring.

“Sharon, I have had enough!” Ngozi was sobbing.

“Take it easy, dear. It is well.”

“Is it? Sharon, is it well?” She asked, her faith as good as dead.

“Should I call the pastor?” Sharon appeared willing to help.

Ngozi was silent for a moment. She knew that there was no going back once Sharon made the call. However, she convinced herself again that it was a pastor they were going to meet, not a herbalist. “Please do.”

“Alright, dear.” Sharon ended the call.

Ngozi didn't have the strength to pray. She allowed her head to rest on the steering wheel. After a few minutes, her phone rang. She looked at the caller's ID- a number with no name. She wasn't in the mood to speak with anyone. She silenced the call and hoped Sharon would call soon.

The strange number called a second time, and she picked the call out of frustration.

“Hello, please, who is this?” Her tone was a bit harsh.

“Good morning, please am I on to Mrs. Ngozi

Bamidele?” the male voice asked.

“Yes, who am I speaking with?”

“This is Pastor Alex, I got your contact from a client, Sharon.”

“A client?’ That didn't sound like an appropriate word to refer to someone you ministered to.” Ngozi quickly brushed the thought aside.

“Yes, Sir, I'm her friend, and she told me about you.”

“That's fine. I understand that you need me to pray for you?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Alright, can we meet up right away if you are free?”

Ngozi was as free as a bird released into the wild from a cage. She had taken excuse from her place of work, and the only other person that could have kept her occupied- Dan, hardly noticed her absence.

“Yes, we can.”

“Great, I'll text you the address of my church. Let's meet there.”

“Thank you very much, Pastor.” She ended the

call.

Her phone beeped. It was a text message from the pastor. She wasn't familiar with the area- however, she was determined not to allow that to deter her. She entered the address on Google Maps and began her one-hour trip to Pastor Alex's church.

Throughout the trip, she struggled with this nagging, uneasy feeling. She continued to ignore it- she kept convincing herself that she needed to go.

As she approached the gate leading to the church, she saw the medium-sized signboard which read 'Divinity Church of God.' She drove into the compound, and as she entered the church premises, she met a young lady seated at the entrance. The lady had a Bible opened on her lap and held a red handkerchief.

Ngozi greeted her and asked where she could meet Pastor Alex.

The lady didn't say a word; instead, she pointed to the door on the pulpit's left side.

Ngozi thanked her, and as she walked towards the door, she couldn't help but notice the queer interior designs. The interior decorators had arranged flowers

around the pulpit. Ngozi also saw a small table beside the pulpit stand; it was covered with red cloth and had four red candles on each of its corners. She also noticed a massive picture of a man; it was the backdrop of the pulpit. There was no visible picture of scriptures or anything like she had seen in other churches.

Ngozi knocked on the door she was directed to, and a voice from within asked her to come in. She opened the door, which led into what appeared to be the pastor's office. It was pretty large, with similar designs likened to what she saw in the church. A middle-aged man who looked to be in his early forties stood up from his chair and approached her.

“You must be Ngozi.” He smiled and opened his arms for a hug.

“Yes, Sir.”

He welcomed her into his house with a warm hug. Ngozi wasn't used to hugs from strangers; however, she hugged him briefly because she did not want to appear rude. As she let go of his embrace, she suddenly felt at home with him; all her doubts about the man's genuineness flew out the window.

“Please have a seat,” he pointed to the chair in front of his table and then walked back to his seat. He removed the overall he was putting on. It was a white robe with a red belt, revealing what he wore beneath it, a black shirt tucked into a black trouser. He hung it on a coat rack at the corner of his office, after which he took his seat.

“So how can I be of help, Madam?” He smiled at Ngozi, giving her his full attention.

Ngozi felt so welcomed and at ease. She opened up to him about all she was going through, and he nodded as he listened.

“Now let me tell you,” he pointed his right index finger at her then continued. “That lady, Valentina, or what's her name again?”

“Veronica, Sir.”

“Ehen (Yes) Veronica, that lady is an agent of darkness sent to destroy your home.”

Ngozi sat up in her chair. “Yes, Pastor, I believe so too.”

“You see, what you have before you is not an ordinary battle, but a highly spiritual one. You have to

fight spiritual battles with spiritual weapons.”

Ngozi nodded in agreement.

“The Bible says that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal; in essence, they are not physical, but spiritual.”

Ngozi was so pleased that he quoted the Bible. His actions finally convinced her beyond reasonable doubt that he was a man of God, not an occultist.

“So here is what you are going to do.” He paused to make sure he had her full attention. “Read Psalm 91 aloud three times over a cup of water and drink the water. Secondly, get four red candles, light them, place a whole coconut in their center, call out the lady's name three times, and command her to leave your husband alone. Afterwards, smash the coconut on the ground. Lastly, when next you are to see your husband, wear this ring.” He opened the first drawer of his table and brought out a golden ring. “Rub your husband's head with this ring, after which he will give you his full attention.”

Ngozi nodded her head. She was happy she had finally gotten the solution to her problems.

“Do you have any questions?” He waited for her

to respond.

Ngozi smiled. “No, Pastor. I understand perfectly.”

“Praise God.” He returned the smile. “Thank You, Jesus.” He waved his right hand in the air.

“Thank You, Lord.” Ngozi believed he had just 'received' something from God for her.

“After taking your bath tomorrow, make sure you don't say a word to anyone until you see your husband and do what I told you. These instructions are essential and Biblical. You remember that God instructed the young prophet in the Bible to follow a particular route and not return to Judah by the same way he came; in the end, he disobeyed, and it cost him his life.”

Ngozi nodded. She felt fear creep in as he spoke about the unfortunate end of the young prophet, a Bible character she was familiar with.

“I believe you are also familiar with the story of Elisha and Gehazi in 2 Kings 4:29. Elisha instructed him not to talk to anyone on his way.”

Ngozi was well aware of that scripture. She nodded to show she was with him even though she was

beginning to have doubts about his methods.

“With all that said, the ministry will appreciate it if you can support us with any amount.” He had a straight face; the smile had disappeared.

Ngozi didn't see that coming. She had no problem sowing whenever she was led, but she didn't seem to be given a choice. She also had no idea of how much would be appropriate to give. Before she could make a decision, she felt an irresistible force compelling her. As if she was being controlled, she opened her bag and brought out all the cash in it—twenty thousand naira, the cash that remained from what Sharon gave. Ngozi had spent the rest on hospital bills.

She stood up, thanked the pastor, and left the office feeling somewhat empty and drained— not just financially but even more, spiritually. The joy and peace she expected to feel after talking to the man of God was lacking.

She brushed her anxious thoughts away and reminded herself of all the things the pastor asked her to do. As she stepped out of the church building, she thanked the woman who had pointed the pastor's office

to her. However, the woman only nodded in response.

“She must have been instructed not to speak to anyone too.” Ngozi thought as she walked towards her car.

On her way, she branched to buy a pack of red candles and a coconut. She kept asking herself what she was doing with the items. Because she was desperate for results, she didn't allow the thoughts to bother her. She bounced them off as fast as they came.

She got to the hospital and saw that Veronica had given her husband lunch. “Why am I not surprised?” She thought to herself as she walked into Dan's hospital room and found him eating while Veronica sat confidently on the chair beside him.

Ngozi ignored her but spoke to her husband. “How are you doing?”

“I'm good. Veronica has been taking care of me.” He smiled.

'What have I been doing for you for the past eleven years?' Ngozi wondered. Those were the words she was about to utter when she decided to hold her peace. She was not ready to begin an argument with her

husband, certainly not in the presence of Veronica. For all Ngozi cared, that lady was the root of their problems, and Ngozi was happy because she now had what it took to deal with her.

“I won't be staying long. I'll have to pick up Seun from school and see if I can attend the prayer meeting this evening.” Ngozi didn't desire to be at the prayer meeting; she only wanted to fulfill all righteousness and avoid misinterpretation from church members.

“I hope your secretary won't stay here forever. She should know there is service this evening.” Ngozi spoke about Veronica as if she wasn't there but knew very well that Veronica could hear her.

Dan chuckled. “She'll be around for the prayer meeting.”

His chuckle irritated Ngozi; she didn't see a reason for it. She left after a few minutes as she couldn't stand Veronica's presence.

She picked up Seun from school as planned and headed home. Exhausted, Ngozi decided to lie down and rest for a few minutes before leaving for church. Unfortunately for her, it ended up being a plan that never

materialized. As she hit the sheets, she fell into a deep sleep, and by the time she awakened, it was 8 pm.

She immediately called Dan to ask about dinner. He told her not to bother, he wasn't so hungry. She checked on Seun, who was in the sitting room watching TV.

“Seun, you didn't wake me up; I wanted to go to church.”

“Mummy, I woke you up twice, but you said you weren't going,” Seun replied.

“Really?” Ngozi had no idea when that happened. She must have been exhausted and in need of rest.

“Mummy, I'm hungry.”

Her daughter's words brought Ngozi to the realization that she had not eaten anything that day.

“That makes the two of us dear. Let's go to the kitchen and see what we can eat.” She had fasted the whole day but didn't have time to pray. She prepared a light meal for both of them, said a short prayer, and they both ate. After clearing up the dishes, they both went to bed.

Very early the following day, she was up. She said a short prayer, and then she brought out all the items Pastor Alex had told her to get. She opened Psalm 91 and drank the glass of water. Next, Ngozi lit the four candles and placed the coconut in the center. She called out Veronica's name three times and commanded her to leave Dan alone. She then went outside to smash the coconut. She picked up its pieces and threw them into the dust bin, after which she returned inside.

She woke Seun up and got her ready for school. Ngozi made sure bathing was the last thing she did that morning because she knew she couldn't speak to anyone afterward. It was challenging, especially with Seun in the car with her as she drove to her school.

“Mummy, when will daddy be coming home?” She began her series of endless questions.

Ngozi nodded.

“Will the doctor discharge him soon?”

Ngozi nodded again. The more Seun asked questions, the more frustrated Ngozi got. She wished she could reply to her daughter, but she couldn't.

“Mummy, we didn't have morning devotion this

morning?” Seun liked every opportunity to pray and read the Bible as a family. “Is it because daddy is not around?”

Ngozi shook her head. She forgot. Pastor Alex's assignment had occupied her mind.

“Mummy, do you know I love you?” Seun looked at her mum and smiled. Her innocent smile meant the world to Ngozi. Ngozi felt like parking the car, hugging her daughter and telling her how much she loved her too, but all she could do was smile and gently pat her daughter's cheek.

“Is there something in your mouth, mummy?” Seun didn't seem to understand why her mum remained silent.

Ngozi saw that as a way of escape. She made some sounds and nodded. Her new trick was to act as if she had saliva in her mouth.

Seun stopped asking questions, and the rest of the drive to school was long and quiet.

After dropping Seun off at school, she went straight to the hospital. Before she got down from the car, she put on the ring the pastor had given her and went straight to Dan's room.

The nurse at the reception greeted her, but all Ngozi could do was smile and nod.

As soon as she entered Dan's room, she met him sleeping. That didn't stop her from doing what she had to do. She rubbed his head with the hand which he wore the ring, and he woke up immediately.

"Good morning, dear," she smiled at him.

"Has Veronica come?" He asked as he looked around for any sign of her.

"What?" Ngozi could not believe her ears. "Have you forgotten you have a wife and children? Must everything be about that girl?" Ngozi was angry.

"It's not that; it's just that I..."

"You what?" Ngozi cut in harshly. "What possible reason can you have for ignoring your family and giving all your time and attention to Veronica?"

He became defensive. "Why are you shouting at me? What have I done wrong by asking if Veronica has come? Do you even know why I am asking?" He sat up in bed, equally upset.

Ngozi could not recognize her husband anymore. He was not the man she used to know.

Just before the conversation got hotter, the doctor came in. The couple immediately acted as if all was well. They smiled and greeted the doctor.

“Mr. Bamidele, how are you this morning? The doctor smiled at him as he moved closer to examine him.

“I'm fine, thank you, doctor.”

“That's great; I'm planning on discharging you today to see you in a week.”

The news of Dan coming home didn't appeal to Ngozi's ears. The mere sight of her husband was beginning to put her off.

“Wow! that's great, doctor.” Dan smiled and looked at Ngozi, whose face was expressionless.

The doctor turned to Ngozi. “The nurse will put you through on how to cater for the wounds, so they don't get infected.”

“Alright, doctor. Thank you very much.”

“You are welcome.” He made some documentations in Dan's case note before leaving. “I'll be in my office if you need me or have any questions.”

“Okay, doctor,” they both chorused.

Ngozi packed up his things and took them to the

car. She was still upset about Dan's behavior. It was apparent the ring did not work. She hissed as she dropped the things in the car, slamming the door in anger.

"Take it easy." Ngozi heard a female voice from behind.

She turned around and saw Veronica carrying a basket.

"If that is for my husband," Ngozi pointed at the basket, "it won't be necessary." She hissed and walked away.

"We'll see about that," Veronica laughed. Her confidence was astonishing.

Ngozi ignored Veronica and went straight to Dan's ward. A few moments after she entered the ward, Veronica showed up.

"Knock knock," she smiled as she entered without being told to come in.

"Good morning Veronica," Dan's face lit up with a smile.

"How are you doing today, Pastor?" She smiled and placed the basket on the bedside cabinet.

“Having seen you, I'm great. The doctor has just discharged me.”

Ngozi watched the both of them with disgust. They both seemed like characters of the worst movie she had ever seen.

“Are you ready to leave?” Ngozi asked Dan with a harsh tone. She convinced herself that whatever declarations she made over the coconut didn't work either.

“Have you met the nurse to teach you how to dress the wounds?”

Ngozi walked out of the room without giving him a reply. She could hear both Dan and Veronica giggle as she left.

She was back after a few minutes. “I'll be in the car when you are ready.”

She sat in the driver's seat and waited for her husband. After some minutes, she saw him being wheeled out of the hospital by a nurse, and Veronica walked beside him, still carrying her basket. The nurse helped him into the car. Ngozi thanked her.

“Darling, can we give Veronica a lift to the

junction?” Dan had not referred to his wife as 'darling' in ages. Ngozi knew that his kindness was because he needed a favor- and that infuriated her the more.

“Can't she find her way?”

“Why are you talking like this?” Dan's countenance changed. He got upset. “Is it too much for us to drop her at the junction? She has done so much for us these past few days.”

“For you maybe, but not for me.” Ngozi folded her arms and looked straight.

“If you don't want to give her a ride, then maybe you should not bother taking me home.” He was ready to come down from the car and find his way home, even with the cast and crutches.

Ngozi looked at him in shock. What did he just say? Had it come to that? Ngozi did not think she could handle it. She didn't have a choice, anyway. “She can come in.” Ngozi unlocked the car.

Dan signaled to Veronica, who was standing some meters away, to enter the car.

She sat at the back and placed the basket of food on the seat beside her. “Thank you very much Pastor, I

appreciate it.”

“Oh, please don't mention.” His smile had returned.

No one said anything till they got to the junction. Veronica got down and thanked Dan again before crossing over to the other side.

Ngozi noticed something different about her after she got down, but she couldn't place it. After she had started the car and driven a reasonable distance, she realized Veronica wasn't carrying her basket. She looked to the back of the car and saw it staring at her. Ngozi knew that was her plan all along. That was why she wanted to follow them to the junction. She hissed at the realization and continued driving.

“Why did you hiss?” Dan asked.

“Nothing.” She was not ready to begin another argumentative conversation with him. She knew she was going to dispose of the food as soon as she got home. Now that she finally had her husband to herself, she felt it was the best time to trace the genesis of all the issues and trash it out once and for all.

“Something has been on my mind,” she began.

“What's that?” He looked at her.

“The accident. Can you remember how exactly it happened?” She gave him a brief side glance and returned her gaze to the road.

“That's the most disturbing thing. I try to recollect what happened, but I can't. All I remember was that I was on my way to the ministers' meeting. The next thing I remember was I was at the hospital.”

“So you don't know how Veronica got into the car?”

“Was she in the car?” Dan looked confused.

“Well, from the information I got at the hospital, she was the one that brought you to the hospital.”

“But that does not mean she was in the car with me”. He looked puzzled.

“You are right; I'm just still trying to understand what happened.”

“So am I.”

Ngozi knew that Veronica had a hand in everything that was going on, especially the accident, and she couldn't have been more right.

A year and a half ago, Veronica had just attended

her friend's younger sister's wedding. Throughout the ceremony, people who knew her kept saying words of prayer that her day of joy too would come. Some asked, point-blank, "Vero, when are we coming to celebrate you too?" Someone even went as far as accusing her of being shameless.

"You have no shame," an older woman said to her. "You are here attending a wedding when you are supposed to have been a mother of three by now. Don't you know you aren't getting any younger? You ought to think about your life." The older woman insulted her to the hearing of the people who sat at her table.

Her utterances hurt Veronica to her marrow. She had up till then endured such comments, but she couldn't take it anymore. She didn't have the words with which to reply her. Veronica just stood up and left.

In her little over three decades of existing, she had never been in a relationship, neither did she have any serious suitor. It got so bad that she began to think she was cursed and had to do something about it. She was ready to go any length to deliver herself from the shackles of spinsterhood.

She summoned courage and opened up to a colleague at work. “Folake, I can't take it anymore. I'm telling you this because I know that you can relate. You just got married last year, and I know you understand that waiting for so long can be very hard.”

“I understand perfectly. I had endured enough and had to take matters into my hand,” Folake replied.

“Please help a sister; what did you do?” Veronica desperately wanted a way out of her situation.

“I thought you were never going to ask. The Bible says the kingdom of God suffereth violence and the violent take it by force.” Folake quoted the scripture to prepare Veronica's mind. She didn't care if she quoted the verse out of context.

Veronica wasn't exactly a sound Christian. She believed in God and went to church occasionally, but that was all. Veronica didn't have a relationship with God, not to talk of having depth or being grounded in His Word. She was, however, familiar with the scripture Folake quoted.

“Someone introduced me to a man who could help my situation. When I met him, he told me to do a

few things, and by the next month, I met my husband.”

“Just like that?” Veronica's eyes widened in amazement. There was so much excitement in her voice.

“Just like that, my sister.” Folake never told her the 'things' the man asked her to do and that she never had peace for a day in her matrimonial home. She always painted a perfect picture of her situation to Veronica.

“Wow, please take me to this man. Let him also help me,” Veronica pleaded.

“No problem, we'll go and see him tomorrow,” Folake assured her.

The next day, Folake took Veronica to the man as she had promised. He was a herbalist by the name 'Bararopa,' and he stayed in an occult shrine. Veronica was initially skeptical and uncomfortable with the whole idea, but she remembered the miserable single life she was sick of living. She kicked her misgivings aside.

The herbalist made some incarnations, after which he spoke to her. “There is one thing you must do to put an end to your situation and usher in your blessing.”

“What is it, Sir?” She was eager to know what it was and was willing to do it.

“We rise by climbing on the shoulders of others...”

Veronica didn't know where he was going with this, but she was all ears.

“And to reach the shoulders, you may need to trample on some or even bring others down.”

She seemed a bit confused but kept listening.

“Your task is to bring down a man who has been causing a lot of chaos for us.”

“How do I bring him down, Sir?”

“By sleeping with him,” the herbalist told her, point-blank

Veronica was shocked; she never expected such a task. She whispered to Folake, who was seated beside her, “I can't do this.”

“Oh yes, you can, and you will. It's too late to go back now.”

That's the same lie the devil always tells when he wants to keep his victims trapped. He'll feed them with lies that they have gone too far in sin to turn back or that their sin is too grievous for God to forgive. All lies.

Veronica turned to the man to continue.

“As soon as you complete this task, your blessing will follow.”

Veronica liked the sound of that.

“Here, take this ring.” He handed a ring over to her. It was a golden ring with red stones all around. “You are not to use the ring on the target because it will backfire. However, you can wear it and use it to touch anything around him that can ultimately affect him.” Bararopa made sure he was crystal clear.

“Okay, Sir.” She collected the ring and kept it in her bag.

“I will hand you over to the person who will oversee your activities. You answer to her; she answers to someone else, who in turn answers to me. Failure to carry out the instructions she gives you can cost you your life. Do you understand?” His warning was straightforward but scary.

“Yes, I do,” Veronica trembled.

“I present to you your master and her own master.” He made some incarnations, and two people walked in.

Sharon, Ngozi's best friend, and Alex, the supposed pastor that Sharon introduced to Ngozi. They were the team she was to gang up with to bring Dan down.

Sharon didn't tell Ngozi that when she visited Pastor Alex for help, he said to her that the only condition for her to receive and sustain her blessings would be to target men of God. Little did she know at the time that Ngozi's husband would end up being a target.

Sharon was initially hesitant when Veronica informed her that Dan was her next target. However, when Bararopa reminded Veronica that failure to comply would result in the loss of her children and her businesses, she reluctantly agreed to do it. Sharon knew that Ngozi would call her when things got worse; thus, Sharon cooked up a story about how Alex was a pastor and how they prayed through the night for her blessings to materialize. Sharon also informed Alex that the wife of their target, Ngozi, would be coming to see him. He, in turn, planned to send her on a wild goose chase, feeding her with lies about the coconut and the ring.

Once Veronica was given the task, she devised

how best to get Dan to sleep with her. She started by joining his church, then becoming his secretary. On several occasions, she wore skimpy dresses to seduce him, but she had to stop because he barely noticed her. Instead, some older women in the church began scolding her for her indecent dressing. She then sought to be alone with him, but that never worked because there was always one person or the other that came to see him in his office; when he was finally alone, the office door was permanently left open.

The day of the accident was her jackpot. Dan was on his way to church for the ministers' meeting when he saw her standing by the roadside and decided to give her a ride.

“Pastor, thank you so much for the ride. I had been waiting for a cab since, but none was forthcoming.”

“That's fine, no problem. We thank God. I didn't know you were going to be at church this early.” He usually informed her whenever he was going to need her for anything but since he didn't, he wasn't expecting her in church. On many occasions, he was fine alone and didn't need her at the office.

Without saying another word, Veronica began to rub Dan's thigh. She was determined to pull him down by any means.

“What are you doing?” he exclaimed.

“I have booked a room for us at a hotel not too far from here.” She didn't stop

“Are you out of your mind, Veronica?” He shouted at her. He couldn't comprehend what was going on.

She didn't respond. She realized that her plan to get Dan to sleep with her would not succeed, so she switched to plan B. “If he doesn't fall one way, he will fall another way,” she had told herself. From the moment she took up this task given to her by Bararopa, she had felt this compelling force to go to any length to carry it out. She didn't feel she was in control of herself anymore. It felt like a spirit possessed and controlled her. Every time she remembered the penalty of failing – death, she was ready to do whatever she had to.

Dan parked the car and asked her to get down. He had been riding with the devil and had no idea. Now that she had revealed who she was, there was no way he

would continue the journey with her. As she alighted from the vehicle, she wore the ring, and as soon as Veronica shut the door, she placed the hand with the ring on the car and decreed that it would get involved in an accident.

Dan's phone rang. He had still not recovered from the shock of what Veronica just did when he took his eyes off the road to his phone for a brief moment to see who was calling him. Before he could take his focus back on the road, there was a massive collision with an oncoming trailer. He immediately lost consciousness.

After the accident, Veronica immediately ran to the car as if she had been waiting for it to happen. Before people gathered, she called out to Dan.

"Pastor, pastor," she tapped him. She didn't get a response, but she saw he was still breathing. She was disappointed that her plan to kill him didn't work. At that point, people had started gathering.

"Please help; this is my pastor," she cried. Her act was smooth and convincing.

Some good Samaritans stopped a taxi and carried him into it. Veronica sat with Dan at the backseat

of the taxi, while the driver took them to the nearest hospital. That was how Dan landed in the hospital, totally unaware of what conspired.

That evening on returning from the hospital, Veronica called Sharon and told her all that happened. Sharon was mad at her for messing up the operation.

“Can't you carry out a simple instruction?” She shouted at Veronica over the phone.

“I'm sorry, Ma,” Veronica apologized.

There was silence from Sharon for a while. “Your new task is to ensure he no longer loves his wife. I need you to come between him and his family. Do everything in your power to make sure he isolates himself from his family and no longer loves them. Once that happens, he will be unguarded and easy to attack. If for any reason he regains love for them, then you have failed.”

“But Ma, why are you desperate to pull this man down?” Veronica needed to understand why they had to go any length to bring him down.

“That's not your business,” she snapped at her.

“I'm sorry, Ma, it's just that you are trying so hard to pull him down.”

“Bararopa already told you that he is a threat to us, and we need him out of the way.” Sharon wasn't happy doing this, but she believed she had to do it.

“From tomorrow, make sure he sees you instead of his wife. Is that taken?”

“Yes, Ma.”

That was Veronica's mission, and she was determined to carry it out to the letter.

Early the following day, while preparing food for him, she wore the ring and kept decreeing that as he ate the food, she would win his heart and that he would forget all that happened.

On getting to the hospital, before Dan could utter a word, Veronica went on her knees and asked him to forgive her for her actions.

“I don't know what came over me. I have asked God to forgive me, and I pray you to forgive me too, Sir.”

Dan looked at her and saw she was sorry. “You can get up. Make sure such an act never repeats itself. Although I forgive you, I can't have you work as my secretary anymore.”

She stood up, “I understand, Sir. I'll be leaving

now. I just wanted to be sure you were feeling better. I also brought food for you. I wasn't sure if you had eaten.”

“Thank you, and God bless you. You can drop the food.”

Veronica knew that if she dropped it and left, he wouldn't eat it. So she dropped the basket beside him, opened the bowl of pepper soup, and began to serve him.

Dan was just about to tell her not to bother when, like a charm, the aroma of the food hit him, and he instantly couldn't remember what he was about to say.

She served him, and as he began to eat, he suddenly felt comfortable with Veronica. The more he tried to understand what was going on, the more he couldn't. Instantly, his memory of the accident wiped off.

These events marked the genesis of Dan's journey to memory loss and mind manipulation.

Chapter EIGHT

The following day, Dr. Ola was at work before 8 am. The first person he went to see was Grace. The nurses had moved her to one of the rooms in the wards, as she was no longer in the Accident and Emergency unit. Dr. Ola noticed that Grace looked a lot better. She smiled immediately she saw him.

“Come and join me, doctor.” She was eating white rice and stew with fish.

“Thank you,” Dr. Ola appreciated her. “I see you are a lot better.” He smiled.

“Yes, I am, but I’m still terrified. I don’t want my aunty to find out what I did. If she does, she’ll definitely tell my parents.” Her concern was logical. No Christian parent would be pleased to hear that their daughter got pregnant and had an abortion.

“Whoever conceals his sins will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain

mercy. Those aren't my words, Grace.”

“Proverbs 28:13. You prayed with me yesterday, remember? I confessed my sins to God, and I believe He has forgiven me.”

“Yes, He has, but it doesn't stop there; God has placed your parents as spiritual authorities over you. You are accountable to them. They have a vital role to play in your restoration. James 5:16 says, Confess your sins one to another and pray for each other so that you may be healed. You have to tell them, Grace. Yes, they will be hurt, but you need them to forgive you and pray for you.

Just as he was speaking, Dr. Florence and the Team on call entered the ward and walked towards Grace's bed. Dr. Ola turned towards her and greeted Dr. Florence as she approached. He didn't expect her that early, but he concluded that her being around early had something to do with her absence the previous day. Dr. Florence was dedicated to her work and had poured her life into it. Having spent a whole day at her home, she saw no need to delay in coming to work the next day.

“Good morning, Ma.”

“Good morning Dr. Ola,” she responded with the usual stern look. She hardly smiled at anyone. “I hear you

attended to a patient with incomplete abortion yesterday.”

“Yes, Ma.”

“Where is she?”

“Here, Ma.” He pointed at Grace.

Until that moment, Dr. Florence had not taken a look at the patient on the bed. She turned towards the patient and was shocked at the realization.

“Funmilayo!” She couldn't believe it.

“Good morning, Ma.” Grace couldn't look her aunt in the face.

“Funmi, what is going on here?” Dr. Florence couldn't bring herself to believe what was going on. Her younger sister's daughter was on admission on account of incomplete abortion? She didn't know whether to be firm and angry with her or put her anger aside, be soft and gentle.

Grace couldn't answer her. She kept looking down, too ashamed to look up.

Dr. Florence looked at Dr. Ola, “please tell me what happened.” The firmness in her tone had immediately disappeared.

He gave a detailed summary of Grace's condition

when her friend brought her in and all he did before handing her case over to Dr. Davis to continue care.

“Thank you so much, Dr. Ola. I appreciate you.” This gesture marked the first time Dr. Florence expressed gratitude to him for anything.

Everyone in the ward round, including the nurses, was shocked to see her so soft. Only Dr. Ola knew Grace was her niece and understood why she had suddenly become tender.

“You are welcome, Ma.” Dr. Ola was glad he could be of help.

Turning to the rest of those on the ward round, Dr. Florence began. Please I'll join you at the next patient.” That was her way of asking them to excuse her. She needed some alone time with her niece.

As Dr. Ola turned to leave, Grace held his hand and asked him not to.

He looked at her and Dr. Florence, who seemed amazed at the gesture. He knew Dr. Florence needed alone time with her, and he didn't want to seem like an intruding third party. “I'll be outside if you need anything,” he told her.

“That's fine; you can stay. I see that Grace wants

you here.” It made no difference to her if he stayed or left. She was still trying to get over the shock. She had still not found the words to say when she heard Grace speak.

“Aunty, I’m so sorry. I am truly sorry for bringing shame to this family and most importantly to God.” She sobbed.

“Grace Oluwafumilayo Adeyeye,” she called out her full name and let out a deep sigh as she shook her head. “Despite all that your parents did for you, is this how you repay them?” Dr. Florence was disappointed, and she knew that Grace's predicament would crush her parents once they found out.

Grace was heartbroken and full of regrets, and Dr. Florence could see it.

“I will come back to see you after my ward round. What matters most is that you are alive and well. Just get some rest.” She tapped Grace on the shoulder and left.

Dr. Ola had been standing by all through. He didn't say a word because he knew it wouldn't be appropriate to do so. He escorted Dr. Florence as she continued the ward round.

The ward round ended around 10 am. Dr.

Florence went back to check up on Grace as she had promised. She met Grace sleeping and decided not to wake her. When Dr. Florence got to her consulting room, she took her phone and made a call through to her sister, Banke.

“Sister mi,” Banke picked almost immediately.

“Banke, Bawo ni gbogbo nkan (how is everything)?”

“Fine o, we thank God.”

“When last did you speak with Funmi?” Banke and her husband referred to Grace as 'Funmi' at home.

“Like two days ago. Kilode, se ko si? (Why? Hope there is no problem?)” From Banke's tone, one could tell that she was getting anxious. Dr. Florence knew her sister; she was the type to panic quickly.

“Don't be alarmed, Banke. I was asking because she is on admission here.”

“Jesus!” Banke exclaimed. “What happened to her?”

“She is fine now, but it would be best you come and see her for yourself.” Dr. Florence preferred to inform her sister what Grace did in person.

“Okay, I'll be there shortly.”

“Alright, see you soon.” She ended the call.

As soon as Florence ended the call, she had a knock on the door.

“Who is it?” she asked.

“It's me, Dr. Ola.”

“Come in.”

Dr. Ola had been praying underneath his breath even before Dr. Florence asked him to come in. “Well done, Ma.” He greeted as he entered the consulting room where she sat.

“Dr. Ola, thank you for taking care of Grace. I don't know what you did to her, but seeing how comfortable she is around you, I know you must be good at what you do.”

Dr. Ola chuckled. “It's not me ma; it's God. I just did the little I could, and God took over.”

She initially wanted to ignore what he said, but she was tired of hearing God's name pop up only when it was time for receiving credit. “He is only given credit when good things happen. When a bad thing happens, we blame it on the devil.” She never planned to bring up this subject, but she couldn't take it anymore. “Where is He when bad things happen to us? Where was He when

Kayode was involved in the accident?" She wondered.

"But Ma, let's not forget that God was right there when His only son, Jesus Christ, was nailed to the cross and crucified for a sin He didn't commit. He is always present. He never promised that we wouldn't pass through storms, but He assured us that He'd always be with us and never forsake us. He is ever-present, whether it feels like it or not." He moved closer to her desk.

"If you have lost anything, He is the reason you haven't lost everything." That was something he had always heard a man of God preach.

"What do you know about losing anything?" The pain she felt from Kayode's death still felt fresh, like it was yesterday. The more she tried to push it behind her, the more painful it felt, and there was no one else to receive the blame other than God. "You people have it so smooth in life and conclude that God is good all the time. You don't know the pain of loss."

"I do, Ma." Dr. Ola perfectly understood how much it ached not to see, hear or hold a loved one again. "I lost my wife four years ago. It was the most horrifying experience of my life. The incident crushed my heart into

a million pieces; there are still no words to describe the pain. I couldn't help but wonder why God allowed it to happen. To date, I never got answers, but I got something more valuable. I got comfort, I received His peace and strength to heal and move on, and all these came from God.”

Dr. Florence allowed him to go on

“We may not be able to understand why certain things happen to us; it may feel like God has abandoned us. That was how Jesus felt on the cross, but God never left Him. God can help us heal; He can calm the storm and see us through it, bringing us out like gold out of a furnace.”

For the first time in years, Dr. Florence began to see God in a different light. She could feel His love and peace. The words Dr. Ola spoke addressed the hurt she had locked up for years. Tears flowed down her face uncontrollably. She bowed her head and wept.

Dr. Ola could feel the presence of God in the consulting room. “Thank you, Jesus,” he muttered under his breath. Sensing that Dr. Florence needed to be alone, Dr. Ola took his leave. He had finished what God asked him to do as he was only a messenger. The One who sent

him had taken over.

Dr. Florence felt overwhelmed with God's presence; all she could do was cry. So many thoughts filled her mind, but she couldn't voice them out. She felt sorry for doubting God's love for her; she opened up her heart and released the hurt she had bottled inside her. After minutes of sobbing, she was finally able to gather her words.

“Lord, I'm sorry. I pushed you away. I locked you out. I concluded you didn't love me, and for so many years, I didn't want anything to do with you. Despite all this, you never stopped loving me. Lord, please forgive me. I ask that you take over the wheel of my life. Heal my hurt and restore your peace and joy in me in Jesus name, Amen.”

She wiped her tears. She felt different. There was an unexplainable joy that bubbled within her. She couldn't have been more grateful to God for what He had just done.

There was a knock at the door.

“Come in,” she thought it was Dr. Ola.

The door opened, and she saw her sister, a shorter and darker version of Dr. Florence. “Where is

Funmi? What happened to her?” She asked, panicking.

“Banke have your seat,” Dr. Florence pointed at the empty chair opposite her.

She sat down but still seemed very uneasy.

“Funmi is fine, I’ll take you to her now, but I need you to please take it easy with her. What she did was terrible, no doubt- right now, she needs your love and forgiveness.” Dr. Florence couldn’t believe she was the one now speaking about forgiveness.

“What did she do? Sister mi, e bami soro (my sister, please talk to me).” The suspense was too much for Banke to take. “Jesus, have mercy on me,” Banke was already close to tears.

“She had an abortion.” Dr. Florence finally let the cat out of the bag.

“Jesusssssss!” Banke exclaimed as she jumped to her feet. “Abor-what? Is this a joke or something?” She couldn’t believe it. The Funmi she raised would never do such. She would not commit fornication, let alone abortion.

“Banke, please calm down, take it easy. Funmi has made her mistake; your actions going forward will go a long way in determining how she will turn out. If you

decide to handle the situation in anger, you may end up pushing her away. First, you need to show her love; afterwards, you can discipline her. I've seen her; she is scared and is very ashamed of what she did. Shouting at her or beating her will not solve anything; it will only make things worse." Dr. Florence tried to help Banke see things differently. The Banke she knew was going to pounce on her daughter if there was no intervention.

"Where is she? Please take me to her," Banke requested

"Alright, let's go."

When they got to Grace's room, she was awake, sitting up in bed. She had her Bible open beside her while she was listening to 'Oceans' by Hillsong. She paused the song immediately she saw her mum, went on her two knees, and started crying. "Mummy, please forgive me; I am so sorry."

Grace's act of genuine repentance broke her mother into a million pieces. She lifted her daughter and hugged her. "Funmilayo, why did you do this? Why?" She cried because she felt she had failed as a mother.

"Mummy, I'm sorry," those were the only words she could utter.

Dr. Florence stood at a distance and watched them both. It was indeed an emotional sight.

"I thought we brought you up in the way of the Lord, Funmi," she looked at her daughter's face for answers.

"Yes, Ma, you did. I did a terrible thing, and I am so sorry." She continued sobbing.

Banke hugged her again. "Although I have forgiven you, this doesn't mean your father and I will not discipline you for what you did. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Ma."

"I can't guarantee your father will take this the way I did." Banke had to make sure Grace understood that actions had consequences.

"Okay, Ma. I deserve whatever punishment I get."

Dr. Florence left them to have some alone time and went back to her office. She continued ruminating on what Dr. Ola told her earlier. She knew only God could have done such a perfect work of healing her hurt. But somehow, Dr. Florence still had this lingering fear. Fear of the future, fear that God will one day forsake her; this made her sad.

She bowed her head and said a word of prayer. “Dear Lord, I want to trust you that my tomorrow is in your hands and that my tomorrow is great because I’ve got you in it. Help my unbelief Lord and put an end to this fear in Jesus name, Amen.”

As she was concluding the prayer, there was a knock on the door.

“Come in.”

Dr. Ola was back. “Good afternoon, Ma.”

“Dr. Ola, the man God sent to me.” Her smile was broad.

Dr. Ola had never seen her that way. He was so happy to see the new Dr. Florence. He laughed at her greetings. “Interestingly, Ma, I have a message from God for you.”

“You do? Please go ahead.” She was all ears, eager to hear what God had for her.

“He says to tell you to try Him and see. He says, to prove you have nothing to fear, He will reverse the irreversible. I’m not sure what He is referring to, Ma, but that’s the Word.”

Dr. Florence knew what this message meant to her. She had just told God about her fears and doubts.

She knew this was God's way of telling her that she had absolutely nothing to fear because she had God, and there was nothing He couldn't do.

'Try God and see,' the words resounded in her heart as Dr. Ola left. "Lord Jesus, You are too great for me to put You to the test. I know you are God all by yourself. All I ask is for You to show yourself strong and mighty and take all the glory in Jesus name I pray, Amen.

Chapter NINE

The black BMW involved in the accident was the church's official car that Dan drove mostly to church or whenever he had church-related functions. He drove the family's car when he had personal errands to run- the same car Ngozi had been driving to and fro the hospital. The church's official vehicle was at the Mechanic's. Pastor Adams had been frequenting the place to follow up on its repairs.

Since Dan was still on crutches, he had no business driving. He mostly stayed home while Ngozi did all the running around. Pastor John had taken over heading the church during Dan's absence, and he faithfully carried Dan along on happenings at the church.

The convention was now a few days away. Preparation was on top gear. Dan had not been in church since the accident, although he had constantly sent his greetings to the members; the members, in turn, showed

love by visiting and bringing gifts.

Things had barely been okay between Dan and Ngozi. Ngozi kept putting up with his changed behavior. Though Dan was physically present, he hardly involved himself with things happening at home. He mostly sat in front of the TV. It was not only Ngozi struggling to put up with Dan's strange behavior; Seun was equally suffering. The other day, she got back from school, and as her custom was, she was about to start telling her father how her day went. Instead of giving Seun his full attention, Dan increased the TV volume and ignored her. Seun felt terrible and, since then, gave him his space. From then on, she never bothered him with any of the happenings in her life.

“Mummy,” she tapped her mum, who was working in the kitchen.

“Yes, my dear,” Ngozi suspended what she was doing to attend to her daughter.

“Why is daddy behaving like this?” The poor girl was close to tears.

Ngozi knew what her daughter was talking about, and she was sure Veronica was the root of all this. She knew the lady wasn't ordinary but couldn't place a

finger on what it was about her that was off. Ever since Dan was discharged, Veronica never stopped calling and texting him. She desperately wanted to make a mark of her presence in his life, and she was succeeding.

The next day, as Ngozi was driving out to take Seun to school, she met Veronica at the gate. She stood by as she drove out of the compound. Not expecting this and filled with rage, Ngozi parked the car and got down.

“How can I help you?” She was ready for a fight. The family was still actively suffering from the damage Veronica had caused thus far. There was no way Ngozi would let Veronica into her house- not after everything Veronica had done.

“I came to see Pastor Dan?” She smiled mischievously.

“You can't go in. My husband will not see you.” She moved closer, ready to attack at the slightest opportunity.

Veronica chuckled. Ngozi's demeanor didn't move her one bit. “Why don't you let him speak for himself?”

Before Ngozi could reply, she heard Dan approaching them.

“What is going on here?” he asked.

“Good morning Pastor, I just came to greet you and see how you are faring.” Veronica put up on an innocent smile.

“Oh, thank you very much; I was wondering when you'd stop by,” he smiled. Turning to Ngozi, he asked, “why aren't you allowing her in?”

“Why should I? She is not welcome in this house!” Ngozi replied bluntly.

“You don't make that call.” Dan raised his voice.

“Oh, yes, I do. Whatever Veronica is using to control you must stop.”

“What did you just say?” Dan moved closer to Ngozi. She saw rage in his eyes like never before. “What is the meaning of that rubbish?” He rested his weight on the left crutch and lifted his right hand, almost hitting his wife.

“Pastor, please take it easy.” Veronica, as usual, interfered in what didn't concern her.

Dan looked at Veronica, and immediately, the frown on his face disappeared. “I'm sorry you had to see that.”

“Dan!” Ngozi raised her voice. “You want to hit

me, your wife. In all the years I've known you, you have never dared raise your hand against me. Now, because of this thing," she pointed at Veronica. "You want to hit me?"

"You better mind what you say with that mouth of yours." He snapped back at her but quickly lowered his voice when he saw Seun watching as she sat in the car.

"I'm highly disappointed in you, Dan, or whoever you are. I never expected this from you." Ngozi shook her head. "I'm not going anywhere until I see Veronica leave."

"You don't have anywhere to go." He turned to Veronica. "Please come in; sorry you had to witness all that." He smiled at her.

"It's okay, Pastor." She smiled and gave Ngozi a rude glance.

"Ha!" Ngozi exclaimed loudly. "Not when I am alive. I can never allow this to happen. Seun, go inside the house this minute. We are not going anywhere today."

The innocent girl didn't know what to do. She came out of the car- obviously scared of her dad- and ran past him before he could do or say anything.

“You want to do this, Ngozi? Really?”

Ngozi felt powerless. Veronica seemed to be making progress in snatching her husband away from her and the children. Ngozi felt she was fast losing her grip.

“You are fighting this battle the wrong way.” She heard the voice from within. Deep within her, she knew this was a battle to be fought in the place of prayer. However, she desperately wanted to deal mercilessly with Veronica. She wished she could beat Veronica blue-black.

“You this wicked woman, you better get your hands off my husband, or else you won't like what I will do to you.” She pointed at Veronica, warning her sternly.

At that very exact moment, Pastor John's car approached the house. Apparently, he rushed to the scene. “Good morning, Pastor. I rushed here immediately I heard...”

“Heard what?” They all looked at him, wondering what he meant.

“Segun. You mean you don't know?”

“What happened to Segun?” Ngozi's heart raced. “What happened to my child?”

“His housemaster called the pastor's official line. He had tried calling both of you, but neither of you was reachable.”

“What are you talking about, Pastor John? What is wrong with Segun?”

Pastor John didn't know how to break the news to them. He said Segun was found lifeless on his bed this morning.

“What do you mean he was found lifeless?” Dan asked; every part of his being was now trembling in fear.

“I don't know, Pastor. I suggest we go there right away.”

Ngozi's legs were almost giving way. She ran into the house to grab Seun. She couldn't leave her at home alone.

Veronica reached for her phone in her bag, pretending she had an urgent call to attend to; she placed the phone in her ear and told Dan, “Pastor, it is well, I have to leave now. I'll call to find out how far.” There was zero empathy written on her face.

“How won't you leave now? Only God knows if you are the one behind this one too.” Ngozi hissed then

continued to the car.

Dan ignored Veronica and rushed into the car. It was as if he just realized that he had a family he had failed to protect. Pastor John and Seun sat at the back. Ngozi drove as fast as she could.

When they got to Segun's school, the students had just finished assembly. The entourage went straight to the hostel and asked for the housemaster's office. The housemaster had taken Segun to the hospital. After getting the details about the location of the hospital, they drove there. They met the housemaster and another student seated at the reception.

"Where is Segun?" Ngozi rushed to Mr. Akpan, the housemaster.

"He is with the doctor."

"What are they saying happened? How is my son?" Dan asked Mr. Akpan. He needed every information he could get.

"We don't know. We've been waiting for someone to come out and talk to us," Mr. Akpan explained to the apprehensive parents.

Pastor John quickly took Seun out of the hospital. He didn't want her to get scared. He waited

with her by the car and asked that they pray for Segun.

Back inside the hospital, Dan and Ngozi were still trying to understand what was going on.

“Femi,” Mr. Akpan pointed at the student with him. “He just noticed Segun was still lying on his bed when he was supposed to be getting ready for school. He called Segun's name, but Segun wasn't responding. He came to call me, and immediately, we rushed him here.”

“We still played together last night. He was fine. I woke him up this morning, but he didn't answer, so I left him, thinking he was still sleeping. After morning devotion, I noticed he was still sleeping, so I woke him up again. It was at that point I realized he wasn't responding. I immediately called Mr. Akpan, and that's how we brought him here.” The young boy narrated his version of the story.

“Nothing must happen to my son. Segun must not die.” Ngozi let out the tears. She was beginning to lose strength. Her life was slipping away; her world was crumbling drastically. She hadn't in her wildest nightmare imagined things taking this path.

Dan went to his wife and held her tight in his embrace. That was the first time in months her husband

had been that close to her. “All we can do now is cry to God.” He said in between tears.

Ngozi looked at him; she couldn't believe her ears. He hadn't spoken about praying to God since the accident. His dwindling prayer life had been a source of concern to her. She was surprised to hear him to talk about prayer, but was thankful he did.

She wiped her tears with the back of her hand. “I almost don't have the strength to pray,” she said, looking straight into his eyes.

“God doesn't need our strength; he knows we are weak but remember that his strength is made perfect in our weakness.” Dan spoke comforting words from the Bible.

Ngozi still couldn't wrap her head around the sudden switch that had just taken place from the Dan that lifted his hand, ready to hit her some minutes ago to the man who was holding her to his embrace.

“Please pray.” That was all she could say.

“Heavenly Father, we come before You today through the blood of your Son, Jesus Christ. We know we don't deserve Your grace or mercy, but we cry that You have mercy on our son and us. Please don't let Segun

die; restore us to You dear Lord, in Jesus mighty name we have prayed.” He allowed the tears to flow as he poured out his heart to God.

“Amen.”

They both took their seats and waited for the doctor to let them know what was going on. After about twenty long minutes of waiting and praying, an elderly female doctor walked into the reception. She went straight to the housemaster, who stood up immediately he saw her.

“Mr. Akpan, right?” She asked.

“Yes, doctor.”

Ngozi and Dan jolted to their feet the moment they knew she was the doctor.

“Good morning doctor, we are Segun's parents.” Dan held Ngozi to his side.

“Oh, I didn't know that.” Although Dr. Florence loved her job, she detested having to break bad news to the patient's relatives. She could not conceal her sad countenance even if she tried.

“Please, how is our son?” Ngozi asked. She couldn't take the suspense anymore.

“When Mr. Akpan brought your son in this

morning, he had a weak pulse, so we immediately began resuscitating him. We continued for close to an hour, yet no improvement. Unfortunately, at 9:50 am, he gave up.” She broke the news to them in the calmest way possible.

“No, no, no, Segun cannot die.” Ngozi fell to the ground.

Dan put his hand on his head, speechless.

“I’m so sorry. We haven’t been able to ascertain the cause of death, but we hope an autopsy will do so.”

Dr. Florence’s words seemed surreal to Ngozi. Death? Autopsy? Was she watching a movie or dreaming? Nothing had felt more unreal. Her mind couldn’t comprehend it.

Just as Dr. Florence was about to leave, Nurse Peju rushed out to call her.

“Doctor, your attention is needed urgently,” the nurse exclaimed.

She rushed back into the emergency.

“What is going on?” Ngozi stood to her feet. “Why did they call for the doctor?”

“I don’t know, dear, let’s just begin to pray in the Spirit,” Dan told her and held her hands.

Pastor John walked into the reception and saw

Dan and Ngozi praying. He immediately joined them. They began to make declarations that Segun would not die but live to declare the glory of God in the land of the living. The prayers went on for a few minutes; shortly after, Dr. Florence, who was initially looking downcast, rushed out with smiles on her face.

“I don't understand what happened, but your son is alive. He is even asking for you.” Dr. Florence was almost jumping up with excitement.

“Praise God!” Dan exclaimed.

“Oh, Jesus, thank You,” Ngozi was ecstatic. “Please take us to him.”

She led Dan and Ngozi into the ward where nurses were attending to Segun. He was sitting on the bed, looking brighter than they had ever seen. She stepped out to give them some privacy. “I'll be outside if you need me. We'll still need to carry out some tests on him to be sure he is fine,” she informed them.

“Mummy!” Segun exclaimed when he saw his parents.

“Oh, my baby.” Ngozi ran and hugged him.

Dan hugged both of them. “How are you doing, son?”

"I'm fine, dad. I don't know how I got here. All I remember is sleeping last night and having the most beautiful dream ever. I saw a man in white; he was so friendly. He showed me a lovely place and told me things about myself," Segun narrated. "Wait, I remember something else." He paused.

"What is it, dear?" Ngozi asked.

"He sent me to tell you and daddy to fix the broken fence of the house." Segun looked confused as he relayed the message. "Did anyone break into our house?" He looked at his parents.

"No, it's not that kind. We know what that means." Dan said as he looked at Ngozi. They both understood the message.

"Immediately I woke up, I sensed both of you were around, and as soon as the doctor confirmed it, I asked to see you." His smile melted Ngozi's heart. She couldn't have imagined losing him.

"Daddy, what happened to you?" Segun was surprised to see his dad with a crutch and cast.

"It's a long story; let's just focus on you."

"There is something extraordinary about the dream I had."

“What's that, dear?” Ngozi rubbed his head softly.

“It felt so real. I didn't think I was dreaming until I found myself asleep on this bed.” He looked puzzled.

“That's because you weren't dreaming, Segun.” Dan sensed Segun had a heavenly encounter.

“Exactly, I said it. It was too real to be a dream.” Segun seemed so convinced.

There was a knock on the door.

“Come in,” Dan and Ngozi echoed.

“We heard the good news and came to see the miracle boy.” Pastor John said, smiling as he entered the room with Seun holding his hand.

“Segun!” She exclaimed and ran to hug her brother. “I've missed you so much.” She was very outspoken. “They said you did not wake up this morning. You know I've told you that you like to sleep too much. See, the doctor is the one waking you up.”

Everyone laughed.

The little girl had no idea the miracle that just happened. Segun himself was oblivious that he died, went to heaven, and came back to life. Their parents knew that with time, the children would understand

better.

Dan knew he owed his little princess an apology. He squatted to her height and held her hand. "I know I haven't acted well to you lately, and I am truly sorry. Please, will you forgive daddy?"

Seun was happy her dad was back as she hugged him tightly. "I forgive you, daddy, and I love you."

"I love you too, my angel." He hugged her too.

"Awwwwwww," Segun and Ngozi chorused with a smile.

Dan stood to his feet and smiled. He turned to Pastor John, "Please excuse us. We'll be back shortly. There is something my wife and I need to do urgently.

They stepped out of the hospital premises and sat in the car.

Dan held Ngozi's hand and looked into her eyes. "I'm sorry I kept it from you; using the church's money was wrong. I allowed the devil to break into our home. I am so sorry, dear," he said with all sincerity.

Tears welled up in Ngozi's eyes. She never knew if this day would come, the day her husband would return to his senses and repent of his wrongdoing. She allowed the tears to flow. She searched for the right

words, but none was forthcoming.

Dan rubbed her shoulder and waited as she let out the pain she had held tightly for so long.

“Dan, you hurt me big time. I thought I lost you. The more I fought for you, the more it seemed you were slipping away. I had almost given up. Hearing you say this is nothing short of a miracle.” She finally managed to gather her words.

“I put you through so much, and I am sincerely sorry about it.” He wiped off the tears on her face.

“It’s okay, dear. There is someone much more important we need to apologize to.” Ngozi felt so much relief as she forgave her husband.

“We? No, I’m the one at fault.”

“No dear, I’m also guilty. I saw you fall, and I did nothing to help. I searched for help from the wrong source and kept fighting the battle the wrong way.”

“Hmmm, you are my backbone, dear. My fall is your fall, and your fall is my fall.” He hugged her and prayed to God for forgiveness. After a while, they went back into the hospital.

Dr. Florence was in her consulting room, still bewildered about what had just happened. She was sure

the boy was dead. His pupils were fixed, and there was no cardiac activity, yet the same boy was alive and talking. If miracles indeed happened, she was sure she had just witnessed one.

She remembered the word Dr. Ola had delivered to her from God. 'Try me and see.' She knew this was God at work. She went on her knees and began to worship God, calling Him all the beautiful names she knew.

"Daddy, you are great. You are mighty, I appreciate You, and I bless Your holy name. Today and for the rest of my life, I vow to serve You and live for You. Use me for Your glory, dear Lord in Jesus name I pray, Amen.

For formality's sake, she ordered the nurses to carry out some routine tests on Segun, all of which came back fine. They saw no reason to keep the boy any longer. He had eaten and was playing with his sister, Seun, and his friend, Femi.

Just before discharging him, Dr. Florence met with Segun's parents in her consulting room.

"In my many years of practice, I have never seen this happen before. Because of certain terrible things

that happened to me, I never believed there was a God. Even if He existed, I couldn't care any less. But yesterday, I had an encounter with Him. He opened my eyes to see how much He loves me, and I rededicated my life to Him. What God did with Segun was His way of reassuring me that He is God and that nothing is impossible for Him to do. I believe God brought Segun back to life to prove to me that He can reverse the irreversible, and as a result, I can put my absolute trust in Him. I believe without a doubt that there is a God, and I am willing to serve Him.”

“Wow, praise God.” Dan was so excited. “Please can we pray with you - if that is alright with you?”

“Please do.” She closed her eyes.

Dan and Ngozi held hands and prayed for Dr. Florence.

Chapter TEN

Veronica sat in her room, puzzled. Her phone was ringing, but she was too scared to pick up the call. She knew who the caller was, but did not have the guts to face the caller. Veronica could feel her heart racing, sweat droplets gathered on her face; she was in deep trouble.

Her phone had been ringing off the hook; she'd watched it ring through six calls. She knew she would be in more trouble if she didn't pick it, so she summoned courage and faced her fear.

"Hello," her voice quivered.

"You must be out of your mind!" Sharon barked at her.

"I'm sorry, Ma." She trembled.

"Will you shut your useless mouth? You dare open up that foolish mouth and apologize?"

Veronica didn't dare reply.

“You had only one task, to get him to sleep with you, yet you failed. You took laws into your hand and decided to get him involved in a car accident. As if that was not enough, you couldn't successfully scatter his home. What exactly have you done right?” Sharon asked, not exactly expecting a reply.

“I...I,” Veronica stammered. The call ended before she could utter another word. “Ha, I'm in trouble,” she lamented as she looked at her phone to confirm if the call was indeed over. “How did I get myself into this mess?” She cried as regret gradually ate her up.

She had failed woefully. The experience with Segun had ended up uniting the family more than ever. Veronica was in trouble.

Her phone rang again. She looked at the caller's ID, fearing it was either Sharon or Pastor Alex. The call was from Dan. She was confused as to why he'd be calling her after all that had happened. Had she succeeded after all? She wondered.

“Hello, Pastor.”

“Sister Veronica, good evening,” he greeted.

“Good evening, Pastor. How is Segun?”

“He is great. Is it possible to come to my house? I'll like to see you.”

Veronica could feel excitement welling up within her. She hadn't failed, after all. “No problem, Pastor, I will be there right away.”

True to her word, she was there in the shortest time possible. Ngozi was the one who opened the door for her.

Veronica didn't expect to see Ngozi at all, let alone with such a calm countenance. 'What is going on?' She wondered.

Dan joined his wife at the entrance. They both stood at the door, not giving room for Veronica to take another step.

“While we were praying this afternoon, worshipping God for the great thing He did and committing our home unto Him afresh, the Spirit of God laid it upon our heart that you are an agent of darkness,” Dan informed her point-blank.

“We called you here to confess everything to us, or else you will experience the immediate wrath of God,” Ngozi didn't mince words.

Veronica began to tremble as Dan and Ngozi held hands and began to speak in tongues. Veronica became so uncomfortable. She began to experience a burning sensation all around her. Veronica looked around; there was no physical fire. The more she tarried, the hotter she got. She went on her knees. "Please, let it stop. Fire is burning me! Please make it stop."

Dan spoke while Ngozi continued praying. "You better speak now, or things will get worse for you."

"I will speak," Veronica pleaded. She opened up about everything, not sparing a single detail.

Ngozi couldn't believe Sharon had a hand in this. She was disappointed and felt betrayed, but she knew allowing the incident to steal her joy and peace wasn't an option.

Her number one regret was stooping so low to receive help from the devil himself. She asked God to forgive her for fighting the battle the wrong way. The whole experience taught her that as a wife, she was the gatekeeper of her home. Whatever she allowed in was what came in and whatever she shut out remained shut out. Hence, she decided to give God a chance to reign in her home and keep the devil forever shut out.

Dan and Ngozi prayed that God would have mercy on Veronica, who was crying, and asking them to please forgive her. They prayed a prayer of deliverance for her led her to Christ.

After she left, they both held hands and prayed, committing their lives, their home, and their ministry unto the hand of God, once again.

Dr. Florence began a foundation for parents who had lost their child or children. She called it the 'Kay Sweet Souls Foundation.' Members of the foundation had monthly meetings where they shared experiences, prayed, went on outreaches to orphanages, and ministered to street children. They gave them gifts and shared God's love with them.

Dr. Ola and Nurse Peju grew closer. He was sure God was leading him to her as his wife, so he told her about his intentions for them to be married. They courted for a couple of months and got married. She took Ayomide and Ayobami as her own and vowed to love them dearly.

THE END

STORMED

About the Book

Dan and his wife, Ngozi hit shipwrecking storms almost claiming their marriage and ministry.

Dr Florence decides to turn her back on God after several heart breaking encounters that left her almost cold hearted.

Will they be able to weather the storm?

This book is full of reminders of what our disposition should be in times of trials.

"This story 'Stormed' will enable you reevaluate your life. it will bring you into the atmosphere of self reflection and make you ask the simple and most vital question "what are you standing on?"

Damilola Mike-Bamiloye



About the Author

Emmanuela Mike-Bamiloye is a daughter of God who loves to use her gift of writing to share His Word to the world. She is a medical doctor, drama minister and fashion designer.

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Her other writings including her first novel, Gbemi are available on her website ellaswritings.com