

# ***ANCHORED ASSURANCE***

***By***

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***“Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil....” Hebrews 6:19 (KJV).***

## Prologue

They shared a house in the heart of the lovely City of Benin, Nigeria. Coming from different socio-cultural backgrounds they were totally different in character; but one thing they had in common was their faith. Read this thrilling story of their anchored assurance in the face of the storm.

**N.B.** - A glossary of Nigerian names and places can be found at the end of this novel.

## **Acknowledgement**

The author wishes to express her profound gratitude to all those who from the very start gave me every encouragement towards the success of this novel.

I am grateful to the following: -

Elizabeth Eminue, Dayo Adeoye, Laretta Agostinho, Perpetual Dibiah and Dotun Akinwale, for their immense help in proof reading this work.

Kensington Temple, for hosting creative ministries in 1992 and to Geraldine Buckley for teaching me about creative writing in that time.

Mrs Kate Jinadu, for her help, despite a busy schedule and to Reverend Tony Peters for his advice and assistance.

Onoriode Dugbo, my uncle, for his invaluable information on lawn tennis.

Joe Avwunu, Theo and Ejovwi Ibuno, my cousins, for their encouragement.

My husband, Afam, for his unfailing support and confidence in me.

## **Disclaimer**

The Characters and events portrayed in this novel are fictitious and any resemblance to person's dead or living is purely coincidental.

Unless specified all bible quotations are taken from the King James Bible.

## **PREFACE**

This novel came about as a result of a conversation I had - in Jos, Nigeria - with Jessica and Toyin, friends of mine. We all loved reading novels and were 'lamenting' the scarcity of Christian one's! We were in our late teens at the time.

We had read or were still reading Mills & Boons (though I love Barbara Cartland and Enid Blyton novels too!). It was agreed that we needed more Christian novels, which had a general attraction to all its readers, young and old.

I told them then, part-seriously and part-jokingly, that I would write one, that's when I first felt the urge to write.

Since then, I started on this manuscript and I've felt God's guidance all the way. It's been inspirational and hopefully, everyone who reads it will find it so too!

The Author.

## CHAPTER 1

It was 9am on a Saturday morning at no.37 West Circular road where the friends lived. They had been up since 6am. Months earlier, they decided to make the sacrifice to wake up early on Saturdays. The purpose was to finish their chores on time, freeing them to spend quality time together before their personal business.

Biola Balogun was the shy one. However, she had become a successful barrister, at 26, and was a partner in a law chambers.

Chinyere Madaku, 24, was more vivacious and a qualified personal secretary.

At 19, Ejiro Ajaro was the tomboy, the baby, and was taking a career break to pursue her love of tennis.

Biola moved to Benin, in the South – East, from Kaduna, up north and teamed up with her friend Chinyere to rent the five-bedroom house. Shortly after, Ejiro, the younger sister of Biola’s old college friend, moved in with them.

“Where on earth is my racket?” Ejiro could hardly contain her fury. “Where can it be?” again asking no one in particular, she rummaged noisily through the cupboards in the hall.

“Ejiro, what’s the matter?” Biola’s gentle voice came from the study to see what the uproar was about.

Chinyere chipped in “Precisely, I could hear you from outside, you and that racket of yours!” she came in closing the front door behind her.

“Now, now” Biola implored, looking from an exasperated Chinyere to a fuming Ejiro, “calm down, both of you.”

Ejiro mellowing explained, “I can’t find my racket, although I’ve looked everywhere!”

“Well, you only had to ask...” began Chinyere “I’ll help you look for it” she added quickly after a look from Biola...

Later on in the day, Ejiro was on her way out and Biola and Chinyere were making the most of a quiet afternoon. “Ejiro, don’t forget to stop over at the market on your way back!” Biola called out after her.

Just then, Chinyere came into the living room carrying a tray of fresh, hot rolls, a jug of freshly squeezed orange juice and two glasses. “Would you like a drink and some rolls, with butter or jam?” she asked Biola.

“Jam, please” replied Biola “I need it” she added with a grin. “Ejiro will let out her steam on the lawn tennis court no doubt, poor coach!” Biola was truly sorry for the coach or whoever it was Ejiro would ‘cool down’ on. This was probable because Ejiro had definitely worked herself into a state looking for her racket, which she eventually found in the backyard.

“ You know what I think?” asked Chinyere “ rackets should be given special honour, like a rack of their own, where Ejiro could always find them, that way there will be fewer outburst”

“Well, you know what I think?” countered Biola. “No, what?” Chinyere sat up eyeing Biola with curiosity. “You’re as bad as Ejiro!” she added laughing at the consternation on Chinyere’s face...

...That evening, as they sat in the living room chatting. “I’ve been thinking,” began Biola “that the cause of so much friction between us, stems from the fact that we do not pray together.”

Chinyere and Ejiro were immediately shamefaced.

“What do you suggest?” asked Chinyere.

“First of all, we should begin to study the bible together,” replied Biola watching their reaction.

“Sure and include praise and worship sessions” added Ejiro visibly excited. “It will be a real family altar, let’s start today!”

Chinyere stood up, “I’ll go and get a bible.” Returning a few minutes later, “I brought yours Biola, it’s because of its dictionary and concordance.”

“Oh, that’s alright, thank you!” Biola replied smiling, as she took the bible from Chinyere. “Now, we will begin with praises, Ejiro, please lead that?”

“Chinyere, would you lead us in a prayer first?” Ejiro asked humbly. “I can’t say I’ve been a very good Christian today.”

“That makes two of us!” Chinyere replied “I’ve been edgy since I received that letter from my mother, yesterday.”

Bowing her head she led them in prayer. “Dear Lord, even as we have confessed, heal our hearts and make perfect your work in us. Let your nature be reflected in us and make our praises acceptable at all times to you, in Jesus name.”

“Amen!” they all chorused.

...“Ejiro we’re waiting” Biola prompted after a long pause, “is anything the matter?”

“Oh no,” replied Ejiro “I’m still thinking of an appropriate song to sing and what position to take as we go into worship.” Pausing briefly she exclaimed, “I think we should stand with arms uplifted, agreed!”

The other two were instantly on their feet with their eyes closed and arms raised in worship.

So, began a miraculous transformation in these women, which bettered them, making them examples of godliness to all around. Although they did not know it at the time, God was preparing them for testing times ahead.

## CHAPTER 2

“Yes? Come in” hearing a knock at the door Biola called out, frowning over some documents. She had asked Cynthia, her clerk to get a copy of Blackstone’s statute and a certain file she needed for reference in a pending court case.

Also, Theresa, the receptionist had just called to warn her that “That troublesome woman is making her way through to your office!”

“Good day, barrister Balogun!” came the forceful greeting as the door closed behind the visitor.

“Good afternoon” replied Biola unruffled as she looked up. “What can I do for you? Mrs.....” continued Biola trying to remember the woman’s last name.

“Omonor” the visitor added. “I require your legal services, immediately!” Mrs Omonor demanded rather than asked, in a tone that brooked no argument. She was a rich woman and used to having her own way.

“Madam” Biola replied quietly, but firmly “you need another lawyer. I’ve told you before; I will not represent you in your matter!” She looked the woman squarely in the eye.

Thinking back, Biola remembered that a colleague had previously handled the case. It was a murder case. Judging from what she had heard and seen, it seemed too tricky and mysterious, and she really didn't want to get *involved*. And according to him, "People were dropping like flies." And she believed it would be against her better judgement to take it up.

As if she followed Biola's train of thought, Mrs Omonor implored "Please, help me, I've got no where else to turn."

Biola was surprised at the sudden change in her tone and manner. She thought, *I could at least hear the facts before making a decision.*

"Please, take a seat!" Biola's voice softened as she pointed to a chair. "Now, start from the beginning, Mrs Omonor" Biola prompted....

...."Sir, you have a board meeting scheduled for 3pm and it is five minutes to the time!" Chinyere exclaimed as she walked into her boss' office and stood at his desk.

"You simply won't let me forget this meeting, so, finish these drafts for me please." Mr Ogundipo said as he got up and reached for his jacket. He was almost out of the office when Chinyere halted him with a call. "Sir, you have left your glasses." She picked them up at the same time and gave them to him.

"Thank you, Miss Madaku," he said.

"**M**y pleasure Sir" she replied, but he was halfway out of the door and did not hear it.

*Well*, she thought, *I might as well type those letters*. She finished the letters and took them to the filing cabinet; just then, there was a knock at the door.

“May I come in?” asked a male voice from the door. “You may,” replied Chinyere turning from the cabinet to face the visitor.

“Oh, God No!” She gasped and half-fainted just as the visitor reached her side and was completely speechless.

“Chinyere, I don't believe it, after all these years!” He exclaimed in astonishment.

*That voice will, I ever stop hearing it?* His question cut off her train of thoughts.

“Why did you leave, what had I done?” he queried. “I was out of my mind with worry. What did I do to deserve being jilted, Chi?”

His voice still carried the pain of the memory. She had been the last person he had expected to meet. He had come in to surprise his father's dearest friend, but had instead been surprised himself. Standing before her he was unsure whether he wanted to hold her or throttle her.

However, as the office was not the appropriate place for a confrontation, he turned and stormed out, slamming the door behind him. Vowing to himself as he did so he would find out the truth.

Chinyere tried to compose herself.

*Dear God! Why did he have to come back? Why, did he have to come to this office? How does he know my boss?* Chinyere

questioned in her heart. Her mind went back to when she was twenty-one and back in London...

....“ It must be a mistake doctor, I can’t be pregnant, and it was my first time!” She cried out in unbelief and broke down in tears.

Her GP seemed sympathetic, “Oh, you’ll get over it, it happens all the time.” He continued, “there are options you know, and you do not have to decide right away. My advice is that you sleep on it.”

She knew he was trying to reassure her.

“Call me when you have decided” he said giving her a few leaflets, before she left his clinic exhausted.

Chinyere walked all the way home from the clinic in Victoria, to her home in Hyde Park. Once she arrived, out came everything, unrestrained, into the ears of her mother who was aghast by the news.

“It’s all my fault, it's what I deserve for not educating you about relationships,” she recalled her mother saying. Mrs Madaku was sitting with her head in her hands, dazed from the news.

“What will I tell your father? Oh God! I am to blame!” she exclaimed and continued. “I allowed my embarrassment to cloud my judgement. We should have had the ‘talk’ when you started this relationship and now my baby girl is pregnant!” She would have gone on, but Chinyere ran out of the living room, up the stairs and into her bedroom and locked the door.

Later that day, up in Chinyere’s room, “Are you sure you are well enough for your graduation ceremony, this afternoon?” Mrs Madaku asked, looking a little worried.

Chinyere sighed, “I’m not sure if I can face Marvin this afternoon mummy, I can’t tell him I am pregnant!” Chinyere was clearly agitated. “Please mummy, let things go on as if nothing’s happened. After the ceremony, I will return with you to Nigeria” she implored.

Getting up from her dressing table, Chinyere went over to the bed where her mother was sitting and knelt by her. “Mummy, I never meant to cause shame.... ” her voice broke as she buried her face in her mother’s lap and wept.

“Chinyere, you must stop this, I do not blame you nor will your father, when he is told. Besides, you must look good for your graduation, today” Mrs Madaku looked down at her daughter, kneeling beautiful and fair before her.

Taking her chin in her hand, she lifted her face “Marvin loves you Chinyere, I know love when I see it” she said reassuringly. “He will only need to look at you to know something’s wrong. I do not doubt that he will be furious when he discovers that you kept him in the dark about this” Mrs Madaku sighed as she observed the adamant look on her daughter’s face.

Chinyere stood slim and tall, every bit the secretary she had become. HOWARD’S SECRETARIAL INSTITUTE, London, was much acclaimed for its academic excellence. Chinyere was graduating with a first degree from Howard’s, and along with it she was pregnant. She sighed deeply. Her mother was quietly shaking her head. “Why God?” Chinyere asked again for the umpteenth time.

*It's not that I doubt Marvin's love. I just don't want to ruin his university career as a Business Administration student. He loves me to the point of distraction and a baby would really ruin...*

“Chinyere, come down sweetheart, I’m here!” Marvin’s voice cut into her thoughts. She sighed again, took a quick worried look at her eyes in the mirror and left the room, leaving her mother behind.

Marvin turned around as she entered the living room and his eyes appraised her. He moved towards her and enveloped her in his arms. “I love you Chi, your adorable.” He said kissing her tenderly.

Chinyere was racked with the guilt over what she was planning to do and could neither reply nor respond to him. Just then, her mother walked in; saying, “food is ready, we must not let it get cold” she smiled at them.

“Marvin, you are looking more handsome than the last time I saw you” Mrs Madaku said with genuine admiration.

“Thank you, ma” he replied leading Chinyere through to the dining room.

Chinyere hardly said a word as they ate, but Marvin thought she was probably overwhelmed by the fact that she was finally leaving student life behind her and job prospects loomed.

The graduation ceremony took the best part of two hours, and after photographs Chinyere was ready to leave.

Chinyere talked Marvin out of going to the airport with her mother; explaining to him that she and her mother had some

women's matters to discuss on the way there and that she would see him on her return...

*...And that's the last memory I have of Marvin Obaka.* Chinyere snapped out of her thoughts. Helping herself up off the floor, she steadied herself.

"I must go home" she said aloud "what if he returns, what will I say?" she asked herself.

Filing the last letter quickly, she fled the office.

... "Look Felix, if you keep serving absentmindedly like this, you'll jolly well play alone, alright!" Ejiro was clearly exasperated, why, could he not concentrate on the game of tennis they were having?"

"It's past the third set!" Felix called out across the lawn tennis court. "Give me a break, you tennis brain" he grinned. "Don't you think of anything else?" He called out again across the court.

"Like what?" Ejiro countered and immediately bit her lip; she knew she shouldn't have asked.

"Like love." Too late for her, he replied. He was moving towards her laughing at the look on her face.

"No way!" Ejiro backed out of the court "you know what I think about your kind of love and you are not going to convince me!" she turned and ran straight into the Coach, who was approaching.

"Ejiro, you are just the person I want to see, follow me" and with this he led her away.

The Coach was a stout, balding, middle aged, ruthless man and a bit of a womaniser. When Ejiro first started at Ogbe stadium he had tried unsuccessfully to bed her, but he soon found out that that wasn't going to happen.

Their relationship soon developed into that of Coach and pupil. Undeniably, the Coach knew his 'stuff' and was excellent at what he did.

The only thing she questioned though was his reason behind pairing her with Felix.

If she thought the Coach was a bit of a womaniser, Felix took the 'biscuit'. He liked anything in skirts and was easily distracted by them and Lord knows they were all over the stadium whether sporty or not.

Despite his faults though, Felix was a spectacular tennis player *and full of himself*, Ejiro thought...

That evening, the three girls were at home in the living room reflecting over the day's events. "Agreed, we've all had a rough day..." began Biola, sitting snugly in the big couch, as she addressed the other two sprawled out on the carpet.

"Hmm! that's the understatement of the year, how am I going to survive in that office now?" Chinyere cut in.

"I think we should pray, I'm particularly not giving into the Coach's 'suggestion' as I have no intention of being used as Shark bait."

“You’re right, we all seem to be in a tight spot right now” Biola got up and motioned to the others to do likewise.

“I hope God sends a speedy answer, I’m perplexed,” Chinyere muttered under her breath, as she stood.

“Chinyere!” exclaimed Biola “that’s not faith” she looked partly reproachful, yet sympathetically at her friend.

“Well, she was only speaking her mind,” blurted Ejiro.

Ignoring Ejiro’s comment, Biola bowed her head and led them in the prayer. “Father, Chinyere, Ejiro and I are faced with situations we just can’t handle. Help us and strengthen our faith to trust you. Thank you Father for hearing us and helping us find the solutions to our problems. We give all our worries to you, in Jesus name we pray.” She concluded.

“Amen!” they all chorused...

After work, at the weekend, the girls were helping Ejiro get ready for her ‘date’ with one of the proposed tournament sponsors.

“Biola, do I have to go?” Ejiro looked at her imploringly.

“Yes, you must!” Biola replied searching the wardrobe for a suitable dress.

“Ejiro, you must see the good in this, God works in mysterious ways” Chinyere tried to encourage her, polishing Ejiro’s black high heeled shoes until they shone.

“Besides, it not a good enough reason to lose your job, you see, with our prayers and your witness he could become a Christian,” she added.

“That’s certainly not what the Coach has in mind” Ejiro replied. “What he wants is sponsorship for the forthcoming tournament and he expects me to ensure it, by being ‘nice’ to Mr Olaiye.” She sighed, “But as you’ve said, God will take care of the situation.”

“That’s right,” Biola replied sticking her head out of the wardrobe. “Here, try on this black, silk dress” she gave it to Ejiro.

“There, you look good!” Chinyere complimented Ejiro, as she helped her put on the gold earrings and matching necklace. “Wait, your hair isn’t right! I’ll brush it out for you” Chinyere said grabbing the hairbrush off the dressing table.

“That will be my undoing, what if he gets attracted,” groaned Ejiro.

“No he won’t, he’ll just be impressed, he dislikes ‘skirts’!” Biola grinned mischievously and continued. “I’ve heard a lot about Mr Olaiye and he is not keen on women, especially mulattos!” She ducked from a flying pillow and burst out laughing, “I’m only kidding.”

“Ejiro, you need a touch of makeup,” Chinyere said in observation, adding a golden hair slide to Ejiro's long wavy hair. Frowning she added, “you’re trying hard to avoid it.”

Ejiro smiled at their reflection in the mirror and applied rose pink lipstick to her lips. “How’s this for effect?” turning to face her friends.

“Wonderful!” exclaimed Chinyere.

“Fascinating” added Biola cautiously.

“Oh, great!” Ejiro moaned looking at her watch

“I’ve just got ten minutes to get there” she grabbed her handbag and left.

“Bye!!” Biola and Chinyere called after her, but she had gone.

## CHAPTER 3

“Do you want to arrange your hair? I can wait” Desmond Olaiye said looking at Ejiro disapprovingly. Her hair was dishevelled as she rushed into the restaurant, a half an hour late, to meet him.

“No, thank you” she met the challenge in his eyes and seated herself. Sipping the clear iced water Desmond had ordered for her, she ventured, “Are you a sports lover Mr Olaiye, or just a benefactor?”

He looked straight at her and smiled a very handsome smile. Lifting an eyebrow, he asked, “I see you are not out to impress me?” he smiled again amused, lighting up handsome features. “While your coach is falling all over himself to impress me, you're unperturbed.”

Desmond looked quizzically at Ejiro, who smiled and replied provokingly, “Let's say, I am not used to crawling.”

Just then, the waiter brought in the food, halting any reply Desmond may have had. “No thank you, I don't drink,” said Ejiro, turning down Desmond's offer of a glass of wine.

“Then I suppose my smoking will offend you?” asked Desmond replacing the cigarette in its packet.

Ejiro nodded at him in agreement smiling as she prayed inwardly, *Lord help me to control my temper.*

“Shall we eat?” Desmond invited with a glance at Ejiro, who nodded and bowing her head in prayer, quietly gave thanks for the food.

Desmond lifted an eyebrow and proceeded to eat.

They ate mainly in silence, savouring the meal and deep in thought. After they had finished their meal they discussed the various sports competing at the tournament and all the training Ejiro and her teammates were getting. Desmond was taking notes on his file-o-fax and Ejiro was beginning to relax, then the conversation came to an end.

“Shall we go Miss Ajaro?” Desmond stood and before he reached her side, she was up.

“Yes please!” she replied eagerly “er ... I mean ... I have a busy day tomorrow, so I...” Ejiro, could have kicked herself, why, for goodness sake was she stuttering?”

“Oh, that’s alright” the beginnings of a smile appeared at the corners of Desmond’s mouth. “As the saying goes: early to bed early to rise” he said with a broad smile...

.... Just over a week later, it was a peaceful Saturday morning, at home. “R...in..g, r..in..g!!” the telephone rang loudly from the hallway.

“I’ll get it!” Ejiro called out as she ran out from her bedroom.

“ R...i...n...g!!!” it came again loudly as Ejiro reached for it.

“Hello, Ejiro here!” she was expecting a call from anyone of her friends.

“Hello Jiro, It’s me Tega!” came the cheerful voice of her brother -in- law.

“Tega! Where are you calling from? are you at the airport?” the excitement was mounting in Ejiro’s voice.

“No, we are still in the States; we’ll fly in Friday afternoon, how’s that?” Tega hastened to assure her.

“Oh, great!” Ejiro said feeling disappointed. “I’ll count the days. “How are Onoriode and Kevin? give them my love.”

“Onoriode isn’t home yet” came Tega’s reply. “Hey, we’ve got excellent news for you, but your nephew will soon tear off my trousers, if I don't give him the telephone.”

She could hear a slight scuffle and then Kevin’s voice came through loud and clear. “Aunt Jiro, hello aunt Jiro!” came Kevin’s excited greeting, Ejiro smiled.

“How’s my favourite nephew?” She asked. She loved the lively four-year-old. “I’m fine, so are mum and dad. How’s my favourite aunt?” Kevin chuckled on the other side of the receiver. “Guess what, mum’s expecting twins and we’ll be coming to spend one whole month with you!” Kevin was obviously excited.

“Give me that!” Ejiro heard Tega demand and she smiled again, as she guessed that Kevin had let the cat out of the bag.

“Ejiro, we’ve got to go” Tega was saying “my regards to Biola and Chi, bye” the line went dead. Ejiro stared at the receiver. She could feel the excitement welling up inside her.

Rushing into the kitchen where Chinyere stood slicing an onion, Ejiro began excitedly. “Chinyere, she’s pregnant and they’re coming next week!”

“Who is?” Chinyere looked up at Ejiro.

“Guess” Ejiro smiled mischievously, looking up at the ceiling and down again.

“Eji... ro...o.o” Chinyere drawled, eyeing her with curiosity.

Ejiro walked about the Kitchen making a deliberate attempt to stall.... “Onoriode and family” she finally said.

“What! Onoriode and Tega here, when?” shrieked Chinyere, she had caught Ejiro’s excitement...

.... Hours later, they were seated in the living room talking.

“We’ve got to prepare the rooms, especially as your mum will be arriving tomorrow,” Biola was saying to Chinyere.

After a short pause, Biola began uncomfortably, “Chinyere, I know it’s difficult, but we have to discuss Daphne” relieved she had finally said it.

“Oh Chinyere! I wish you had told us earlier, how are we going to prepare for her?” Ejiro exclaimed completely at a loss.

Chinyere stood looking out of the window into the dark. “I’m sorry, I just couldn’t explain everything all at once,” she was crying. “You must understand I am not ashamed of my child, that’s why I’ve decided to raise her myself. But, what am I going to do about Marvin?” Chinyere wailed. “I can’t marry him, he hates me and besides...” her sentence was cut short.

...“ He’s not a born-again Christian” Biola and Ejiro concluded for her.

“It’s a very delicate issue, but the fact that he is not a Christian isn’t the point!” began Biola, “not now anyway” she mused.

“What is the point, Biola?” Ejiro asked “we need to sort this out fast, because he may call again and demand explanations!” Ejiro’s last comment visibly shook Chinyere.

“Do not consider running away again Chi” Biola said giving Ejiro a reproving look for her undiplomatic approach. “Come Chinyere, sit down, there’s nothing too difficult for God to do,” she said in an attempt to reassure her.

“Was I wrong Biola, should I have told him?” Chinyere asked sadly.

“I don’t know Chinyere, but God does, you’ll see” she smiled at Chinyere, who returned a watery smile back.

Ejiro spoke up attempting to ratify the damage her words had caused. “ One thing I’ll assure you of Chinyere, Daphne, will be loved and well taken care of here” Ejiro came and put her arms around Chinyere reassuringly. “She’ll have three dotting mums,” Ejiro concluded and they all burst out laughing at the joke.

“That’s right Chinyere, laugh it out” Ejiro encouraged her “I’ll get us some coffee.”

## CHAPTER 4

...Monday morning at the office, Chinyere stood awkwardly, looking down at her boss. “Sir, I would like to leave earlier than usual today; my mother and my daughter arrived from Owerri yesterday.” Chinyere looked apprehensively at Mr Ogundipo.

He took off his glasses slowly, “Sit Miss Madaku, did I hear you say ... daughter?” Mr Ogundipo asked surprised. “I did not know you were married?”

Chinyere sighed, “No sir, I’m not married” she began to explain as Mr Ogundipo listened silently to her...

“..So, I now want to take over full responsibility for her” Chinyere concluded, looking expectantly at her boss.

“Miss Madaku, I will give you casual leave. You will have to make adequate arrangements for your daughter. I advise you to take the rest of the week off. You are a good girl; give her all your love.” Mr Ogundipo paused, “however, I disagree with you keeping the father in the dark for much longer. Miss Madaku, take some fatherly advice, let him know.” He got up “give this to your daughter and do bring her in sometime, I won’t mind.”

“Sir, how can I thank you? This is too much! what will she do with twenty naira?” she was touched by her boss’s kindness. She knew him to be good and considerate, but had not expected this and was grateful.

He waved aside her thanks, “good day Miss Madaku that will be all” he smiled as he dismissed her.

“Oh, thank you very much sir!” Chinyere almost ran from the office.

At home that evening, Biola had just come in from work and had briefly exchanged greetings with Mrs Madaku, who sat reading in the living room. “Where are Daphne and Chinyere?” Biola asked looking around.

Before Mrs Madaku could reply, Ejiro who had just walked in, replied, “They’re in Chinyere’s room. Did you have a nice day?”

“Yes, thank you” Biola smiled. “Mother and child meeting, presumably?” She added.

Chinyere walked in just then, “I heard that, Biola” Ejiro’s eyes met Biola’s and they laughed.

Chinyere smiled and then said, “Mummy says she is leaving early tomorrow morning.”

Turning to Mrs Madaku, Biola queried, “but why do you have to hurry back?” looking searchingly at Mrs Madaku.

“It’s nothing, I just want to get back to my husband, I miss him” Mrs Madaku smiled.

“Now, what will those of us who are single do?” Biola quizzed.

“Marry!” Mrs Madaku retorted, causing nervous laughter...

The next day came and Chinyere went into the guestroom to see her mother off. “Good morning mummy” sitting besides her mother. “What time are you leaving for the garage?” She asked her mother.

Mrs Madaku was fully dressed “in an hour’s time” she replied. “Did you have a good night?” She asked as she reached out tenderly smoothening her daughter’s hair.

“Yes, thank you, mummy” was the reply.

“Please, don’t forget to thank daddy again for me and tell him that I really appreciate all he’s done” Chinyere requested.

“Remind him to keep his promise, it’s all in my letter to him anyway,” she concluded.

Mrs Madaku smiled at her daughter. “Your father is a very busy man, but I’m sure he has not forgotten his promise to you.” She continued, “ he knows how grateful you are and really you do not have to keep thanking us every time an opportunity arises” she gently admonished Chinyere.

Biola and Ejiro came in ready for work and after they had all exchanged greetings, Biola offered Mrs Madaku a lift to the taxi park...

... Daphne awoke a few hours later and wandered around the house looking for her mother. “Mummy, were is everyone gone?” She asked as soon as she came into the kitchen where her mum sat at the table sipping lemonade.

“Daphne, aren’t you going to greet me first?” Chinyere asked.  
“Ooh, I forgot” Daphne replied as she ran over to give her mother a hug.

“Good morning mummy, how are you?” Daphne asked.

“I’m fine thank you Daphne, how are you too?” Chinyere replied.  
“Did you have a good nights rest?” She asked looking lovingly at her daughter.

“Yes” Daphne replied, smiling contentedly as she looked around the kitchen....

....“ Daphne, look at your hair!” Chinyere said incredulously. Her daughter’s neatly plaited hair was wearing the food she had given her, just before she left the kitchen. Chinyere hastened into the kitchen, “did you have to feed it? I am angry with you, this is naughty.” Chinyere’s scolding made Daphne cry, so, gently lifting Daphne, Chinyere kissed her forehead.

“Don’t cry Daphne, I still love you, I only dislike the mess” Chinyere explained. “Did I frighten you?” She asked and smiled at Daphne’s vigorous nod. “I’m sorry darling, will you try not to do it again?” and broke into a grin when Daphne again nodded and attempted to take out the yam remains from her hair.

## CHAPTER 5

“That’s their flight being announced” Chinyere was telling Daphne.

“Yes, and I can’t wait to get my arms around Onoriode!” Ejiro said full of excitement. The plane landed and passengers streamed into the arrival hall. “I don’t see them, where are they?” Ejiro was asked anxiously.

“There they are!” Biola exclaimed, dashing forward with Ejiro and Chinyere following.

Onoroide and Kevin also were running towards the girls once they had spotted them, while Tega was behind struggling with the bags. “Ejiro! how are you?” Onoriode embraced and kissed her sister.

“I’m fine thank you, how are you?” Ejiro replied beaming at her.

After the general greetings, Biola said “lets go to the car, you must all be tired after your long trip.” She helped Tega with one of the suitcases as Kevin introduced himself to Daphne. Biola led the way to the car.

“You’ve got a car?” Tega asked surprised.

“Sure we’ve got one!” Ejiro was indignant. “Don’t tell us you, of all people, still think we trek long distances in Nigeria with no means of transportation!”

“No, of course not, we didn’t know you girls had a car” Onoriode stepped in to defend her husband, in her rich French- American accent.

“ Well, Ejiro’s still as hot headed as ever” Tega said, “ but I’m glad you’re all doing well for yourselves” he added smiling, winning them all with his charm.

At the dinner table later that day. “That was delicious, we had almost forgotten what Ukodo (yam porridge pepper-soup) tastes like” Onoriode said with a smiling glance at her husband. Tega nodded approvingly, unwilling to give up on the piece of chicken in his hand, chewing it with relish.

“Yeah, aunt Biola, but don’t you think it was rather hot?” Kevin added, not quite use to the pepper.

“No, as a matter of fact it was just right,” replied Biola tying on an apron.

“You better get use to it Kevin, it might get hotter!” Tega said, trying hard to keep a straight face.

Kevin turned to Daphne seeking her opinion. “Daphne, what do you say?”

Unfortunately, Daphne misunderstood and looking at him puzzled, she replied, “I didn't say nothing” which sent everyone into fits of laughter.

Chinyere got up from the dinner table “Biola, I’ll help you with the dishes” she offered. Then turning to Daphne she said, “Daphne, you’ve been fighting with that chicken a century” reproving her daughter.

“Mummy” Daphne replied wide-eyed, “what’s a sen-tree?”

Ejiro chipped in with a reply, “have I not told you not to fill the child’s head with big grammar? answer her question!” She concluded laughing heartily...

Days later, everything was back to normal. Ejiro and Onoriode sat in the study talking. “Ejiro, that school I wrote to you about will be beginning a new semester in September and they are enrolling now. What do you say?” Onoriode asked searchingly, “it has turned out remarkable professionals in the past.” Onoriode spoke persuasively, but was not unfamiliar with her sister’s abstinence. Unfortunate as it was, she was solely responsible for her kid sister.

Onoriode Edafe was the eldest of two children from the late Mr and Mrs Ajaro....

Daniel Ajaro met and fell in love with his beautiful French wife more than twenty-five years ago. Not long into the marriage they had two little bi-racial girls: Onoriode and Ejiro, who were very much loved. It was a very happy and secure family. Although Blanche loved Nigeria and her husband, she missed France. On their way to France for their annual anniversary three years ago, their plane crashed leaving no survivors.

It had broken Onoriode's heart when the news of her parent's death reached her. Tega was beside himself with worry wondering what his young wife might do to herself. Ejiro on the other hand, had, it seemed, gotten over her grief fairly quickly. But that was only a facade; Ejiro was good at hiding her grief...

Now her eyes narrowed as she watched Ejiro, now nineteen, still messing about with rackets. And as she had always felt responsible for her little sister, being four years older, she had to make Ejiro see sense. "Ejiroghene, you've always wanted to become a medical doctor, what's wrong with you? I'm concerned" Onoriode was losing her patience and always called Ejiro by her full name when she did.

Ejiro sat quietly listening to her sister, then slowly raising her eyes to meet Onoriode's big brown one's, she said "I'll think about it, I'll give you a reply..." Ejiro had hardly finished, but Onoriode had had enough.

"Why, are you so mule headed? I do not understand you lately, what is it?" Onoriode was exasperated.

Then almost immediately Onoriode softened as she went over to put her arm around her sister, "Ejiro, mama and papa wouldn't have expected this from you."

"I will think about it, Onoriode" Ejiro began "I'm sorry I've been so much trouble" she apologised. "Oh, my dear darling, you've been no trouble at all" Onoriode replied truthfully as she kissed Ejiro affectionately...

Meanwhile, Biola sat in her chambers daydreaming about the pleasant events of the past few days when a sudden knock on her

door jolted her back to reality. “Good morning Biola!” Osas put his head round the corner. “Good morning, Osas” she smiled at her colleague of three years, “please, come in, what brings you to my office so early?” she asked.

“Biola, I was wondering if I could pick your brains on the Vincent case?” Osas looked expectantly at her. “My junior counsel’s bailed out on me at the last minute, she called me an impossible task master, can you believe it? I only asked her to study the Hailsbury Law mandate and compare it in the light of clause 17 for this case” Osas groaned.

Biola was sympathetic, “sure Osas, but let’s do it after lunch, I’m buying” she offered. She smiled at the relief on Osas face.

*He is really a very good advocate, shame about his treatment of his junior counsel though. I have to find a way to tell him to be more considerate and appreciative of her because she’s great at what she does, Biola thought.*

“Thanks Biola, somehow I knew I could count on you for assistance” Osas said grateful for her help.

Biola smiled in response getting out of her chair, “Osas, I’ve got to go, see you later, at noon.” Nodding he opened the door for her as they left the office together.

... Ejiro and Chinyere had planned an exciting schedule for their guests for the next few days, as they both were off from work.

Their first stop would be the Oba’s palace; Chinyere loved history and was going to give the parents and children a lesson.

Ejiro thought the Ogbe stadium, where she worked, would be an excellent treat for young and old alike. It was always abuzz with activity that anyone, who was not a hermit, would love it.

Then there was Airport road to see, as the airport was also in their plans with that lovely cultural art shop; and the food and snacks around was great.

They also went sight seeing in the G.R.A. (government reservation area). They visited the army barracks, the boutique shops, the cultural shops the bookshops and the Faith Arena. Next, they looked at the houses famed for their architectural beauty and some occupants actually allowed them in and gave them a tour.

In short they had a really great time – the people in the City, were truly hospitable.

By the weekend all they wanted to do was relax and take things more slowly.

## CHAPTER 6

“Kevin hurry or we’ll be late for church!” Tega called.

“In a minute!” came Kevin’s reply.

“That makes fifteen minutes in all, your idea of a minute isn’t very appealing” muttered Tega.

Tega was at the steering wheel as none of the others had the inclination to drive. *It had been nerve racking attempting to get everyone ready on time, these gals were dressed to kill and it was the time that had died*, he thought. He envied Ejiro who had left for church an hour and half ago to prepare for the service - a requirement for all choir members. Now, he was becoming increasingly impatient as Kevin made a last minute dash for the toilet, having only just made it to the car.

Moments later Kevin arrived, “There you are, Your Excellency! may we go now?” Onoriode asked slightly amused. “Yeah” replied Kevin “I hope we’re not late, are we?” but one look from his father made him race to the back seat.

Biola sat quietly at the back and as Tega turned the key in the ignition, she said, “Chinyere isn’t here yet.”

Just then Chinyere came out, “a bright and sunny day I would say” She began smiling, “just the kind of serenity for a lovely Sunday.”

By now Tega was clutching the steering wheel as he ran out of patience, “This is no time to be poetic, hop in, we’re late,” he said gritting his teeth.

As the Honda Accord sped along to the church, Daphne asked “Mummy, isn’t it a sin to be late?” Chinyere didn’t answer the question.

So Onoriode replied, “well, it depends on the reason actually.”

Kevin whispered to Biola, “We’ll have to ask God for forgiveness, won’t we?” as she nodded in consent, Kevin added matter-of- fact; “he’ll forgive us.” The last statement brought a smile to his mother’s lips and complete silence reigned for the rest of the journey.

...“ I ask you again, will you be there and will you be found among the faithful?” Pastor Enoch Jackson spoke about the second coming of Jesus Christ, with conviction. “Don’t let the Lord meet you unprepared. Remember, Lot’s wife, she was not faithful to the end.”

He preached on, “Ananias and Sapphira were conspirators of evil and they grieved the Holy Ghost: God’s Holy Spirit.” He paused and looking at his congregation he said, “too late, they died without repentance. Watch therefore and be ye ready, for in a time you think not the Lord cometh, Matthew 24:42. Brethren, let us

begin to check our lives and know if we are ready. So, let us begin now to ask ourselves: if He comes now will I go?"

The Mount Zion congregation were silent, some hadn't liked the message much, it was a bit too hard, but truth is sometimes hard they concluded.

Pastor Jackson closed his bible, "Let us pray." Leading the prayer he said, "Lord Jesus, let your coming not take us unaware and let righteousness and truth be our path from today. Help us to do your will and please God, who has called us to victory, in Jesus name."

"Amen!" the congregation chorused.

... Back at home, they were all relaxing after lunch. "I wish we could remain like this, just one big happy family" Ejiro sat day dreaming by the living room window.

"Well, if you ask me it's a nice thought, but I don't think it's a good idea" Onoriode replied. "We really have to go home sometime, Ejiro" she concluded.

"You sound as if you can't wait to leave" Biola sounded hurt by Onoriode's speech. "Don't take it like that Biola, we are enjoying our stay, but..." Onoriode tried to explain.

"East or west home is best!" concluded Chinyere hiding a grin. "That's not fair!" Onoriode argued, "but true" she laughed and the other's joined in.

"I wish next week would never come" Ejiro whined.

“If wishes were horses...” drawled Onoriode. “ I’m not a beggar, so it doesn’t apply to me” Ejiro was unperturbed by Onoriode’s remark. “I really wish you’ll be delayed” Ejiro continued.

“Oh, you big baby, stop dreaming, do you have a delay tactic in mind?” Onoriode teased a bit exasperated with Ejiro’s childlike display. “Supposing I do?” Ejiro winked mischievously...

A week later finds Chinyere in her office, typing expertly away, when she hears a sharp knock on the office door. “Come in!” she calls looking up, “Chinyere, did you go for Daphne?” Onoriode asked as she came in looking slightly agitated.

“No, what’s happened?” Chinyere was instantly on her feet.

“Daphne” Onoriode could have choked, “Daphne, hasn’t come home!”

“Onoriode, are you sure Ejiro didn’t take her?” Chinyere inquired, Onoriode slowly shook her head.

“Then what happened” Chinyere looked bewildered.

“I arrived at Daphne’s school fifteen minutes late and she was gone” Onoriode was trying hard to keep calm. “I had a flat, on the way to her school” Onoriode explained swallowing hard.

Chinyere was speechless.

“We’ve got to be strong” Onoriode spoke quietly attempting to reassure her. She continued as she moved closer to Chinyere, “Let’s pray for strength and wisdom.” So with their faces lifted, they prayed earnestly for help and at that moment in walked Mr Ogundipo.

“Having a prayer meeting, are we?” he chuckled. “No sir!” they chorused. “Sir, my daughter hasn’t come home from school and no one seems to know where she is!” Chinyere blurted.

## CHAPTER 7

...At home that evening, they were all gathered in the living room anxiously waiting, talking and praying. Ejiro was reading from 1 Peter 5:7 and was encouraging Chinyere to, “Cast her cares upon the Lord, because he cares for her.” Biola was by Chinyere’s side, silently asking God to give her the grace to trust Him. They were all praying for a miracle...

The next day at Chinyere’s office, “Where, is your efficient secretary?” Marvin asked sarcastically, after a brief handshake.

“I was going to find out after work today” Mr Ogundipo replied as he sat down again. “Surely, it can’t be that serious? only yesterday afternoon I allowed her to go home as she was concerned that her daughter hadn’t come home from school.” Mr Ogundipo explained. Ignoring Marvin’s gasp, he continued, “knowing a mother’s fears, I permitted her to go home and look for her.”

Marvin could hardly believe his ears, *Chinyere, the love of his life was married!*

Following his train of thought Mr Ogundipo said, “No, she is not married it’s quite a remarkable story,” remembering his reaction when he first heard it. And observing the relief on Marvin’s face, he got up from his desk and walked around to where Marvin was sitting, across from him and placed his hand on the back of his chair.

Marvin was the son of his close friend, Edward Obaka, therefore was like a son to him. He had felt as proud as any father when Marvin graduated. *Since then, the boy’s done really well in business. However, getting a young girl pregnant was irresponsible and would be met with a mixture of emotions by his family and indeed himself once it was revealed. Frankly, he thought, the whole thing was a mess and Miss Madaku, would have to sort it out before it worsened.*

He asked Marvin, “If, you care for her so much, why hide it behind a facade of sarcastic Remarks?” Remembering past situations in the last few weeks, where he honestly thought that Marvin would cost him his secretary. It was the atmosphere more than anything, so he made every conceivable effort to keep them apart. He sensed, rather than felt, Marvin stiffen, “let’s call at her place after our meeting, just to make sure everything is okay” Mr Ogundipo suggested. “No protests” he tapped Marvin’s shoulder silencing him....

... Meanwhile, Daphne was the hostage of a ruthless gang, who had the evil intention of sacrificing her to become wealthy by her death - she had been snatched from the empty school yard while the teacher minding her, had her back turned for a brief second - it was a satanic ritual which enabled those willing to pay the price of murder, to become immensely rich, immediately. Recently, people had started disappearing in the City and all that the police could do

was to warn people to be extremely careful and to go out at night in pairs when necessary.

Rumour had it that it was part of the initiation process as well as an occultic practice. All that was required, was to cause the intended victim to eat the ritualised food specially prepared for this purpose and once it was swallowed the victim died. The amazing thing was, every time a particular word was spoken the victim would vomit loads of money.

One of the men had served her some of this food. Glaring at her he compelled her to eat it, “My..my Father won’t..won’t let.. let you harm me” Daphne said glancing at the food with suspicion, “He..he’ll help me.”

The man was getting impatient, “And who is this father of yours?” he asked sarcastically.

“God is!” came the concise reply, “Jesus and his angels are guarding me right know.” Daphne was more defiant than frightened as she said this. The man was taken aback, but quickly replied, “Who filled your head with such rubbish? you’ll soon be cleared of it!” the man was menacing.

Daphne was visibly shaking, but retorted quickly, “It’s not rubbish, Jesus is real and He’s doing something now to help me!”

Just then, the leader walked in, took one look at the uneaten food and barked, “YOU DARE DISOBEY ME!” as he walked menacingly towards the first man. “No Boss, this one is stubborn” he backed away in fear.

“Well, well” the boss turned towards Daphne, “so, you’re stubborn?” he turned and barked out another order. “BRING ONE OF THEM FOR HER TO SEE.” One of the guards scurried off

quickly and brought one of the recent one's – a boy who looked gothic.

On seeing him, Daphne screamed and fell in a sick heap on the floor, banging her head against an iron chair.

Seeing this the boss ordered, “REVIVE HER QUICKLY AND THIS TIME SUCCEED!” he turned and briskly walked out, followed closely by four armed guards.

The first man succeeded in reviving her, but between beatings couldn't get her to eat the food. He grabbed a handful with the intention of forcing it down her; when she let out a scream..

## CHAPTER 8

“Jesus, help me!”

Immediately, a terrible noise filled the place and a brilliant light flooded the room. The man dropped lifeless and Daphne sobbed out of relief. Peace flooded her soul as she sensed, rather than saw, the angelic presence, and then she knew God had sent them to save her.

“Thank you Jesus, get me out of here now, please God!” She prayed earnestly.

The door flew open and the boss, with his bodyguards rushed in. He took in the sight and ordered, “GET HER OUT OF MY SIGHT, FAST!”

...At home that evening, “Just everyone stay calm” Tega said looking at the jumpy lot. “It’s only the bell,” he concluded as he walked out of the living room to see who was at the door.

“Yes” he inquired, looking at the visitors, door held ajar.

Mr Ogundipo and Marvin introduced themselves to Tega and were let in. “Any news of the child yet?” Mr Ogundipo inquired.

“No not yet” Tega replied leading them into the living room. “However, we been praying and we know what God can do.”

On seeing them, Chinyere’s eyes filled with fresh tears, while everyone else sat quietly pensive. Christian music was playing softly in the background and the words from the songs helped to lift their spirits with hope.

Mr Ogundipo rushed over to Chinyere’s side and held both her hands, patting them gently like a child’s.

“You must not give up hope; you have told me so much about your Jesus, you have got to trust Him now.” Mr Ogundipo said trying to encourage her.

“Yes” Marvin cut in, “if He’s up to the task,” he concluded with sarcasm.

After a brief pause, Tega replied, “God isn’t afraid of challenges, He’s up to the task” in a tone that brooked no arguments.

Silence reigned for a while after Tega’s reply. It didn’t seem right to engage in idle chatter. No one dared to fear the worse for Daphne, but it was getting to be quite a challenge to keep the faith – that God would protect her and bring her home safe, as they had asked Him.

“Sir, we have looked everywhere and tried everything, but we are trusting God to see us through this” Chinyere said wiping her eyes. She was determined not to let God be insulted, even if it was by the man she loved; she had to express her faith.

“We know that God is watching over Daphne wherever she is and has heard our prayers to Him” she concluded with confidence.

“That’s the spirit Chinyere; we all back your faith” Ejiro added by way of encouragement.

“Now that that’s settled, I’ll bring us some coffee; it’s a cold night.” Biola wanted to keep busy as all this waiting and quiet was causing her mind to wander.

“I’ll give you a hand,” Onoriode offered, leaving the living room with Biola.

Marvin got up and was pacing up and down by the window, struggling with his thoughts. *I can’t imagine why God let this happen to people who obviously love Him, please let the child be safe. His thoughts turned again to Chinyere, I would love to comfort her, but she jilted me; still I can’t deny that I love and want her. She is even more beautiful and graceful...*

“Marvin, please take a seat” Tega broke into his chain of thought; his pacing seemed to be unnerving the others. Marvin turned away from the window and took the closest seat to Chinyere. *I just want to be near her*, he thought.

“Coffee, everyone!” Biola called cheerily as she came in, placing the tray on the centre table, in the living room. “And here are the cookies” Onoriode added walking in after Biola...

“What Kevin, still haven’t finished your biscuits?” Biola inquired. Kevin lowered his head and said, “Aunt Biola, I miss Daphne.” Biola took him in her arms and whispered, “She’s coming home, keep trusting Kevin.” Kevin sniffed and nodded, “I’ll try,” he said. She smiled in agreement, “yes Kevin, have faith.”

## CHAPTER 9

Chinyere cleared her throat and ventured, “Marvin, it’s nice of you to call.” Marvin stared at her through handsome brown eyes and replied bluntly, “Mr Ogundipo brought me.”

Complete silence reigned after that, broken by Ejiro’s question “What do you do?” she asked, directing her gaze at Marvin. He took his time and then replied curtly, “Importing and exporting goods.”

Mr Ogundipo frowned at Marvin’s attitude and went on to enlighten Ejiro. “Marvin’s in the textile trade and occasionally he sells his textiles abroad and imports foreign fabrics.”

Marvin smiled stiffly, “nicely put thank you.”

“There is no need to be sarcastic, everyone’s tried to be nice to you since you came” Biola said getting impatient with him.

Ejiro got up to turn the cassette over, her hair in one long ponytail, falling over the front of her tee - shirt.

Biola began to clear away the cups and Kevin got up to help her. "I'm letting go, aunt Biola, to let God," he said as they got to the door.

"That's right" she replied smiling down at him.

Back in the living room they all sat quietly, deep in thought, the cassette playing softly in the background amid Kevin's occasional whisperings. A faint knock was heard at the front door; Tega got up to make sure.

Opening the front door, he looked down, startled by someone or something wrapped silently around his legs. The screeching of car tyres could be heard outside the gate. The Boss had ordered her safe return, never, had he been so scared in all his life; he knew the power guiding her was greater than any he had ever seen and felt compelled to do so.

"Daphne" Tega gasped, "Oh God, thank you!" he exclaimed lifting her gently and then quietly closing the door.

Onoriode's voice came from the living room inquiring, "Who is it Tega?" Tega looked at his watch as he called out, "Just a minute" it was a quarter to ten. He walked slowly into the living room, everyone's eyes were in his direction, "it's Daphne" he said. And added the words everyone wanted to hear, "she's alive."

Everyone snapped into action. "Chinyere, oh God, she's here!" Ejiro was half laughing, half crying. Onoriode rushed to Tega, with

Kevin closely behind her, “Give her to me, poor child, she’s trembling.”

Tega handed her over, “I’ll inform the police” he said turning and walking out of the living room.

“It’s a miracle!” exclaimed Mr Ogundipo.

“Unbelievable!” added Martin looking at Chinyere.

Chinyere was saying over and over, “Thank you Jesus!” She stood arms outstretched and gasped, “Daphne.” Onoriode brought Daphne over to her mother and there was hardly a dry eye in the room as they watched the two clutch each other. Chinyere looked her over and asked. “Daphne, what’s happened to you, you’re bruised all over?”

“This is no time to ask her questions, she needs a bath and warm food” Mr Ogundipo spoke up.

“I’ll bath her, she is good hands” Biola offered, as she prized Daphne out of Chinyere clasp. “Welcome home Daphne, we’ll hear the story later” she was saying as she carried her out.

“And I’ll clean the bruises; the first aid kit’s in the bathroom” Ejiro added, following Biola out.

Tega came in, saying, “The police will be coming around to take statements first thing tomorrow morning” looking at Chinyere, who acknowledged his statement with a nod, still dazed her eyes filling afresh with tears.

There was a long pause. Mr Ogundipo took Chinyere aside pleading with her to tell Marvin the truth about Daphne, before he heard it somewhere else in the light of present events.

Meanwhile, Onoriode and Tega shifted uncomfortably in their seats sensing a climax.

Growing suspicious Marvin asked, “What’s going on, did I miss something? By now everyone was avoiding eye contact with him. “Would somebody please tell me, does it concern me?” he pleaded breaking the silence. “Chinyere?” he turned to her pleading, “will you tell me, please?”

He noticed tears falling down her cheeks as she said barely above a whisper, “For...give me th...that I d...did no..not tell you so..sooner, Daphne’s.. our child.”

Marvin was astounded as she went on to explain. “A..After m.m..my graduation, I..I came ho..home with my m.m..mother to ha..have the b.baby; I di..didn’t t..tell you because I..I didn’t wa..want to ruin your career, so..so I..I le.left you ” Chinyere’s words were barely audible.

Marvin was visibly shaking. Kevin had fallen asleep in all the excitement. Emotions raging from relief to hate, filled Marvin and getting up, he left without a word. Mr Ogundipo excused himself and followed him out...

Ejiro and Biola walked in carrying a cleaned and just fed Daphne, taking in the scene, Biola said, “We’ve managed to clean her up.”

She placed Daphne in Chinyere’s arms, whom holding her close, wept.

## CHAPTER 10

Tega and Onoriode decided to go for a walk after dinner. They loved the City at night, the hustle and bustle of the food traders setting up and workers rushing home.

The drama of the last few days brought back memories for them. And, it only confirmed what they had already known – as long as you are alive you will have trouble and how you cope is the key.

Talking as they walked arm in arm, they fell silent after awhile being deep in thought. It was obvious to them that God had been good. What the girls didn't know was that they had had their own drama back in California.

Tega's thoughts took him back to the incident that almost cost him his marriage just over three months ago.

*Onoriode had been travelling a lot launching her new boutique and cosmetic line in New York and, he missed her. Kevin stayed mainly with Onoriode's friend Dionne, who lived a few blocks away. Tega had started working late, having just been promoted to*

Senior Editor at the National Express, beating four others to the post. However, with his promotion came temptation in the form of Melanie Andrews, his new assistant.

Melanie had recently joined the team having moved from Iowa and soon sent all the ‘brothers’ drooling. The fact was, it was difficult not to notice her; she was beautiful and always wore revealing clothes.

Unfortunately for Tega and even more for his male colleagues, she only had eyes for him; and this helped to limit his joy in his new post. *She was extremely good at her job and this fact did not help. I could not justify replacing her, even if I tried,* he mused.

Melanie made no pretence about her intentions –she wanted him and knew just how to get him.

*In the office working late again, crosschecking data, confirming deadlines and generally tying up loose ends, Melanie walked in. To my amazement she calmly slipped out of her dress and walked over to where I was standing and threw her arms around me.*

*Onoriode who had just walked in went off like an Amazon. Having just arrived from the airport and hoping to surprise me, she had bought some takeaway from Ying’s, who was our family’s favourite Chinese takeaway.*

Melanie was scalded by the food, which was all over her and Tega – served her right! Now, if she had been fully clothed that wouldn’t have happened.....

*Onoriode was distraught and had cried for days and Dionne was there for her.*

Tega was no longer Senior Editor; Tyrone Burke who had been second in line, now had that position. *He and his new P.A. were getting on really well. They had both planned this all along and I had no choice but to step down, considering the 'evidence' against me was overwhelming.*

However, that was the least of his worries, Onoriode would not speak to him and he missed her and Kevin.

*Dionne would call from time to time relaying information and did all that she possibly could to help us to resolve it.* He remembered that the phone had rung one evening at the office, six weeks after the incident. Dionne sounded apprehensive as she told him that she had just received a call from the hospital saying that Onoriode had just been brought in.

*Her husband, Jerome Al Grant snr, babysat the boys (Kevin and her son Jerome jnr.) while we rushed to the hospital. I kept praying that it was nothing major and that Onoriode was okay.*

*.....On arrival at the hospital, the receptionist was initially uncooperative. "....Ms Ajaro didn't mention you and I didn't see no ring on her finger" she said eyeing him with suspicion.*

Tega was getting angry, so Dionne stepped in, "girlfriend, he is her husband okay! Now, 'cut' the 'brother' some 'slack'" she was as diplomatic as ever. The nurse softened, "He in the 'dog house' huh? I'll see what I can do."

The nurse was gone for what seemed like ages and came back with news. Unfortunately, as Onoriode had been exhausted she had fallen asleep. The nurse was confident that she would be discharged the next day after a good night's rest.

She was right, the next day came and Onoriode was discharged.

But Dionne, who Onoriode was depending on to take her home the next day, refused to go anywhere until they had resolved everything in the family lounge of the hospital.

*I swallowed my pride and begged my wife's forgiveness, not that I was guilty, but that I failed to see Melanie for what she was and because of that failure, I had caused my loved one's pain and embarrassment.*

*It was there Onoriode told me the good news that she was two months pregnant. And that it was just discovered when they rushed her in the day before, having collapsed from exhaustion. She looked radiant and I just held her firmly in my arms. Dionne put her head through the door at that moment and gave a broad grin – she'd been a great friend...*

By this time they had walked over a mile and Onoriode wanted to return. Taking her hand Tega led the way back home...

“Felix, what did the coach say?” Ejiro looked eagerly at him, coming towards her. “Did he agree with you?” certain she had been right and his hare-brained idea would be ‘tossed.’

“Keep your hair on, are you a reporter in disguise?” came Felix's peeved reply. He continued, “Coach was neither for nor against the idea.” Felix shrugged as if he couldn't care less.

Ejiro looked at him quizzically, “What do you mean neither for nor against? he either said yes or no. Felix, you either win or loose this argument, now which is it?” she probed, determined to wear him down.

Felix raised his hands in desperation, “Honestly, he neither agreed nor disagreed with my suggestions for the championship” he explained.

“Then, he means no!” Ejiro declared triumphantly and as she walked off, called over her shoulder grinning, “Felix, take advice next time you get it!”

“Ejiro, Miss Ajaro!” a not too familiar voice called her to a halt. Ejiro swung round to face Desmond and another young man smiling down at her.

“Ejiro, so we meet again under better circumstances I hope?” Desmond said cheerfully extending his hand.

“Good afternoon, Mr er... Desmond” she frowned at her forgetfulness. “You sound quite cheerful” Ejiro stated bluntly. Desmond evading an answer went ahead to introduce the stranger.

“Let me introduce you two. Kayode, meet Ejiro, Ejiro meet Kayode, my brother and business partner.”

After a nod from Ejiro and a smile from Kayode, Desmond continued, “I don’t suppose you’ve had lunch?”

“No, I haven’t, I was too busy training that I lost track of the time” Ejiro replied trying to figure out the change in Desmond.

“Then your most welcome to join us, we were on our way to ‘Q’s’ when I spotted you” Desmond invited.

“Well, I won’t wait to be asked again, I’m starved” she grinned.

Minutes later, they sat chatting in the restaurant. “..So, who cared for you after your parents’ death? Kayode quizzed, he suspected an uncle or aunty or some distant relative, as she was a youngster at the time.

“Onoriode for a while, then I later moved in with Biola” Ejiro replied with a smile. She continued, “Onoriode made sure I was in good hands, before leaving for the States. Biola and Onoriode were classmates back at college and they’re as close as sisters...” Ejiro was going to go on but stopped. “I may bore you; tell me about your family, about yourselves.”

Kayode smiled in response, “let me begin with myself...” Ejiro listened attentively, eyes shinning brightly.

This was truly a family of entrepreneurs. The senior Olaiye’s had started the construction business in the 60’s and now it was a blooming empire.

Now that their children had grown up and taken over the company, Mr and Mrs Olaiye had decided to retire.

Desmond was the Executive Director and head of the board. He took his responsibilities seriously and stocks and shares had greatly improved under him.

Kayode was the managing director and saw to the efficient daily running of the company.

Their sister Natasha was the head of graphic designs and advertisement and it was this position that had taken her to France on assignment.

“... So, it was mum and Natasha, who prayed faithfully for our salvation” Kayode was saying.

*They definitely love their sister, Ejiro thought, they talk about her with so much love.*

Desmond added, “She’ll be back next week and I bet you two will hit it off. Come to think of it, you remind me of her and she is very beautiful too” he spoke proudly of her.

“Oh, but you don’t like mixed race females!” She grinned mischievously.

“Who told you that?” Desmond asked.

“Biola” was Ejiro’s quick reply.

“Oh, and what else did she say?” He probed.

“Please, don’t take it like that” Ejiro was beginning to regret having said anything, “She was only pulling my legs.”

Kayode and Desmond exchanged glances, “Pulling your legs?” they enquired.

“Yes, the night I was to first meet him” she nodded quickly in Desmond’s direction.

“I was very unwilling to carry out the coach’s instructions: to ensure Desmond’s sponsorship of the tournament. Biola and Chinyere however, saw it as an opportunity for me to be a witness of God’s love and grace instead” she explained. Then with a sigh she added, “it’s her famous way of getting my obedience: she throws challenges, knowing full well that I’ll catch them!”

Ejiro's last statement made them laugh.

“Your household sounds really interesting” Desmond began, “the others are people we should like to meet.” He paid the waitress and as they left, said to Ejiro, “you've been a blessing Ejiro, we'll be in touch.”

As Chinyere, Ejiro and Biola settled down at home that evening, they discussed Ejiro's encounter ... Onoriode and family had left earlier in the week to return to the States.. “I think he's now a Christian, from what you've said Ejiro” Biola was optimistic. Ejiro grinned, “I think so too, but he's been so evasive about it.”

They sat deep in thought. “You did say this Kayode, is a Christian, didn't you?” Chinyere asked, “just like his mother and sister? Well, in that case Desmond and his father cannot resist for long, can they?” She continued smiling, “they're surrounded!” And with that they burst out laughing.

The bell interrupted their laughter. Biola, who was nearest to the door, went to answer it. And there standing outside was Desmond and another gentleman, she presumed was Kayode.

Desmond spoke first, “Allow me to introduce myself, I'm Desmond Olaiye and this is my brother, Kayode.

Biola smiled letting them in, “I know who you are Mr Olaiye, your attorney is my colleague,” she said shutting the door behind them.

“Then, you must be Biola?” Desmond and Kayode stated simultaneously.

Biola grinned, “I am,” she said leading the way, “this way gentlemen.”

“Desmond, Kayode, it’s good to see you again” Ejiro stood to greet them as they came into the living room. “Please, sit” she said smiling at them.

Chinyere smiled in greeting as she said, “We’ve been looking forward to seeing you; Ejiro’s been telling us all about you.”

“We’re glad to meet Ejiro’s beloved family at last. You must be Chinyere?” Desmond enquired, with a smile.

“Yes, I am, and you’re Desmond and Kayode? pleased to meet you both” she said.

As everyone settled down in the living room chatting lively, Ejiro went out to get some refreshments. Biola started to engage them in conversation.

“Desmond, what exactly do you do?” Biola asked. “Oh, we advertise, planning, estate management and construction” he replied. “Is that what the three of you do, Natasha and yourselves?” she was making an effort to be lively, as she was usually quiet when in the company of strangers.

“Yes, as a matter of fact, but Natasha’s our designs specialist and advertising manager” Desmond replied. After a brief silence, he asked, “who, told you about Natasha? trying hard to conceal his smile, glancing in Ejiro’s direction as she walked in.

“You’ve probably guessed” Biola grinned as Ejiro feigned ignorance.

Coming in with a tray spread with cakes, biscuits and five cans of Coca –cola she set them down on the mini, centre table and sat down.

There was a brief silence, which Kayode broke, “Thank you, shall we bless and eat?” Receiving an affirmative from his hosts, he turned to Desmond, politely inviting him to give thanks for the refreshments.

Ejiro, Biola and Chinyere, exchanged knowing glances then shut their eyes, tight.

“... I told you that he is now born-again!” Ejiro declared as soon as Desmond’s car sped off.

“Ejiro, you weren’t sure,” Chinyere countered. “Anyway, it’s great to have him out of the devil’s grip” Chinyere added.

“What do you think Biola?” Chinyere turned to her inquiringly.

“We have to be godly influences and let them see Christ in us” she said.

“Biola, you’re so spiritual, you always say the right things!” Ejiro spoke with real admiration for her friend.

“I’m not perfect Ejiro, but God gives us the grace and strength to live for Him, when we trust and ask Him” Biola reassured her.

## CHAPTER 11

Months later and the tournaments were due to begin in a few days in the capital Lagos. Ejiro was packing in preparation to leave with Desmond - another idea of the Coach, but Ejiro was not arguing this time. They would be following closely behind the coach, when the time came. Biola came into the room to find her packing.

“So you’re set on going?” Biola asked, “I wish you weren’t” she sighed.

“Fine, then what do I tell the Coach?” Ejiro asked exasperated. “Look Biola, I’ll be fine, remember I’ll be in good hands” she paused before adding, “and it’s only for two weeks!”

“Considering that Desmond is driving, I’ll try not to fret,” Biola said in a bid at self-consolation. *It was hard not to remember the dangers people faced on such long journeys.*

Anyone listening to you would think I was two!” Ejiro replied indignantly.

Biola smiled. “I think I hear the telephone,” she made her way to the door...

“Who was it?” Ejiro asked on Biola’s return minutes later.

“It was Ray” Biola replied positively glowing.

“I should have guessed he alone brings the stars to your eyes!” Ejiro teased.

“Don’t be ridiculous!” Biola replied embarrassed.

“What did he say?” Ejiro quizzed.

“Oh, that we’ll be going somewhere special tonight” Biola replied smiling contentedly.

“Oh?” replied Ejiro “and where might that be?” finally fastening the zip around her suitcase.

“Nosey parker, go get your own!” Biola retorted mildly.

“On second thoughts, I withdraw the question” this was one matter Ejiro avoided.

...Away in the park Chinyere and Marvin sat talking, Chinyere’s head slightly lowered. “Chinyere, mama, is unwilling to give her consent..” Marvin was saying, “her argument is that someone who would do what you did must be wicked,” Marvin explained.

Chinyere was silent. It was quiet in the park. Daphne was busy playing quietly on the grass, by the fountain, making straw people from the hay that fell off a passing cart.....

It had been a tense few months. Chinyere, Ejiro and Biola had never fasted so much in their lives. In fact, a few friends from church joined in too. Finally, God answered their prayers. Marvin, after months of soul searching and not before telling Chinyere exactly what he thought of her, came to repentance, asking God's forgiveness and Jesus into his heart.

Afterwards he spent weeks getting to know Daphne alone as he would not go anywhere with Chinyere and in all this Biola was the mediator. Chinyere continued to pray for him, answering all his questions and giving him the time he needed with Daphne.

He finally became less hostile towards Chinyere and discovered he loved her even more now and intended to marry her, if she would have him....

Now Marvin reached out to her, "I will marry you Chi, I waited so long loving you all this while! As God is my witness, it will happen!" he affirmed. Chinyere looked up at him smiling.

"I'm so glad you're now a Christian Marvin, my heart leaps to hear you speak with such faith!" Chinyere said beaming. "But if we don't marry I'll always love you" she added her eyes glistening with tears.

"Chi, you shouldn't talk like that," Marvin exclaimed, "don't utter such things!"

"I'm sorry Marvin, I don't want to loose you" she sniffed. Marvin drew her close and kissed her forehead.

"You won't loose me, don't even imagine it" he spoke lovingly.

Chinyere looked into his dark brown eyes. “I love you so much differently now, with a love deeper than we had before!”

Marvin laughed and said, “Now you’re talking and it’s Jesus making the difference; and we will be different, to God’s praise and glory!”

“Yes, we must show the world that every good and perfect gift is from above...” Chinyere smiled happily.

“...The Father of lights, in whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning” they quoted together. Chinyere smiled mischievously as she asked, “Marvin, where was that scripture taken from?” expecting he wouldn’t know it.

“James 1:17” he replied. “I love the Lord better now and study his word at every opportunity, my darling.”

“I’m so proud of you Marvin, you’re becoming more of an inspiration, and I hope I’m the same for you?” She said turning away and lowering her eyelids. Marvin took her chin in his hand and gently turned her face to him.

“Who was it that taught our daughter everything that she knows about the Lord?” he asked. “Who is responsible for her spiritual development, hm?” He asked again touching her nose.

“You’ve been a good mum Chinyere, I know you’ll make a good wife” he assured her.

“I won’t take all the credit, Biola and even Ejiro, have been a lively challenge to me” Chinyere grinned, “this past year we’ve been together has been marvellous.” She continued “Ejiro, once said, ‘whether we get through this, we’ll just praise the Lord anyhow!’”

Marvin smiled, “She said that? she’s a great kid!” he said.

“Yes” Chinyere agreed laughing, imagining Ejiro’s reaction to that description of her, “she is!”

...At home later on that evening, “Auntie Jiro, I don’t want to go to bed now!” Daphne was pleading. “Who’ll keep you company?” Daphne asked earnestly trying hard to extend her bed time.

Ejiro broke into a grin. “Did I say I needed company, Daphne?” Ejiro enquired.

“But you can’t talk to the TV.” Daphne began, “if you need anything, I can get it for you” Daphne stood arms akimbo.

Ejiro got up, “Oh no, you won’t!” taking hold of her. “You’re marching straight to bed!” she said.

Daphne wailed, “I don’t want to go!” and seeing that that wasn’t working she added, “please, aunt Jiro!” Ejiro shook her head and bundled Daphne in her arms and marched off.

Up in Daphne’s room, they knelt by her bed as she prayed, “God, please help mummy and daddy to serve you more. Help me to be a good girl at home and school.” By this time Daphne was yawning, but continued, “help aunty Biola and uncle Ray.

Look after Kevin and aunty and uncle in America. Let aunty Jiro come back safe from the tormomet, in Jesus name, amen,” she said.

“Amen!” Ejiro echoed grinning, “it’s tournament and not tormomet Daphne, okay?” she asked. Daphne nodded yawning her head off. Ejiro tucked her in and kissed her cheek.

“Is uncle Desmond going to the tornonet too?” Ejiro burst out laughing, “Daphne, you’re impossible!” A dimple appeared in the child’s cheek. “Goodnight Daphne” Ejiro said switching off the light. “Night auntie” replied sleepy head.

Two hours later Ejiro was recounting the incident to Chinyere and Marvin in the living room. “No, she wasn’t naughty, just unwilling to go to bed” she said giggling recalling the event. Chinyere was taking off her shoes and Marvin had settled into the big black leather armchair. They had just come in and he was listening intently, “What did she do?” he asked.

“Oh, she tried to act mature and denied the fact that she was sleepy.” Ejiro’s dimples were really visible now, “and when she was praying, she could hardly keep herself from yawning.” Chinyere chuckled and Marvin burst out laughing.

“If it weren’t for the fact that we were praying, I’d have burst out laughing!” she said between fits of laughter, as she pictured Daphne earnestly praying.

Both Marvin and Chinyere were curious as to what actually happened and exclaimed spontaneously, “What Ejiro?”

“Well, she kept pronouncing tournament wrongly” Ejiro was uncontrollable now as she repeated ‘tormomet, tornonet!’ Chinyere and Marvin burst out laughing at Ejiro’s vivid account.

“Anyway, I’m sure God didn’t mind” Ejiro said wiping the tears from her eyes.

“On the contrary, he took her seriously!” Marvin grinned.

“He understands baby talk,” Chinyere added.

They fell quiet for a while with the occasional bursts of laughter. Then Chinyere began softly to quote scripture, “..Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

“Oh, how very true!” Ejiro said and added “..Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.”

They fell silent again, each meditative. Marvin broke the silence “Please give me the scriptures where those quotes are taken from.”

Ejiro replied instantly, “Matthew 19:14 and Mark 10:15.”

“You really do love children, don’t you?” Marvin asked rising to his feet. Ejiro and Chinyere rose too, “Ooh yes, dearly” Ejiro replied.

They bowed their heads as Marvin prayed thanking God for the day and the command to bring the little children before Him. Also that they might receive help to be obedient children of God, to enable them to do His will and to be an inspiration to all that they meet. When he concluded he was ready to leave. Chinyere was seeing him out.

“Goodnight Marvin!” Ejiro called from the front door, “and don’t be long Chi-chi!” Chinyere smiled; “a minute, I promise” she called and took Marvin’s hand.

“Remember, the Lord is our shepherd, Psalm 23,” she said giving his hand a squeeze and running back to the house.

“That’s a minute almost gone, well done!” Ejiro held up her stopwatch as Chinyere came into the bedroom and grabbing a pillow, she threw it at Ejiro, which Ejiro caught and hurled back, hitting Biola as she came through the door.

## CHAPTER 12

“Hey, what is it, am I that late?” Biola asked amused.

“No, not really, it was originally meant for Ejiro” Chinyere explained.

“Started again, has she?” Biola asked sitting down on the beautifully made up double bed.

“Oh, no!” Ejiro groaned knowing what was coming next.

“No escape this time!” Biola said as she took one look at her and burst out laughing, with Chinyere joining in.”

“What do you really have against men?” Biola asked.

“Nothing much, until they show an interest and start seeing me as a woman” Ejiro said shrugging her slim shoulder’s.

Chinyere rolled her eyes then exclaimed, “Now, there’s a thought! Ejiro, your a beautiful young woman, men are bound to notice,” Chinyere sighed.

At that Ejiro too rolled her eyes and said, “Don’t change the subject, if you haven’t noticed, Biola needs to fill us in on her love life.”

They both turned to look at Biola.

Biola cleared her throat. “I want you two to be the first to know” she began, and then didn’t quite know how to continue.

“Go on Biola, please tell us!” Chinyere prompted.

“We’re all ears,” Ejiro added.

“I’ve decided to marry Raymond,” she said quickly.

“You did what?” Chinyere and Ejiro could hardly believe that they had heard right.

There was a brief pause before they both exclaimed, “When?” “Where?” they were ecstatic.

“Biola, praise the Lord!” Ejiro beamed.

“Oh, when is it?” Chinyere asked excited, “When do we hear wedding bells?”

“Now, which questions do I answer first?” Biola teased, laughing happily her dark brown eyes going from one to the other.

“Bola, go on tell us!” Ejiro was really glad for Biola...

*... Raymond Igwe, a medical doctor, about six feet tall, in his early thirties, had loved Biola patiently for years. Biola on the other hand, thought Ejiro, hadn’t even smiled in his direction, not that*

she could remember. Then she and Chinyere - *it was really Chinyere's idea* - conspired and gave Ray their telephone number.

*Good old Ray, he was patient for two whole nights, then after the Tuesday bible study it happened, Biola received a call from Raymond.*

*It was clear that she was embarrassed, her lashes lowered as she heard his name. Her small lips trembled as tears of exasperation fell. She was good enough to listen then replaced the receiver. Ejiro and Chinyere were peeping and began to feel perhaps they should have stayed out of it.*

*It's not very clear when she did give in, certainly, his smile could somersault any girls heart....*

“Alright! I accepted his proposal earlier this evening” Biola said glancing at her friends shyly.

“Oh Biola! What did Ray say?” Chinyere asked eyes shining “he really does love you!” she concluded.

“Hmm!” Ejiro began, “this is what I don't understand, you and Biola's eyes twinkling like stars when you're in love.

“Oh, you don't, do you?” Biola replied, “try looking at yourself when you're talking about rackets!”

Ejiro grinned as the other two laughed heartily. “Well, I'm sure when I talk about Jesus too!” Ejiro countered.

Chinyere smiled thoughtfully that *certainly was true!* And turning to Biola asked, “Sincerely now, tell us what was Ray's reaction?” Chinyere inquired.

“He was so glad that he gave me a bear hug!” Biola replied.  
“It was so brotherly, it made me feel so loved and secure; I’m glad I said yes,” Biola added with a smile.

Chinyere and Ejiro joyfully hugged her and each other. “You conspirators!” Biola accused them, “you were both behind him all the time, weren’t you?”

“Why do you say that?” Chinyere feigned ignorance. While Ejiro, on the other hand looked so innocent it was almost convincing.

“Come on, you girls encouraged him, giving him excuses on my behalf!” Biola was confrontational.

“It worked, didn’t it?” Ejiro sat down beside Biola, giving her a loving squeeze.

“Dear Biola, I’m so glad for both of you!” Chinyere ruffled Biola’s naturally curly hair, which was as a result of her Fulani descent and which she always kept short.

“Ray’s joy was indescribable, I hadn’t realized how much he really loves me” Biola said running her fingers through her hair.

“He loves you alright,” Ejiro said, “my ears still reel from his rehearsed speeches!” she confessed.

“You know he’s really going to take care of you!” Chinyere spoke confidently.

“I hope to take care of him too!” Biola replied seriously. “I’m so glad you and Ejiro knew what was good for me” she said bashfully, “it makes me feel ashamed that I treated him so badly.”

Chinyere replied, “I bet that he doesn’t even remember a negative thing about the whole matter.”

“The wedding is going to be on the first Saturday, in April of next year” Biola said.

“Only a few months away, simply wonderful!” exclaimed Ejiro delighted.

“Fantastic, Biola!” Chinyere joined in, “what exactly changed your mind about him?” Chinyere was curious.

“Well” Biola sighed, “he not just a handsome face, you know” she got up and walked over to the window. “I could see his sincerity; I just couldn’t deny it anymore.” Biola stood with her back to the others, running her fingers through her hair again.

The other two grinned. It was not unusual for Biola to do that, depending on what state of mind she was in. “I wonder what daddy will say?” Biola asked.

“I know!” Ejiro cleared her throat, “Fulani, so you’ve become human at last!” she finished off with a perfect imitation of Mr Balogun. It was so realistic that Chinyere exploded, waking Daphne up with her laughter.

Biola frowned, “I’m serious Jiro!” Ejiro took Daphne back to bed and promptly returned.

“Give daddy a call and on my way back from the tournament, I’ll stop by and see him and take a message for you” Ejiro ventured on a more serious note.

“How about it, Biola?” Chinyere whispered, not wishing to wake Daphne up again. Biola glanced at her watch it was an hour before midnight. “I’ll call him now” she said, “I know he’ll be thrilled!”

## CHAPTER 13

“How was it?” Chinyere asked Biola who had just got in from her marriage counselling appointment.

“It was how we thought, interrogative!” Biola replied.

Chinyere laughed, “Come on Biola, I’m sure it wasn’t that bad!”

“As you’re next, you’ll see for yourself!” Biola retorted.

Chinyere looked at Biola and grinned. “You past judgment before you got there!” she said half – reproachfully.

Biola sat at the kitchen table and admitted, “Well, I was extremely nervous, so my judgment was clouded. “ It’s not every time you get to sit before the church marriage committee,” she explained.

Rolling her dark eyes, she said, “I was practically stuttering!”

Chinyere threw back her head in laughter. “They’ve reduced their numbers to three, what would you have done if they were still seven?” she asked grimacing.

“Fled!” was Biola’s curt reply.

The marriage committee in church, headed by Pastor Jackson, was set up to prepare couples for marriage. Through a series of counselling sections the couple were able to decide if they were ready to commit, God’s way.

Pastor Jackson knew that a relationship based on Jesus would stand the test of time. He tried with much faith and prayer to know the mind of God and bear it to the couple. And it was working, because all of those marriages were still existing and going strong.

Anyone wishing to marry at St. Timothy’s had to make sure it was of God or else, would certainly wish they had not gone before the committee. Some ladies would leave in tears and the men visibly shaken.

*The committee could detect immorality a mile away. The Reverend Jackson was a minister of divine grace and humility; he hated sin just like God, but loved the person.*

Gruelling though the questions seemed, Biola sensed the minister’s love and goodwill. She was thankful that neither she nor Ray had anything to be ashamed of.

*Ray had been unperturbed, indeed, very much at ease. His missionary training and medical skill probably had something to do with it, teaching him how to deal with any situation.*

Just then, Ejiro came in, interrupting Biola’s train of thought. “Hi, you two! Biola how was it?” she enquired.

“More, questions?” Biola groaned.

Chinyere winked at Ejiro, who said, “It must have been quite trying for someone as shy as Biola.”

“Amateur psychologist!” Biola muttered under her breath.

“I’m starved!” declared Ejiro who pulled out a chair, turned it around and sat down beside Biola. “Go on, tell me,” she urged.

“We passed the test if that’s what you mean!” came Biola’s reply, “but those questions are meant to rock one” she added running her fingers through her hair.

Ejiro narrowed her brow thoughtfully, “It has produced many stable, Christ centred marriages in the church so that I’m envious,” she said. “However, if that is what they go through” she continued, “I do not wish myself the pleasure!”

...After lunch, “Chi, that was great!” Biola stretched yawning.

“You’ve out done yourself, Chinyere!” Ejiro exclaimed, “but wasn’t that my recipe? for next week” Ejiro teased, causing Chinyere to smile.

“It’s been quiet without Daphne” Biola said as she proceeded to clear the table.

Chinyere sat down at the kitchen table, her head in her hands, “Why, is his mother making things so difficult for us?” she asked.

“Chinyere, it will all work out in the end, give Marvin’s mother time” Biola encouraged her.

Ejiro touched Chinyere lightly on the shoulder. “Remember James 5:16 ‘... The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth

much'. You've always said trust in the Lord and never worry"  
Ejiro reminded her.

Chinyere managed a wry smile, "I'm trusting Jiro, I'm trusting."

...Later that evening "What are the prayer topics for tonight?"  
Ejiro asked Biola, as they both got ready for the evening service.

"The church and the government of this country" was Biola's  
reply.

"Did, Chinyere say that she'd not be attending tonight?" Ejiro  
quizzed.

"Why, what made you say that?" Biola stopped what she was  
doing and stared curiously at Ejiro.

"Nothing, I just wondered" Ejiro replied.

At that moment Chinyere ran in excited, "they'll be back in two  
weeks..." she blurted out, "and all's settled at home!"

Ejiro grabbed the letter Chinyere was waving and danced with joy  
as she read it, "Chi, this is marvellous!" she said.

"It's a testimony for tonight, God's been so faithful" Biola added  
pleased for Chinyere...

...The prayer meeting had just ended. Almost everyone was  
yawning, they had had a good time, but they were now tired. Ejiro  
was talking to Yinka and deaconess Garuba sidetracked Biola.  
While Chinyere was waiting patiently to speak with the pastor...

Days later, just after breakfast, “When did Desmond say he was coming to pick you up?” Chinyere asked Ejiro.

“In about half an hour’s time” Ejiro replied promptly as she moved to and fro cross checking that she had everything.

Biola came in just then, took one look at what Ejiro had packed and asked, “Are those pink stilettos necessary?” Ejiro burst out laughing at her absentmindedness.

Shortly after, the sound of Desmond’s Peugeot 505 was heard pulling up outside. Ejiro rushed out with Chinyere close behind her. “Your Nike’s, you’ve forgotten them!”

Desmond stepped out of the car, “Scatter brain, I’ll give you ten minutes to crosscheck that you’ve got everything” he told her.

Biola went up to him and after the initial exchange of greetings she asked, “have the others left yet?”

“Yes, they left an hour ago, although we’ll catch up with them as our mode of transport is faster” Desmond replied smiling, but Biola frowned.

“Don’t worry Biola, she in good hands!” he said to reassure her.

Biola smiled assured, “When is Kayode due back?” she asked changing the topic.

“Oh, it depends on a number of things” he replied vaguely.

Grinning Biola said, “You’re not going to tell me are you?”

Desmond corked his head to one side saying, “Lawyers! You’re all so inquisitive.”

... The journey took the best part of two hours as Desmond and Ejiro initially drove behind the coach. However, after forty-five minutes of doing that, Desmond told the Coach at the next stop of his intention to go on ahead.

Ejiro really enjoyed the drive because Desmond was excellent company. They talked and laughed all the way there and Ejiro, much to her surprise, found that she was beginning to feel a real connection with him.

At a point he interrogated her about her plans after the tournament, in a manner of which Onoriode would have been proud. And as can be imagined they had fallen out briefly about it. Desmond said that she was not ambitious and she told him to mind his own business in no uncertain terms.

However, their tiff did not last long as Desmond soon started charming her with more tales of his escapades with Kayode when they were lads. He soon made her laugh and she enjoyed every minute of their time together, which was soon cut short when he ‘dropped’ her off at the hotel, where the team would be staying.

.... The days ahead were filled with competing training and more competing. Ejiro and Felix won both the singles and doubles and took the gold medals for lawn tennis.

In the shot-put Mariam, a team member, out did herself and won gold.

The high jump had always been tricky and the general opinion of the team was that they would be lucky to get away with bronze. They did.

The track events were a disaster to begin with and the Coach was furious. Whether it was the lecture he gave the team or his extreme disappointment in them that did it, no one knows, but at the next event they came away with the silver.

Time had flown by; and they had less than a week of competing and the Coach was demanding their optimum in training and was strict with their curfew. In short, a social life was out of the question, unless you had won a medal.

Through it all the Coach and Desmond encouraged and inspired them to reach for their best. If the truth were known, Desmond was a real sports lover with real admiration for the Coach and he felt privileged to be a sponsor.

Ejiro, who had become the Coach's favourite at this point, was allowed to see the sights and be Desmond's escort for the rest of the trip. At this stage she did not need much convincing, as he was excellent company.

They visited Victoria Island and Ikeja mainly; and Ejiro really did not want their time together to end. In her emails and phone calls to the others she was always enthusiastic and it was always, "Desmond this or Desmond that."

All too soon, they had one more day left in Lagos and Ejiro was feeling low. Desmond couldn't understand it; she had spoken of the others so much, he thought she would be glad to return home. That evening, he took her for a meal in an attempt to cheer her up.

He loved her company and had grown close to her, *she was really a well brought up girl.*

He also loved the fact that she was unpretentious and considerate. She had refused previous offers of meals saying, “and what is it the hotel is cooking for us, is it not the same food you want to go to a restaurant and pay extra for?”

This evening was different, she was down and he wanted to get to the bottom of it. At the restaurant, he probed Ejiro concerned she might have had bad news.

Putting down her knife and fork, she blurted out, exasperated that he would not let the matter go, “I’m going to miss our times together and I just did not want it to end.” Angry with herself she got up and mumbled something about the ladies as tears stung her eyes.

Desmond paid a waitress and waited patiently for Ejiro at the entrance. As she came towards him looking slightly embarrassed, she said, “the waitress gave me your message.”

He smiled at her, in contrast to their first date she looked gorgeous.

Her hair was loosely wrapped high, with some curls framing her face. Her native print outfit was a close fitting, ankle length dress. She wore medium heeled black slippers with a matching handbag.

As they walked towards the car Desmond confessed, “I’ll miss our time here too, Jiro.”

Ejiro had not missed the last bit, “what, did you call me?”

Desmond smiled as he replied, “You heard me.”

They got to the car and sat in silence for a few minutes. Desmond took in a deep breath and spoke directly, “Ejiro, during our time together I’ve discovered that I’ve grown to love you.”

He looked into her eyes and added, “and unless I’m mistaken, I believe you feel the same.”

Ejiro could only nod in response. Now that he had actually voiced it, she had started to panic. *I’ve just turned twenty! How am I going to face Biola and Chinyere? I know that Chinyere is going to look so smug when she hears this and Biola will be pleasantly surprised!*

Desmond noticed the change in her expression and asked, “what are you thinking?”

Ejiro smiled at him and admitted sheepishly, “I’ve started to panic.”

She then proceeded to tell him all that was on her mind. He listened quietly and when she had finished, told her of his fears. Ejiro could not believe that a man with so much confidence could be afraid of commitment.

He looked at her surprised and said, “It’s not exclusive to women you know.”

That admission helped Ejiro to relax and she joked, “well, it’s nice to know I’ll have some positive male influence.”

Desmond replied in mock horror, “I’ll certainly need to keep my eye on you, young lady!” And turning the key in the ignition they drove off back to their hotels.

## CHAPTER 14

Chinyere and Biola had just finished their morning devotion. Biola who was still in her pyjamas was yawning. “It’ll be good to hear Ejiro’s voice again, I miss her,” she said.

Chinyere grinned, “two whole weeks, more like two years!” Chinyere added.

Biola smiled, it had become so quiet in the house since Ejiro left, and she really had to tell her how much she had missed her.

Chinyere felt the same way.

“At least, winning those medals would compensate for the way she had been carrying on prior to the tournament” Chinyere said as she went towards the bathroom wrapped in a towel.

... Hours later, “Chinyere, I’m sorry I can’t come with you to the market” Biola was apologetic. “I have an emergency meeting with a client, I’m sorry” she apologised again.

“Biola, will you stop apologising, it’s nothing” Chinyere replied. “After all, you did all the baking yesterday” she concluded.

*“That was yesterday, Biola frowned. Grabbing an umbrella on the way out, she muttered, “It’s beginning to rain, again!”*

...At home, later that evening, Chinyere was waving another email from Ejiro, “you won’t bee-leave-it!” she said with exaggerated surprise.

“Ejiro says she and Desmond have caught the love bug, and she will tell us all about it on her return.” Chinyere was looking really smug as she had always believed they’d make a good match and had even told Ejiro so.

Biola on the other hand, was pleasantly surprised she never suspected. Chinyere was grinning from ear to ear as she handed Biola the print out. Biola smiled as she read it.

“Oh no!” the smile was wiped off her face.

“Kayode came to see me today and confided that he felt that he was falling in love with Ejiro; and was hoping to tell her this on her return.”

“What!” Chinyere could not believe her ears. “He better snap out of it! I like Kayode, but he is not the one for Ejiro” she added irate.

Biola pleaded with Chinyere, “please, let me deal with it and don’t tell Ejiro anything about this.”

Chinyere relented and got up to make a phone call in the hallway.

Meanwhile, Biola turned up the volume on the television. A short time later, a scream from Biola brought her rushing back.

Biola was as still as a statue, eyes transfixed on the television set. Nothing Chinyere tried received a response from Biola. Just when she began to panic, she heard the sound of screeching tyres followed by muffled voices outside. As she moved towards the front door, the caller was already shaking the gates impatiently.

“What is going on?” she muttered angrily to herself. “I’m coming!” she called out. From where she stood she could make out Pastor Jackson and Ray.

As she rushed quickly towards the gate, she also noticed a few of the neighbours, weeping and wailing. She opened the gate and greeted her visitors, puzzlement written all over her face. Ray looked away and Pastor Jackson replied gravely, taking her arm gently but firmly, as they moved her swiftly towards the house. Too late, madam Bose, blowing her nose loudly exclaimed, **“Oh God, so Ejiro is dead!”**

“Chinyere tore herself away from her pastor and rushing back towards madam Bose, she demanded, “What, did you say?” her voice barely above a whisper. Madam Bose began to narrate. The message hit home and Chinyere slumped.

Ray swiftly lifted her in his arms, wondering how Biola would take it. Pastor Jackson was trying his best to control the crowd; he finally got to the front door, locking them out.

On reaching the living room, he noticed Ray still had Chinyere in his arms. His gaze fixed on Biola’s still frame in front of the television set. Taking Chinyere from him, he placed her on the couch, fanning her with an old newspaper. He looked over at Ray who was at Biola’s side.

Ray turned and spoke. “Reverend, she must have been watching the television, when the news came on” he said “and she appears to be in a state of severe shock, sir.”

“I had expected weeping and hysteria, but not this” Pastor Jackson shook his head sadly. “The women are taking it badly,” he added, shaking his head again. *This was such a tragedy; these are fine Christians who always seemed to be laughing and very fond of each other*, he thought. He walked into the hallway to make some phone calls...

A while later, the sound of knocking was heard at the front door. The pastor went to see who it was. Deaconesses Garuba and Alieu, who were both red-eyed, greeted him; coming in behind them was his wife, Pastor Theresa, also red-eyed and wiping the tears away.

Sighing with relief, he said, “Thank God you’re here, please follow me.” The three women stood silently in the living room. It was a grave situation.

*Desmond and Ejiro, returning victorious from Lagos, snatched away in a ghastly motor accident, earlier in the day. Had we known we would have spared the girls hearing it on the news.*

“I think that they will have to be put in bed” the pastor cut into their chain of thought. Pastor Theresa and deaconess Garuba immediately went over to Chinyere and carried her to the bedroom. She hadn’t even battered an eyelid; and was out cold.

Ray turned down deaconess Alieu’s offer to assist with Biola. He lifted her like a child and carried her still form to the room that Chinyere was in. Looking at them so still in there grief brought fresh tears to the eyes of those watching. “I’ll have to inform

Ejiro's sister by telegram about this, first thing tomorrow morning" pastor Theresa said. *Father help me, she's pregnant!*

More members of the church had arrived since the girls had been taken upstairs. Pastor Jackson was deep in thought, some just stared into space and others just bowed their heads, not knowing what to say or where to look.

Yinka began to sniff again; she had caught sight of a portrait of the three girls in the little glass display cabinet. Some of the others were beginning to follow suit.

The Reverend Jackson rose to his feet and motioned to the others to do the same. Stooping to pick up his bible he turned to the book of Thessalonians 4: 13 - 18.

He read slowly. "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that you sorrow not, even as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we, which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them, which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

He lifted his head from the bible and said, "We that have this hope believe God's word to be true. So, let us please not add to their grief, but share it" he admonished. "It's a natural thing to cry, but if all cry, who will comfort?" he asked. "Therefore, let us allow the

Holy Spirit to work through us....” he stopped unable to continue for awhile.

After a brief pause he whispered, “let us pray; and ask God for comfort.” Everyone began to pray quietly for a while.

The Reverend Jackson raised his voice conclusively, “our God and our father, we ask for comfort and strength to bear the loss of our brother and sister. Although we know your promise, help us oh Lord, to really believe you. We ask for your comfort upon the bereaved...” he paused. “Father of love, mercy and steadfastness, you know best!” his voice was barely above a whisper, “In Jesus name” he concluded.

“Amen!” everyone present chorused.

Excusing himself, Pastor Jackson walked out towards the front door, but was gently halted by Pastor Theresa. “Have you sent representatives to brother Desmond’s home?” she looked up into his face.

“Yes, I have, I’m going there now” he replied and bent to kiss her gently. He turned and opened the door; “I’ll call you” he said and was gone.

## CHAPTER 15

The next few days were a maze of activities.

Onoriode and her family had flown in from the States. It was a very sad meeting at the airport - a contrast from the last time.

They had cried and grieved and the kind airport manager had offered a private area away from the arrival hall for them. They accepted this gratefully until they felt able to continue the journey home.

On arrival home tears flowed afresh as the neighbours had laid out wreaths, flowers and a framed portrait of Ejiro at the gates.

Onoriode was bent double in grief and Tega frankly was unable to console her as he too was in pain. He missed Ejiro dearly, and had to be strong for Onoriode and Kevin. Now however, it had become all too much for him to bear.

Biola and Chinyere, with Ray's help, were able to get everyone inside.

Ray and Pastor Jackson between them had seen to most of the

funeral arrangements. Pastor Theresa, with the help of the other members of the church took in turns to keep watch over everyone at the house. If there was ever a time they needed support it was now.

Ejiro's body was laid in state at the local mortuary. From the time of its arrival the girls had kept vigil, fussing over it and weeping.

As soon as Pastor Theresa heard it, she set about keeping them away. It was heart rending to have to use force, but the women were stubborn and at the time they needed it.

For the next few days church members cooked, cleaned and comforted the family.

That Sunday, the church was packed full as it was also the day of the funeral.

Desmond's family were in the pews to the left of the altar and Ejiro's, to the right.

Their coffins were just before the altar and were opened.

Pastor Jackson on the advice of friends and family had called on people close to the departed to give a eulogy.

Friends and family of Ejiro and Desmond came out to talk about them, taking only a few minutes at a time.

After, twenty minutes of tears and more tears, Yinka came and made everyone laugh with stories about Ejiro.

Seizing this as his cue, as he returned to the pulpit, Pastor Jackson reminded everyone to remember them with joy and thankfulness to God for their time on earth.

He took only a few minutes then invited Onoriode up to the altar to sing Ejiro's favourite song, 'Redeemer' by Nicole C. Mullens.

Seeing, her up there, reminded everyone of Ejiro and not only because of the semblance, they sounded alike as well. Needless to say, there wasn't a dry eye in the church – it was a truly powerful and appropriate song to sing. The service ended and everyone made their way to the cemetery.

“... Ashes to ashes, dust to dust..” The Reverend was solemnly saying. It was a windy morning, but hardly anyone noticed.

Onoriode, in black, leaned against Tega exhausted. Her black lace handkerchief hung limply from her left hand. The reality of it all began to dawn on her. Ejiro was DEAD!” It seemed to loom before her.

Biola left Ray’s side to go and stand beside her father. As she approached him, he turned to look at her, lean and frail, the light gone out of her eyes.

He took her hand and whispered, “Let’s look towards the dawn of eternity, when we shall see her... again!”

Biola nodded as tears filled her large brown eyes afresh. “Yes...” she bit her lip; “I miss her!” she sobbed.

Chinyere’s black dress fluttered in the wind. Her hair was covered in a black scarf. Marvin stood silently beside her, as he took her hand; she looked away towards the trees. She had cried until the tears seemingly had refused to come.

Everyone stood silently as Pastor Jackson, in a black suit with a clerical collar, read from the scriptures.

To Daphne, everything had seemed a bit too confusing; she still did not understand what all the fuss was about.

*Uncle Desmond and aunty Jiro were in their coffins, but were supposed to be with God in heaven. So, if they were in heaven why was everyone so sad? and what do they mean by spirit, soul and body.*

She left her mother’s side to sit on the grass.

Kevin spotted her and went over. “Daphne” he said, “maybe God loved them too much, and so He took them.”

Daphne looked confused, “why, are they still in their coffins then, if God took them?”

Kevin listened patiently, “That’s their body, dad says, their soul and spirit have gone back to God, in Heaven!” he stated.

And noting Daphne’s puzzled expression he explained. Everyone has a spirit, soul and body. God made us into three different parts and they all do different things.

“So, we are like a boiled egg then?” Daphne asked wide-eyed.

This time Kevin looked puzzled. “Daphne, what are you on about?” he asked bewildered.

“You know, the shell, the white bit and the yoke!” she replied elated, remembering the message in her Donut Man - Celebration video.

“Oh Kevin, you’ve made it much clearer now” she laughed, happy that she finally understood.

Kevin felt proud that he could be of some help. However, he continued, “As I was saying, if we believe in Jesus, we’ll see them in heaven, but if we don’t, we won’t see them again; because we won’t be in heaven!”

Kevin stated in a matter-of-fact tone, “Daddy told me.”

He was glad that he finally had an opportunity to say it...

The Reverend Jackson continued from the book of Ecclesiastes, 3, “.. a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.” He closed his eyes in prayer, “may God bless his word into our hearts, in Jesus name.”

“Amen!” the people chorused.

Sister Gloria started playing the organ softly, melody filled the air as some sang: #*‘We have an anchor that reaches the soul, steadfast and sure as the billows roll, fastened to the rock that cannot move, anchored safe and deep in the Saviour’s love’.*

Well-wishers were filing out of the cemetery. Kayode and Natasha were leading their parents back to the awaiting car. Chinyere and Biola turned at the same time, going back to the tombs, to pay their last respects, to the departed.

Onoriode was already kneeling by Ejiro’s grave, talking to her.

“Goodbye, my love” she was saying, “till we meet at Jesus feet, adieu!” She got up, and they all walked back slowly towards the waiting cars.

Onoriode stopped, looking back, a tear beginning to fall down her cheek, “Ejiro, I won’t forget you, goodbye dear sister, goodbye!”

## Epilogue

It had been months since the funeral and contrary to their beliefs their lives had not come to an end. Although Ejiro had been a big part of it she was now gone and sad though it was life as they knew it had to go on. She would always be remembered with fondness.

Strange though it seemed the demise of Ejiro and Desmond had brought Ejiro's loved one's and the Olaiye's closer.

Natasha and Kayode exchanged visits with Biola and Chinyere and the senior Olaiye's soon grew to know and love the women.

Onoriode and Tega had also started to keep in touch much more by email and regular phone calls.

So it was a cause of great celebration when they heard the news that Onoriode had been delivered of twin girls: Dinah and Micah - the same biblical names her parents had given to her and Ejiro.

Tega told them that they were hoping to have the dedication Service in three months time at their church: Mount Sanai, in California. He also informed them jokingly that, "the flower girls will be ready in time for the wedding."

Tega also had more cause for celebration, he had been reinstated as the Senior Editor at the National Express. This had followed an internal investigation of Tyrone and Melanie's activities at work - which had led to their dismissal.

As the day for the wedding approached Biola had become more nervous.

Chinyere, who had just married Marvin, in a lavish traditional ceremony, preceded by a church blessing, had temporarily moved back in to no. 37 to help Biola prepare...

Two months prior the whole of the Mount Zion congregation had turned out for the traditional ceremony. Marvin and Chinyere who were dressed in matching native attire and laden with coral beads looked magnificent.

Although it was a traditional affair, Marvin and Chinyere insisted on the removal of the ritual elements of pouring libation. The elders took some convincing, but eventually gave in.

There was an assortment of food and drink and lots of cultural dancing.

And Chinyere's dad had not forgotten his promise to secure her plot of land in her village - she wanted to build a school for all types of handy-work training, to help the local people. Indeed, he had actually built it and handed the building to her as a wedding present, much to her surprise.

...A week to the time, Natasha who had taken Ejiro's place on the bridal train, also moved in to no. 37 to assist Biola.

So much it seemed still needed to be done.

Alex the tailor hadn't finished the gown; he incidentally, seemed to work better under pressure. And just when he had finished it, it had to be taken in again - Biola had lost two more inches off her waist since he started on it.

There had also been a bit of a hitch with the caterers, they wanted to change not only their agreement terms, but also the menu.

Ray was irate, Biola in tears. Osas asked to take over, he'd soon sought it out.

A few parents, mothers undoubtedly, decided that they wanted to choose individually what their children would be wearing on the bridal train.

In short, anything that could go wrong did.

That was until Pastor Theresa took over, with Ray and Biola's permission, she did some 'chopping and changing'.

First, she called a meeting with the parents and established some ground rules for their children staying on the bridal train. It was not that she was ruthless, but firm. In the end, they had all agreed a common uniform and Pastor Theresa ensured that Alex had the four outfits ready on the day.

Kevin's and Daphne's outfits had been ready three weeks previously - they were the little bride and groom.

Eventually, things settled into their proper order and Biola began to relax and gained the two inches again- much to Alex's annoyance.

Natasha had bought the decorations for the church and hall and would sort out the floral arrangements and the bride's bouquet.

Now, two days to go and everything was ready. However, Biola worried that her father wouldn't make it on time from Kaduna, nor, would Tega and family make it in time from the States.

That evening the phone rang, Ray and Biola were only too glad to rush to the airport to pick Tega and his family up. It was good to see them all together, a completely different scene from the last time.

Tega and Ray brought the suitcases, Kevin now five, pulled the mini travel suitcase, while Biola and Onoriode carried a twin between them. They laughed and talked all the way to the car - Ray had brought his Range Rover.

Mr Balogun, Biola's dad arrived the next morning and that evening they went for the rehearsal at the church.

The big day finally arrived and everyone was up early, they were all excited.

Chinyere, Natasha and Onoriode got the children ready.

Kevin and Daphne looked absolutely fabulous; their outfits mirrored that of the bride and groom.

Dinah and Micah were like little cherubs; they were dressed in matching cream coloured outfits. Onoriode had also fixed little butterfly accessories to their wavy hair.

Biola looked like an African princess and was ‘drop dead’ gorgeous in Alex’s creation.

Tega and Marvin had decorated the wedding cars and had gone over to Ray’s to prepare themselves.

Kayode came two hours later to drive Biola and her train to the church as scheduled.

Chinyere and Natasha took the Honda Accord and went to do some last minute checks on the hall and the catering staff.

Everything was perfect.

They then made their way to the church, as Natasha was Biola’s chief bride’s maid; she had to be there in time to take her place by Biola’s side.

As they arrived at the church so did the others. Everyone took their places and Biola walked in to the music of ‘two hearts’.

The ceremony was absolutely beautiful and a few joyful tears flowed, Mr Balogun and Onoriode being the ‘ring leaders’.

Following the ceremony, Pastor Jackson proceeded with a short sermon on marriage linking it to the biblical story of the marriage supper of the lamb in Revelations 19. He reminded the guests that all were welcome to it and warned them of the consequences if they turned it down, in Revelations 20.

He concluded his sermon and prayed for Ray and Biola that they would grow in love towards God and each other. He also prayed for the guests that they would not miss out on the final

## Marriage.

The brother manning the sound system received his cue from the Pastor as he ended the prayer. He started playing a selection of gospel music as the bridal procession made its way out into the sunshine.

**The End.**

**GLOSSARY – Words and pronunciations / sounds like**

1. **Biola** - Bee - o -lah
2. **Chinyere** - Chi- n - ye - re
3. **Ejiroghene** - A- gee – row – ge –ne
4. **Balogun** - Ba - low - goon
5. **Madaku** - Ma - da - coo
6. **Ajaro** - A - jar - row
7. **Ogundipo** - O - goon - dee - poor
8. **Onoriode** - O - no - rio - de
9. **Tega** - Tay – gar
10. **Edafe** - A - da – fay
11. **Olaiye** - O - lah - yeah
12. **Kayode** - Car - your – day
13. **Obaka** - O - bah – car
14. **Omonor** - O - mon – or
15. **Osas** - O – sass
16. **Oba** - Or – bah
17. **Yinka** - Yeen – ca
18. **Garuba** - Ga - rue – bah
19. **Igwe** - Eee - gway
20. **Bose** - Boss - air
21. **Alieu** - Ali - you
22. **Benin** - Bee - nin
23. **Kaduna** - Ka - do - na
24. **Owerri** - O - way - ray
25. **Fulani** - Full - an - ni
26. **Ogbe** - Org - bay
27. **Ukodo** - Ooh - co – doe
28. **Lagos** - Lay – gos
29. **Ikeja** - E - kay - jah

**Obuaya** ( O - boo - a- yah).

