

1.

The clock read quarter past five in the morning. The flutter of the curtains stirred me from my day-dream; I could hear the trickling of raindrops on the roof. The tumultuous rain from the previous night had robbed me of sleep. I grew restless when it rained. I wished I would fall asleep, I craved the rest. My mind raced, overworked and on edge, preparing for the day ahead. The street cleaners had begun their morning routine; the sound of broom swishing about on the concrete composing a sweet symphony which played in the back of my mind. The shop owners would begin to open shortly after and the dance of the day would begin; each one off to an adventure of their own.

A sudden gust of wind carried the foul smell of the sewer behind the house into the room, triggering an irritation as the odour mingled with memories; It triggered the smell of blood and I could now feel a metallic bile crawling up my throat, suddenly I was back there, crouched over the body which was draped by glass from where the centre table once stood. I shrugged and made a mental note to inform the caretaker that the sewer must be full.

My gaze settled on Toby, peacefully asleep on the couch. I wondered why he had dropped everything and came down, no matter how many times I turned down his advances towards me, to him; home would always be where I am. His deep melanin always fascinated me—the rich depth of his laughter, the resonance of his voice, I knew the nuances of his features, the colour of his eyes and how they turned golden brown when they struck light. Yet he *“wasn't good enough for me”*, that was what I told him on the day he left, I didn't mean it but he asked me to go with him and I didn't trust myself to give in to the love he offered so easily. He had been gone for months, until now.

I got up, already overwhelmed by the reality of the day ahead. I thought about that night three months ago, it seemed like a lifetime away.

“Biobele! Bio!” someone was crouched beside me, saying my name in a frantic yet hushed tone, I glanced over and saw Hanniel, my work bestie. Gravitating towards ourselves wasn't hard, we often joked about how our relationship could be classified as trauma bonding.

"What happened?!" I finally figured out what Hanniel had been trying to say after what seemed like ages.

"He's not breathing" I muttered in reply. I knelt there, crouched by the body while my life flashed before my eyes.

"I need to call the police" Hanniel said again realising that she wasn't getting anywhere with questioning me.

I had not realised that I had been holding my breath, I mentally registered the smell of blood and how it made my stomach turn, I also noticed the glistering of the glass draped around him, it was beautiful, almost poetic; he looked so powerless and I remembered a time not long ago when I was in that position and he put me there. The brown rug soaked in blood and was now maroon in colour. The golden statue of a now bloodied lady liberty was strewn across the floor beside Sagay's Law of contract textbook, for some reason I saw the room more clearly, all the times I had been in here previously it had been overwhelmed by a presence; one which was now gone.

"Not yet" I said, regaining my composure, *"There's something I need to do first."*

2.

After Law school I had a map of how I needed my life to go, I needed the Law to be the thing that saved me, that gave me a sense of importance and belongingness, the ticket out of the childhood I dreaded. Applying for jobs was the most painstaking experience, with every application I grew more distressed.

When I woke up to a mail from Adubo, Gregory & Kennedy, I glanced at the "Congratulations" heading and pranced about the room doing a happy dance, I was ecstatic until I saw the salary figure on the offer letter.

"abi my eye dey pain me?" I thought furiously to myself. I shrugged off the thought, trying not to come off as ungrateful. The firm had a reputation that preceded them, they were considered as one of the top tier firms in the country, If I was going to get paid in "exposure" AGK was the place to do it, I was going to take the opportunity and make the most of it, so I counted my blessings, said a subtle prayer of thanksgiving and began to think of what I'd wear the following week.

"Good day everyone, you are all welcome to the offices of Adubo, Gregory & Kennedy. I would give you the history of how our firm came to be but if I had to do that then maybe you're not the brightest of the lot after-all," I watched as the office manager led us through the facilities, her attitude permeating every step. In the conference room, we were introduced to the firm's Partners and Senior Associates. As the meeting began, a wave of anxiety surged through me. My stomach churned audibly in testament to my nervousness. The male associate next to me cast occasional glances, seemingly aware of my discomfort; I closed my eyes and prayed I didn't release gas.

"I lost count at how many times they used the phrase 'you are here to learn' we all know what that stands for..." A slender girl with clear brown skin, an 18inch bone straight hair, on heels so high, I could swear it would give way at any second, stood beside me and was speaking, I realised just in time that she was speaking to me.

"Modern day workplace slavery..." I responded bemused, *"and it's not like they will compensate us adequately"*

"Exactly!" we both broke out in laughter. *"I'm Hanniel, You?"*

"I'm Biobele, It's nice to meet you."

3.

It was about 4:45pm, almost close of work. The office settled into silence as everyone began to leave.

"Biobele, Chief Adubo has asked to see you in his office." Adubo had called Peculiar's desk through the intercom, each time his secretary had come to get me she gave off an air of annoyance; she probably hated the distance she covered to come and get me; by extension hated me for it and I would wonder why Adubo had not just called my desk directly like he did when he needed any other of my colleagues. That was when the flag should have turned red; in hindsight it was his attempt at reducing the amount of times he contacted me personally. I was blinded by the need to prove myself, by the sense of self worth that would follow being validated by him – Chief Addison Adubo, SAN, so when he called, I left everything and went to him, He had made it his mission to make me feel less of myself, pawning off grunt work and never letting me handle briefs worth my expertise. As I walked into the corridor leading up to the office, I had a feeling of foreboding and felt a pit open up in my stomach. I shrugged off the thought and knocked on the door before going in.

"Good day Sir, You sent for me" I said calmly, trying to guess what grunt work he was going to assign to me now. This was the fourth time he had sent for me this week after occasionally humiliating me at the Associate's offices.

"Yes, Biobele." He gestured at me to sit down and passed his laptop to me to type up an e-mail, I was halfway done and was so engrossed in it that I didn't notice him hovering over me. The pit in my stomach widened, instinctively I jumped up, not fast enough, he grabbed my hands and lunged me towards the wall.

"urghhh, what are you doing sir? Please stop"

"Stop?, Is this the way you young ones play hard to get these days eh?!" I could feel his hard wrinkled palms on my breasts, surprisingly he was strong, too strong, I couldn't get any wriggle room. I gnawed and scratched, hoping that it would get him to relent, to realise that I wasn't worth it. Then with one hand he reached down and caressed himself until I felt the heat on my skin. He let go.

"Clean up and leave here my friend, you young girls run around here seducing all the men and then act surprised when we react"

"I should have seen it coming, I had made myself an easy prey, I let myself down".
The thoughts raced through my mind; if I got up I was sure I would fall. At that moment all I could do was close my eyes; an attempt to keep my tears from spewing, I felt small and helpless.

4.

I hated rainy days, the way my feet felt like slime inside my shoes, the way the roads flooded and made taxis hard to find. It was raining this morning; I woke up with a sense of foreboding, it was familiar and that made me uneasy. It had been a month since the incident with Chief Adubo. I had not been able to confide in anyone, it made me irritable and upset at the slightest things.

At work I got in my deliverables on time, but I would not be caught dead in a room with him, which meant I had to make excuses to get out of our weekly status meetings. It held in the mornings so I could easily get in late and say I was stuck in traffic; he had not noticed or could not be bothered because he stayed out of my way and sent e-mails if he needed something done which was not out of the ordinary. I felt irritated afresh, why was I the one who should run and hide while he walked around the firm like it was any regular day, He had sexually harassed me and I kept quiet.

"People who died to give women a voice would be ashamed" I thought. I looked around the office and wondered if there were others; my heart sank.

When it rained the weekly meetings were pushed forward, which meant unless I was going to miss out on work entirely, I would be in that meeting, breathing the same air as that animal. I felt the anger and resentment almost leap out of me. I stood still, inhaled the cold air and felt the wild breeze caress my skin. It seemed like the world was wrapping me up in a hug and for a tiny space in time I loved being there. The loud honk of a taxi cab jolted me back to reality.

"Oga, howfar nau you wan jam me?" I said in a surprisingly calm manner.

"Sorry madam, which side you dey go?" he said in their usual transactional manner.

"Airport road by Akore Junction"

"Oya enter madam make we dey go, na because of you I dey load that side o. Fine girl" I smiled softly at the sense of importance that gave me, slipped into the car and drifted off in thought as the driver leapt out of the car to begin his call for other passengers.

We went through the meeting quickly, he was there but I managed to hide my disgust and stay out of his sight. During lunch with Hanniel earlier, we decided to stay back after work to finish off the draft on a brief we were assigned. After the meeting everyone was out the door almost thirty minutes later except Darey and Paul, they hung around the office. I had seen them walking out of Chief's office and head into the kitchenette with a smirk I wished I could smack off their faces, I caught a whiff of alcohol as they passed by and I knew there was no way they were still sane.

We had been working for a while when Peculiar, Chief's secretary came in, my heart sank, I could feel the blood drain from my head.

"Mr. Adubo is asking for you" She said. I swallowed hard, trying to disguise the tremor in my voice and managed to mutter *"Me? Why?"*

"Not you ma, He asked me to call Miss Hanniel" she said just as she sauntered away. I looked over at Hanniel and I could immediately recognise her demeanour, I had just gone through that emotion; Fear.

Hanniel stood up to leave, a split moment before I regained my senses and quickly gripped her hand.

"How long ago?" I asked, she looked at me in confusion, somewhat embarrassed but realising that I could empathise, she answered *"three weeks"*.

That was less than two weeks after he assaulted me; I could feel the anger I felt earlier in the day resurface and takeover; I had to do something, he was never going to hurt another woman on my watch.

"Stay here". I said before dashing off towards his office.

5.

The city lights twinkled below as the evening sun dipped beneath the horizon. The past few months had gone by in a blur. The air was thick with tension, as if holding its breath alongside me. Today marked the end of that tumultuous journey. The trial had concluded; the verdict delivered. The weight that had been crushing me, lifted; replaced by an odd mix of emotions—relief, exhaustion, and the lingering taste of justice.

"We did it, Bio," Hanniel whispered, her smile a reflection of my own feelings.

"We did" I felt relief, followed by a pang of guilt. I didn't intend to kill him, I had confronted him, asked him to resign from the office by threatening to expose him; but when the god's want to kill a man they make him mad, he charged towards me with fire in his eyes; the danger of a man with everything to lose, he strangled me; I reached out and grabbed the statue of Lady Justice, blindly waving it around until it hit his head. He stood and wobbled around before crashing into the centre table; then he was gone.

Darey and Paul were found innocent like I had imagined they would, they were unruly but that wasn't enough reason to punish them for a crime they didn't commit; I had framed them because they were drunk, unsuspecting and available. I got them into the room, covered them in blood to make it look like a struggle and hoped to heaven it would fool the police, I had counted on the inefficiency of the Nigerian Judicial system and it worked – they had their suspects and didn't care for further investigation – they had seen two heavily built males at the scene of the crime, intoxicated and covered in blood. The straw man fallacy – it was too easy. For the first time I had taken my story and woven it, the doubt had gnawed at me, the fear and wonder whether anyone would ever truly believe it. True justice had indeed prevailed.

Toby was waiting by the courthouse steps, a smile as warm as the sun on his face. Over the months, he had been my source of comfort. As night fell, Hanniel, Toby and I sat on a park bench, sharing stories, laughter, and the unspoken understanding of what we had all been through. The city seemed to hum with life around us, a reminder that despite the darkness we had faced, life always moves forward.

I glanced at Hanniel, then at Toby, feeling the weight of their presence, their unwavering belief. I knew that the journey ahead wouldn't be easy, the scars—the

memories—those were mine to bear and they would remain, but I was no longer defined by them. I was more than that experience, more than the doubts that had haunted me.

The scent of rain hung in the air, a reminder of where it had all begun—the rain-soaked evening when my life had taken an unexpected turn. I looked on, grateful for the people who had stood by me, determined to shape my own destiny, one step at a time.

And suddenly, I was free.