

# **Solace**

by

Idowu Zaheed Aderinto

They say you never hear the sound of the gun, aimed at you. Who knew blood would be that thick, she shrieked but no one came to her aid. A dull throbbing sound at the back of her head, she looked down at her blood-stained hands and the expanding pool.

“Is this how it ends, at the very beginning?”

“Look at me, look at me!” He said, with eyes bloodshot red.

“None of this would have happened, if my instructions were followed.”

“Don’t touch me you monster!”

He took a glance over his shoulder, to see if anyone was watching, leaned in and stared her in the eyes.

“This isn’t my fault.”

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Just barely a week before, on Saturday morning; the air was still and the environment was surprisingly quiet, you could hear the birds sing, without the single sound of an automobile. For a city like Lagos, this was quite unusual. Adegoke was one of the lucky few, his flat was away from the hustle and bustle of Lagos. In a respectable bedroom size, with a workspace by the corner and a lack shelf on the wall, with several books, fiction and non-fiction. He wasn’t involved in the pointless civil war, between both.

The sound of a notification snapped him out of his thoughts and back to reality. Irritated at the sudden disruption, he took a minute to lean over and reached for his phone.

“Visit the bookshop today”.

He got up, showered and dressed up in a t-shirt, jeans and slides. Grabbed his car key from the lack shelf and stepped out of the bedroom. Through the tiny lobby, that led outside the compound. He opened the gate and unlocked his car, parked on the street. Ade turned on his engine, engaged reverse to give a little space between him and the car in front and put the car in drive. Just before driving off, he played the new, I Said What I Said episode, with his music app timer set to 40 minutes. He gave a gentle honk to the security once he got to his estate gate and a polite nod as he drove off to the bookstore.

Finding a space at the bookstore wasn't a problem, it's not like it was a Wizkid concert at Landmark. After pulling into a space right in front of the bookstore, he picked up his wallet and said to himself, "I'm only here to get one thing".

He stepped into the bookstore, and headed straight to the non-fiction shelf which was just opposite several fiction shelves, picked up a copy of *The Man Died* by Wole Soyinka and turned around to leave.

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That's when he saw her, and time seemed to stop. She had cherry red lipstick, on her heart-shaped lips, a yellow sundress and glasses at the bridge of her nose. She had an astounding poise; it added elegance to the simple bookstore, like an antique clock in a cluttered room, she was a work of art.

She glanced at him, the book he was holding, rolled her eyes and went back to book surfing.

"Ah yes, yet another victim of the civil of the war" came straight to his brain, but not out of his mouth. Right by her, a book caught his attention. *The thing Around Your Neck* by Chimamanda, "This would complete my collection" he said, walking through the imaginary Berlin wall, between fiction and non-fiction.

She was about 5 feet 6 inches and had caramel-like skin. Her hair was packed in two buns, as dark as charred coal. He caught a glimpse of her gold necklace, peeking out of her dress and a tiny mole just behind her ear.

“Excuse me,” he said in an attempt not to startle her. She turned around and their eyes locked for a brief moment, he broke the gaze and stretched for the book, invading her personal space. She could smell his cologne, woody, but not too strong. He got the book and brought it down slowly, her face wore a worried look, “You read both?” she asked.

“Yeah, I’m one of the weird ones.”

I’m Ade, by the way,” he said stretching out his hand.

“Tolu,” she said while shaking it.

“So, Tolu, what book are you looking for?” he asked letting out a little smile.

“Uhm, I’m not sure, anything by John Grisham, I guess”.

“Then you might be here a while” he replied, as he walked towards the register.

“Any suggestions?”

“The Racketeer.”

“All right.”

She took a minute to find it in the sea of other Grisham books, picked it up and made her way to pay for it.

“So, what’s the plot”, she asked Ade as she met him in the queue.

He replied “An innocent man, accused of murder”.

“That’s all?”

“That’s all I can give you.”

They spent their time in the queue getting to know a bit about each other, best and worst reads, hobbies and careers. She was a lawyer and he was an Architect, both young professionals looking to break the next glass ceiling, in the city of Lagos.

He walked her out of the bookstore and noticed they were parked right next to each other.

‘Isn’t this interesting, so you’re a stalker?’ Ade said.

‘I got here first, you’re just projecting’

He chuckled while bringing out his phone. ‘Let me get your number, so it’s a little easier.’

She couldn’t deny it. There was something here, something that drew him near. Maybe it was the way he clenched his jaw, his brown funny hair or the fact that he was older and hopefully more mature. Slim and tall but muscular, with light brown eyes and dimples when he smiled.

He was a mystery and she was going to find who he was.

‘Here you go’, she said handing him back his phone.

They both drove off, in opposite directions, Ade back to his flat and Tolu to hers. She parked on the street, picked up her bag and stepped out of her car. She said hello to the neighbours while opening the gate. Walked through the compound and up the flight of stairs, that would lead to her front door.

They spent the next couple of days texting, throwing jabs at each other. How she couldn’t parallel park and how he couldn’t function without music, she hated custard and he wouldn’t touch pap, with a ten-foot pole. All through the day, they heard from each other.

It had barely been a week, but they both knew, there was something here, something deep. They both longed for each other, for their bodies to intertwine, like perfect pieces of a puzzle, that are always so hard to find.

“I want to see you again” popped up, on her phone while at work on Wednesday.

“I’ll come pick you up, Friday night” followed.

“Where would we go?” she replied.

“Somewhere clean and quiet.”

“All right, I’ll see you then”.

She spent the next day pondering, what Ade had planned and of course what to wear. This was usually a problem, but now it was even larger. The stakes couldn’t have been higher, she knew she was gorgeous, but tomorrow night she had to be stunning. So, he could stop dead in his tracks when he saw her. The only hint was quiet, which meant classy.

Her phone screen came to life, she picked up and started smiling.

Yes, Ade was calling.

“Where am I picking you up, tomorrow, home or office?”

“Home silly, not everyone is a workaholic like you” she replied.

“Where’s home?” he asked.

“Home is where the heart is” she replied with a grin on her face”

“Ode, answer jor,” he said while blushing.

“I’ll send it now, hold on” she replied after laughing.

“All right, I’ll be waiting”.

He hung up and she sent him her address.

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Friday.

Ade turned on the tv in his sitting room, after dropping his late lunch on his coffee table. It had the same minimalistic interior theme as his bedroom. Beneath the tv, was a sound bar on the entertainment cabinet.

A bigger shelf on the right side of the wall, mostly filled with a collection of books he had read and all his furniture, facing the television to some degree. It was big enough to take a small dining table that sat four, in case he had company, which seldom happened.

He glimpsed at his phone.

“Night out with Tolu” Ah yes, the reminder.

“I’ll be ready in less than an hour,” he said to himself.

He got up and looked out the window, the sun had begun its descent. “Finally,” he muffled.

He went into his bedroom, took off his shirt and stripped to his boxers, glanced at the mirror and smiled. Going to the gym had started showing some, long overdue results. He stepped into the bathroom and turned on the shower.

After over half an hour, Ade opened the bathroom door and steam escaped into his bedroom. He stepped out and picked up his leather toiletry bag, used the cream, sprays and what have you. He opened up his wardrobe and pulled out the hanger, housing a silk white shirt and navy blue trousers. Placed it on the bed and brought out his black Oxford shoes from under.

He got dressed but left three buttons undone, which revealed the tattoo of a bear, peeking out of his chest. He took a glimpse at the mirror as he put on his watch.

He texted Tolu, “I’m on my way.”

“I’ll be ready before you get here” she replied.

He got out of his flat and into his car.

“Here goes nothing,” he said as drove off to hers.

Friday night was pretty predictable, almost the whole of Lagos was outside, and Ade was stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic. Thankfully, Tolu’s place was less than two hours away even with traffic, he twisted the knob of his car air conditioner, to reduce the temperature.

Two and a half hours later, he stepped out of his car and walked up to her front door. He rang the bell and she stepped out.

“Wow.”

He was stunned, she had on the most beautiful lilac dress he had ever seen; It was curved and straight in all the right places, paired with silver stiletto heels which matched the tip of her sleeves. A perfect fit for his queen, he was well and truly stunned.

“You look so beautiful.” He said as he reached for her hand.

“Thank you,” she replied flushing.

“I want to tell you something and I’ll only say this once. I am enemies with the bare minimum.”

He smiled and looked at her. You deserve your lofty expectations, “but, trust me, this night I’ll do my best to match them.”

They walked back to his car, he opened her door and went around to his, he entered and pushed the start engine button. He drove them to what looked like an isolated high-rise building and parked by the side of it.

“Where are we?” she asked in a paranoid tone.

“Don’t worry, just trust me.” He replied reassuringly.

When they were both out of the car, he gave a signal and lights came on.

He explained that one of his clients had just acquired the property and how the elevator was fixed because of tonight.

“The roof has a stunning view, that I’d like to show you”.

She took a deep sigh and replied “Alright, let’s have a look.”

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They spent the entire elevator ride to the roof stealing glances at each other, a few moments later they heard a ding and the doors swung open.

“After, you”, he said.

“Such a gentleman”, she replied.

He walked her to the centre of the roof and pointed to the Lagos skyline, as he drew her closer.

“You can see it all from here, the island and mainland”.

They were finally together again, alone.

He stared into her eyes and leaned in to kiss her. She met him halfway and he caressed her.

He broke away from the kiss, “We’re going to be late.”

A couple of minutes later, they were back in his car and off to their next destination. He explained that the next location was a restaurant, with an art gallery in the basement while en route.

“We’ll be there shortly”, he said.

He drove through the Lekki tollgate, from Victoria Island and noticed a car accident up ahead, it was a head-on collision with a streetlight’s base. The car had run straight into it, the front bumper and headlights were completely wrecked.

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“Help! Help!!” yelled a young man.

“He’s not breathing” he said gesturing to the man at the wheel.

“We need to help them”, Tolu said.

“We will”, Ade replied as he parked. He stepped out, walked towards the stranger and asked if he had any knowledge of first aid. “No, I don’t please just help him!” he replied.

As he approached him, he got a glimpse of a shiny black metal. “Is that a gu...,” it was too late, he hadn’t completed the word before he felt the cold metal, “don’t you dare move an inch” the armed robber said quietly.

“Hand over your phone, wallet and car key, I won’t say it twice”.

“Alright no problem”, Ade replied.

Tolu was out of the car at this point and was coming towards Ade, to see how she could help. She was only a couple of meters from Ade, who reached for his phone a bit too quickly, the robber thought he was trying to pull a fast one.

He pulled the trigger and Ade screamed.

She heard the sudden sound of a gunshot, she was shell-shocked as Ade fell to the ground, she screamed and ran to him.

“No!!”

“What have you done?!” she screamed.

Her head started to pound like she had a migraine.

“This isn’t my fault”, he said.

“He tried to grab the gun!!”

“We agreed not to shoot, you idiot! Get in the car!!”, the very much conscious, getaway driver, yelled at him. He stepped over the pool of blood, got in the vehicle, yelled something inaudible and they drove off.”

Tolu was still trying to clot Ade’s gun wound, with her dresses's right sleeve which she ripped, when she noticed she had hers, it must have gone straight through him and hit her when all hell broke loose.

“Ade.... don’t ....,” she paused, tore off her other sleeve and squirmed, as she placed it on her side,

“.....you dare shut your eyes!” she said quivering.

They knew both wounds were fatal, he stared into her teary eyes and smiled. Coughed a bit of blood from his mouth and wiped it off with a portion of his white silk shirt, “Most people.... die in solitude, at least right now..... we have each other.”

“Tolu, seei...,” he groaned at the searing pain “.....seeing you at that bookstore was a coincidence.”

“Becoming your frie....., friend that I chose, but falling head over heels in love wi....., with you”, he moaned as a tear trickled down his face "wasn’t a thing I could control.”

“I...,” she placed his slipping hand, back on his wound, her hand trembling “lo...., love you too, but this isn’t fair, our....., love st...., story is only just beginning,” she replied in anguish.

She sat right beside him, with her head on his chest, “I’m... really going.... to miss this.”

He looked at her and smiled. “Fa....., Farewells are for folks...., that love physically, we’ve lov..., loved each other wi....., with our hearts and souls, so..... we would never part ways.”

The end.