

As he sat in the uber driving him home, the thought that filled his mind was how his family would react to his new look. Platinum blonde hair, stud earrings, tattoo of his favourite scripture on his left wrist which was *Philippians 4:13*, a chain on his neck with the inscription *love* as the pendant, a grey contact lenses to replace the years of using glasses, that was his new look. He also had on a black crazy jean styled with a black shirt and black boots.

Kachi had a reason for his new look. He was tired. Tired of Christians judging people based on their appearance. He was tired of how Christians would look at their fellow humans and conclude that he or she was not a 'good Christian' based on their appearance. Who made them the judge of that? Saying 'tired', was an understatement. He was sick of it. In his opinion, dressing had little role to play in a person's relationship with God. If the person wasn't dressing provocatively, he didn't see the issue. But he had realised that most Christians had an idea in their head of how a 'good Christian' was supposed to look.

For the female: long skirt, don't wear trousers because you are not supposed to put on a man's clothing. Wear a blouse with a long sleeve, a woman's hand can also tempt a man. If you don't want to wear a skirt, you can put on a long gown that doesn't flaunt your God-given features. Natural hair. No earrings but, if you want to, a small one that is barely visible is preferred. No makeup, a lip gloss can be managed especially during the harmattan season. Look like this, and you are automatically a 'good Christian girl'.

For the male: low cut, skin cut is preferable, but, if you want to keep hair, make sure it's so low, no way in hell should you keep an afro. Did you say dye your hair? Dreads? Woah! Are you a yahoo boy? Now, you want to keep beards too. Beards is for wayward children and not children of God. Tattoos? Earrings? Alternative fashion? You are going to hell, my brother.

Kachi was sick of the 'don't do this', 'don't do that', idea that Christianity was projecting to be all about. Most Christians were more focused on that than their actual relationship with God, he concluded. He has had enough of that, and he was on a mission to break that stereotype. Being a Pastor's son, he had experienced being put in a box all his life. Someone was always telling him how to behave. He was twenty-two now and he would love to live his life and serve God his own way without the opinion of others clouding his reasoning.

As he approached closer to home, his heart started to beat faster than usual. It was a surprise the uber driver couldn't hear it. Kachi let out a long sigh to calm himself and prepare for the worst because, the worst was coming.

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She was excited to be seeing her son. One year of not seeing him physically had felt like ten years and boy had she missed him so bad. Video calls could not compare to seeing him in flesh but, she was thankful for the invention of it. What if it didn't exist? How would she have coped? It wasn't like she could just wake up one morning and book a flight to Imo State to see him. Her husband would reprove of it. He would say his famous lines, "you baby this boy too much. How is he ever going to be a man?" But she couldn't help herself. As much as she would say she didn't have a favourite child, she alone knew within her that Kachi was her favourite child. He was the only one who really cared about her wellbeing among her other children. Tobe, her first child was more of his father's son and Kamsi, her last child and only daughter was neither here nor there.

Morayo was in the kitchen preparing Kachi's favourite, *Oha soup*. Even though her help, Esther, could make the soup, she would not let her. She wanted her son to eat the soup she

made by herself. It had been a year since he tasted her food, and she was sure he missed it. All Esther had to do was make the yellow garri that would be used in eating the soup. Morayo served a tiny portion of the soup on her palm for tasting. She licked it and deliberated for a few seconds what seasoning lacked and needed to be added. It was perfect and she nodded in affirmation. But, to have a second opinion, she called on Esther.

The petite girl in her late teens, put the last wrap of *Eba* in the warmer, cleaned her hands with a napkin and went over to Morayo. Morayo served her a tiny portion of the soup on her palm just as she did for herself.

“It’s sweet, ma”, Esther confirmed.

Her words put a smile on Morayo's face. It had been a while she prepared the soup, and she was glad it didn’t end in tears.

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“I want to make you a star”, was what he said to her the night he heard her sing. She and her friends, Lola, Janet, and Amarachi had gone to a karaoke bar that night and that was where she met him, Paul, as he instructed her to call him even though he was much older than her. He was a man in his mid-thirties and she a girl of eighteen and so, it was awkward calling him by his first name but, he would not have it any other way.

Singing had always been Kamsi's thing and because of that, she had been in the choir since she was a child. Her father had made her know that the best way she could appreciate God for giving her such a powerful voice was to use that voice for him. And that was what she had been doing, using her voice for God. Now Paul wanted her not to use her voice for God.

Did she want to be a star? YES, in capital letters. She had always admired those celebrities she saw in the media. Now the opportunity to be one rested in her decision of accepting or not. She never knew it would be this hard to make that decision and, as she sat on Janet’s bed in her hostel, that was what occupied her mind.

Janet who was busy watching TikTok and snacking on a cup of cornflakes, looked up from her phone and noticed Kamsi lost in her thoughts. Of their group of friends, the two of them were the closest. They were both Engineering students, so, they saw each other more frequently. The first time they met was during one of their lectures. Kamsi was watching anime on her phone that day while waiting for their lecturer and Janet being a lover of anime herself was thrilled to find someone who shared her interest. That sparked their friendship and since then, the two had been inseparable.

“Don’t tell me you’re still thinking about it”, Janet voiced.

Kamisi didn’t respond but, even her silence was a response on its own.

“This is an opportunity that many people are looking for”, Janet reminded her. “If I had your voice, I wouldn’t even think about it. You know what, give me your phone”. She stretched forth her hand to receive the phone.

“Why?” Kamsi questioned.

“I want to text Paul on your behalf that you’re ready to let him talk to his brother”.

Paul’s brother was Vincent George, one of the biggest music producers in the country. This was a golden opportunity that had come to her with ease, and she was being sceptical about it all because her family would not approve. What about what she wanted? None of her family members had given up anything for her, why then was she considering them? That was the moment she realised that she would regret it if she turned down this offer.

“You don’t need to”, she voiced. “I’m going to do it myself”.

She picked up her phone that had been lying on a corner of the bed. That was when she saw the six missed calls from her mum. She had put her phone on silent when she went for lecture few hours ago and forgot to remove it from silent when she was done with the lecture. She knew why her mum had called her. Her elder brother Kachi was coming home from the mandatory one-year Youth Service and their mum wanted all of them to be home to welcome him. Well, the call to Paul would have to wait because right now, she needed to head home.

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He wondered why their mum was making a big deal out of Kachi's return home. During his own time, she didn't take it as serious as this. Was he jealous? Maybe a little bit but, he knew their mum had a softer spot for Kachi. He never believed her, "I love all of you equally" speech and he could see through her.

"I'm on my way", he told her over the phone.

And truly he was on his way. He couldn't drive faster than he already was just because he wanted to get home before Kachi. Besides, why Kachi didn't want any of them to pick him up from the airport and insisted on taking an uber was suspicious. What did he have up his sleeves?

It was a Saturday and Tobe's favourite place to be on a Saturday was the gym. There was something about working out that brought peace to his busy life and made him feel sane. Saturdays were his only free time, and he would spend half of it in the gym. It was his own self-care.

Being a Lawyer and a Youth Pastor came with loads of work and left him with little time for himself. Now the little time he created for himself, he had to cut it short just to welcome home his younger brother.

He and Kachi were not the best buddies. Since he left for Youth Service, it would be five times in total since they called each other and that was a decent amount based on their relationship. He wouldn't lie and say he was so excited to see his brother but, he did want to see him, nonetheless. He was having a feeling that Kachi was up to something, and he was eager to see what it was.

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He walked into the living room to see everyone doing one thing or the other. Morayo and his daughter Kamsi were blowing balloons and hanging them. Esther and Tobe were putting up a *Welcome Home* banner. Over at the dining, the table was set. He had been perceiving the aroma of the food from his room where he was observing his quiet time and his belly was craving to have a taste but, he knew Morayo would not let anyone eat until Kachi arrived. There was also a cake sitting pretty on the table. Chidi was not a fan of cake but that *Oha* soup and *Eba*, he could not wait to dig into it.

Morayo had succeeded in getting everyone home to welcome Kachi. If there was anything he loved about his wife, it was how she was always able to get whatever she wanted. How she would not rest until she was able to have her way. It was what attracted him to her anyway, besides her good looks and love for God.

For the past two weeks, she had been talking about how she wanted to throw a welcome party for Kachi and now it was a realisation. He was not against her throwing a party but left to him, he did not see the need. Their son was only coming home after the one-year mandatory service, it was not like he won a lottery. He did not see how completing Youth Service was

worth celebrating. Maybe when Kachi would get a high paying job then that could be celebrated. But who was he to stand against his lovely wife?

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The uber driver assisted him in bringing down his load from the car before driving off. His load was not much. Just one medium sized box and a hand luggage. Before Kachi left Imo State, he had given out a lot of his clothes. The church he attended back there usually gave out food stuffs and clothes to the less privileged at the end of the year and Kachi wanted to be a part of that even though he would not be there physically. One thing Kachi was big on was giving and would not hesitate to whenever the opportunity presented itself.

As he wheeled his box to the front door, he wondered why no one had come out to welcome him. He called his mum the minute he entered the estate and expected that she and Kamsi would be standing at the front door waiting to receive him. He knew Tobe would not come out to welcome him neither would his dad and he did not expect them to but, not his girls. Maybe Kamsi was not home, he concluded and maybe his mum was busy with something she could not leave. Whatever it was, they would all still see each other *last last*.

As he got to the front door, he knocked. If he thought his heart was beating in the car, now, the beating had tripled. What was he thinking? He asked himself. This whole new appearance he was doing to prove a point, how did he think he could pull it off?

“This is not the time to let fear get the best of you”, he told himself.

He was about to knock on the door again when it opened revealing Esther. Esther let out a quizzical look which was expected.

“Welcome sir”, she voiced the moment she got herself back. She took his boxes and ushered him in. One reveal down, four more to go.

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Morayo made them to hide behind the sofas. She wanted Kachi to walk in before they would reveal themselves. Typically, how surprise parties are done. Tobe was not having it and was starting to get irritated. He would still be in the gym by now doing what he loved so much. Instead, he was squatting behind the sofa. Things we do for family.

He turned to Kamsi who was squatting beside him.

“Just look at him taking his sweet time to walk in here”.

Morayo heard him talk and shushed him. She would not let him ruin that element of surprise she wanted to achieve. Tobe let out an eye roll. One more minute of delay and he would be on his feet.

Thankfully, Kachi strolled in before his one-minute grace elapsed.

“Wow”, he heard Kachi say.

That was the moment Morayo signalled for them to reveal themselves.

“Surprise!” Morayo voiced with excitement as they made themselves visible. And that was when they all got introduced to Kachi 2.0. They wanted to give him a surprise, but he ended up surprising them.

Tobe suspected that Kachi was having something up his sleeves but, he never imagined it be this. Who was this person standing in front of him? Definitely not his baby brother. The Kachi he knew would never come home looking like that. What happened to him? So many questions he needed an answer to.

“Are you all going to keep staring at me without saying anything?” Kachi asked.

“What have you done to yourself?” Morayo wanted to know.

“I just decided to change my style”, he replied.

“Change your style?” Chidi finally spoke up. “Being a gangster is the new style you’re going for?”

“I knew something was wrong when you did not want any of us to pick you up from the airport”, Tobe told him. “Bro, have you gone nuts?”

“I think he looks cool”, Kamsi countered.

They all turned to her, dazed that she thought that way.

“Thank you, Kamsi”, Kachi said with a smile.

Not minding the stare her parents and brother were giving her, she went over to Kachi and gave him a warm hug.

“I’ve missed you so much. Welcome home brother”.