

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a traditional indigenous headband with leaves and a necklace, is shown in profile, looking towards a large waterfall in a lush rainforest. The scene is filled with rain, creating a misty and serene atmosphere. The waterfall is the central focus, with water cascading down into a pool of water. The surrounding forest is dense with green foliage and trees.

Mother Rain

A Q U I L A T A I W O

CHAPTER ONE

Looking through the window, I noticed the moon shone brightly, and strangely, it was dark red, as if the heavens painted it with blood. The clouds were also having their fun time bringing down its lightning, which thundered loudly in my ears, and the sparks it emitted were frightening to behold. I knew these signs as it had happened before when a person had to be taken by Mother Rain to make the earth and the produce of the land fruitful and surplus. It usually happens every year, especially close to the harvest season. You don't volunteer to be taken, but you get chosen.

I was scared and agitated because Mother Rain had chosen me this time for this harvest season. I could feel my skin molding into droplets of rain; my heart was full of pains and rage because just when I found the love of my life in the person of Dekunle, who has always made me happy and fulfilled, who knew my weakness and carved it to my strength, appreciated my beauty and treated me like his queen, his actions were full of love, love filled with kindness and good intention, the night I was to be bound to him, to become one, to finally get married to the love of my life and become intimate, that was the day mother rain had chosen.

Suddenly, I looked at my body; my flesh had become like a pool of water. I started hearing cries of souls that Mother Rain had chosen in the past. I shrieked in fear and screamed because of the pain buried in those cries. Suddenly, I saw this figure in front of me, like a mirror filled with water, stood in front of me and opened like a door, ushering me to come in. Dekunle tried to call me back but couldn't because it was like he was touching water. You know what that meant? I entered or flowed into what looked like a door. I turned back to see my Dekunle for the last time, and suddenly, the mirror-looking figure closed its door.

Moremi! Moremi!! Oh my goodness, it was all a dream. My Dekunle woke me back to reality; the dream looked so damn real, then I suddenly saw what looked like a ring on my finger. I then remembered I got married to Dekunle yesterday at the village square, which meant that I wouldn't be taken away from the love of my life for eternity. I am free from Mother Rain because Mother Rain doesn't take betrothed or married ladies, but what if the dream was a sign? What if Mother Rain still wanted me, whether married or not? What if this change would start

from me? What would happen to my Dekunle? Then, with Dekunle suddenly hugging me back to sleep, I forgot all my “what if” and went into my “me now.” As long I still have my Dekunle, it will break the spell Mother Rain plans to cast on me.

CHAPTER TWO

It was the harvest season again, time to reap all you have sown and harvest plenty. Dekunle and I couldn't wait to embrace what our hands had planted. Also, I was almost due. People told me my unborn child would symbolize hope since he would be born in this harvest season. Yes, I have always hoped it was a he. I fancy not having a girl child as a firstborn as I have noticed how the first girl child was so close to their fathers and even inseparable in my village. Hmm, I still cherish the full attention of my Dekunle. I prefer it not to be shared. Stop it! I am not being jealous.

The harvest season also comes with its worry that a soul will get depleted in the human race. Mother Rain must bless the crops before we can harvest, but she never goes back alone; she usually takes a handmaid with her. I was happy I had escaped that phase but unhappy someone had to go. However, I was scared of the kind of dreams I had been having lately. I didn't understand as I always saw myself in the stream where Mother Rain swallows its prey and an invisible hand trying to pull me down from underneath the water. I had this same dream during the last harvest season; although Mother Rain never took me, the dream still haunted me some days after and now another harvest season is near, and this same dream has started to resurface. I felt Mother Rain was pained because I had escaped her wrath since I had married before the previous harvest season and was now heavily pregnant close to this present harvest season. What would she even want from a pregnant woman?

I decided to wave it off, then suddenly the earth shook, everywhere became dark, the clouds were at war, and the sky was smiling sheepishly, prepared to open its door. These were signs that Mother Rain was coming to pick its prey, but it wasn't even time as Mother Rain usually came a day before we were to harvest, and these signs were showing 3 days earlier. Everybody was confused as this was very strange; some people were beginning to call their kids who had gone far away to play, and people were closing their huts and awaiting what came next. I was observing through my windows, and suddenly, something caught my attention in the sky. It looked like the image of a baby, but it had bulging eyes and a face that looked like an older woman, and then the face was slowly turning in my direction; at that exact moment, I felt two

hands grab me from behind my heart almost jumped out, and my attention shifted away from the sky to this person.

My heart bubbled when I saw it was my Dekunle; he told me to stop looking through the windows. He asked if I wanted a massage or anything. Dekunle was just so sweet. Dear, are you not always worried about Mother Rain? You never seem to care since I have always known you. He responded that he had no business with Mother Rain and that the only thing that could make him worry was me and my unborn child. Hearing that, I smiled again, and then we were suddenly interrupted by a thunderbolt; it was so loud and scary that even my baby kicked. I rushed to my hubby and wrapped my hands around him. I have always hated thunder. Then the rain started; at first, it came with a flow that seemed forced before it became heavy. I could hear strange noises and cries coming from the rain. I also listened to a loud shout from my neighbor's court. I could sense the rain had taken her child, her only child.

These events altogether made me despise Mother Rain the more. Why must she come to rain blessing and seal it with a curse? Nobody had seen what Mother Rain looked like. Some said they had seen her come as a little girl, and some said an older woman; whatever nature she deemed fit to come, I had developed a deep hatred for her. My thoughts got interrupted by my hubby's sweet voice as he was rocking me to sleep with a lullaby, and with that, I drifted into a deep sleep with the sound of the rain falling, becoming distant.

CHAPTER THREE

I could hear a sound coming from outside. I hated that the sound just woke me from a beautiful sleep. I was angrier because the sound was coming from outside my door. Somebody was banging my door badly. On opening the door, it was as if all the other villagers had gathered at the front of my door. I was shocked at what could have happened that would warrant everyone at my doorstep. *'So na sleep you dey sleep sotey you no no say your husband no dey beside you nawa for you o'* that was what Mummy Chioma told me.

I had always disliked that woman because of her saucy mouth and her 'aproko' behavior; immediately I heard the word my husband, I almost ran wild, then I remembered I hadn't noticed the presence of my husband before coming outside, where was he? Where had he gone? "Errm iyawo", there is a problem, and please, you have to calm down; that was the name the villagers called me. Mother Rain is taking two persons this year because your husband is already at the stream. On hearing that, I screamed at no one in particular. What? When did Mother Rain start taking men? A married man, for that matter; why would she even pick my husband? Whhy! I kept screaming. Some of the villagers were trying to calm me down. I angrily pushed them away and marched towards the stream. She dare not take my husband; she dare not take my husband; I kept saying that till I got to the stream.

On getting to the stream, I was shocked at what I saw. It was a very tall woman with her face looking like a 92-year-old, but her body was like the skin of a 9-year-old. Her hair was so long because I saw her hair still flowing down into the river, but what I dreaded the most was that her hands were on my husband's head. I hated how she used her long, dirty fingernails to scan through the hair on Dekunle's head. I was the only one allowed to do that; all the villagers were also at the stream, and they were also shocked. It was the first time we saw this image; from the look, it could be Mother Rain. Get your filthy hand off my husband; I shouted at the image with rage.

The tall woman was staring at me and showed no emotions. I shouted again; this time, I was already walking through the stream to retrieve my husband from the so-called woman. The

villagers couldn't enter the water with me because they were scared about what could happen next. I didn't care. I was only bothered about this stranger who dared take my love from me, unaware. I said leave Dekunle alone. Still, the image never replied but intensified how she scanned her dirty fingers through Dekunle's hair. I was also angry at Dekunle as to why he wasn't reacting. Then I knew he could have been hypnotized.

As I was close to getting to this strange image, I suddenly noticed something invincible held my legs from inside the water, and I could not move. At this moment, the image said something. The image started with a wicked laugh and said, You dare question my power? You have a significant force around you I don't quite understand. I have set eyes on you for a long time because I know feeding on you will ignite my will and boost my strength, but this strong force around you has been stopping me. I couldn't take you last year, and now you are pregnant. The image laughed again. This year, I decided to take two individuals and see what that does to my spirit. I took your neighbor's child and was again coming to your abode, yet this strong force stopped me.

I don't know who you are or what you carry inside of you. Then I thought to myself, you and your husband have bonded. A part of you is in him, so I should have your husband then. She licked her tongue and mischievously looked at Dekunle. I was shattered and troubled at this point; her tongue was ugly; some things looked like worms joyfully playing on her tongue. I got angry and suddenly let out a scream, and surprisingly, the invincible hands that held my legs disappeared, and I immediately started running toward the image. The image looked surprised that I had escaped from her grip.

I couldn't believe my eyes; a few steps closer to reaching her, she pressed Dekunle's head into the water and disappeared with him. To say I was shocked was an understatement. I was speechless and terrified at the space before me; my husband was gone. I suddenly felt a sharp pain in my belly; my water broke inside the stream as I was in labor. The villagers were already inside the stream, trying to pull me out of the water. I winced in pain and laughed; these people thought they would get me. Not minding the labor pains I was experiencing, I went underneath, deep down into the waters, determined to find where Mother Rain had taken the father of my unborn child. This is war, yes, and it just began!

CHAPTER FOUR

I could hear some voices around me but couldn't decipher any meaning to what was said. I also discovered I was lying on a bed as I just opened my eyes. I tried to sit up, but I was so weak and tired. I scanned the room and saw some women around me, but something else caught my attention. At the far end of the room was a woman clothed with white linen and charming to look upon. She just sat down there smiling at me and nodding her head as a reassurance that everything would be okay. I had never seen such beauty before, and just looking at her, I felt a form of bliss and heavenly peace I hadn't experienced before.

She is awake; she is awake, one of the women said. Iyawo, how are you doing? Please, you have to be strong for me and the baby, and you need to push. Then I started to recollect past events and remembered I should be in the waters looking for my husband; what was I doing here? No, Where is my husband? Why did you pull me out of the stream? I need to be out of here. I need to find my husband. I kept shouting and suddenly felt a cold touch on my hand. It was the beautiful woman that was smiling at me earlier. Iyawo, you must be strong and put everything behind you to deliver this baby. The child you carry in your womb is no ordinary child as he is a great force that would cut the shackles this village has been under for a long time.

Let me also tell you a mystery you don't know. I am Mother Rain. WHAT? Yes, and I know you are shocked. Indeed, I come down to rain on the crops before harvest, but I never come down to take Eledumare's people. A long time ago, Eledumare needed seers to guard each village that prayed to him. Eledumare chose Mother Bliss for your village, but she didn't execute her duties as assigned by Eledumare, and I replaced her. She got suspended, which made her angry that the spirit of bliss rooted within her got corrupted by darkness, and she vowed that she wouldn't make my reign easy. So, whenever the harvest season is near to carry out my duties, she plants a sorrowful aura to make people despise my coming by taking a soul. I am Mother Rain, and I don't bring darkness. I represent the fruitfulness and wetness of the earth.

The child you carry will hinder the dark Mother Bliss, which is why she plans to kill you. You have to gather your strength and deliver this baby. Your husband will surely come back if you

don't lose faith. Be strong, "Iyawo". I was still trying to ask her a question that suddenly formed in my mind, but she was nowhere in sight. She had disappeared. I suddenly felt a rush of strength, and I was emotional and sorry for myself and the despair I had kept in me for Mother Rain. The women around me never noticed another presence with them; they only pressed me to push. Then, with all the strength left in me, I decided to PUSH...yes, Iyawo, keep pushing, keep pushing, the woman kept reassuring me, I can see the head, it is coming, it is coming, Iyawo, keep going, you are getting there, keep pushing.

"Waaaaam waaaaam" iyawo it is here, it is a bouncing baby boy. Congratulations. I couldn't believe this tiny little cutie just came out of me. I had such great joy within me and a sense of womanhood. Suddenly, I remembered my husband and heard those words again: *if you have faith, he will return, and the child you carry within you will break the shackles that Mother Bliss has put your village in.* I sighed in relief and trusted Eledumare to bring my husband back home. But how do I groom this child to what he needs to be? I wish Mother Rain could give me a second chance to answer my many questions about walking this path of the unknown.

My name is "Iyawo," and this is my story.....