

The godfathers

“Doctor! We need you in Ward 8 now!” A nurse shouted as she ran in the corridor and to the doctor's office.

“Ward 8?” I asked myself. “Is it not the new patient who had no diagnosis? This was the third patient in one week that had this type of complication. They came into the clinic and no doctor or health personnel could figure out the issue with them. I walked slowly after them as they ran into the room. I stood beside the window and watched. His mother knelt beside his bed and cried heavily while his sister prayed and walked around the room.

“Madam, we need to check on him. You shouldn't be here,” the doctor said to his mother.

“I shouldn't be here? My son is shaking like a jellyfish and I shouldn't be here?” she cried. “What have you people done eh! What exactly? You don't even know what the problem is? All you quack doctors! Hei! Nigeria has killed me!” she lamented.

I could feel the pain in her voice but trust me, I have no idea how she felt. This was a mother watching her son die. It was...

“Oby,” someone called my name from behind, breaking into my thoughts.

“Doctor Taiwo,” I said, startled.

“Are you going to continue to watch from the window or are you going to help them out. Help them take out his mum and his sister please.” Dr Taiwo said to me.

“Interns are not allowed to intervene in this case. I don't know but Dr Titi called it a special case. The last one, we were not allowed to attend to them and the other patient that came on Monday, the 17 year old boy, we were not allowed to work.”

“You saw all three patients?” he asked me.

“Yes I was on duty. But I'll try and see if I can help. I'll take the mum and sister out.” I moved forward to walk into the room but Dr Taiwo stopped me.

“No, no need for that, you can go on a break.” Thank you for all you do, Oby.”

I smiled and bowed my head. “You are welcome Sir,” I said, walking away.

I sat at the tiny office I shared with two other interns and munched on my lunch. It was silent on this floor as it was majorly interns who worked here. The doctors, nurses and full staff worked on the upper floors. Wait a minute, where were all the interns? I walked to the notice board that had

the timetable. Each day everyone was supposed to be on duty. I am definitely not the only intern who works on Friday. I was right, where are the others?

“Where are the other interns?” I asked myself. I picked up my phone to call Valerie who was also supposed to be on duty today.

“Hi Valerie,” I greeted as soon as she picked. She yawned. “You are sleeping? So you are not in the hospital today I guess?”

“They asked us not to come now. Since Tuesday. They sent mail to all interns and asked us not to come.”

“Mail? Since Tuesday? So I have been wasting transport? I didn't get anything o. I check my mails everyday.”

“Maybe they made a mistake and didn't add you. They gave us a 2 weeks break. Be going home ooo, best intern of the year,” she joked.

“I have gist aha. Things have been happening here. Remember that boy that came with his family on Monday, the one that no one knew what was wrong with him, the one that was shaking anyhow,” I explained.

“Eh yes I remember. What happened? He died now”

“Yes he did but there have been more like him too. Another guy came on Tuesday and another today. Same symptoms. The one that came today is not dead yet but he is most likely to die. Do you think something worse than COVID is in Nigeria?” I asked her.

“Omo! Are you serious?”

“Oby!” Dr Titi called from behind, scaring me.

“Valerie, I'll call you back.”

“Best intern of the year!” Valerie hailed before hanging up.

“Yes Dr Titi “ I answered, getting up.

“You are needed in the conference room,” she said, walking away.

I kept thinking about what I might have done that will make them call me into the conference room. Do they need me to help them figure out what was going on with the boys? Was I finally going to be recognized?

“Suspended?” I asked as I looked at all the doctors who sat in the conference room. “I have been suspended?” I asked again.

“Oby, you were rude to a customer. We got reports and we take customer service very seriously here.” Dr Taiwo said to me.

“Rude? I was never rude to any customer sir. Maybe this is a mistake. I treat every client with respect. Sir, there is definitely a...”

“Oby, you can leave now. Pack your things and we will let you know when your suspension is over through your mail.”

What! I couldn't believe my ears. I had no idea of what they spoke about but it seemed like they already had their minds made up. I went back to my office and packed the little things I had there and left.

When I got outside. I sat at the stairs just beside the security gate and cried. What kind of mess did I get into? What if I never get called back. How do I start another medical internship? What do I tell them? That I was suspended in my last place? Oh God! I weeped silently and cleaned my tears immediately as they escaped my eyes. As I sniffed. I heard someone crying behind me. I got up to check. The cloth was familiar but I couldn't see her face because she bowed her head.

“Hello,” I called. She raised her head. It was the sister of the boy who was in ward 8.

“He's dead,” she whimpered. “He's dead.”

My heart fell as I saw her. Here I was crying that I got suspended while someone lost her brother. I had no words to tell her or how to console her.

“He fought for his life. He really did. I told my mum not to put him in a psychiatric home but she didn't listen. Those treatments made him worse.” She bursted out, crying.

“Your brother was in a psychiatric home before coming here?” I asked her. Her eyes went wide.

“How did you know I spoke about my brother? Do you work here?” She sounded annoyed.

“Yes I do. I don't know if I do. Well... I just got suspended.”

“You people killed him!” She shouted.

“No we didn't. We tried to save him. We did. I'm an intern, they never allowed us to treat the patients.”

“So you mean you don't attend to patients? What kind of internship is that?” She asked, sniffing in her running nose.

“We attend to patients but not special patients. Your brother was considered a special patient. Three of which we have had this week.”

“What was special? He was in the mid ward. We are not rich? What exactly?”

“You said he was transferred from the psychiatric home so maybe...”

“I shouldn’t be discussing this with you. I need to find my mum,” she said, getting up and walking away.

A psychiatric home? Here I was thinking it was another version of Covid. But the other guys, were they all from a psychiatric home? I was about to leave the hospital gate when I realized I felt lighter than how I normally feel when passing the gate. I definitely forgot something. My laptop! Oh no! That would have been bad if I had gone far. I started to text Valerie to inform her about what had happened as I walked back into the building and straight into the elevator. My face was buried in my phone as I anticipated Valerie’s response. As the elevator opened. I saw Doctor Taiwo and some other doctors rolling a stretcher. Wait, am I on the wrong floor? I looked behind and yes, I was on the wrong floor. I was on floor 8. Why were they carrying a stretcher? It was never their work to do so. They were junior doctors who did that. I turned to the elevator to return to floor three but then I heard a sound that made me go back. Someone was screaming.

What was going on here? I asked myself. I slowly tiptoed and walked down the hallway till I was close to the room they were inside. The voice became louder. I used my hand to separate the blinds so I could peep. My mouth spread wide open. The boy from ward 8. He was alive and screaming. Why did they tell everyone he was dead? What was going on? One of the doctors picked up a red bottle and another carried a calabash while doctor Taiwo recited something that sounded like an incantation. The worst happened. Something I had never seen before. Green flames started to leave the eyes and mouth of the boy on the stretcher. He struggled and tried to scream but he couldn’t. The flames came out from him and into the bottle and suddenly his body became old, and immediately turned into ashes.

Oh my God! Could this be the reason why I had been seeing bags of ashes in the incinerator? Were they turning the patients into ashes? Too many questions roamed in my mind but I had to get out of there before I was next. I walked back to the elevator shivering at what I had seen and as soon as I got to my floor, I went straight to my office and picked up my laptop. This is why they didn’t want the interns here. What just happened to the patient from ward 8? I needed answers. As I was about to leave my office, the elevator door opened and I immediately hid under the table. The same doctors I had seen upstairs were down here.

“Is it safe here?” One doctor asked.

“Yes. Doctor Taiwo replied. He held onto the bottle with the green flames. “It’s safe here. All the interns have been sent home.”

“And the last one? The one who didn’t get an email?”

“We dealt with that.”

I gasped but used my hands to close my mouth immediately so I wouldn’t get caught. What was happening and why was I caught up in all this mess?

“Good.” The doctor responded. “Muyiwa will be here soon. He says he is in the elevator already.”

Within a few minutes, a fat short man walked out of the elevator. He wore scrubs and a lab coat. I looked closely but I had never seen the man in my life before. Who was he?

“Dr Muyiwa!” Dr Taiwo shouted as he sighted him. They shook each other and he did the same with the other doctors present. “The mad man specialist!” Dr Taiwo joked, patting Dr Muyiwa’s back. They both laughed.

“How did this one go?” He asked them.

“Perfect like the rest.” One of the doctors said, smiling with glee.

“We need more patients, Muyi.” Dr Taiwo said.

“You know this thing is not easy. I’ll send 7 more but that will be all for the month oo. If too many patients from my psychiatric hospital get missing in one month, the press will notice oo. People will talk. 10 is enough for 1 month.” Dr Muyi said.

“The godfathers needs 34. We can’t give him 10. You have to find a way oo.”

“If the godfathers need 34, they should get other psychiatric doctors na. I can’t be the only one.”

“Shey you’ll tell them by yourself? They are coming here already.”

“The godfathers are coming here?” Dr Muyiwa asked, surprised.

“Yes now.” one of the doctors replied. “Why do you think we called for you? He said it was an emergency.

I was sweating where I hid. In fact, I wanted to urinate badly. Who were the godfathers? Why did they kill young boys with mental Issues? What were they going to do with their ashes? I kept asking myself. The doctors kept on pacing around the hall as they awaited the godfathers.

“They are here!” Dr Taiwo shouted. Everybody froze in their positions and I could hear my heart beat loudly. The elevator opened and four men walked in. The doctors went to their knees.

“The godfathers be praised, reign supreme, live forever.” they chorused as they bowed to them.

I looked closely! What! I could see Governor Timini the Governor of Lagos, Senator Abena, a face I couldn't recognize, and the... the..the president! What was going on here? They sat on a chair the doctors had arranged and soon a black man dressed in red and black wrapper came in from the wall.

What was I about to witness?

“We don't have much time,” the president said to the man who came through the wall. “Let's get it started.”

“This place feels odd,” The man replied, sniffing the air.

“Okuku, do it now. As you can see, I don't have time. He said, revealing his arms. They were shaking and extremely old and rotten.

The man started to dance around them, as he sang a song. Oya open the bottle he shouted as he danced. Dr Taiwo opened and the flames escaped and went into the president, senators and the governor.

“A Life for a life and a soul for a soul. Oya Okuku, add to the Godfathers extra years from the young soul of a mad boy! Extra years Okuku!”

They all started to shake like the patients did as the flames went into them. After a few seconds, they stopped.

“Ehehn, ehehn! It is done.3 years have been added to your years each.” the man said with a laugh. “Before it expires, you'll need other lives of young men.”

This was why they lived for so long. They bought the lives of others! I couldn't believe what had happened before me. The man stopped laughing and he started to sniff around the room again.

“Okuku what is the matter?” the president asked, smiling.

“Something is wrong with this place,” he said sniffing.

“What do you mean?” the governor asked.

“Someone is here!” he shouted, frowning at Dr Taiwo.

“Ha no o!” Dr Taiwo responded, laughing uneasily.

My life was over. I stood still and didn't breathe as the man sniffed close to where I hid. He kept sniffing and soon he left my area. I was relieved as he walked back to where the others stood.

“Ding!” my phone made a WhatsApp notification sound.”

“Ika!” the strange man shouted, turning in my direction. “Okuku! Oya bring out the human who has hidden amongst us!”