

The New World

Everything about life after I got out was different. Everything felt new and I felt like I moved to another realm. Prison life was easy but daunting, we knew what to do when to do it, and food was provided. I had learned a thing or two from people that came after me but nothing prepared me for what I saw on the streets of Lagos. The ride from the prison at Mushin didn't do any justice as I reached Lakowe. Lakowe had life and they were fixing the roads, I couldn't believe it. There was a new school where the uncompleted building we used to have quickies in with the workers and big truck drivers for money used to be. Everything had changed, even Ajah had so many buildings, I wondered if I could find the beach at this rate. Before I went to prison, Lagos was just a bubbling town and people started moving in. The Lagos I knew had limited roads and incomplete buildings all over, The Lagos I was familiar with was rugged but this new Lagos was full of life. There were estates everywhere and buildings with different names. The ride through Lagos island shocked me, a place that was mostly filled with water was filled with people. How long was I gone? How much did the world change when I was away? Some popular spots remained but they didn't look the same. The nightlife was even more shocking cause there was a lot of movement compared to before and the Lagos nightlife was very much alive. I only knew one place and this is the only place I dreamt of returning to while I stayed in prison. The deal I made in prison saved me some money and I bought my father's house in Lakowe. I would love the rest of my days there till I die. I never wanted a family and all I knew was my papa and survival. I was 62 now and I was going to survive in this new world.

I know you're curious to know what I went to prison for but that's not as important as what almost took me back there. When you buy a house from prison, they only show you physical pictures, they don't talk about the area or even whether you get light. I took a gamble because my father lost the house after he gambled all our funds away always pining after the woman that abandoned him. It was an old house in the middle of nowhere and I didn't realize that I wouldn't come back to that solitude I so yearned for. The house was transformed into a brothel and it took me months to chase everyone away and look for better tenants. The caregiver was nowhere to be found and I couldn't believe my eyes. After settling, I thought about what to do for work. I considered letting it stay as a brothel but that is how I landed in prison in the first place so I decided to hit up a younger friend I made in prison that helped me understand phone and technology. She was like my own child. She had left her contact cause I was fond of her and took care of her when she was in prison. She was delighted to hear from me and when I mentioned a job, she didn't hesitate to ask for my address so she could visit.

An old woman like me wasn't willing to do a lot for money, I had no great skills and I was only good at selling my body which was a sorry state for what it used to be. So when this smallie in front of me told me I could be her touch point for drugs, I laughed so hard my ears rang. My initial thought was prescription drugs, like a fake pharmacy selling drugs but I was very wrong. She meant the hard kind as they shower in the movies we were allowed to watch in prison. I was very shocked and a little worried by what she meant but she said all I had to do was just sell it and collect money. She said I had to be strict with the customers and she said I should never tell them my real name. I would be her wholesaler and her first point in Lagos cause she had things

moving in from Lakowe. No one was going to look at an old woman with no family living in her house alone. She encouraged me to have a small shop so it wouldn't be suspicious and get tenants for the empty room. There were so many things that shocked me since I came out of prison but nothing prepared me for what the next months would be like.

Just like that, Mama Care was born. Smallie said it's because I took care of her better than her mother. She was always quick in her fit and wishing weeks and small provision shop was erect. She transformed the gateman's house and turned a room into a warehouse for both drugs and provision. Someone to help with the shop and security was given a room and a lady who would sell retail on the side was given a room. I found out later that the young man was part of a cult once. I never asked Smallie what she did or what she was in for, I only took what she told me and never asked questions. In prison I heard whispers that her father was a rich politician, I also heard her father was a pastor and this was to punish her for doing drugs, I never believed them and waved them off as rumours. With me, she only spoke about her mother and never her father, she spoke ill of her always. I figured her family wasn't a happy one and I saw myself in her. One night she asked me while they casually bagged the drugs in smaller bags, if I was appalled by what I saw. I wasn't but the ease of business always shook me because it was so hard to deal drugs when I was her age. She also never asked me personal questions, she asked about my family once and when I told her I had none, she said she would be my family.

The next couple of months came by so quickly and with time, everyone knew about Mama Care. I became a household name and the stories and rumours started flying. I heard I had killed my husband and went to prison and took all his money, I also heard I was a politician's concubine whose wife sent me to prison, I also heard, and this is the most ridiculous one, that I led a revolution against the government in the 90's and was sent to prison. I would laugh when my help from the shop would tell me while grilling me with questions. I was glad no one knew the facts, I was glad no one knew about me or my father or what he did. I was glad that they feared me cause I went to prison so they tried not to overstep. Things started going well and I settled into my new life. Everything started going well and my inner child came out. I would splurge on clothes and jewellery and visit so many restaurants in Lagos. A typical day would be me overseeing any incoming goods we have and making sure none of the boys swipe anything and they often do. They are sorted into smaller bags and zip locks and ready for pickup while they're kept sealed in cartons in the provision store. Mama Care was a registered business and I did home deliveries too so moving my other goods wasn't hard at all. We always tipped the police on the road generously and most of the local youths and agberos knew us. I bought two trucks and a big van later to help move things easier from Lakowe so that our retailers dealt with less stress of delivery. Smallie always called me the mama with the brains. I successfully saved up money from prison and bought this house, of course, I could run a successful business. The boys liked to ask about stories from prison while worked and I always told them stories of things that happened to others but I never gave any details about what I did or how I ended up there. I'm sure they, like everyone else, were curious as to why Mama Care was in prison for so long. Even Smallie didn't know about my sentence and she didn't care or bat an eyelid. I wondered if I'd ever tell my story If anyone wanted to listen to a rich old woman who went to prison for most of her life. I often thought about how I would end up or where I would die, and although I never gave much thought to death, I mostly thought about how I'd be remembered. I also never thought about where the drug ended up, Smallie would say it went to universities and offices mostly and I wondered why a lot of people consumed so much because of how fast we were selling. A

dealer in VI who took a liking to Smallie and followed her everywhere was proud to sing to me that he made over 2 million and turned a profit in less than two weeks. I thought about what he said and how he wasted it buying Smallie a dress she hated. Selling provisions became so profitable that I had to build a supermarket close to the house just by the school. This school held so many memories for me from my younger days. It was the days I remember fondly while I was in prison. It was an incomplete building then and the workers and truck drivers that passed through would always use it after they petitioned the prostitutes on the street. The supermarket was big and students trooped during their break so it was easy to handle the other operations at this time to quell any suspicions.

Running a business was the easy part of this. I was a brilliant child and my father was the son of a politician. I grew up wealthy and lived in Victoria Island for most of my life till tragedy struck. My mother died at childbirth so everyone encouraged my papa to remarry. They wanted him to have more children and a mother to care for me. He was adamant at first and said he would love no other woman but soon after he fell for someone. I never liked her or the way she treated Papa but he never saw it and only fell for her. It felt like he would do anything for her and he began to neglect me and his duties. My grandparents disowned him when he married her and we had to move to Lakowe. My life was turned upside down and even though I tried to make the best of it, everything got worse when she realized he had no more money. She left him not long after and my papa became a shell of himself. He would neglect his work and drink all day while calling out for her name. On some days, he went to look for her in town and would come home drunk when she shunned him or he couldn't see her. I hated her for what she did to him, I hated love more so I decided I didn't want a family. I dropped out of school and had to fend for my papa and me. I was brilliant and always wanted to go back to school and become a banker, my papa taught me a lot about business but none of that mattered when I landed in prison. Years after I heard my papa gambled the house away and they found him in a ditch dead. I only cried once because I wasn't going to mourn a man who threw his life and mine away. My papa's documents were the only thing left for me in his will, I read it with the lawyers and found out he had made a deal with a politician that could land them both in prison. I knew he dabbled in illegal affairs but I didn't realize the extent. I reached out through my lawyer and the man immediately contacted me. He asked me about my father and what he could do for me, Just like my father did, I started handling all the illegal financial paperwork from prison. He paid me good money for my work and silence and he helped me reduce my sentence. I also helped other inmates who knew my affiliation with the politician. I knew my way around a business so when my supermarket flourished, it was no shock to me but to everyone around me. They just thought I was uneducated and illiterate since I went to prison.

Everything was going well till a child at the new secondary school fainted. The issue became a big event when the parents found out it was a result of drug intake. They were furious but as rich parents, they pushed for an investigation. At first, it didn't bother me at all but the stories started flying around and people associated with my business started popping up.

The goods always came from the provision and the workers did a good work of separating and sorting them. Also, Smallie made sure that most of the retailers in the area were our people. I did not know how she handled that but I didn't expect them to sell to kids. I had no moral high ground and I didn't care at first but I had gotten accustomed to this life and I didn't want to go back to prison. For a couple of weeks, I wanted to halt operation, take a trip to Abuja because I

had never been, and wait till everything blew over but Smallie said an important shipment was coming and it couldn't be delayed. I insisted but since I was just a front for her, I let her decide.

This new world I had tried to survive, this new world I wanted to live in seemed like it would slip from me, I thought about running away with the money I'd saved but where would I run to, and the house I worked so hard for would be abandoned again. I thought about quitting but I had come so far and I loved the comfort it gave me, I thought about Smallie and the lives she's let up till now and how she had survived. I thought about the girl who died and how she would have lived and how she would have survived this new world, Would she end up like Smallie? Or was it better she ended up dead