



PAPER PLANE

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“Annie!” Annie!” The thick bass voice of Ma’ Rose rang sharply in my ears as she emptied the full bucket of ice-cold water on me. Instantly, an electrifying surge jolted me back to the realm of the living. I gasped desperately for breath while battling with the icy grip of the water that threatened to petrify my very being.

“Get your lazy ass up and let’s go! If you make me late today, I will make sure you regret it!” Ma’rose yelled in her scratched voice as I stared in shock. I gazed around the room for a while with my eyes wide open, as though I was trying to see beyond the walls.

“Where am I?” I muttered as I squeezed my drenched cloth while surveying the room
Annie, you need to get up; Ma’rose will definitely discipline you again if she comes back and you’re not ready!” the curly-headed girl, who was about my age, said as she walked into the room with a basket of clothes

“Here! You can wear these!” She said handing me some clothes, which I reluctantly collected while shivering from the cold and somewhat fearful.

P-p-please, where am I?” I stammered

“What do you mean?” the girl replied in confusion

“I mean, where is this place? Is this Benin?...”

“What are you saying? You’re in the Imperial city of Vasti; you came in last night!” the girl replied as she neatly arranged the clothes.

No, you don’t understand. I was on the Elinger plane from Lagos to Benin for my deployment. I’m a youth corper, and last I can remember, the pilot said there was an engine failure and we

were going down!” I said in a shaky voice as I tried hard to recollect the past events while struggling with an intense headache.

“What is with you, Cellis? Look, I know the war was hard on you guys, but you have to keep it together. Ma’rose is not very patient; she will definitely send you back to the council if you continue rambling this nonsense!” the girl said sternly, then hurriedly left the room. It took a while before her words sank in properly, but I was still fazed. The last thing I can remember is getting on a plane heading to Benin City for my National Youth Service, so how did I end up here? How?

The old wagon came to a halt right in front of the finely bricked house with the most beautiful flower arrangement I have ever seen. All the passengers alighted, including myself and Ma’rose. I was still trying to regain my strength and, if possible, my memory.

“Don’t you speak, girl?” Ma’rose asked sharply as soon as she finished bidding her friends goodbye

“Yes ma’am!” I replied softly

“Look, I know it must be hard for you having to witness the great war like that and the tragedy of losing your family; God bless their souls, but you should count yourself lucky to have made it into the city alive. There’s new hope for you here, but a ranger with no use is easily disposable, so make yourself useful!” Her tone quickly transitioned from a regular one to the stern, sonorous one I was familiar with.

“Move!” she instructed as I quickly followed sheepishly behind her into the big house.

“I see you brought a new one!” The plump lady dressed in a yellow apron and matching toque said this with a wide smile the moment we entered the kitchen.

“The council keeps sending these girls to me as if I don’t have enough already; put her to good use, will you?” Ma’rose said as the lady nodded

“C’mon now!” The plump lady said to me as I followed her quietly, I was way too weak and bewildered to react to anything happening; I was trying to put the pieces of this puzzle together in my head. From what it looks like, I’m definitely not in Benin City.

“What year is it?” I asked as soon as we had gotten away from Ma’rose

Oh, you speak! Wonderful! A lot of girls from Celli don’t speak much English!” the plump woman said with sincere surprise and delight.

“What year is it?” I repeated agitatedly

“Uhm.. this is the year after the great war; the world really turned upside down, huh! It must be hard being here!” the lady replied

So, like, what year was the great war?” I queried as she looked at me in some perplexity

“1935!” She replied, as I inhaled sharply, If the great war was last year, that means it's currently 1936! Lord, have mercy!

“Oh dear! You look paler than a ghost; should I pour you some milk?” she asked while holding me up tenderly. Almost immediately, Ma’rose walked in with an elegantly dressed lady, and we all straightened our postures and greeted her immediately.

“As you all know, we will be hosting the Emperor today for his betrothal to my daughter, and I need everyone on their best behavior. We have been preparing for this visit for over a month.

Marose, I need your strict discipline because nothing can go wrong today!” Lady Helen spoke in a rather unyielding tone as she suddenly shifted her gaze to me

“I’ve never seen her before!” Lady Helen said approaching me

Yes, ma’am, she is the girl I spoke about, a new addition to the kitchen staff; she’s my ward, ma’am!” Ma’rose instantly replied as she signaled to me to bow and greet, as I had earlier seen others do.

Hmm, she looks presentable; add her to the serving girls!” Lady Helen said as she walked out.

“The Imperial City of Vasti, 1936!” I muttered to myself as I trembled. I was trying to figure out this new world; it all seemed like a dream, which I fervently prayed I would wake up from because if not, that only meant one thing. I traveled back in time! to a world and place I never knew existed... I tried racking my brain to figure out where this city of Vasti could be—on what continent? But I was sure I had never heard of it. From the information I was able to gather, apparently my new name is Annie, not Adaeze anymore, from Celli, the city recently conquered by the Emperor of Vasti. I was one of the captives and was assigned to Ma’rose to start a new life here in Vasti. The workers like us were called rangers. I currently work at the Jackbrue’s home with Ma’rose; they are one of the most powerful families in Vasti, and today the Emperor will be visiting to finalize his engagement to their daughter, Lady Katherine. None of these made any sense!

“C’mon girls! Look sharp!” Ma’rose yelled as they all scrambled to order. I slowly picked myself up and walked over to the line with the other serving girls as Ma’rose violently grabbed me.

“Get your act together; I have sympathized with you long enough! And what is this I’m hearing of you going around asking people questions about where you’re from, your family, and the great war? Do you want to get yourself killed? You are no longer in Celli; you are now in Vasti, so snap out of this nonsense and act right; this is your last warning, or I’ll have them whip you till your skin peels!” Ma’rose yelled, then threw me aggressively back in line as I battled to regain my balance while fighting back the tears I had bottled up since I awoke to this madness.

“My dear, I think it’s time we saw Katherine!” Lord Jackbrue said to his wife, Lady Helen, who excitedly stood up to make the preparations. Almost immediately, an entourage walked into the large dining room with Lady Katherine, who glowed heavenly.

“My Lord, meet my daughter, Lady Katherine Jackbrue!” Lord Jackbrue said as the young, handsome Emperor stood up and approached Lady Katherine, who smiled softly, “My Lord!” she greeted, bowing her head down slightly

“She’ll do!” Emperor Gazi said after taking a long and keen stare at Katherine

“Of course she will; she is perfect!” Lady Helen said immediately with a subtle laugh

“My mother, the Queen, will come and conclude the wedding plans with you; I’ll be heading back to the palace!” Emperor Gazi said

“Oh no, my Lord, we’ve prepared the best dessert for you; you certainly must try it. We spent months on the recipes; please show us your impeccable kindness and have a taste!” Lady Helen pleaded, and he obliged reluctantly. We immediately walked into the room and began to serve the dessert. It was my turn to serve, so I walked briskly and followed what the other girls were

doing. My mind still wondered as I tried my hardest to keep my trembling hands steady while carrying a tray of desserts.

“My Lord! On the topic of the new captives from Celli, there are a set that have been giving us a lot of trouble, talking about some kind of Elinger plane and some utter nonsense; we believe them to be spies, sir!” Lord Jackbrue said this while dabbing his mouth with a napkin.

“Did you say Elinger plane?...Yes, Elinger plane, I was on the plane from Lagos...!” I said frantically before Ma’rose gripped my arms firmly and flung me behind her.

“Forgive me, my Lord, she’s my new ward, and she’s a bit hazed from the rigors of the war; it’s all nonsense she blabs; kindly take no interest in her words!” Ma’rose said politely

“Isn’t she from Celli too? Could this be a code word they are using to communicate?” Lady Helen said, as all attention immediately rested on me

“We might have to send these Cellis back if they continue such disrespect; we have been kind enough to welcome them into our city after their king started a war with us that led to the death of thousands of brave Vasti soldiers!” Lord Jackbrue said with anger

“Take her back to the kitchen, Ma’rose; let’s not spoil the beautiful atmosphere with all these dreadful talks!” Lady Helen spoke with a forced smile as she stared sternly at me

No, please, you don’t understand me; there was a crash; I’m not supposed to be here; I’m from Lagos State, Nigeria, and I was heading to Be...!” I was interrupted by a thunderous slap on my cheeks from Marose, which muted me immediately.

“Forgive me again, my Lord; I will send her back to the council immediately!” Ma’rose said in a disheartening tone as I fought back tears while caressing my throbbing cheek

“You will do no such thing!” Emperor Gazi finally spoke, as he had been silent through the whole mayhem

“Speak!” He said to me as I slowly lifted my head up, and without hesitation, I began to narrate my ordeal to them. After a long period of explanation, I was satisfied with how I had detailed all that happened. From the silence in the room and the way they all keenly listened, I was sure my ordeal might soon come to an end.

“So basically, you traveled back in time from 2019 to 1936!” Lord Jackbrue asked after a long silence in the room

Yes, I believe so!” I said sniffing, and almost immediately they all burst into a loud laughter. I looked up and saw the Emperor grining too. I felt like a fool; they all didn’t believe a word I had said.

“What amazing entertainment I have received today! I must commend you, Jackbrue’s!”

Emperor Gazi said, still grining as he gulped down his wine. I hissed under my breath out of frustration as Ma’rose dragged me violently out of the room.

“I am sending you back to the council, you lousy girl!” Ma’rose yelled as she dragged me through the corridor while I struggled. As we got into the kitchen, we were met by a group of soldiers.

“Emperor Gazi has ordered us to bring this ranger to him immediately!” One of the soldiers said with a straight face

“Stupid girl, you're saying all that nonsense in front of the Emperor. Well, at least I will have one less mouth to feed. May the good Lord guide you!” Ma’rose said, looking at me with what seemed like pity as she handed me over to the soldier.

I was escorted outside to the yard where the Emperor stood with the Jackbrue’s and his soldiers. He bade the family goodbye as he softly kissed the hands of his betrothed, Lady Katherine.

“My Lord, as you requested, a gift from us to you!” Lord Jackbrue said with a wide smile as he violently pushed me forward

“How gracious of you to oblige! I enjoyed her stories; the Cellis are very good at story-telling. I will add her as part of my royal entertainers!” Emperor Gazi said as I hissed again, biting my lips in anguish.

“Me Adaeze Okoli! A first-class Engineering student from the University of Lagos, a royal entertainer? What an insult! I cursed them all under my breath with so much anger.

They immediately carried me into a wagon, which followed right behind the Emperor’s carriage as I sat quietly, holding my head in my palms. After a few miles, the wagon came to a halt, and the door to the wagon flung open. It was the Emperor!

“What does this nonsense Emperor want again?” I hissed loudly

“Get down!” he said as he stared at me keenly

“Why? I don’t have any stories to tell you!” I said rudely

Well, I do!” he said as he climbed into the wagon with me. I began to shout as he held my mouth close. I struggled with him as I punched and kicked, but he also put up a fight.

“Be quiet!” he yelled as he closed the door of the wagon and finally released me from his grip.

“I swear if you touch me, I will injure you, and I will sue you!” I yelled while quivering

“Mcheew...It’s like you’re not ready to leave this place!” He said it in a slightly different accent from earlier as I stared at him in bewilderment.

“I was on the Elinger plane too!” he said as my eyes opened widely and, for the first time today, I cried.

“It’s a lie; you’re the Emperor, so how?... how?!” I stammered

“I have no idea; I woke up after the crash and found myself as the Emperor. I have been playing the part pretty well till I met the others!” he said in a whisper

“Others!” I whispered too in joy

Yeah, there are other survivors, and that’s why I didn’t allow them to send the Cellis back. We will find them, and we’ll go home. I think I know a way; we’re going home!” he said as I burst into tears

He held me close as he whispered words of solace, which quieted my fears. Suddenly the door of the wagon flung ajar as we both shielded our eyes from the luminous cascade of light that burst in.

“Hello! Hello!” the familiar voice called out drastically to me

“Can you move? We’ve gotten to Benin!” he said rather harshly as I rubbed my eyes. Quickly, I snapped back from the brink of oblivion as I felt my neighbor wriggling his way fiercely out of his seat beside me.

“Emperor Gazi!” I yelled at him in shock with a mix of panic; I knew that voice was familiar

“Who?!” the guy asked as he stared at me in confusion

“Never mind, sorry mistake!” I quickly said with a shy smile as he scoffed, adjusted his tie, and then walked off.

“It was a FREAKING DREAM!” I sighed with so much relief as I hurriedly walked off the Elinger plane.

THE END