

ABISOLA

02:15 AM

FEMI

The average person walks past thirty-six murderers in their lifetime, the New York Post article had said.

But what are the odds you have sex with one? Or someone who could be one. Amaka's words return to me every time I close my eyes and see blood. Abisola edges closer to me as if on cue and flings her left leg across mine.

Her hands slowly stroke my belly, then make little circles around my ribs. On other days, I would draw her closer and bury my face in her neck, wishing the night could be longer before she had to run back home. But not today. If she suspects I am onto her or anything is amiss, she may go off and kill me, too.

Abisola turns me to herself and looks into my eyes,

"Why are you like this? What's going on?" She asks, revealing her dark, bare skin from the bed.

"Nothing, babe, I'm just tired," I say, then close my eyes, hoping she would leave it be. But Abisola doesn't know how to leave things be. She always has to be in charge. She always has to know what's coming. I found out when I once made the unfortunate mistake of hugging her from behind without telling her. That day, I nearly lost my legs. With Abisola, she had to be aware. Informed. In charge. And I had loved her for it. Now, I'm unsure who this dark, willowy woman in my bed is.

"What happened that made you tired? Is it something I did?" She asks. That's another thing with Abisola. She doesn't know how to co-exist with discomfort. How not to fix things.

Even though my heart is in shreds, I know I must smile. Because if I don't, and Abisola finds out, Amaka and I would be dead within the hour.

"Abisola, I'm sorry. Today was just rough. Two promising projects I have invested my time and money into rugged today, and it's affected me." I say, looking away from her and turning to my side.

She grasps my shoulders and pulls me back to herself.

"Is that it, Femi?" she asks, her white eyes widening in concern as she lays down back and rests her head on my chest. A chime from my bedside table sounds, alerting us that it's 3 AM.

"Oh, my baby, let me see what I can do to make you feel better. You'll not hear me if I tell you to leave this crypto thing now." She says, running circles again with her fingers on my belly.

"So we can survive on what? Your house girl salary abi?" I say, laughing and tickling Abisola, whose eyes are already twinkling.

"It's me you're yabbing? I'll show you." She says and begins to tickle me. I may be dying inside, but I manage to giggle. It's about time Amaka sends me that signal.

4:15 AM

FEMI

Suppose I ever leave this situation alive and eventually write a memoir; this will go down in history as the longest night of my life. It feels so surreal. I am lying next to someone who would kill me if she could read my mind now and find out what I am doing to ruin her plans.

I look at the girl sleeping beside me. Abisola has become "the girl" in my mind. This is the same girl I had fallen in love with at first sight. The first girl I had snuck home and slept with in my father's house. I remember everything. All our firsts. The first time we kissed. At first, her lips had remained shut, stubborn and unwilling to part. Then she let herself go and kissed me back. Later on, I found out that that was the first time in years she had allowed someone else to lead her to do something, the first time she hadn't felt in charge. After that, she often snuck out of her madam's house on some nights and came here. The security guard knew better than to rat me out. And no one in Abisola's house knew that their neighbor's son was dating their housemaid. Nor would they have cared.

How had that sweet, beautiful girl become this person whom Amaka was so sure was a killer? And what the hell was the deal with Amaka? It was 4:15, and she hadn't sent the signal we had both agreed on.

While I waited, I would look at the face of the girl who was no longer my Abisola but a cold-blooded killer.

5:15 AM

FEMI

"Sleepyhead, wake up. I'm going back home." Abisola says in a whisper as she pries my eyes open with kisses.

"What time is it, babe?" I ask

"5:15. I need to go. Nneka may just decide to surprise me now and wake up early. So let me go. We wouldn't be doing all this drama if you just do and marry me."

"Soon, baby, soon." I lie, looking away. Even now, with everything I'm doing and everything Amaka has said, I know that I can never love anyone the way I love Abisola.

"I love you, baby," Abisola says, briefly bending her head to kiss me goodbye. I pull her into my lap and bury my face in her neck. Then I kiss her slowly, then hungrily. I kiss her like a soldier about to go to war, like I used to when we first met, kissing every chance we got.

"Babe, I had better go. I love you." Abisola says and kisses me on the forehead.

"Bye, Abisola. I love you. Always." I respond. She smiles, and then climbs down the window. After confirming she's gone, I let out the breath I didn't know I was holding and text Amaka.

"She's on her way. Hope you're ready and everything is set."

Then I lay down and curse myself for being the one to betray Abisola.

07:00 AM

ABISOLA

I was seven the first time I realized that you had to take charge to win in life. I was homeless and standing in the rain, yet my eyes burned with venom as I looked at the snake who had come to tear what was left of my family apart.

Spitting at the shrub at his feet, I looked on in disgust as my mother rolled on the floor, begging *him*. The shameless man who had killed my father now wanted to repossess our house. My father's body wasn't cold in the ground, yet here he was.

Now, I'm twenty-eight years old and still taking charge. I am always ahead, and nothing threatens me. Even Nneka, the figurehead in this house, knows I am the one who calls the shots. She

collapses in her armchair and snores away all day. The pig. Sometimes, I wish her round head would fall off her neck. For weeks, I have pressed my hands to my sides while walking past her to resist the urge to strangle her. That would ruin the plan. And nothing must destroy the plan. For eight years, I have served faithfully, waiting for this day.

I steer the scrambled eggs I am making for breakfast with an extra flourish. What a day this will be!

"Bisi! Isn't breakfast ready? The children will be late for summer lessons, oo?"

"Yes, ma. Everything is set. I will soon bring it in, ma," I say in the syrupy voice I reserve for the pig when she is awake. Sometimes, I almost feel bad about what I will do to her and her stupid children.

So what if Nneka is innocent? If you dined with the devil, you were his friend, too. And that's what Nneka has done. She married the devil. I am sending her to hell very soon to meet him there. I turn off the gas and wash my hands in the sink. Fat raindrops splatter across the window suddenly.

I blink back tears and wipe my eyes. No one can ever see me crying. Not even Femi, who is my greatest weakness.

But on rainy days, I remember, and then I weep for Mama. I remember Mama begging *him*.

"Stop begging, Mama! He won't listen. We will live on the streets if we have to, but we will have our dignity."

Dignity was a big word for a seven-year-old and an even bigger possession to keep. In my sixteenth year on the street, I had lost everything I owned except Mama.

When I had to choose between paying for Mama's Diabetes drugs and dignity, I understood for the first time why Mama begged. But if I had learned anything from this wicked life, it didn't favor those who begged. It favored those who took charge. So I took charge again and sold dignity for the dirty notes roughly pressed into my palm after that. By the time I reached Mama with the drugs, she was dead.

Bisi!" Nneka bellows from the parlor. I snap out of my reverie. Remembering is easier today because judgment day is here. I scoop the eggs onto the children's plate, Aunt Nneka's, and Amaka's. Then I bring out my secret weapon, and walk out to receive the unfortunate children about to walk into judgment day.

Nneka has forced everyone to bow their heads and pray before eating. I smile slightly because I know that no God is coming to save them. I raise my head in time to catch Amaka's eyes. Does she suspect something?

I've waited too long and worked too hard for my plans to be ruined. If she makes any suspicious move, I will take care of it. The rest must suffer the same fate I did years ago before they meet their evil father. Today is judgment day, and nothing will get in my way.

07:15 AM

FEMI

"I'm sorry, Femi. I know how much she means to you. But I'm afraid it's true."

My heart pounds as I read Amaka's text over and over. It's final. It's over for Abisola. For me. For both of us.

"Okay. I'm doing it now." I type, but my finger hovers over the send button. Briefly, I think about turning my back on Amaka. I think of calling Abisola and begging her to stop. But I know Abisola and how quickly she'll unravel if she feels cornered.

Even with my AC on full blast, I'm still perspiring. A text message from an unknown number comes in.

"It's Go time." I text Amaka, swing myself to my feet, throw on my Marvel T-shirt, and begin the short walk to the house across mine.

7:30 AM

AMAKA

I can feel Abisola's glare on my neck from across the room. By now, it's evident to everyone that I am stalling. Even Aunt Nneka is beginning to lose her patience with me.

I plead with Aunt Nneka in my head for a bit more time.

"Are you okay, Amaka? Are you sure you can still drop the children off like this?" Aunt Nneka asks me.

"Ma?... Yes, I can..." I stutter. Femi has texted me to say that the policemen are on their way but would they get here in time? Something tells me Abisola won't wait much longer to strike.

I remember trying to convince Femi about Abisola. He had been adamant that she was innocent. The only thing that helped my case was when I had another vision right there before him. This time, it wasn't my Auntie that died or her kids. It was Femi, lying in a pool of his own blood, his white D and G polo soaked.

That was enough to jar Femi from his reverie, that and the fact that I had been clairvoyant since I was a child. The first time Femi saw my vision manifest, we were both ten and playing in his backyard. After the seventh time, Femi stopped arguing with me. Afraid that I would be hated or taken from one deliverance center to another, I had sworn Femi to secrecy. No one knew about my clairvoyance or the startling accuracy of it. And this gift, which I had hated for many years, was about to save Auntie Nneka's life and the life of her children.

A beep from my phone startles me.

"Men are in position. Act Now. Good luck."

"I'm ready now, auntie. Thank you." I say, pushing back my plate. "Let's go, Clara and Tobe." I say, looking at Abisola through the corner of my eyes.

I know that if anything goes wrong with this plan, I will die, but it's a chance I'm willing to take to expose Abisola and save Auntie Nneka and her children.

Faintly, I can hear the men slowly making their way up the stairs. Abisola can hear them too, I suddenly realize. She's walking closer to me, her hand folded in her apron. I don't need to look to know that Abisola is cradling a knife under her apron. In my vision, she hadn't planned to kill me first, but Tobe. Just as the men burst in, Abisola lifts the glistening knife and brings it down on the shoulder of the startled Tobe, but not before I fling myself across him, and everywhere goes black.

12:30 PM

ABISOLA

"Hey, wake up!" Someone is saying, pushing my head roughly and breathing down my neck. I open my eyes and try to recollect where I am. Then, it all comes rushing back to me. Amaka flinging herself. Auntie Nneka shrieking and running for her child, and then Femi looking at me with tears in his eyes.

1:15 PM

FEMI

So much can happen in twelve hours. You could meet the love of your life, get run over by a truck, or lose your loved one to the cold hands of death or, in this case, crime. Amaka is squeezing my hand, but it barely registers. As long as I live, I will never forget how Abisola looked at me when she knew. Thankfully, Amaka had been fully prepared for the blow and had worn protective clothing. The force of the knife hurt her shoulder, though.

"Are you okay?" She asks. We are back at Aunty Nneka's house, and she's phoning her family members and relating the story. The children have been rushed to bed even though it's early afternoon and they have only just woken up.

"Yeah," I respond, but Amaka, the clairvoyant, probably knows I'm lying. She takes my hand and we sit in silence for an hour. All the while, I can only think of the next time I would walk past a killer, or anyone who could be one.

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