JERICHO FALLS

You. You. Yes you. Do not pretend and look away. I am talking to you. You were ten years old when you found out you were ugly. Your smooth, shiny and dark skin was considered undesirable at that age. So was your fat body that jiggled when you walked or ran. You also had a twin sister who looked nothing like you. No one believed she was your twin not even you. I mean, who would. She was slim, light skinned, pretty and had a sweet and dreamy voice. She was everything and more that you wished to be and everyone loved her. Worst of all, you were always placed in a dumb and constant comparison to her. When she entered a room people went "Oh" or "Hi pretty" or "Hello gorgeous" unlike you who received "Meh" or "Are you sure it was the same God that created you and your twin sister?". You remembered praying to God to recreate you to look like your sister but alas when you woke up, you realized your prayers were unanswered and the boy next door reminded you of that fact by calling out as soon as he saw you "blackie, how far?" you remembered crying that's morning and decided to stop praying to God.

You lived in Jericho falls a neighborhood ravaged with burning poverty, lust And crime. There was an ashewo shack at the beginning of one alley and a herbalist shrine at the end of another alley. Jericho falls was an unmapped zone, completely erased from the mind of the Lagos government.

You and your twin sister were the only surviving children of a dead father and an absentee mother. You also were, maybe, privileged to be blessed with a present step father who loved booze and boobs. Ah! speaking of boobs, you remembered your dearest step father loved fondling your twin sister's almost non existent boobs. You did not understand why he chose hers over yours, which had started making you feel shy and try to cover up. You remembered standing outside of his room and overheard him tell your sister " Do not worry, I am not going to hurt you. I am just helping you. Men do not like small boobs, but I swear, yours are smaller than the grapes mama Ibeji brought the other day. Come on, you know I would not do anything to hurt you. Stop crying, you are a big girl. You are such a pretty girl and I love you so much. Do not cry, let me touch them, so your friends will not mock you for having such tiny boobs". Now, don't get me wrong. You were definitely not a fan of your step father. You detested him. But you were still a ten years old girl and you craved some of the love and attention he gave your sister. For example, he got her chocolates, clothes and sweets and just the other, you had seen him try to kiss your sister on her lips. Shocking! One day, you and her were in your room playing Ayo when he came in and told you to continue the game outside with invisible playmates. You remembered your sister held your hands so tight and looked at you with pleading eyes not to leave her alone with him. But of course, you misunderstood those signs and hated her even more for being pretty. You remembered your step father leaving the room a minute later with a somewhat fulfilled look, like he had achieved something grand while giving you the "mind your own damn business, you ugly duckling" glare. While your sister came out half limping with tears on her face. Sometimes, you tried to snuff tales out of her, but the look she gave you scared you more than it scared her. You had to tell someone. You knew you had to tell someone, anyone. And of course, you were looking out for her when you ran to prophet Jeremiah, the newest member of Jericho falls family for help. Prophet Jeremiah saw himself as the God sent wind of change in the neighborhood, calling out sinners and all wrong and evil doers, to abandon their sinful ways and thoughts and cling to God's light, spelling doom and destruction on whoever went against him and his holy book. You were not surprised how eager he was to salvage your sister from hell and condemnation. I mean, that was his job. He always made you stand outside while he delivered your sister. And when he finally opened the door, he would

come out looking more demonic than ever, sweating heavily like a Christmas goat. You wondered if he got into a bloody physical fight with the devil. Meanwhile, your sister would go back home with you, half limping with tears on her face. He would say to you "No one must know what the great and mighty Jehovah is doing in her life". Alas it seemed the prophet's prayers were working. You did not go with your sister to see the prophet the next day. You had woken up with a writhing pain in your stomach and blood on your sheets. She said she would go alone and before you could flip your pillow to the cold side, she was back. Her dress was stained with blood that was obviously not hers. She sat down, smiling sheepishly and holding your hands. You found her actions strange but what you found even stranger was hearing that the beloved prophet Jeremiah had been found dead in his room, lying in the pool of his own blood with six knife stabs on his chest. His cock was also missing. Crudely chopped off his body. No one bothered to call the police, because if they ever came, they would search for the roughest looking individual and pin the murder on him. No one knew what kind of burial the late prophet desired and really no one cared about the late prophet and his God. But he had to be buried. So a few strong men dug a grave in his room and buried him.

Later that day, you began to have a really high fever and if you did not take some medicine, you would soon join the late prophet, wherever he was. Your sister who had been caring for you, decided to go get some medicine and food. You did not know where, when and how she got the money from. You were too weak to ask.

There you lay with the darkness enveloping you like a thick blanket when you heard a voice. It was not your sister's. It was thick, heavy and gruff. The voice moved closer and closer and closer till its owner fell on you like a thud. It was your step father. He was drunk and smelt like hellfire. You tried pushing him off you. You could not. He was heavy like damp wood. He reached for your dress and began tearing off your pants. There was fire in your body, in your head, in your teeth. You bit him. He slapped you. You bit harder. He slapped you even harder and clutched your throat in his hand, swearing to slice it off if you bit him again. You cried. You prayed. You had not prayed in a very long time. You felt God was partial, making your sister pretty and you ugly. You could not breathe. You saw death raining on you like hailstones. He was about to do his business when you heard a sharp and loud cry of pain. Then silence. Not the silence that greeted you when you told a cute boy in your alley "Hi". The silence was – dead. Even though he was still heavy on top of you, you easily pushed him off. His body fell to the ground. You were terrified. You stared at him in horror. His was stiff, lifeless and dead. Stabbed with a knife on his neck. You stood up quickly from the bed and ran to the door. That was when you noticed your sister kneeling down in a corner of the room, crying and whispering;

"I…I…I…I am so sorry. I have killed him. That was what he always did to me. You did not know. You could not have known. I had tried to tell you before but he threatened to kill you if I exposed him. I did not think he would do the same thing to you. He promised me he would not. Even that evil prophet. I killed the prophet and now I have killed him too. Please, please forgive me. I am so so sorry".

In that moment, all the hate and jealousy you had ever felt for her fizzled away like vapour. Your heart was filled with a knew found peace and love for her. You met her at her knees, cupped her wet face in your hands and whispered in her ears "No one must know what the great and mighty Jehovah is doing in our lives". She smiled knowingly at you. You smiled back. You and her put his body in a cart and walked into the night. Taking turns to push it until you both got to a bridge. You both overhauled the body and waited and listened till it dropped into the waters. You and her drove the cart back home.

You both sat outside of your home and held hands. You even shared a laugh at one point. It was raining heavily but you did not care. You both watched as the heavens swept Jericho falls with rain, knowing the bond you both now share can never be broken.