

Kimilokan

That day, I suddenly decided without premonition that I was going to make a life-changing move regardless of age. I believe that my destiny is in my hands and only I can determine it. Well, did I? I will let you be the judge of that.

As my people say, You can only decline or accept a food offer with your mouth. I had to choose whether I wanted to continue to live in a house where I was constantly reminded that I was a bastard, where tales of my mother's failures and woes were narrated daily, painting me as the evidence of her early misfortune in life, or leave to go to a people whose behavior and life pattern remain unknown.

Even though it is well known that the devil you know is better than the angel you don't know, I think I will prefer the unknown angel. What's the worst that could ever happen, that isn't happening here? Every time, we sit together as a family, this vile man ensures that I am consistently reminded that I am unwanted, his mouth curved up as he throws jabs at myself and mother, after which he claps his burnt hairy hands, throws them around her shoulders and laugh "It's just a joke, babe. Come on, you don't think I am serious about that, do you?" Then he proceeds to do it again.

When mother was pregnant with the kamsi, I prayed so hard that the baby wouldn't resemble the ugly man, with beards all over his face like a chimpanzee, since Tolani, their first son resembles him completely, with the same stinking attitude.

Thankfully, Kamsi doesn't.

She is just as beautiful as mother.

Mother, the woman with ridiculous taste in men. Still beautiful at 32, her caramel skin which is always glowing is her best feature as it announces her presence from afar.

Her oval face is accentuated with her high cheekbones graced with dimples. She has the right amount of hair on her face, head, and skin. Her pear-body shape is the talk of the town, at least that's what her friends say.

I know Dili, my stepfather likes it too, because anytime mother stands up, his mood regardless, his eyes roam over her body appreciatively.

They seem to only have something to argue about while I am there. Every time I am indoors, or eavesdropping on their conversation with my ear on their rich brown plywood material bedroom

door that still smells of spray paint though it's been four years, I hear their laughs, low voices, or even sexual noises.

They are always happy without me.

You have been wondering who I am, right?

I am Kimilokan, a twelve-year-old boy. Mother and her husband seem to forget that I just clocked twelve, they expect so much from me. Well, I sometimes forget too.

I do not know my father, and no one will tell me about him, Mother cries every time I bring him up. My grandmother turns her mouth the other way anytime I ask of him during her very scarce visits. Mother's friends claim not to know him though I can see through their lies.

All I know about him is that I resemble him, though I have my mother's complexion. Do I go around town looking for men who look just like me but with a different skin tone? That would yield no result.

Although, people say I am handsome, I don't care much for that. One thing I am grateful for that I got from my father is my eyesight.

Mother and her other kids will one day be bats, but I can see miles ahead from a tiny hole, my grandmother calls me "seer".

Grandmother says she is so happy that I am smart. What she doesn't know is that years of living like I have made me smart.

That day, I was helping my mother blend some tomatoes and peppers in the kitchen. She said she was going to make a sauce on her return from the salon with Kamsi. When it was nearing evening, I went to blend it, so she wouldn't have to go through the stress of doing that.

I was still in the kitchen when Dili returned. Tolani, my 5-year-old brother went to open the front door for him.

"Where is that good-for-nothing Kimilokan? I know he will be sleeping like a fool, didn't he hear me knocking?"

"No, he's in the kitchen and I told him I got the door since I was watching a cartoon here".

Go and call him for me, he thundered.

I breathed calmly and went out of the kitchen before Tolani came in as that might cost me more strokes, as I would be guilty of "ignoring him".

"Good evening, sir", I said, lying prostrate

Keep your greeting to yourself! Were you deaf when I was knocking?

"No sir, I was helping mother to blend pepper and Tolani was excited to be the one to open the door for you, so I let him".

"Ehn ehn! Tolani is your house boy now that will be opening the door for everyone knocking abi? Let's go and see the pepper you are blending", he said walking into the kitchen.

On getting there I showed him, and he carried the purple bowl. "Is this why you ignored me after hearing the car drive in with your bat ears?".

"Si...I" I was still stuttering in response when he poured the pepper on my face.

"Jesus", I screamed dancing around the kitchen, looking for the source of water.

Now, since scotch bonnet is peppery, I blend it first, wash my hands, add shea butter to the burns, and rest a bit before I blend tomatoes so that by the time I eat the meal prepared, the sting and discomfort from blending the scotch bonnet would have gone.

The purple bowl was filled only with the juice of scotch bonnet pepper!

Daddy! Tolani shouted.

"Ah! Pele, it wasn't intentional", he said and took Tolani away from the kitchen while I was left there, screaming.

I turned on the tap to pour water on my eyes. When I could see some things, I went to my bathroom, poured water into a big bowl, and dipped my eyes inside. I was in this position when my mother came in.

"Kimilokan, are you mad?"

I raised my semi-blind eyes from the bowl, the water dripping on my faded gray t-shirts.

Ma? I asked confused and the next thing she did was slap me.

"Are you mad? Why would you pour pepper on Tolani's hands? What's the meaning of that nonsense? Why would you do that to your younger brother?"

I didn't know what to say, I stood still, my mouth opened, confused for a while, and then I went back to dip my blurry stinging eyes back into the bowl.

She grabbed me, pulled me out of the bathroom, and gave me the beating of my life while I screamed. Her husband came in and asked why I was stressing his wife after pouring pepper on his son. He unbuckled his belt, removed it from the straps, and began flogging me. I could faintly hear mother say it was enough in the background till I passed out.

I found myself on the cold tiled floor when I woke up. The first thing I felt was my stinging eye.

I moved to stand up to go to the bathroom, but I felt heavy, every part of my body hurt and stung. I pushed till I stood up, and soaked my face in a fresh cold bowl of water for a while. Cleaned up my face and applied shea butter all over it.

I dragged myself downstairs, took some ice from the fridge, added it to a bucket of water, carefully had my bath with it, locked my door, and went to bed, crying.

Mother knocked on my door the next morning, but I refused to open it. I heard her hurl insults at me, but I didn't care much for the details in particular. Then I heard her husband say "He'd better lock himself in there till he dies".

I decided the night before that I was going to my grandparents' house in Ibadan, once everyone left the house for work and Pre-session coaching lessons.

Once the house was quiet I went to my mum's room opened her drawer, took some money, and carried my bag.

I already called my best friend Temitope's brother, Uncle Lekan who frequents Ibadan when I woke up from my beating. Luckily, he was going to Ibadan, so I agreed to meet up with him at his friend's house, his friend lives in our Estate.

I assured him I was going to my grandparents and since he knew my predicament, he decided to help by dropping me in front of their house.

Uncle Lekan is one of my role models, even my mother agrees, mostly because he doesn't "carry girls". He has always been the best graduating student in his set, up till the tertiary level, he studied estate management and he is a rich realtor.

I want to be as rich as he is, and he has told me that it is possible once I am diligent, focused, determined, witty, God-fearing, and confident. All these, I am sure I am.

Before I could change my mind, I was on my way to Ibadan. Uncle Lekan had to run a few errands, and there was traffic because of the RCCg Holy Ghost Service, so we didn't arrive in Ibadan until 10 p.m.

He said he didn't want to disturb my grandparents and we would have to sleep in a hotel until the next day, before going to them.

I agreed, beggars don't have a choice, and I was a bastard beggar, so my choice range must be very low.

We slept in Bounty Hotel somewhere in Challenge Ibadan. I felt uneasy as we walked into the hotel. The hotel was glamorous, but there was something off in the atmosphere. However, since

I'm not paying and Uncle Lekan says he has been visiting the hotel consistently on every visit to Ibadan for the past year, I couldn't say anything.

In the middle of the night, I heard some sounds. At first, I thought it was an armed robbery operation. Mother has always called me a bat because of my sharp ears. I could hear gossip from miles, and if people were talking about me, my ear twitches.

I brushed the unnecessarily heavy quilt off me, and stood up, moving the drapes a bit, I looked out to window and didn't see anything amiss. I strained my eyes to be sure, but there was no car parked in the middle of the hotel parking lot or outside the gates with someone holding a gun on the lookout and a driver at alert with the carbon ignition mode like we see in Nigerian action movies.

So, no robbery, I thought. The noises came again, this time it sounded like a large group of people were murmuring or humming.

I looked back to the bed to see Uncle Lekan out, snoring. I picked up my torchlight/phone, gently and noiselessly turned the key twice, removed it from the lock, opened the door, and locked Uncle Lekan in.

The passage was quiet but the humming voices were louder. I turned off my torchlight since the space was lit up, put my phone in the pocket of the colorful boxers I went to sleep in, and went in search of the voice.

The atmosphere was completely weird and eerie, everything quiet except for the humming, no footsteps coming or going, I went further down the hallway in the direction of the voice and when I had almost got to the end the voice got even louder, drowning me in. This is the spot I thought, but still, no movement. Which of these rooms is it?

I looked to the floor as if to ask a question. The rich red carpet spread across the hotel peered back at me, daring me to read its lips and I did.

Back home, Dekunle, my playmate, who lives opposite my mum's husband, loves to play hide and seek with me. At first, I hated it because I never won, I didn't have anyone to play with at home, and I also had to be perfect at school.

However, on a certain day as I moved closer to the place Dekunle was, I felt his presence from the rug, I didn't understand it. I followed the pull and caught Dekunle. Since then, Dekunle never won against me, whether in hiding or seeking, I will always feel his presence.

I asked my physics teacher about it, and she said that it was gravitational force, and while it can exist between humans, it can't be particularly felt except from a distance, it can only be felt in space where every object, size irrespective exerts force on other objects.

Well, for some reason, I can feel the gravitational pull from humans as long as we are standing on a rug. I guess I defy physics.

Following my gravitational instincts, the humming was coming from the room on the left. I went towards it and looked in through the keyhole praying that I could see whether or not the key was there.

Indeed I bent my body and neck to look through the steel keyhole and at first, all I saw was red, I almost went blind with the intensity. I drew back, took a deep breath, and looked through again. I screamed out loud, thankfully in my head. I have narrated the things I saw in that room once and I would never narrate it again.

I gently scurried back to our room and locked the door, Uncle Lekan was widely spread on the bed, still snoring.

I went into the bathroom, removed my phone, and dialed "112" explaining the situation of things in Room 49, I dialed "122" the other national emergency number, relaying the same message. I was scared breathless, I sat on the toilet seat, waiting for them.

For the first time, the Nigerian system disappointed me. I felt some movements in the hallway about 30 minutes later, At this time, the humming was full-fledged and Uncle Lekan snored even louder.

These guys swung into action, they came in two batches since called twice. We were all packed out of our hotel rooms, everyone in disarray, some philanderers in towels, people dressed for a bridal shower, the ministers, everyone was out screaming, jumping, shouting.

Who dialed the national emergency number?" one of the police officers asked after the noise went down. Everyone was looking around for who it was.

"I'm the one sir", I said, coming out from Uncle Lekan's embrace. Everyone present including Uncle Lekan was shocked, and then they celebrated me and forgot their fear for a moment.

Towards Noon the next day when everyone had relaxed, I was invited to the police station, Uncle Lekan followed of course.

I was celebrated once again and given a full scholarship for my secondary school education at the Nigerian Police Secondary School. Since then I've been invited and gifted by the Governor, news stations, etc.

"Oh, mother, well she..they were looking for me and the news got them to me faster. She's asked that we go home together, but that's no home for me. I'm glad NPSS is a boarding school."

"What about your holidays?" the TV host asked.

"When we get to that bridge I will cross it".

"You are such a brave young man, I mean, what possessed you to go searching for the source of such an eerie sound in the middle of the night".

"Curiosity, and besides my name is Kimilokan (Make me bold enough to do whatever it is I want you to do) Who better to make bold than I?"