

“WHISPERS OF THE OLD TOMORROW”

A SHORT STORY BY OJO BOLUWATIFE S.

Wednesday, September 30, 2036. 9:32 AM.

“The birds aren’t singing this morning.” Zita said to herself. There was usually a flock of them scattered among the trees and some would arrange themselves along the power cables. But this morning, it was complete silence. Could they have migrated for the season, or are they still here, choosing not to make known their presence? The air outside also felt gloomy. Even if the sun had chosen not to come out yet, its rays would’ve at least illuminated the blue of the sky by now. But looking outside, there were nothing but dark clouds. It was going to rain, she predicted, and soon enough, it began to.

She had been up for at least half an hour, choosing to spend the better part of her morning waiting for the tunes of her songbirds, and analyzing the weather. The first moments where the sun would shine from across the horizon, the tweeting of songbirds, and the cool morning breeze that would blow across the window; it was the little things she appreciated. She particularly wanted to have them now, for she knew exactly what kind of day today was to be. Just then, there was a knock on the door, and someone let themselves in. She didn’t need to look back to tell that it was Derek.

“What are you doing?” He asked.

“Waiting for the sun.” Zita replied. He made his way across the room fiddling with some old framed pictures on the bookshelf, before proceeding to join her in staring out the window. He stood there for some time, as he secretly enjoyed the calm, somber ambience the deluge offered.

“How’d you sleep?”

“Pretty good, considering. I actually didn’t think I’d be able to.”

There was once again a short interval of silence, until Zita knew she had to break it.

“Derek, I – I just wanted to say thank you for...everything.”

After a pause, he let out a long sigh. “Please don’t go turning sentimental on me.” He said, smiling.

“Besides, I’m pretty sure these things should go without saying now, after all this time together.”

She was staring at him,

“Yeah. Yeah, I guess you’re right. It really *has* been a long time, hasn’t it?”

“It was my pleasure, really. No matter how today goes, I just want to let *you* know that I would have done it all over again in a heartbeat.”

She smiles back at him.

At that moment, Derek’s phone rang, and as he opens it, his smile disappears, reverting back to his usual stoic nature.

“It’s almost time. Everyone’s already getting into position.”

Zita goes back to staring out the window. It had stopped raining, the deluge being a short-lived hoax, and the dark clouds slowly beginning to gain color.

“Are you ready?” Derek asked, looking at her.

“Hmm. Tell them to have the troops be on standby, and wait for the order to mobilize.”

She had gotten up, and made her way across the room to grab her jacket placed against the armrest of the desk chair. She told Derek to wait for her outside, and took some minutes to get dressed in something inconspicuous.

As she came through the main entrance, the car engine was already humming, with Derek at a distance, holding the rear passenger door open.

“The convoy will take you directly to the safe house where the unit commanders are waiting for you,” Derek said, “I hope you still remember the plan.”

“We’ve spent the past couple of years planning this. Kind of hard to forget on the day the show’s meant to kick off.” She said.

“Alright then. Let’s move.” Derek said as he walked over to the other side of the rear passenger seat, Zita having already gotten in.

As he opened the door to get in, he paused for a moment.

“What? What is it?” She asked, wondering what the delay was for.

“Look,” Derek said, gesturing towards the horizon behind them, “The sun’s come out.”

11:28 AM.

“Will that be all Ma’am?” the waiter asked, as he set the cup of hot coffee down on the table.

“Yes, that’ll be all. Thank you.” Sarah replied, looking up from her laptop only for a brief moment to politely smile at the waiter.

She was at her favorite coffee shop, as was her ritual on the mornings where she chose not to show up to work early. It didn’t really matter because, even when here, she was always on her laptop working anyways. If not on something for the news station, then on some freelance work that came her way. She also wasn’t the one reading the headlines today, so Mr. Johnson would forgive her truancy, as he usually did. He did this not out of understanding, of course, but out of the comfort and leeway that years of working together afforded. After almost ten years at the station, their professional relationship had grown beyond the workplace, into an almost father-daughter-like bond; with both the pros and cons that come with that accordingly.

Currently, she was working on a historical think-piece tracing back the notable series of events that brought about the political system in which their society now operates. ‘The old tomorrow’ she had chosen to title it; a write-up centering on how the British Empire has been able to continue existing as long as it has, and foster a somewhat peaceful society housing both natives and Englishmen alike, within its still existing African colonies, in this particular case, Nigeria. The peace being somewhat, because there *have* been riots and demonstrations happening here and there, mostly minor ones though. A handful of insurgent groups of native men crying out for conversations about an independent nation to be had.

It’s not like the ruling government was evil or anything. And quite frankly, the economy was doing better than ever. It was just one of those things that not everyone saw eye to eye on. Despite Sarah’s line of work, she didn’t like to voice her opinion on such matters anyways, all the better to keep her from writing something that came off as biased towards a particular narrative.

While writing this piece, she did, however, realize that in her history research, she couldn’t help but notice gaps in the recorded chronology of events. Major events that had to occur for certain systems to currently be active were...missing, or just recorded as vaguely as possible. For some reason, she suddenly began to think about the riots and insurgencies. “An independent nation...hmm...” she muttered quietly to herself.

Breaking her train of thought, her phone starts buzzing. She sees that it’s Iyke calling her and she picks it up.

“At the coffee shop again, I’m assuming?”

“Hmmhm. Want me to pick you up a bagel?” she replies.

“Nah, I already ate. What I *do* want, is to know why Johnson hasn’t chosen to tell HR to get your severance package ready for you.”

“We all know he’d miss me too much. I’d be back in a week.” She said, in between sips of her coffee.

“Ha-ha,” Iyke laughed sarcastically, “You’ll be shocked one of these days, when you come in and he smiles and greets you like it’s a normal day. And as you make your way to your desk, you’ll see one those interns sitting there, all your stuff packed neatly in a brown box to the side.”

She let out a light chuckle, almost spilling her coffee.

“Well, I’ll have you know that I’d be dragging you along with me on my way out.”

“And you really think I wouldn’t scream, letting people know I’m being taken against my will?”

“Did you just say ‘scream’? As a man, do you actually have any shame at all?” she said, still laughing.

“Nope. I stopped worrying about such trivial things a long time ago.” He said, now also laughing.

“What are you working on?” he continued.

“Well, it’s a think piece I’ve had on my plate for a couple of weeks now. I thought I should take out some free time today to —”

BOOM!

“...”

“Hello? Sarah? Sarah, hello? Sarah, what happened?!”

The sound of Iyke’s voice on the phone had now faded into the background, swallowed up by the deep, ringing tone playing in Sarah’s ears.

The entire world seemed to suddenly angle diagonally. She was disoriented, and the mass of people moving hurriedly in all directions, forcefully pushing her out of their path, wasn’t exactly helping her get her bearings.

She managed to pick herself up, and began to slowly make her way to her phone, Iyke still on the line, now yelling almost to the point of exhaustion.

“Iy-Iyke? Iyke, I-I’m fine. I think...I think a bomb just went off.” She managed to speak. Iyke was saying something, but he was speaking so hurriedly now, and her head was still ringing so much, she couldn’t really focus on a word he was saying.

“Look, I’ll try to meet you at the news station, ok?” she gasped for air, as she let out a dry cough.

“Tell Johnson to lock the doors, I’ll...call you soon as I get there.”

“Ok. Ok, just try to get here as quickly as you can, ok? And please, be careful.” Iyke said over the phone.

“Alright.” She said as she cut the phone.

1:14 PM.

‘Tap, tap, tap, tap...’ was the sound Zita’s boots made against the floor, as she paced anxiously across the room. She had finally done it. After spending nearly the past six years gathering intel, planning, and recruiting men for the cause, she had finally made her move. Twenty different units, had planted bombs at various locations across the city. All detonated simultaneously, to create as much chaos in an instance, as possible. The plan was to allow the confusion fester for a while. With the armed forces and first response medical teams spread thin across the city, and all the administrative staff in the senate building running about their offices like headless chickens, everyone would be too distracted to realize that their objective was to storm the senate building.

Being an amalgam of various individual insurgent groups scattered across the country, each of which no one really saw as a major threat, there was no way for law enforcement agencies to imagine that someone could manage to bring all these groups together. Ergo, there was nothing to even look into until now. She, herself, was a ghost, making sure to be as discreet as possible in her planning and exhibition. Not even the troops knew who she was. Only the leaders of each group reported directly to Derek and her. It was meticulous.

But what made her anxious now, as everyone rendezvoused at their various positions near the senate estate, wasn’t the weight of what she had now done. No. It was the thoughts of her father, and what he would say if he was here. When he was still alive, he had fought the good fight. Being a politician, and a popular one at that, his words and actions carried a certain weight that no regular civilian, or insurgent could ever. He had established his own party, moving his campaign from state to state, helping struggling communities he found along the way the best he could. He was trying to make change. He wasn’t even vying for national independence like the extremist groups were. All he wanted was equal opportunities among all social classes in Nigeria.

He was a good man, an honest man. And how was he repaid for his good deeds? Killed by his own party members. Of course, they would never admit that. The whole thing was covered up. She was aware that his righteous crusade was causing a stir, riling up the nationalists. What she never imagined was that the higher ups somewhere, were getting concerned as well. Worried about just how far the repercussions of his mission would go. None of them would admit it. Nobody, not a single one. But, she knew.

Thinking about all of it now, realizing why she decided to do all this in the first place, her mind had grown calmer. The troops were getting ready to storm the senate building soon. She too had to prepare herself.

2:03 PM.

“Hurry. Hurry, get in.” Iyke shouted through the bolstered doors as he led Sarah inside the news station.

“Jim, go get her some water, please, quickly.” He led her up the stairs, to an office chair in the conference room, where Mr. Johnson and some others were holed up, peeking through the windows to watch the chaos ensuing on the streets.

“Is that Sarah?” Mr. Johnson asked with an air of elation and relief.

“Sorry I’m so late today sir. Hope you’re not going to dock my pay.” She tried to smile, even though she was exhausted from trying to make her way here. Her eyes were only half open, and watering from all the smoke she had to walk through.

“I’m glad you didn’t get hurt.” Johnson responded, making no effort to smile back, but placing a hand on her shoulder to show his comment was heartfelt.

“Does anyone know what the heck is going on?” Sarah asked, looking around the room.

“They’re saying it’s a terrorist attack. But no one’s come out to make a statement yet.”

“So the entire city’s on fire, and we still don’t even know who’s responsible?” She retorted sharply, almost in anger.

Mr. Johnson shook his head to signify replying her “No.”

There was a silence around the room now. Everyone was lost and confused, unsure of the next step to take.

“I’ve already called Mary to lock and bolster the doors, and stay inside with the kids. Everyone has also called their loved ones to make sure they’re safe, and to do the same.” Mr. Johnson said. “We have enough water and food in the pantry and the kitchen to last us a few days. We might as well hole up in here for a while, at least until we hear some news. Rather we stay in here, than face what’s going on out there.”

“I-I guess that makes sense.” Iyke said to break the short silence that came after Johnson had spoken.

“Good,” Mr. Johnson replied after a sigh, “now, Iyke?”

“Yes sir?”

“Go start up the cameras, we’re going to broadcast.”

“But...there’s no news.” Iyke replied.

“I know. It’s just a goodwill message to help lift people’s spirits, and a caution to stay in their homes.”

“Oh...Ok then, I’ll get to it.” Iyke said as he made his way out of the conference room, to the broadcasting room.

“Alright then. Sarah, can you stand now?” Johnson asked.

“Yeah, I think I’m better.” She replied, now calm.

“Good...you’re up on set.”

Thursday, October 1, 2036. 1:37 AM.

Nearly half a day had passed now. They were all wrapped in blankets sitting on office chairs and tables, waiting for some news. The TV’s were kept on for this purpose, the noise of empty static filling up the whole station. Not that it bothered anyone. Everybody was too scared to get any sleep anyways. And then suddenly a message appeared on all the screens: “Emergency broadcast from the senate”.

“Good morning, my fellow Nigerians...” It was a black woman speaking on the screen, a group of five armed men standing behind her, expressionless.

She continued, “My name is Chizitaram Ndibe, daughter of the late honorable Charles Effiong Ndibe. I am here to address you all on behalf of we, the *New Age Nationalist Freedom Coalition*. We are the ones responsible for the series of bombings across the capital city earlier yesterday. We would also like to share that over the course of the last few hours, we stormed and took control of the Senate villa, with the prime minister and the members of his cabinet being held as our hostages. We are here to tell you that, we are not terrorists! We are not your enemies! We are nationalists, and we are here to take back the freedom and autonomy which should have been given to us all long ago. In the hours to come, we shall proceed to policy making, and will dispatch an ambassador to handle all diplomatic relations. Thank you all...and happy Independence Day.”