

Omo Omo Alhaji

Before your father became prophet Idris Jonah Akindele, he was an omo Alhaji. Your grandfather never disowned him so he did not really stop being an omo Alhaji. But your grandfather did not *not* disown him. “Mummy, why did Laide cover her head like she’s muslim?” you asked your mom when you both returned from the owambe where you met your cousin in person for the first time. “Ah, because your father’s people are muslims now, I have told you their story before.” She poured the jollof rice from the black nylon into a fanice container. One of the caterers at the owambe, a church member, gave your mother a generous portion to take away. Plenty of jollof rice but only one beef because she said a different caterer was in charge of protein. You watched as your mother pressed the lid of the fanice container that had seen more soups and stew than vanilla ice cream. If that container returned to this world, it would avoid your mother. She emptied the remaining jollof rice into a white coupe plate. It was some minutes past 6p.m. “Prophet Jonah will break his fast with this one, I’m too tired to cook,” she said as she handed you the fanice container. It was up to you to find a deserving home for it in the overflowing refrigerator.

“You don’t remember the story of your grandpa and their bad family tradition?” she asked again with that look on her face that told you she knew you remembered. The tradition wasn’t necessarily bad in your opinion. Fathers in your father’s family were obligated to send all their sons on their first Hajj, even if they had to borrow money. As for the daughters, they believed it was the responsibility of their husbands to send them to Mecca. If they got married to men who could not afford the holy trip, then the daughters could still get the reward of Hajj just by being good to their parents. When your father became a Christian in his first year of National Diploma at Federal Polytechnic, Ado Ekiti, your grandfather

stopped talking to him. Before he died, he sent your father's younger brother, Laide's father, to Mecca twice.

It took a while, but you eventually found a spot for the fanice container next to the bowl of egusi soup that had been there for over one month. Your mother never wasted food. If she found that the egusi soup was no longer fit for consumption, she would mix it with chicken feed. You returned to the living room to see if she still needed you to do anything for her. She had untied her gèlè and was running her fingers through the mark it left on her forehead. She was scrolling through her Facebook timeline and reading out the caption on one of the pictures. That was a good time to go to your room before she started telling you parts of the story you never believed—like how God called your father.

The good thing about being an only child is that you always have a room to yourself. But, it also meant your room housed any extra box and ghana-must-go. You scanned through the room and counted the extra luggages. Five leather boxes and six ghana-must-go. All that was yours was one box and one ghana-must-go. The box was open on your bed as you had started packing all you would need for your resumption at the University of Ibadan. You could hear your father's voice in the living room. He was back from the mountain where he went for prayers whenever he fasted. You could hear him asking your mother about the owambe and for food.

You were not sure God called your father or that he even truly saw visions. He was a good man, but he probably did not hear God's voice clearly. You did not think surviving an okada accident three times within six months was a reason to completely change his religion and conclude that God wanted him to become a prophet. Couldn't it have been a sign that God wanted him to make so much money so he would never have to use an

okada in his life? When your father tells the story of how God called him, he doesn't fail to equate it with the story of Jonah fleeing when God sent him to the people of Nineveh. It was probably why he changed his middle name from Jamiu to Jonah. When the time was right, you would change your first name from Amos to Akanbi. You detested English names, whether they were biblical or not.

Your father's call and vision may not be valued in his own home by his own son, but his church members did not joke with his visions. During the last gubernatorial election of your state, your father announced he had seen a vision as soon as the three major candidates' posters started littering every wall. God had shown him that the winner would be the candidate who was bald, well above 50 years, held a past position in government, had only one wife and was from one of the local governments that had not produced a governor in years. Engr. Olufemi Ashimolowo from Owo who became the governor of Ondo State perfectly matched the description. The Sunday after the winner was announced, several local politicians attended their first service at God Commodores International Ministry. You wondered if none of them saw how any of the other two candidates could have conveniently been the subject of your father's vision.

The only person who doubted your father's call as much as you did was Bamise. That was why you became friends in the first place. That, and the fact that you were both only children of your parents. Bamise's father had traveled on a visitor's visa to London when he was barely 3 months old. He once told you his mother's only prayer point was that his father's visitor visa would not expire till he could take them to London. You both knew Bamise's father was never coming back. Bamise was the only person you would miss in Akure, besides your mother. After service on Sundays, you both spent hours dissecting your father's visions and laughing about the logic. That Sunday was not an exception. You had tried to convince him to

apply to University of Ibadan, but he insisted on going to Federal University of Technology Akure because he wanted to be close to his mother. That was one of the things you did not have in common. You wanted to be as far away from home and the church as much as possible. Ibadan was about three hours from Akure by bus, but it was better than studying at Adekunle Ajasin University. When you were filling your JAMB form, you told your mother you would pick University of Jos as your first choice and she started panicking. It was too far. For as long as you could remember, you had wanted to attend UI, but if she knew that was your first choice, she would want you attending somewhere closer like Adekunle Ajasin University or Ekiti State University. The best way was to make her think UI was the compromise.

Your mother was the only one who followed you to Iléshà garage when you travelled on Monday. It took a lot of convincing for her to drop the idea of travelling with you to Ibadan. Even though it was your first solo trip outside Akure, the several years of being forced to accompany her to Chinese village to restock her shop had equipped you with the perfect starter pack to survive on those unfit-for-human-and-animals-buses. The perfect seat was always the one next to the driver, but this bus was going to take two passengers in the front seat. You could see the àpótí beside the front seat. The next best seat was anyone near the window on any row except the last row. Never sit on the last row because as soon as the driver fuelled the car, those at the back seats were in trouble. Not to talk of the extra load that would sometimes push at their feet. They would be lucky if blood still flowed to their feet when they arrived at their destination. You looked round the bus and saw that one of the window seats two rows behind the driver was empty. You found your way there as you continued to watch your mother haggle over the price you would pay for your box and one ghana-must-go.

“Báwò ló she ma travel tí kò ní gbé erù, e dè bèrù olórun,” your mother yelled at the agbèrò. He was insisting on 1,000 naira for your luggage but your mother was not ready to pay more than 200 naira. That was how she haggled, divide the initial price by two and then divide it by another invisible number. The man was adamant. “E wò, e so fún omo yín kó bó lè tí e bà lé san 500 naira o.” She eventually settled the man with 400 naira, with torn pieces of notes. The look on the man’s face was one of frustration, but he knew better than to ask her for better naira notes. All through her negotiation, she was constantly glancing at her wristwatch. You knew she had to be in church for Monday prayers, but she also wanted to wait till you left the park. You promised to call her as soon as the bus moved. After a really lengthy prayer asking God to take charge of the wheels, and the driver, and the road, and the passengers and other road users, and the weather, she eventually left. One would think it was her presence holding passengers back because less than twenty minutes later, the bus had just one more passenger to go.

“Ibadan, Ibadan, Ibadan” the agbero had increased his tempo. You were tired of saying no to all the vendors that would not let you rest. Bread, gala, yoghurt, coke, malt, earpiece, jewellery, power bank, sex enhancement drugs and one was even selling phones. “Mi ò ra coke se,” you told the woman who would not stop calling you “my colour” and reminding you how long your journey would be. The only empty seat was the one next to you, and you silently hoped it would not be one of those women that bought and ate everything on the bus. The universe was on your side as the last passenger was a girl, one that looked like she was about your age.

You would later get to know her name was Ubaydah and she was also heading to the University of Ibadan to study Communication and Language Arts. The first thing you noticed when she got on the bus was how her perfume wafted through the bus. She smiled with her eyes when

you offered to give up your seat so she could sit closer to the window. The lady that was negotiating her luggage fee looked too young to be her mother, probably a sister or an aunt. You were never one to like someone at first sight but hers was different. Maybe it was her perfume. Would her parents allow her to marry a Christian, let alone the child of a prophet? You decided that when the time came, because you knew it would, the first thing her family would know was that you were the grandchild of an Alhaji. You would make sure her family knew your father converted, and so would you.

“Why psychology?” she asked you after she settled into the seat you gave up for her. The bus had started moving and one of the women in matching aso ébí sitting on the last row had started the customary safe-journey prayers. If your mother had been on the bus, no one would have beat her to it. Should you tell Ubaydah you were studying psychology because you did not meet the cut-off mark for Law? No. The prayer took longer than expected, and when the woman was done you already had a perfect answer to Ubaydah’s question. You told her you chose to study psychology so you could become a counsellor because you felt a lot of those who came to your father for prayers needed counselling instead of prayers. She thought that was a really thoughtful reason to choose the course.

The rest of the journey up until you got to Ile-Ife was about getting to know her more. She was 19 years old, two years older than you were. Your mother was five years older than your father, so it was probably the destiny of men in your family to marry older women. She wanted to become a journalist so she could report on climate change issues in Nigeria and make it really easy for locals to understand. She also had plans for a waste-to-wealth business. If your counselling business went well, you would definitely be investing in it. When the bus got to Ile-Ife, the driver stopped because most people on the bus, including you, wanted to buy akara and

bread. Every time you followed your mother to Chinese Village in Lagos to restock her shop, akara from Ile-Ife was the best part of the journey. It was why you refused to eat some of that leftover jollof rice without meat from the owambe when your mother offered you that morning. You bought enough for you and Ubaydah. That should signal to her you were capable of taking care of her. She said she was trying the akara for the first time, and you wanted to tell her you were prepared to give her many more firsts. Several people, mostly men, had stopped to urinate on the roadside and Ubaydah was irritated because she said it was not good for the environment. You had more questions to ask her, but more importantly you wanted her to know that your family was originally muslim. You gave her time to finish her akara and bread. Maybe you should not have given her time.

Or maybe the bus should not have stopped for you to buy akara. Maybe then it would have gone farther than the trailer carrying those iron rods before the trailer lost control. If your mother had been on the bus, she would have been shouting as soon as your bus driver got in front of the trailer.

Or maybe you should have worn a white shirt instead of a black one.

One of your father's visions you spent time dissecting with Bamise on Sunday was of someone in a black shirt dying in a bus accident. But was it you or the bus driver or the man who sat on the àpótí next to the driver that your father saw in that vision?