

SHADOWS IN THE PENINSULA

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Bakassi Peninsula, Somewhere in the Gulf of Guinea

22:15 hours

The vertical girth of the black mountain graciously sitting at the edge of the black river concealed the faint beam of light from the two-day-old moon crescent, and cast a thick shadow on the edge of the river. It was so dark that one could feel its thickness on the skin.

Tena was standing there.

Stealth on the smooth-curvy toe of the mountain, she noticed a faint outline of a boat as it appeared with a gentle sail from the river. Then, a silhouette.

She was ready. The silhouette bridged the gap as it made its way towards her. "Stop", Tena ordered with a sharp but fierce voice, and abruptly brought the silhouette to a halt, "that's close enough".

The silhouette stood in silence for a minute more and said: "The moon crescent shines bright".

"Only when the stars concede".

Tena stretched both hands to accept the package wrapped in a small envelope. The silhouette removed her hood and took a deep breath. So deep, that Tena could hear and almost feel what she could not understand as either exhilaration, anticipation, or sheer release of tension.

They still could not see each other. Just outlines. Silhouettes. Not even the colour of their clothes let alone the faces. It was neither a rule, nor a law, but merely what Tena established to ensure successful espionage in the peninsula. Tena was almost turning, and...

"It's an honor", said the silhouette. Tena froze. "You are becoming a legend in '*the yard*', you know? Fifteen straight kills in six months. Impressive, as Colonel would say", she chuckled.

Tena grimaced with a devilish grunt.

"And no one ever spoke about your beauty". Tena was a tall, busty, and leggy twenty-five-year-old spy of Operation Bakassi sent to further instill confusion within and among the insurgency groups here. "Itahan is my name", the silhouette added.

And that was it. Tena walked close to the Silhouette: "You know it's against the code to mention your name to me".

With a gentle grunt, "I know. But no one is listening".

Serenity overtook the ambiance. Tena knew what to do to this rookie, and she would not hesitate. Itohan implied the control room, and not here. Of course, no one was here. But definitely, the Colonel and the control team were. "*Such a pity*", Tena mumbled under her breath, "*what a waste!*".

"Wait. Is anyone listening to this..."

Tena grabbed her neck, in a ridiculously swift move. She turned her body sideways and thudded her frame on the ground. She blocked Itohan's nostrils with her right palm as she held her neck tight with her left. Now on the cold soil of the shore, a frothy white substance began to seep from her mouth.

Tena stepped back. She had poisoned her. The duo had moved away from the dark shadow of the mountain. Now close to the edge of the river, Tena could see her choking, fighting for her life.

"Why?", Itohan asked with all the breath she had left. "Why?". Her eyeballs popped.

"You saw my face", Tena said as she removed the night vision glasses from Itohan's face. She sensed it the moment she complimented her beauty.

"I only... I was just". Itohan breathed her last.

The long-distance between the rendezvous point at the black river and Sounka - mainland Bakassi, made it felicitous. But Tena would not always trek the distance. Instead, she walked through the boa snake-invested baobab tree zone. The Baobab trees were well arranged with scattered pathways leading to the very backyard of Kuti - the Pro-Nigerian Militia Leader. The well-landscaped space around his fenceless lair was well-lit with solar streetlights. Tena sashayed out from the plantain plantation at the southwest corner. To her dismay, there was a parade.

An execution was about to take place.

"*What the dickens is going on?*", Tena mumbled.

By the side of the building, underneath the eave projection of the approach view, was Claw - Tena's very close friend; a twenty-something-year-old homeless Cameroonian, who shone the

shoes of the movers and shakers of Kuti's camp. Tena spotted him and threw a face that simply demanded explanations.

Claw made a gesture, and immediately clamped his palms in a praying manner. Tena smiled and walked towards him underneath the eave: "Another theft?".

"Pilfering is what I would call it". Claw said with a mien of insouciance.

With a grin, Tena replied, "What is the difference?".

"Well, because of the little value of the stolen item".

One would wonder how Claw, a low-life, speaks so well, despite coming from the French-speaking populace. He had schooled himself, he would always say. The stolen item was a piece of expensive jewelry belonging to one of Kuti's playthings. The disappearance of the piece had caused a huge ruckus among folks of the camp in the past days, so when the pilferer was found, Kuti handed down a judgment: *mutilation of the right hand*.

"If it's expensive, it's not of little value".

"You are right on that one though". Claw looked on and saw Eskay - the Camp executioner -, raising a sharp edge machete in the air, "Oh no", he whimpered.

Tena looked away.

When the machete landed, an agonizing scream filled the air with the faint 'ha' and deep 'uhn' of the spectators. Tena looked away not because she felt empathy or dread, or any sense of despair for this place, but because her mind went in quick retrospect to her episode with 'the yard' before her time here.

14 February 2006; Valentine's Day
The Yard, Ikosi Ketu, Lagos, Nigeria
20:35 hours

When the Federal Security Council (FSC) was informed, in a memo, by the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, through the Ministry of Interior, about the signing of the Greentree Agreement with Cameroon, scheduled for execution in about six months from now, they had to put some plans in play. Plans that could instigate war and change the course of history. The Department of Secret Service in a collaborative handshake with the Military Intelligence Unit (MIU) of the Nigerian Defence set up Operation Bakassi, under the command of the only man who had served his country with his soul, blood, and sweat, Colonel Dada Daniels.

"I want the live feed cut off". He said as he entered the control room. All personnel rose swiftly to salute him. His sight, through the transparent wall, caught the frame of a young lady looking ragged and rough in a one-piece gown, sitting quietly in the interrogation room, and he threw a stare for a while. "Keep your seats please".

He removed his highly decorated military jacket and tossed it on the shoulder of his aid. "I want no recordings of this either".

"But Colonel". Lieutenant Major Babs attempted to protest. "The Minister demands the recordings, and according to...".

"I am aware of your concerns. If we want to run a clean and successful operation, we can't afford to always dance to the tunes of these dirty politicians".

The room went silent. He looked at the faces of all in the room.

"No offense". He said faintly and slowly, as though a sudden fear of politicians shrouded him. He rolled his sleeves to the middle of his upper arm, "Cut the live feed, that's an order", and walked to the interrogation room.

The slamming of the door brought the young lady back to reality. Colonel Dada sat directly opposite her and maintained eye contact. "My name is..."

"I know who you are", the young lady, Tena, cut in abruptly. "I was told about this place, and the person that runs it". She paused. "What I wasn't told is the reason I am here". She turned her face away.

"We can cut to the chase then". He dropped a dossier on the desk. "I heard you are well-read. Top of your class in Accounting, professionally majoring in Business Administration and Management for the past two years. What I don't understand is why you decided to ruin your promising life for what's not worth it".

Handcuffed, Tena charged swiftly at Dada like a tiger chasing an antelope, "My father's health is worth more".

"Your father?", Colonel Dada scoffed. "You mean the man that has smoked cigarettes for the pitiful part of his wretched life?".

"Do not speak of my father in that manner".

"And if I do?", Dada said, bending towards Tena, "what will you do?".

Tena relaxed. Her cheeks flushed with tears as she blubbered like a child. All she wanted for her father was good medical care. She had no other choice when the opportunity to make money through drug trafficking presented itself, only to end up in the den of the Drug Enforcement Agency of Nigeria (DEAN). "What do you want from me?", she forced out a sentence.

"A proposal". Colonel Dada said. "A promise of freedom for you and free medical care for your dying father".

Tena, without blinking an eye, said, "What do I need to do?".

22 November 2006
Sounka, Bakassi Peninsula
08:45 hours

Only a few humans had the rare opportunity to enter Kuti's main lounge. Only a few. And only Tena, Eskay, Claw, and two of Kuti's comrades had it. Unless, of course, he had the company of one or two or three of his prostitutes. He would always sit on the wooden sofa whenever his shoes were to be shone. Strange to see a man in his shoes before they are shone. He had trust issues. This place was volatile and vulnerable. They were at war, anyone could die anytime, any day.

Claw was here. Shining shoes.

"Eskay", he called. The puff of his cigar had barely left the dungeon of his gullet.

"Yes, Baba". With his deep, crooked voice.

"Wetin be the update for this early momo".

"We no too get updates for now, Baba. Na after the operation we go come give updates. E be like say antie Oyinbo get serious business updates".

Since Tena made her way to the peninsula and the camp of Kuti, she had been the one keeping eyes on the businesses; drugs, trafficking, prostitution. Things she had to do to keep herself here for the mission. "Good morning sir". She winked at Claw who returned the favor with a smirk.

"Morning Auntie Oyinbo", replied Kuti with a smile. *"Wetin dey sup"*.

"I've got new eggs coming today".

"Good. Good. Good".

"I will ensure to send the best to you as soon as they land, as usual".

This conversation was not about eggs. Actual eggs were not allowed into the camp for a reason best known to God. 'Eggs' was a moniker for 'prostitutes'.

Same Day
Guidna, Bakassi Peninsula
15:05 hours

The last instruction in the package delivered to Tena by Itohan at the black river was two-fold; one concerned Kutu. The other concerned Baraday, the leader of the Biafra Separatist Group. For the past week, she had worked on the plans, and tonight, both plans will culminate in a series of brutal events in line with the mission objective to destabilize the region.

Part of her dangerous mission was playing both sides of the card. Geographically, the Pro-Nigerian Militia and the Biafra Separatist groups appear to be on the same side, they are not, however, politically. The Biafra Separatists in the region had orchestrated attacks against the interests of the Pro Nigerian Militia group in the past.

At the center of the Guidna settlement was a small abandoned cathedral building. Tena had been here several times to meet Baraday in recent times. A man sat at the edge seat of the right column from the front. Tena approached the front area upon sighting the figure.

"The dog leads the park". It was not the voice of Baraday, but the code was damn right.

"Only in the absence of the wolves". The voice was different. Tena knew this immediately as she sat right behind him on the second row. "Where is the Wolf?"

Baraday used the codename 'Wolf' in his transaction with Tena. It has kept both parties and the transaction safe. At least, that was Baraday's belief, but Tena knew his real name.

"Where is the Wolf?", Tena asked again in a high pitch and different tone.

"He is busy with some important issues". Said the man. "I am here in his stead".

"I don't care if he is with the King of Norway or the Queen of Atlantis. If he is not here as agreed, he gets nothing.

Tena's mission tonight was not just to meet Baraday for some low-level disclosure of secret information from Kuti's camp, she had to kill Baraday tonight; That was the second of the instructions in the last package.

"Well", the man began, "there is nothing I can do about that. I am a messenger merely following instructions".

And the man was right.

Tena was numb for a couple of minutes as her lips denied her words. Her mind races across several outcomes and questions start popping up. But at the very end of her silence, an idea came to her mind. Tena stood, held the man's neck from the rear, and slit his throat with a stiletto knife.

She was fast. It was sharp. The cut was not so deep, but the deed was done. She held the man in position for another minute as blood gushed out, and then, it was over. She dropped the branded wristband she had taken from Eskay on the floor. This was enough; the death of Baraday believed to have been from the camp of Kuti, could have started an all-out war. Even when that has not happened, what she just did would prompt catastrophe.

Tena was approaching Kuti's lair when she saw two of his boys throwing Claw out of the entrance pouch. His workbox was scattered on the floor, and she ran towards him.

"Something bad has happened, Tena". Claw said.

Tena made a gesture; she played dumb.

"Oyinbo!", one of the two boys called, "Baba been dey find you. Where you disappear go".

Tena displayed a facade of indifference.

"They tried to kill Kuti". Said Claw.

Tried? Tena mumbled beneath her breath. The plan was for Kuti to be dead by the time she returned from Baraday's meeting.

"The egg you brought for him...". Claw picked up the last of his tools and wiped the dust off his right arm. "Be careful. It's hot in there".

When Tena made it to the lounge, the room went silent. She walked across towards Nma, whom she just brought for Kuti this afternoon.

"Egg wan take my life. Oyinbo where you see am?", Kuti almost screamed his intestines out, *"Where you see am".*

"I am so sorry. You know I only vet and collect"

"E mean say you no do your job well".

Tena's composure changed as she walked towards Nma. "Who sent you?"

Nma remained silent. Tena had given her a mission and she had failed.

"Na the same question we been dey ask am. I don run out of patience sef. Eskay, pluck hin eyes".

"No please". Nma begged. "I will talk".

She will talk?, Tena thought. She will talk.

When Nma tried to speak, she stuttered. It could be due to the trauma or the disappointment of failing her mission. She stammered. And Tena grabbed that opportunity.

Tena held her neck. "Talk, who sent you?", She covered her nostrils with her palm, and she continued to ask the same question. "Who sent you".

Nma fell. A frothy white substance began to seep from her mouth. Tena had poisoned her like she did Itohan.

"This one na suicide mission o", Eskay said. In a way, Tena was okay with this reaction. She was still patting the face of Nma as she lay dead, waiting for what Kuti would say..

A hefty man walked in, panting, *"Baraday's son don delete. Dem see in dedibodi for cathedral building".*

"How that one take concern me", Kuti said angrily. "Abi you no see wetin dey ground?.

For a split second, Tena smiled. The plan is coming to fruition.

"Baba, Baraday think say na we do am. Dem find Eskay wristband for there. Fight dey come, baba".

Without hesitation, *"Gather all dem boys. The time don come".* Kuti said with utter confidence.
