

Temi woke up with a start; her head was banging, and it was dark. She couldn't even let out a proper cry in her pain, only a muffled sound. Was this an effect of the headache? No, she was gagged; it took a while to realise it, but it was all dark because she was blindfolded. She couldn't move either; her wrists were bound behind her back, and from the tension she felt in her shoulders, they'd been tied to her ankles too. She was lying on her stomach with her head turned to the right.

"What the hell is going on? Where am I?" She could barely think straight with the headache, but slowly she became more aware of her surroundings: the floor was concrete, wet, and drenched in her own sweat; there was a musty smell in the air; and it was way too hot for comfort. She wasn't sure at first, but she could hear some movement, shuffling against the floor; there were other people in the room; a muffled whimper; sobbing to her left; and three or four others around her. She didn't move; she just took it all in and tried to gather her thoughts. "What's the last thing you remember? Think, Temi..."

She was walking home after work at the pharmacy. She stepped out at about 8:00 p.m. as usual, got a couple of doughnuts from the nearby Kountry Kitchen, and started on her usual route, the usual fifteen-minute walk home. She crossed the small wooden bridge and turned left into Owolabi Street, and then... nothing beyond that: "Well damn, you got yourself kidnapped; what a way to go". She could have started crying like the other voices she heard, but what good would that do? She started to think, "What could anyone want from a short, twenty-four-year-old, fresh graduate from a middle-class family? Ransom money, human trafficking, ritual killing?" The fact that she wasn't the only one almost ruled out the first: "So I'm either leaving Nigeria for the first time or leaving life altogether."

There was a sudden commotion in the distance, men shouting in Yoruba; she couldn't make it all out, then she heard a man curse not too far from her, "Steven, Wake up! Something is happening. Watch the girls; I'll go and check". Some of the other girls tried making louder sounds, panicking, or trying to signal their possible saviour. She couldn't tell. "Shut your mouths!" Steven was shouting in Yoruba now, threatening the girls to be quiet or he would "break their heads". She tried to focus on the noises outside their room: shouting, banging, some metal clanging, what sounded like a strong gust of wind, and something else. Occasionally there'd be a loud buzzing sound: "I really hope this isn't the day I die. Dad always said he didn't like that my shift ended so late. I really should have listened to him and taken the morning shift".

The commotion had gotten closer to them now. "Jide! Jide, what's going on?" Steven was starting to panic now. "Stay there!" Jide shouted back just before she heard another shout and a loud buzz, then a thud. Jide was shouting now, "You stupid child! I'll kill you." There was that whooshing sound again, what sounded like punches landing, some grunting, "Hyaa... Ugh..." that didn't sound like Jide, then a loud buzz again, a strained grunt, and a thud. "Jide, are you okay?" Steven's voice was shaking now. "Jide, answer me!" She heard him run out now. "Get back!

Ugh!" Another thud. There was silence now, only the muffled sounds of the other girls for a few seconds, then heavy footsteps approached them.

"Hold on, I've got you." Jide wasn't back; only the soft voice she'd heard earlier had come to their rescue. Temi could hear her breathing heavily as she untied the other girls. "Don't leave; help me untie the rest; I'll get you all out". She stayed quiet and patient as the room got a little more lively around her—an occasional sob, a cough, a "thank you" from one of the girls—but nothing that helped her guess who their rescuer was. After what felt like forever, someone was loosening the ropes around her ankles, then her wrists. She was helped up to a sitting position before her gag and blindfold were removed. She squinted when the light from the fluorescence hit her eyes. She gasped and cleaned some drool from her chin before looking up again to see who was talking to her: "Are you okay? Can you walk?" She could make out the costume now, a dark grey, sleeveless top with a high neckline embroidered with a blue and yellow pattern, matching trousers and black and blue sneakers, "Cable", that explained the buzzing sound, Cable could generate large currents of electricity, like an electric eel, she'd heard that is sounded like currents passing through high-voltage cables, hence the hero tag, "thank you...oh my God" she said just before looking around and past the hero who was squatting in front of her, there were six other girls, two were in the corner to her left, tears running down their cheeks, one girl was trying to prop another up who was unconscious, one was looking out the door and the last was standing just behind Cable looking at her.

"Here, let me help you up", Cable was standing up now, and then she wasn't; she'd taken a step backward and was now falling. Temi jumped up and instinctively reached out to grab the wrist of this woman, who was taller than her by about a foot; she was heavy and already pulling her to the ground along with her. The girl who was close by helped, and they lowered Cable to the ground as gently as they could while the girl at the door ran towards them to help. She just now noticed the state Cable was in: cuts and bruises on her arms; some parts of her costume were burned, and the exposed skin was blistered; her blue-tinted goggles were cracked; and she had a busted lip. Their kidnappers had really done a number on her.

One of the girls was crying loudly now. Understandable; their hero suddenly looks like the one in need of rescuing. What next? How do they make it out of this? She was looking around again, barely thinking this time, the panic had started to set in, then she noticed something she hadn't before, black marks on the floor, she blinked a few times to clear the tears that were building up and obscuring her vision, she traced the lines of what looked to be a ritual circle drawn with charcoal, a large seven pointed star touching the circumference of the circle and symbols drawn on the outer parts, ritual sacrifice, the worst of all the fates she'd thought of before, they were so lucky that Cable showed up when she did, she'd saved them mostly, she snapped back to their current situation, Cable is out of action for now, one girl was supporting the other who was still passed out, barely breathing in one corner, two others were having a full on breakdown in another corner, the last two were in front of her looking down at Cable.

They had to get out of here; what if someone comes to finish the ritual? It seems like they were waiting on someone; why else would they have been kept alive all this time? She looked up at the girl who had been watching the door before Cable collapsed and asked "what's your name?", her natural hair was tied up in two buns, she looked about the same height as Cable, dark skin, her slender build was accentuated by her skinny jeans and pink crop top, she could be a model, "I'm Anita" she put her hands on her knees and let out a sigh "and you?", Anita was clearly doing her best to remain calm as she looked at her waiting for an answer, "I'm Temi" they both turned to the light skinned girl in a cream coloured gown who now had Cable's head cradles in her laps, she had a rosary around her neck and was clutching the cross in her right hand, muttering a prayer, her hair was a simple "all back" braid with short attachments, they observed her round face and full lips for a few seconds before she noticed that they were staring, she looked up with wide round eyes, Anita spoke up, keeping her voice calm "your name?", "Grace" her voice was soft and soothing, just that one word and you could tell that she was the only one here who was actually calm, why? Faith and hope? Maybe, but the answer didn't matter now; they needed to move.

Temi found her voice again: "Okay, we can't wait around for the next hero to possibly show up; we're not safe here." She tried not to let her panic show too much; she pushed her chin forward, gesturing to the collapsed girl in the corner, "Anita, please help her with the sleeping beauty while Grace and I take Cable". Anita sighed, smirked, and nodded. The little joke seems to have helped her nerves; she moved towards the two girls and asked for the name of the one who was awake. Temi listened to hear Bolu respond before she turned to the two girls crying in the corner. Hey," one of them was a little startled and looked up at her; she lowered her voice now, "I need you two to get up; we can't stay here; let's get out while we can. What are your names?" Chinwe responded first, and Lara responded mid-sob before asking "Where are we supposed to go?", "I don't know, but anything is better than waiting here like Christmas goats; please get up".

Temi and Grace now had Cable's hands over their necks and were dragging her towards the door, where Anita and Bolu were waiting with the sleeping beauty in the same hold. They stepped out and saw Steven a few steps from the door. "What now?", Lara asked apprehensively behind her. "Follow the trail of corpses, I guess." Anita was sounding calmer now. "They should lead us to where Cable got in." As they moved slowly and cautiously through what seemed like an abandoned warehouse, Temi took mental notes. The walls were not all part of the original structure; some had been put up using planks of wood, iron sheets, and old curtains. She counted the bodies as they walked past them and noticed some of them had white robes on with red fabric tied around their waists and foreheads. The graffiti on one of the curtains made her heart jump: a goat skull painted in black and surrounded by white flames, the crest of the new Esu cult, devil worshipers. They were almost sacrificed to the bloody devil.

She'd heard that some of the more devout members were actually granted the ability to wield the devil's white flames, which explained the whooshing sounds and burns. She thought then that Cable wasn't fully aware of the situation when she rushed to their rescue, but she powered through either way, and who knows how many of these men and women now dead actually wielded the flames? They came to a flight of stairs that took them from the underground space to a smaller room, where they found an open door and three more bodies thrown in different directions around the room. That makes twenty-six now. This young woman, who looks barely older than twenty, fought and killed twenty-six men and women, some with terrifying abilities, to save them.

Sleeping Beauty was finally waking up. They paused for a while for Anita to give her a quick summary of their situation. There was no rush; the exit was just ahead of them, and they were home free. Sharon stood up, finally needing only a little support from Anita, and they all started towards the open door. They stopped short, only a few steps away, when they noticed the tall, muscular man walking towards the door. He was dressed casually in a white t-shirt, blue jeans, and leather slippers. He ducked a little to get through the door and glanced around at the three white-clad corpses before turning his attention to the eight girls in front of him. His eyes lingered on Cable, still showing no signs that she'd wake anytime soon. "Put her down, and all of you get on the floor now." With the last word, there was a spark in his right hand, and then a white-hot fire pointed at them. He was maybe ten metres away from them, and Temi could feel the heat coming from him. She heard Lara and Chinwe start crying and begging behind her as they shuffled to the floor. Anita, Bolu, and Sharon were also starting to kneel and she found herself doing the same when she noticed that Grace had clutched her rosary again and seemed to be praying. "I don't think God would make it in time to save us now, Grace," she thought to herself. Now would be a good time for Cable to wake up.

She was kneeling now and letting Cable lie down in front of her. The man at the door was talking to Grace now: Get down now, or I'll burn you. Last warning." She was about to tell Grace to listen to him when she looked at her and noticed a faint yellow glow in her eyes. "Please, take us to safety", Grace spoke to the man as if she'd known him for years; she didn't waver, just looked him straight in the eyes. Then they heard his voice again, calmer this time, "this way", Temi caught a glimpse of his eyes just before he turned around; the same yellow glow was there too, the white flame was gone, and he was leading them out through the door. Grace kept her eyes on him and called out to the rest of them, "Let's go quickly; I'll hold him for as long as I can". They scrambled to their feet without questioning her and rushed out through the open door and into an open field with tall trees spread out around them at intervals and a small flowing stream to the right side of the bungalow.

The man was leading them towards the stream now, and they followed after some encouragement from Grace, who still held on to her rosary and kept her eyes fixed on him. Temi finally asked what everyone else probably had in mind: "Since when?" She kept her eyes on the man too, as if helping Grace to maintain control while she waited for an answer. "For as long as I

can remember", Grace's voice remained calm as she kept her focus on their guide, "but I've hardly used it since I first discovered it."

Cable stirred and groaned just as the man started plodding across the stream. "It's about time you woke up."