

I am Lumo

August 2015

You can see the two prominent corners of her forehead, excess hair overlaying it. It fascinates you to the point of tingles—this physical trait you believe stands you out the most. You want to touch it, want to feel what it feels like on another body. You glance past the eyelids to the pronounced cheekbones. *This is me.* You almost giggle. And the nose that does not draw attention to itself. Her lips are pursed and chapped by whatever harsh weather that is not harmattan. You understand she does not yet know proper lip care, the kind that goes beyond cheap lip glosses. The eyelids flip open and you are immediately fixed with those small gentle lights that can easily turn cold and hard, her eyes. The suddenness of her full attention shakes you for a split moment and you do not know what to say. But say something you must or...

“Good afternoon.” You should not believe the greeting is for you, the way she glances away right at the end of the last syllable, a gesture that can easily be read as “I do not need your reply or whatever you want to say after that” but which you instinctively know did not mean that. And there is no other person in the hearing distant, so

“Good afternoon, dear,” you respond. “What’s your name?” You smile at her.

“I’m Precious.” She does not smile. She frowns instead. This girl. But that cannot turn you away now.

“I’m...Lumo.” For that is a name she does not know now. “And you are beautiful.” For she is, and you know she needs to know. And now she is smiling.

“Thank you. You are beautiful, too.” And in that sincere reception of a honest compliment, she throws her hands forwards, revealing the cover of a book.

Oh books! The fastest and easiest way to reach her. You almost do not believe your luck. “Is that Dale Carnegie’s *How to Win Friends and Influence People?*” The flicker of excitement in her eyes cannot be missed when she says yes.

“Oh, that’s great. I read it a few years back. It’s impressive to find someone your age—I suppose you are fourteen...thirteen—reading something like this.” You know better than be accurate about her age.

“Thank you. I’m fourteen.” A pause. “What do you think about the book?”

This is your invitation to sit with yourself of fifteen years ago, and from here you can steer the conversation where you hope to. And by God’s help make life better for her, for you.

“Well,” you begin, spreading a handkerchief on a part of the halved tree log that serve as benches all over this side of St Leo’s Parish, Trans Ekulu. You sit and bunch your knees up since you are wearing a skirt. “I gifted it to a very good friend. And I intend to gift it to more people. Although not everyone appreciates a book present.”

“So you think everyone should read this book?” She smiles, and it shows in her eyes.

“Everyone who values human relationships. It is the accelerator of success in any other area of life.”

“A success accelerator? Not hardwork? Not smart work? Not gratitude or giving or sacrifice or prayers or some spiritual principle that controls the universe? I know I’m not a people person myself. Not like I don’t value people, but they are just not my favourite thing to handle.” She shrugs and stares at her hands, slender beautiful fingers. “Books are.”

I was this cool back then? You are amused by her perception, and it tugs at the sides of your lips.

“Tell me, Precious, what do you want to be in future?”

“Well, a neurosurgeon or a cardiologist. I’m inspired by the Carson story. Before now, it was not clear. I thought lawyer, psychologist, there seem to be limited range of things someone like me can be. But I’ll stick to the doctor now.”

You remember the meme about having ambitions to be a lawyer when you are younger and finally ending up an online vendor. You almost laugh.

“A doctor is a great thing to be. But why are you reading this book?”

“My sister brought it home.”

“Curiosity, I see. Just hunting for knowledge. What will you do with all the knowledge you are gathering?”

“They say none of it is ever a waste. I believe they’ll come in handy sometime.”

You know you must correct a perception here. “True. But there’s no way you are remembering everything in that book when you need it. So there has to be some intentional seeking of knowledge. Tell me, when do you think this book would be most helpful? Is it when you are reading to store up the knowledge? Or when you’re reading because you want to apply what it says to get better in your relationships with your family and friends?”

“The second, I believe.”

“Great. Because I am about to explain how your relationships with people can accelerate or impede your success. And I wish for you to apply what you learn. Is wisdom not applied knowledge?

“There were two women in the same church organization. Their family and friends were roughly on the same level financially. Each woman had a daughter in the university. One hard year, the school increased their fees by over two hundred percent. Each woman went around seeking help from family and friends. One received help that grossed slightly over the amount for her daughter’s school fees. The other received what was barely 20% of the tuition amount and stories of how the country was hard.

“You know what made the difference? What each woman said, how she said it, and the quality of her relationship with each person prior to the request. It’s been this way in business, in work relations, in any sphere of human interaction. Never make people your financial strategy though. But know that whether in good times or bad, you’ll fare better with them than without them. And as for whether your relationship with people overrides all other success principles, it doesn’t. It works with them. You need those principles in your relationship with people. So, my dear, don’t take whatever you read in that book for granted. Don’t rush it. Take your time, as long as it takes you to master what you read.”

She looks at the book in her hand. A look like it has morphed into something intriguing before her eyes. You nod to yourself. *One point out of three made.*

“But people cannot be my financial strategy,” she says. It is obviously the easiest thing for her to echo.

“Sure. So we should always be proactive. You know, the world is fast changing. Speedy technological advancement. People who think every new thing is a trend that will faze out will always be left behind.” You stare ahead of you, ruing the things that have changed between her time and yours. “But you are a seeker of knowledge. You will be fine.” You turn to her and smile.

Instantly and happening in a way you cannot comprehend, you begin to feel panic. Panic that you need to instil these things into her deeper than whatever storms she’ll face can uproot. As much depth as can be found in a fourteen-year-old. Panic that you do not have much time left with her.

“There’s another book I think you might love to read. *The Richest Man in Babylon*.”

She throws you a look, and you laugh. “Oh, I suppose a doctor has nothing to do with being the richest man in Babylon or Nigeria. But it is just to help your money sense. To make sure you don’t have unnecessary financial worries that will distract you from pursuing your passion. It talks about savings and investment. By the way, do you have a savings?”

“I’m just in SS2,” she says in bewilderment. But seeing your unyielding gaze, she explains, “I save now and then for one thing or the other.”

“Cool. *The Richest Man in Babylon* will teach you a lot. You might not understand all of it now, but you can always go back to it. Try to do so every year or two until you grasp it.”

You glance at your wristwatch. *Time to go*. “It’s been nice talking with you, Precious. You got a journal, right? Swift documentation will help you recall.” You get up and begin to make your way out. She follows.

“Thank you so very much, Ms Lumo.” Her face beams with smiles. “Can I get your contact, please? Phone, email, Facebook handle?” She is gesturing widely in delight.

You return her smile. “We’ll meet again, Precious. We’ll see in the future.” You disappear towards the chapel.

She will come into the chapel some two minutes later. She will look all around and wonder. But she will not find you.

© Nenyé Okoye, 2023