

The Debt

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Chapter 1: The Invitation

The text came at 10:42 a.m.

"Bro, come through. Bring no one. Your money is ready."

Stephen stared at his phone for a few seconds before replying.

"On my way."

It wasn't like Bright to pay back so soon, let alone with extra, but Stephen wasn't about to question a stroke of luck. His rent was overdue, his mother needed medication, and the weight of the world pressed heavier every day. That \$200,000 was more than money — it was hope.

He ironed his shirt, slipped into dark jeans, and tucked his ID card into his back pocket. He debated telling his mother where he was going but thought better of it. He'd be back before she noticed.

The streets of the city were alive that morning. Hawkers with trays of oranges and bottled water weaved between crawling cars. The sun hung overhead like an unforgiving eye, and sweat clung to Stephen's brow before he even reached the bus stop.

By the time he stood outside Bright's two-story house in Gwagwalada, it was just past noon. The gate was slightly ajar. He pushed it open and stepped inside.

The house was quiet — eerily quiet. He knocked once, then again, harder. Bright answered, smiling.

"My guy. You finally made it."

Stephen noticed the living room was tidy, more than usual. No TV blaring, no cousins lounging about, no smell of cooking. Just Bright, dressed sharply, counting a bundle of notes on the dining table.

Bright handed him the stack.

"Here's your two hundred."

Stephen counted quickly. Perfect. Then Bright handed him another bundle.

"Hold this three hundred for me. I don't trust the banks these days."

Stephen raised an eyebrow.

"That's a lot of trust, Bright."

Bright laughed — but it didn't quite reach his eyes.

"Who else will I trust, if not my own brother?"

Stephen slipped both bundles into his backpack and stood.

"Alright then. I'll keep it safe for you."

He turned toward the door, but something about Bright's expression made him pause. The smile was gone now. In its place was something... unreadable.

"Stay safe, Steve," Bright said

Stephen nodded, and walked out into the blazing afternoon sun.

He never came home.

Six days later, his body was found in a gutter, wrapped in a blanket, stabbed until he was unrecognizable, and burned.

Chapter 2: The Body

The smell hit her before the sight did.

Detective Adaeze Nwosu covered her nose with a handkerchief as she crouched near the gutter. Even after twelve years on the force, she still hadn't grown used to it — the smell of burnt flesh.

The body lay in a shallow ditch behind a row of abandoned shops in Jabi, a different neighborhood from where Stephen lived or where Bright lived. Whoever dumped it here knew the area well: no cameras, no foot traffic, no curious eyes.

Adaeze studied the scene in silence.

The young man's body was wrapped tightly in a faded floral blanket. Parts of it had burned away, revealing charred, blistered skin beneath. But even through the burns, the stab wounds were clear — angry, deep, and plentiful. Someone had hated him enough to stab him over and over before trying to erase him with fire.

"Who found him?" she asked.

An officer stepped forward. "A street sweeper, ma. Around 5 a.m. She thought it was just trash at first, then saw the hand."

Adaeze nodded. "We've confirmed his identity?"

"Yes. Stephen King. Immigration officer. His mother reported him missing four days ago."

Adaeze straightened, scanning the gutter and the dirt path beyond. No blood trail, no signs of a struggle here.

“He didn’t die here,” she murmured. “They killed him somewhere else, wrapped him up, and brought him here to burn. Someone wanted him gone but didn’t want the neighbors to see.”

A faint breeze stirred the ash around the body. Adaeze squatted again, staring at the burns.

“Bring the blanket carefully,” she ordered. “Let’s hope the lab can still get fibers or prints. And check the area for tire tracks — he didn’t walk here.”

Her phone buzzed in her pocket. She answered on the second ring.

“Detective Nwosu.”

“Ma,” came a young officer’s voice. “You told us to check the missing person’s report? His mother says the last person to see him was a man named Bright Okoye. He sent Stephen a text to come collect some money he was owed.”

Adaeze’s brow furrowed. “Has Bright been notified?”

“No, ma. But neighbors at Bright’s house confirm Stephen came there last week. No one saw him leave.”

Adaeze glanced down at the charred figure in the ditch and clenched her jaw.

“No one saw him leave,” she repeated softly.

She stood and turned to her team.

“Bring Bright in.”

Chapter 3: The Interrogation

The interrogation room was cool and smelled faintly of disinfectant. Bright sat at the metal table, arms folded, trying to look calm. But his fingers tapped restlessly against his bicep, and sweat beaded on his forehead despite the air conditioning.

Adaeze entered, dropped a folder on the table, and sat opposite him.

“Bright Okoye,” she began, her tone flat. “Do you know why you’re here?”

He cleared his throat. “Because Stephen is missing. Or... dead now. They said you found him.”

“That’s right. He was found stabbed and burned in a gutter six days after visiting you. Wrapped in a blanket. Does that blanket sound familiar to you, Bright?”

Bright’s eyes flicked upward briefly, then away.

“No,” he said.

Adaeze opened the folder and slid a photo across the table. It showed the floral blanket, half-burnt.

“You sure about that?”

Bright stared at the photo a little too long before shaking his head.

“I don’t know it,” he muttered.

Adaeze leaned forward.

“Tell me again what happened that day.”

Bright clasped his hands in front of him. “Stephen came over around noon. I owed him two hundred grand. I gave it to him. I even gave him an extra three

hundred to hold for me — just to keep safe, you know? He thanked me, put it in his backpack, and left. That's it. I didn't see him again."

Adaeze's eyes narrowed.

"And you're telling me you trusted someone else to keep three hundred thousand dollars for you? Why not the bank?"

Bright shrugged weakly. "Didn't trust the banks. Stephen was like a brother."

Adaeze let silence fill the room for a few moments. Then she asked:

"Where were you that night?"

"At home. Alone."

"No one saw you?"

"No."

Adaeze closed the folder and stood.

"You're free to go — for now. But don't leave town. We'll be seeing each other again."

Bright stood slowly, visibly relieved, but Adaeze caught the way his eyes lingered on the photo of the blanket as he left the room.

She called after him.

“Oh — one more thing. Where’s the money?”

Bright froze in the doorway.

“What money?”

Adaeze tilted her head.

“The five hundred thousand he left with. Was it found on the body? No. Was it deposited anywhere? No. So where is it, Bright?”

He turned back, forced a weak smile, and said,

“I don’t know, detective. I guess the killer took it.”

Adaeze watched him go, her gut telling her two things:

Bright was lying.

And he wasn’t the only one.

Chapter 4: The Missing Money

Adaeze sat at her desk late into the night, staring at the crime scene photos scattered before her.

Stephen’s body.

The blanket.

The gutter.

And the faint outline of tire tracks nearby.

She picked up her phone and dialed her partner, Sergeant Ifeanyi, who was still at the forensics lab.

“Anything yet?” she asked when he answered.

Ifeanyi’s voice was weary but sharp. “Ma, we got something. That blanket? Belongs to Bright’s house. One of his bedroom sets. His neighbor’s maid confirmed seeing it hanging to dry in his backyard just a week ago.”

Adaeze closed her eyes and exhaled.

“Anything on the money?” she asked.

“That’s where it gets strange,” Ifeanyi said. “Stephen’s bank records show no deposits since the day before he died. We’ve also checked his house — no cash, no signs of it. And Bright hasn’t deposited anything either.”

Adaeze frowned. “So where’s half a million naira?”

“Gone,” Ifeanyi said. “If Bright kept it, he’s hiding it well. But... you might want to see this.”

“What is it?”

“We pulled CCTV from a fuel station near Bright’s house, about an hour after Stephen was supposedly seen leaving. A silver Toyota Corolla was parked there, and someone was putting something heavy — like a wrapped body — into the trunk. Plate number was obscured, but we traced the car. Belongs to Bright’s cousin. A man named Chuka Okoye.”

Adaeze sat up straighter.

“Chuka.”

“Yes, ma. Neighbors say he doesn’t live in town, but he comes around sometimes. Quiet type. Works in the markets. No one’s seen him since the night Stephen disappeared.”

Adaeze felt the pieces shifting in her mind.

Bright may have handed over the money and even let Stephen leave alive — but if Chuka was waiting outside, everything after that was still in play.

She stood and grabbed her coat.

“Send me the address,” she said. “If Bright’s cousin thought he could disappear, he thought wrong.”

Two hours later, Adaeze and a small team pulled up to an old market compound on the outskirts of the city. It was past midnight, but a faint light flickered in one of the back rooms.

They moved in quietly.

Inside, the air was thick with smoke and kerosene. A mattress lay on the floor, and in the corner, a man sat hunched over a battered suitcase, counting cash by candlelight.

Chuka Okoye.

He looked up, startled, as Adaeze’s team burst in.

“Police!” she barked. “Don’t move!”

Chuka froze, eyes darting between the suitcase and the door — but he didn’t run.

Adaeze stepped forward and kicked the suitcase shut.

“Where’s the rest of it?” she demanded.

He didn’t answer.

She squatted, lifted the suitcase slightly — bundles of cash spilled out.

Bright’s story was beginning to make sense.

Or rather — his lie was beginning to show.

Adaeze straightened, her voice cold.

“You killed Stephen, didn’t you?”

Chuka smirked faintly, then said,

“Prove it.”

For the first time since the case began, Adaeze felt a spark of anger in her chest.

“Oh, don’t worry,” she said. “I will

Chapter 5: The Neighbourhood’s Secret

The sun was already high when Detective Adaeze returned to Bright’s street. The narrow road buzzed with life — children playing, women selling fruits, and neighbors watching from shaded porches. But when they saw her unmarked car pull up, conversations dropped to whispers, and eyes darted away.

She stepped out, adjusting her badge at her belt, and scanned the houses. Everyone here had been cooperative enough — on the surface. But Adaeze knew when a neighborhood was hiding something. And this one reeked of it.

She approached an old woman sitting on a stool, fanning herself.

“Good morning, mama,” Adaeze greeted.

The woman gave a tight nod.

“You live here?” Adaeze asked gently.

“All my life,” the woman replied.

“I’m investigating what happened to Stephen King. The young man who visited your neighbor Bright last week. You remember?”

The old woman’s eyes flicked toward Bright’s house, then back to Adaeze.

“I remember,” she said.

Adaeze squatted beside her, lowering her voice.

“I think you saw something. Maybe something you didn’t want to get involved in. But this isn’t just a fight over money anymore. A young man is dead. And if the killer isn’t stopped, he could hurt someone else.”

The woman was quiet for a moment, then sighed.

“I didn’t see everything,” she admitted, “but I saw... enough.”

“Tell me.”

“That day, after Stephen went in... maybe thirty, forty minutes later, another car came. Not Bright’s car — a silver one. A man got out. Tall, dark, thin. He didn’t even knock — just walked in like he owned the place.”

“Chuka?” Adaeze asked.

“I don’t know his name,” the woman said. “But I know his kind. Trouble. Always watching from the corner.”

“And then?”

“They argued. Loud. I could hear it through my window. Stephen kept saying, ‘This isn’t part of the deal.’ Then a bang. Like someone fell.”

Adaeze felt her pulse quicken.

“Did you see Stephen leave?”

The woman shook her head.

“No. But later that night, when it was dark, I saw the silver car again. Two men carried something heavy out — wrapped in a blanket. Put it in the trunk and drove off.”

Adaeze stood, thanked the woman, and slipped her a card.

“If you remember anything else, call me,” she said.

Back at the station, Adaeze pieced the timeline together.

Stephen arrived at noon.

Bright handed him the money.

Chuka arrived soon after.

An argument. A struggle.

By nightfall, Stephen's body was in a trunk, on its way to a gutter.

She called Sergeant Ifeanyi.

"Bring Bright back in," she ordered. "Now."

An hour later, Bright sat across from her again — this time with sweat soaking through his shirt.

"You lied to me," Adaeze began.

"I didn't—"

"Your neighbor heard everything. She heard Stephen begging you to stick to the deal. She heard the fight. She saw you and Chuka carrying his body to the car. So stop wasting my time."

Bright slumped in his chair, covering his face with his hands.

"It wasn't supposed to happen like that," he muttered.

"Tell me what happened," Adaeze demanded.

Bright looked up, his eyes wet but defiant.

“I owed him the two hundred. I gave it to him. But when he saw the extra three hundred — he started asking questions. Saying he deserved more. Threatened to tell people where it came from. That’s when Chuka lost it. He... he stabbed him. I didn’t even touch him.”

Adaeze leaned back, studying him.

“You stood there and watched?”

“What was I supposed to do?!” Bright shot back. “He already killed him!”

Adaeze shook her head slowly.

“You could have stopped him. Or at least called for help. But you didn’t. You wrapped him in your blanket and dumped him like trash.”

Bright’s shoulders sagged.

Adaeze stood, signaling to the guards.

“Take him and book him. Accessory to murder.”

As Bright was led away, Adaeze whispered under her breath:

“Stephen deserved better.”

Chapter 6: The Cousin

Chuka sat in the corner of the holding cell, his legs stretched out casually in front of him, as though he owned the place. He barely looked up when Adaeze walked in.

She dismissed the guard and pulled a chair up outside the bars.

“Chuka Okoye,” she began, her voice calm but steely. “We need to talk.”

Chuka smiled faintly. “Already did. Your boys dragged me in, beat me up a little. Said I killed some immigration officer. Not my problem.”

Adaeze studied him for a moment. Then she dropped a thick file on the floor just outside his reach.

“You know what that is?” she asked.

Chuka didn’t answer.

“That’s not just about Stephen King,” she continued. “That’s you. Robbery. Loan sharking. Extortion. Drug running. Your name comes up in half a dozen unsolved assaults in this city. But you were always careful. Always used someone else to do the dirty work. Until now.”

Chuka’s eyes flicked to the file, just for a second.

“Stephen was different,” Adaeze went on. “He wasn’t from your world. He thought he was just collecting money. But he found out what you and Bright were really up to, didn’t he? And he threatened to talk.”

Chuka chuckled dryly. “You think you know everything.”

Adaeze leaned closer.

“I know enough. I know that Bright was laundering dirty money through Stephen — because no one would suspect a young immigration officer with a clean record. But

then Stephen started asking questions. Wanted a bigger cut. Threatened to expose you both. And you couldn't have that."

For the first time, Chuka's smile faltered.

"You stabbed him in Bright's house," Adaeze pressed. "You wrapped him up. You dumped him and burned him. But you made one mistake — you thought nobody saw you. And you thought Bright would keep quiet forever. But he already gave you up."

Chuka's jaw tightened, and his eyes darkened.

Adaeze stood and motioned for the guard to open the cell.

"You're finished," she said simply.

As the door clanged shut behind her, Chuka called out after her.

"You don't know who you're dealing with, madam detective. You think this ends with me? You're wrong. There are bigger men than me in this game. Men you can't touch."

Adaeze paused at the door and turned slightly.

"Then I'll drag them down too," she said. "One by one."

Outside the holding area, Ifeanyi was waiting.

"Well?" he asked.

Adaeze gave a grim smile.

“Bright and Chuka are both going down for murder. But Chuka just gave me something more valuable.”

“What’s that?” Ifeanyi asked.

Adaeze’s eyes narrowed.

“He just told me where to dig next.”

Chapter 7: The Bigger Game

The next morning, Adaeze sat in her office, staring at a single name written on her notepad:

Chief Onwudiwe.

Chuka hadn’t said it outright — but when she pressed him after booking, he’d sneered and muttered, “I only answer to the Chief.”

Ifeanyi leaned against her desk, arms folded.

“You really think he meant Onwudiwe?” he asked.

Adaeze nodded.

“Who else? Chuka and Bright don’t have the kind of power it takes to launder that much money without someone shielding them. And Chief Onwudiwe’s name has come up too many times in dirty whispers. Stephen must have found out where the money really came from.”

Ifeanyi sighed. “That’s dangerous ground, ma. The man has friends everywhere — police, judges, even the press. You come for him without proof, and they’ll bury you before you can blink.”

Adaeze's lips tightened.

"Then we get proof," she said.

Later that day, she and Ifeanyi paid a quiet visit to a low-rise office building downtown — the headquarters of one of Chief Onwudiwe's many "logistics" companies.

The receptionist eyed them nervously when Adaeze flashed her badge.

"We just have a few questions," Adaeze said.

But when she asked about Bright and Chuka, the woman clammed up. Even when pressed, she refused to confirm whether either of them had worked for the company.

On their way out, Ifeanyi muttered, "They're scared."

Adaeze nodded. "Scared of the Chief. Which means we're on the right track."

That evening, Adaeze returned to the evidence room and reviewed everything they'd collected from Bright's house, Chuka's hideout, and Stephen's personal effects.

It was in Stephen's phone that she found the clue.

Buried in his deleted messages was a voice note — a shaky recording Stephen must have made just before he died.

Adaeze put in her earbuds and pressed play.

“...Bright is acting strange... they gave me more money than they said, but now Chuka is here, yelling... they’re talking about Chief... they think I don’t know where the money comes from but I—”

The recording cut off abruptly with a loud bang, followed by muffled shouting and then silence.

Adaeze sat back, staring at the phone in her hand.

Stephen had known. He’d realized the money was tied to the Chief’s empire — and he’d tried to hold that over them, thinking it gave him leverage.

Instead, it got him killed.

The next morning, Adaeze called her team together.

“We’re not just investigating a murder anymore,” she told them. “We’re looking at a criminal network — and Stephen stumbled right into the middle of it. Bright and Chuka are just the bottom. We’re going after the top. Which means,” she added grimly, “we’re going after the Chief.”

Ifeanyi raised an eyebrow.

“You’re sure about this?”

Adaeze slipped Stephen’s phone into an evidence bag and gave a tight nod.

“I’m sure. This isn’t just about Stephen anymore. It’s about everyone he tried to protect — and everyone the Chief thinks he owns.”

She stood and straightened her jacket.

“Let’s go shake the tree. Let’s see what falls out.”

Chapter 8: The Chief

The gates to Chief Onwudiwe's mansion swung open slowly, as though even the metal was reluctant to grant Adaeze entry.

She and Ifeanyi stepped out of the car and were immediately flanked by two armed guards.

"Detective," one said curtly. "The Chief is expecting you."

Adaeze only nodded, her eyes sweeping the sprawling grounds — fountains, marble columns, men in expensive suits watching her every move. The kind of wealth that was built not just on money, but on fear.

Inside, the Chief sat in a vast leather chair behind a gleaming mahogany desk. He wore a spotless white agbada, gold rings on every other finger, and a calm, calculating smile.

"Detective Adaeze," he said smoothly, rising to shake her hand. "What an honor."

Adaeze didn't take his hand.

"Chief," she replied evenly.

He chuckled and gestured for her to sit.

"You're a brave woman, coming here. Most of your colleagues would have just filed their little reports and moved on. But not you. You... you dig."

She sat, locking eyes with him.

“I don’t dig,” she said. “I uncover.”

The Chief leaned back, still smiling.

“So what have you uncovered, my dear? That I give loans? That some young fool couldn’t pay back and got himself into trouble? That I employ cousins and neighbors who don’t always follow the rules?”

“You ordered Stephen King killed,” Adaeze said flatly.

The smile froze on his lips for just a second before returning.

“That’s a very serious accusation,” he murmured.

Adaeze pulled out her phone and pressed play.

Stephen’s panicked voice filled the room.

“...they’re talking about Chief... they think I don’t know where the money comes from but I—”

The recording ended, and the room fell silent.

For the first time, the Chief’s expression hardened.

“That boy didn’t know what he was playing with,” he said quietly.

“And neither do you,” Adaeze shot back.

“You think you can just... arrest me? Walk me out of here in front of my people? Do you know who I am?”

Adaeze stood slowly.

“I know exactly who you are. I also know you’re sloppy when you’re angry. You didn’t just kill a man — you left a trail. Witnesses. Bank records. And now,” she added, holding up Stephen’s phone, “a recording.”

The Chief stood as well, towering over her.

“You won’t make it to court,” he hissed.

Adaeze smiled faintly.

“Then you’d better hope your men are faster than mine.”

She turned to leave, but paused at the door.

“Oh,” she said over her shoulder, “and one more thing — Bright and Chuka are already talking. By tomorrow morning, you’ll be just another file in my evidence room.”

Behind her, the Chief’s knuckles whitened on the edge of the desk.

Outside, Ifeanyi was waiting by the car.

“How did it go?” he asked.

Adaeze slid into her seat, her eyes still blazing.

“He’s scared,” she said. “He knows we have him. But he’s dangerous. We need to move fast before he disappears or silences anyone else.”

Ifeanyi nodded grimly.

“So what’s the next step?”

Adaeze stared out at the mansion’s gates closing behind them.

“The next step,” she said, “is to bring him down. Completely. Not just for Stephen — but for everyone he’s hurt along the way

Chapter 9: The Fall

The plan was simple.

The execution was not.

At exactly 3:00 a.m., three unmarked police vans rolled silently toward Chief Onwudiwe’s mansion. Adaeze sat in the passenger seat of the lead van, her jaw tight, her hands resting on her lap to keep them from clenching.

All night she’d thought about Stephen. About how he’d walked into that house believing he was collecting what he was owed — and never walked out again.

Tonight, she thought, he’ll finally get justice.

Beside her, Ifeanyi checked his radio.

“All units in position,” came the voice of the tactical commander.

Adaeze gave a single nod.

“Go.”

The mansion gates didn't stand a chance. A black armored vehicle rammed through them, and armed officers poured into the courtyard. Lights flashed. Boots pounded. Shouts echoed off marble and stone.

Adaeze moved with them, her weapon drawn, her eyes scanning every corner.

The Chief's men scattered like rats — some surrendering, some trying to flee. But this time, there was nowhere to go.

She found him in his study, standing in his immaculate white agbada, a glass of brandy in his hand as though nothing were happening.

“Detective,” he said, his voice calm, even amused.

“Chief Onwudiwe,” Adaeze replied, stepping forward. “You're under arrest. For the murder of Stephen King, and for conspiracy, money laundering, racketeering—”

“—and anything else you care to invent,” he cut in smoothly.

But Adaeze only smiled coldly.

“No need to invent anything. We have your men. We have your books. We have your voice on a call ordering Stephen's ‘problem’ to be taken care of. And,” she added, holding up her recorder, “we have the courage to finish what we started.”

For the first time, something flickered in his eyes — something that looked a lot like fear.

Guards cuffed his hands behind his back, and Adaeze leaned close enough to whisper.

“You thought you owned this city,” she said. “But men like you never really own anything. Not while there are people like Stephen — and people like me.”

The next morning, the headlines screamed:

CHIEF ONWUDIWE ARRESTED IN MIDNIGHT RAID. UNDERWORLD EMPIRE COLLAPSES.

Bright and Chuka, already in custody, agreed to testify. The neighborhood that had once been afraid began to speak openly. Stephen’s name was cleared, his family given the truth — and the honor he’d been denied.

At the cemetery, Adaeze stood quietly beside Stephen’s grave as a breeze swept through.

“You didn’t deserve what happened to you,” she murmured. “But you made them pay attention. And we made them fall.”

She placed a single white rose on the headstone and stepped back.

Justice wasn’t perfect, she thought. But tonight, it felt like enough.

Epilogue:

Weeks later, as Adaeze packed away the case files, Ifeanyi poked his head into her office.

“You ever sleep?” he teased.

She smiled faintly.

“Sometimes,” she replied.

“You think it’s over?” he asked.

Adaeze glanced at the stack of papers, at the fading headline still tacked to her wall.

“For Stephen?” she said quietly. “Yes. For the rest?”

She closed the file and stood.

“We’ll see

Chapter 10: The Shadow Left Behind

It had been three months since the raid.

Chief Onwudiwe sat in prison awaiting trial. Bright and Chuka were in protective custody, preparing to testify. And the press still buzzed with Adaeze’s name — the detective who toppled a kingpin.

But Adaeze wasn’t celebrating.

Late one evening, her phone rang.

“Adaeze?” came Ifeanyi’s voice.

“Yes,” she answered cautiously.

“We’ve got a problem,” he said grimly.

An hour later, they stood over another body — this time in a quiet park, under a streetlamp that flickered weakly.

The victim was a young woman. Barely out of university. Wrapped in a blanket. Burned.

Adaeze crouched down, her eyes narrowing at the signature she knew too well.

“Same method,” Ifeanyi murmured beside her.

Adaeze nodded slowly, her mind already racing.

“But Onwudiwe is behind bars,” Ifeanyi added. “This... this shouldn’t be happening.”

Adaeze stood and stared into the darkness.

“No,” she said softly. “It shouldn’t. Which means someone else is carrying the torch. Someone we didn’t see.”

The next morning, she pored through her files again — reading every note, every witness statement, every name mentioned in passing.

One name kept surfacing at the edges.

One man who had never been arrested.

Never even questioned.

Dike.

A driver. A fixer. The Chief’s silent shadow. Always present, never in the spotlight.

Her hands tightened around the file.

“How did I miss you?” she muttered.

That afternoon, she visited the prison to see Chief Onwudiwe.

He looked thinner now, but his smile remained infuriatingly calm.

“Detective,” he greeted. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

Adaeze leaned forward across the table.

“Who is Dike?” she demanded.

For the first time, the Chief’s expression faltered — just slightly.

“Ah,” he said finally. “So you’ve met the ghost.”

“Where is he?” she pressed.

The Chief chuckled softly.

“If you find him,” he said, “you’ll wish you hadn’t.”

But Adaeze had made a promise — to Stephen, to herself.

No more ghosts.

She stood, her jaw set.

“I already wished that once,” she said. “It didn’t

Chapter 11: The Ghost

It wasn’t easy to find a man who didn’t want to be found.

For two weeks, Adaeze and Ifeanyi followed every lead — a warehouse in the port district, a safe house in the hills, a name whispered in a bar at midnight.

And every time, Dike was already gone.

One night, after yet another empty stakeout, Ifeanyi rubbed his eyes.

“Maybe he really is a ghost,” he muttered.

Adaeze didn’t answer. She just stared out into the dark city streets.

“No one’s a ghost,” she said finally. “Not really. Everyone leaves footprints. You just have to know where to look.”

That night she went home, not to sleep but to think. She pinned all the known addresses, names, and dates to her wall. Stood back. Looked at the map as if it were a single living thing.

And then she saw it — a pattern.

Dike wasn’t running aimlessly. He was circling. Always moving between the same few neighborhoods, never straying too far from the Chief’s old territory. Like a predator marking his ground.

At the center of that circle was an abandoned factory on the edge of town.

Two nights later, Adaeze and Ifeanyi approached the factory quietly, without backup. Too risky to tip him off — and too dangerous to wait.

Inside, it smelled of oil and dust. Shadows stretched across broken concrete.

And there he was.

Dike.

Leaning casually against a pillar, smoking. As though he'd been waiting for her.

He was tall, with a shaved head and eyes like flint.

"Detective Adaeze," he said, his voice low, almost amused. "You found me. Congratulations."

Adaeze stepped forward, her weapon drawn but steady.

"It's over," she said. "You're done."

Dike flicked his cigarette to the ground and crushed it with his boot.

"You really don't get it, do you?" he murmured. "The Chief? Chuka? Bright? They were nothing. Pieces on a board. You take down pieces — but the board stays the same."

Adaeze tightened her grip on the gun.

“You killed that girl in the park,” she said. “You’re trying to send a message. To me. To the city.”

Dike smiled faintly.

“No,” he said softly. “I’m just keeping the board in order. The Chief may be gone, but his work... his work continues.”

Then — faster than she expected — he lunged.

Adaeze fired.

The sound of the gunshot echoed through the empty factory.

Dike fell hard to the ground, clutching his shoulder, blood pooling beneath him.

But even then, he was still smiling.

“You can’t stop it,” he gasped. “You... can’t... stop... it...”

His eyes closed, and he went still.

Outside, the night was quiet.

Ifeanyi stood by the car, watching her as she emerged.

“Well?” he asked.

Adaeze glanced back at the factory, her jaw set.

“He’s alive,” she said. “But just barely. Call for an ambulance. And put guards on him.”

Ifeanyi nodded, but his eyes narrowed.

“You think he was telling the truth? That someone bigger is still out there?”

Adaeze didn’t answer right away. She stared into the darkness, her hand still trembling faintly from the shot.

“Yes,” she said at last. “And I’m going to find them.”

Chapter 12: The Board

Dike survived the night.

But when Adaeze visited him in the hospital the next morning, he was already gone.

The guards posted outside his room swore they hadn’t seen or heard a thing — yet the bed was empty, the IV ripped out, and the window wide open.

On the sheets, written in faint blood, was a single word:

“Board.”

Adaeze stared at it for a long time.

Back at her office, she pinned the word to her wall, right at the center of her case map.

Bright.

Chuka.

Chief Onwudiwe.

Dike.

And around them... spaces. Blank pieces waiting to be filled.

If Dike had been telling the truth, then everything she'd fought for so far — the Chief's arrest, the crumbling empire — had only removed the obvious players.

The board was still set. The game was still being played.

The breakthrough came from an unlikely place — a dusty ledger found in the Chief's mansion during the raid months earlier.

It had always struck Adaeze as odd that he kept it at all — the Chief wasn't careless.

But now, reading it again with fresh eyes, she saw what she'd missed.

The names listed weren't just payments and debts. They were codenames. Locations. And dates.

At the very bottom, underlined in red:

The Circle.

And next to it:

Next move — August 15.

That was tomorrow.

That night, she met Ifeanyi in a quiet diner to plan.

“You think this ‘Circle’ is what Dike meant by the board?” he asked, lowering his voice.

“I don’t think,” she said. “I know.”

“Then who are they?”

Adaeze tapped the page.

“That’s what we’re going to find out. Tomorrow night. The address here — it’s an abandoned hotel on the outskirts. If they’re meeting, we’ll be there.”

August 15.

The hotel loomed like a skeleton under the moonlight. Its windows were shattered, its doors chained — but faint light glowed through cracks in the boarded-up walls.

Adaeze and Ifeanyi slipped inside.

What they saw froze them in place.

In the center of the grand ballroom was a long table, lit by a single bulb. Around it sat seven figures in suits, their faces masked, their hands resting on black folders.

On the wall behind them, painted in crimson, was a single word:

BOARD.

One of the figures — at the head of the table — raised a hand without turning.

“Detective Adaeze,” he said, his voice calm, commanding. “You’ve been expected.”

Adaeze stepped forward, her heart pounding but her voice steady.

“I’m here to end this,” she said.

The man chuckled.

“No,” he said softly. “You’re here to learn how

Chapter 13: The Circle

The masked man at the head of the table gestured to an empty chair.

“Sit,” he said.

Adaeze didn’t move. Her fingers itched toward her holster, but Ifeanyi caught her eye and gave the slightest shake of his head. Too risky here. Too many of them.

So she sat.

The seven masked figures studied her in silence.

“You’ve been persistent,” the leader said finally. “You dismantled the Chief’s empire. You tracked down his shadow. You even bled to find us.”

Adaeze’s jaw tightened.

“You killed Stephen King,” she said. “You killed that girl in the park. You think wearing masks hides you? You’re all just criminals pretending to be kings.”

Another figure leaned forward slightly.

“And yet you came,” he said, his voice softer. “You came because you know the truth. That this city runs on us. That without the Board, there is only chaos.”

The leader opened the black folder in front of him and turned it toward her.

Inside were photographs. Of police commanders. Judges. Politicians. All smiling, shaking hands with members of the Board.

“All your superiors,” the leader murmured. “All your heroes. Every one of them takes from us. Eats from us. Lives because of us.”

Adaeze stared at the photos, her stomach knotting.

“You think that scares me?” she said finally.

“No,” the leader replied. “We think it tempts you.”

He pushed another folder toward her — thicker, heavier.

Inside: bank statements. Property deeds. Offshore accounts. All in her name.

All empty.

“For now,” the leader said. “Join us. Sit at this table, and you’ll never have to fight the tide again. You can change things — from here. Where the power really is.”

For a moment, the room was silent but for her own heartbeat.

Then Adaeze closed the folder slowly.

She stood.

And she looked each of them in the eye, one by one, even through their masks.

“You think you’ve already won,” she said. “But this? This is just the beginning. I see you now. I know your names — even if you think I don’t. And I’ll burn this whole table to the ground before I let you drag me down with you.”

The leader tilted his head.

“That’s a very dangerous thing to say,” he murmured.

Adaeze smirked faintly.

“Good,” she said. “Be afraid.”

She turned and walked out, Ifeanyi close behind her.

Outside, the night air felt colder. But she breathed it in deeply, her hands steady now.

“You just turned down a fortune,” Ifeanyi said quietly as they reached the car.

Adaeze stared back at the hotel one last time.

“I don’t need their money,” she said. “What I need is enough rope to hang them all.”

Chapter 14: Checkmate

For weeks, Adaeze moved like a shadow herself.

The Board had underestimated her — but she refused to underestimate them.
She stayed out of sight, changed her routines, planted false trails.

And quietly, methodically, she gathered her own pieces.

A forensic accountant.

A tech expert.

A trusted journalist.

And Ifeanyi, of course — always at her side.

One by one, she uncovered the Board's hidden assets, their offshore accounts, their private meetings.

Every masked figure now had a name, a face, a weakness.

It all came to a head one rainy night.

She sat in the back of an unmarked surveillance van, parked a block away from the grand hall where the Board was holding its annual gathering — a masquerade ball for the city's elite.

Inside, her team was already in place — cameras hidden, recorders live, every exit covered.

"You're sure about this?" Ifeanyi asked, adjusting his earpiece.

Adaeze didn't take her eyes off the monitors.

“I’ve never been more sure,” she said.

At exactly midnight, she stepped into the hall herself.

Wearing a simple black dress and no mask, she walked calmly down the marble steps, her heels clicking against the polished floor.

Conversations faltered. Heads turned.

At the far end of the room, the leader of the Board rose from his chair, still masked, still smiling faintly.

“Detective,” he called over the music. “You came back.”

Adaeze stopped in the center of the room.

“No,” she said clearly, her voice cutting through the air. “I came to finish this.”

She pulled a small remote from her pocket and pressed it.

On every screen in the room — the massive projection behind the band, the monitors above the bar, even the guests’ own phones — photos and videos began to play.

The Chief’s voice ordering hits.

The Board members taking bribes.

The murdered girl’s body being wrapped and burned.

Every secret laid bare, in front of their entire audience of allies, puppets, and press.

Gasps filled the room. Some guests began backing toward the exits.

But Adaeze raised her hand.

“Don’t bother,” she said.

At that moment, uniformed officers and plainclothes agents swept in from every door, weapons drawn.

One by one, the Board members were unmasked and handcuffed, their empire collapsing around them.

The leader — still trying to keep his composure — looked at her as they dragged him past.

“This changes nothing,” he hissed.

Adaeze met his gaze coolly.

“It changes everything,” she said.

Later, standing outside in the rain, Adaeze watched as the last of the Board was loaded into vans.

Ifeanyi joined her, offering a faint smile.

“You did it,” he said.

Adaeze didn’t smile back — but her eyes burned with quiet triumph.

“No,” she said. “We did.”

She turned her face to the storm and let it wash over her.

In the distance, sirens wailed.

But for the first time in a long time... she felt at peace

Chapter 15: Retaliation

It started with a phone call in the middle of the night.

Adaeze sat up in bed, the ringing slicing through her dreams.

“Detective,” said Ifeanyi on the other end, his voice tight. “There’s been an attack. Bright’s safehouse — it’s gone.”

Adaeze was already pulling on her jacket before he finished.

When she arrived, the air still smelled of smoke and gasoline. The safehouse, once tucked away in a quiet neighborhood, was reduced to rubble — a blackened skeleton of walls and ash.

Paramedics wheeled Bright toward an ambulance, his face bloodied, his eyes wild with fear.

“They came for me,” he gasped when he saw her. “Three of them. Masks. Guns. They... they said ‘the Board isn’t finished.’ Then they lit the place up...”

Adaeze crouched next to him, her jaw tight.

“You’re alive,” she said firmly. “That’s what matters now. We’ll keep you alive.”

But inside, she felt the chill of the words still echoing:

The Board isn’t finished.

That morning, Adaeze gathered what was left of her team in the precinct.

“This is bigger than we thought,” she told them. “We’ve cut off the head, but the body’s still moving. Someone — or someones

— are trying to rebuild.”

“Could it be Dike?” Ifeanyi asked.

Adaeze shook her head. “Dike’s in a coma. This is someone else.”

She glanced at the map on the wall, her eyes narrowing at the network of pins and strings she’d built.

“There are still players we haven’t identified,” she said. “And they’re making their move now.”

That evening, she returned home to find her apartment door ajar.

Her instincts kicked in instantly — she drew her weapon and edged inside.

The living room was dark and silent.

On the table lay a single envelope, sealed with red wax.

Adaeze opened it carefully. Inside was a card — plain, black — with three words written in gold ink:

YOUR MOVE, DETECTIVE.

Below it, a photograph of her standing at Stephen's grave — taken just days ago — with a target drawn in red over her chest.

Adaeze set the card down, her hands steady despite the knot in her stomach.

If this was their idea of a warning... she thought grimly, then they didn't know her at all.

She reached for her phone and dialed Ifeanyi.

"Gear up," she said when he answered. "We're going hunting."

Chapter 16: The Mole

By the next morning, Adaeze had her team working around the clock.

Every phone call, every email, every unexplained absence among her colleagues — she watched it all.

Because if the Board could still find her, still strike at Bright and send her photographs...

It meant someone close was feeding them information.

She and Ifeanyi reviewed hours of security footage, call logs, and visitor records.

“What if you’re wrong?” Ifeanyi asked quietly as they sat in the surveillance van late at night.

Adaeze didn’t look away from the monitor.

“I’m not wrong,” she said flatly. “We have a leak. And they’re sitting somewhere in this building, watching us hunt ghosts while they keep the real monsters one step ahead.”

The first real clue came during a review of the precinct’s evidence room cameras.

At 3:17 AM — when no one should have been there — a figure in plain clothes slipped inside.

They moved confidently, heading straight for the locker that held the files and USB drives Adaeze had seized during the raid on the masquerade.

Minutes later, the figure left — carrying nothing. But Adaeze noticed: the locker door hadn’t quite latched afterward.

When she zoomed in on the footage and enhanced the frame...

She froze.

It was Officer Obinna.

Her own second-in-command.

The one who always stayed late. The one who always agreed. The one who knew everything.

That evening, Adaeze called a meeting in the squad room, every member present, including Obinna.

She kept her expression calm as she spoke.

“We’ve identified the source of the leak,” she said, her eyes sweeping over the room.
“The one who’s been helping the Board strike back.”

Obinna stood at the back, arms folded.

“Who is it?” he asked, his voice even.

Adaeze’s gaze locked on him.

“You,” she said.

For a split second, he didn’t move.

Then — faster than anyone expected — he bolted for the door

But Adaeze was faster.

Her gun was out and her voice cut through the air:

“Obinna! DON’T MOVE!”

He froze at the threshold, his shoulders stiff.

Slowly, he turned back toward her.

“They promised me everything,” he said quietly. “You’ll never stop them, Adaeze. You can kill every last one and still not touch the heart of it.”

Adaeze stepped closer, her weapon steady.

“Maybe,” she said. “But you? You’re done.”

Obinna lowered his head, finally defeated, as two officers moved to cuff him.

Later, sitting at her desk, Adaeze stared at the evidence Obinna had stolen — and at the note she’d found folded in his pocket.

It was another black card.

This one said only

HE WAS JUST A PAWN. THE KING STILL WAITS

Chapter 17: The Mastermind

The black card sat on Adaeze’s desk like a curse.

"HE WAS JUST A PAWN. THE KING STILL WAITS."

For hours she stared at it, turning it over in her hands, wondering how far this board extended.

She’d thought she was closing in on the heart of it — but the heart kept moving, deeper and deeper into the shadows.

She knew one thing for certain now:

If there really was a King, he wasn’t just powerful.

He was untouchable.

Three days later, a lead finally surfaced — not through evidence, but through Bright.

From his hospital bed, still bandaged from the safehouse attack, Bright whispered her a name.

One he swore he'd only heard once, in a whispered conversation between the Chief and Dike before they fell.

"Igwe."

It wasn't a name so much as a title.

In the old tongue, it meant King.

Adaeze dove into research, scouring everything she could find on the word and who it might refer to.

It kept leading her back to one man — a name that never appeared in any criminal files, yet was known in quiet rumors throughout the city.

Obiora Maduka.

A billionaire businessman.

A philanthropist.

Owner of one of the largest real estate empires in the country.

Untouchable.

That night, she and Ifeanyi parked outside Maduka's mansion on the hill, looking up at its lights glittering against the dark sky.

"You really think it's him?" Ifeanyi asked.

Adaeze nodded grimly.

"I don't think," she said. "I know."

They watched as expensive cars came and went through the gates. Politicians. Celebrities. Police commissioners.

"Look at them," Ifeanyi murmured. "All coming to pay respect."

Adaeze's jaw tightened.

"They think the King can't bleed," she said quietly.

Inside the mansion, Obiora Maduka stood at the head of a long dining table, surrounded by his guests.

He wore a perfect white suit, his smile calm and warm as he raised a glass.

"To our future," he said.

In his breast pocket, tucked just slightly into view, was a black card edged with gold.

And even as he toasted, his eyes flicked toward the window — toward the dark street below — and for the briefest second, Adaeze could have sworn he looked right at her.

Later that night, back at her apartment, Adaeze found another black card slipped under her door.

This one read:

"CHECKMATE IS COMING."

Below it, a time and place:

Midnight. Tomorrow. The docks.

Adaeze stared at the card, her heart pounding but her resolve hardening.

If the King wanted to play one final round...

She was ready.

She picked up her phone, called Ifeanyi, and said just two words:

"Gear up."

Chapter 18: The Trap

The docks were a maze of rusted containers and cracked concrete, shadows pooling like ink under the flickering floodlights.

Adaeze arrived with Ifeanyi just before midnight, their footsteps echoing softly against the silence.

The black card's instructions had been clear — this was where the King wanted to meet.

They moved carefully, weapons ready, scanning every shadow.

Then, from the darkness, figures emerged — masked, but smaller in number than Adaeze had expected.

“Welcome, Detective,” a voice purred from the shadows.

Obiora Maduka stepped forward, his white suit spotless even in the grime of the docks.

“You’re brave to come,” he said, a sly smile curling his lips.

Adaeze didn’t hesitate.

“This ends tonight,” she said.

But Maduka only laughed softly.

“You think you’re here to arrest me?”

Behind her, Ifeanyi whispered urgently, “They’re surrounding us.”

Adaeze’s eyes flicked to the containers — more shadows moving silently into position.

Maduka's smile widened.

"You walked right into my trap."

But Adaeze was ready.

Hidden in her coat was a small device — a signal jammer she'd borrowed from her tech expert.

With a flick, the radios and phones of Maduka's men went dead.

Then, from the shadows, her own team emerged — armed, armored, and ready.

"Surprise," Adaeze said, voice steady.

Maduka's smile faltered — for the first time, a flicker of uncertainty.

A tense standoff followed.

But Adaeze held firm, every step calculated, every command precise.

Slowly, one by one, Maduka's men lowered their weapons.

And when the cuffs finally clicked on Maduka's wrists, Adaeze felt a fierce relief wash over her.

Later, at the precinct, as Maduka was booked and read his rights, Adaeze finally allowed herself a small smile.

"This game is over," she said softly.

Ifeanyi nodded.

“For now,” he replied.

Chapter 19: Redemption

The city felt different.

Not because the streets were safer — they weren’t. Not yet.

But because the shadows were retreating, if only a little.

Bright sat across from Adaeze in a quiet café, his face still marked with bruises but his eyes clearer than they’d been in months.

“I owe you,” he said quietly.

Adaeze shook her head.

“No,” she said firmly. “You paid your part by staying alive. That’s enough.”

Chuka joined them, fresh from the airport, a determined look on his face.

“I’m ready to help,” he said. “To make sure this never happens again.”

Adaeze smiled for the first time in days.

“We’ll need every ally,” she said. “Because the Board wasn’t just a gang. It was a system. And systems don’t die easily.”

Together, they poured over evidence — old files, new intel, names that had escaped their notice before.

With Bright and Chuka's help, Adaeze planned a sweeping operation to root out the last pockets of corruption.

The night before the raid, they gathered once more — a quiet moment before the storm.

"To new beginnings," Bright said, raising his coffee cup.

Adaeze nodded.

"To justice," she replied.

The raid was brutal but swift.

Officers took down key figures, confiscated weapons, and seized stacks of documents that would keep the Board's legacy buried for good.

Later, Adaeze stood once again at Stephen King's grave.

She laid down a small plaque, engraved with a single word:

"Remember."

A promise to keep fighting. To never forget.

And as the sun set behind her, Adaeze finally felt the weight begin to lift

Chapter 20: Justice Served

Months had passed since the Board's fall.

The city was healing, slowly — scars still visible but hope growing.

Adaeze sat at her desk, now promoted and leading a new task force dedicated to rooting out corruption.

The phone rang. It was Bright, voice steady, finally free from fear.

"Detective, they're calling me a hero," he said.

Adaeze smiled softly.

"You are," she replied.

In a courtroom packed with reporters and survivors, the remaining Board members faced justice.

Chuka testified with courage, helping seal their fate.

Adaeze watched quietly, knowing that while the system was imperfect, this was a victory — hard-fought and well-earned.

That evening, she visited Stephen's family.

His mother held her hand tightly, tears shining in her eyes.

“Thank you,” she whispered.

Adaeze nodded, swallowing the lump in her throat.

“No,” she said softly. “Thank you for trusting me.”

As she left, the city lights shimmered beneath the night sky.

Adaeze breathed deeply, feeling the weight of the past years — and the promise of the future.

Justice had been served.

But the fight for truth never truly
End.

About the Author

Roland Ihenyen writes dark, atmospheric stories about flawed people facing impossible choices. When not writing, he can usually be found haunting quiet coffee shops, watching late-night crime films, or wandering neon-lit city streets for inspiration.

