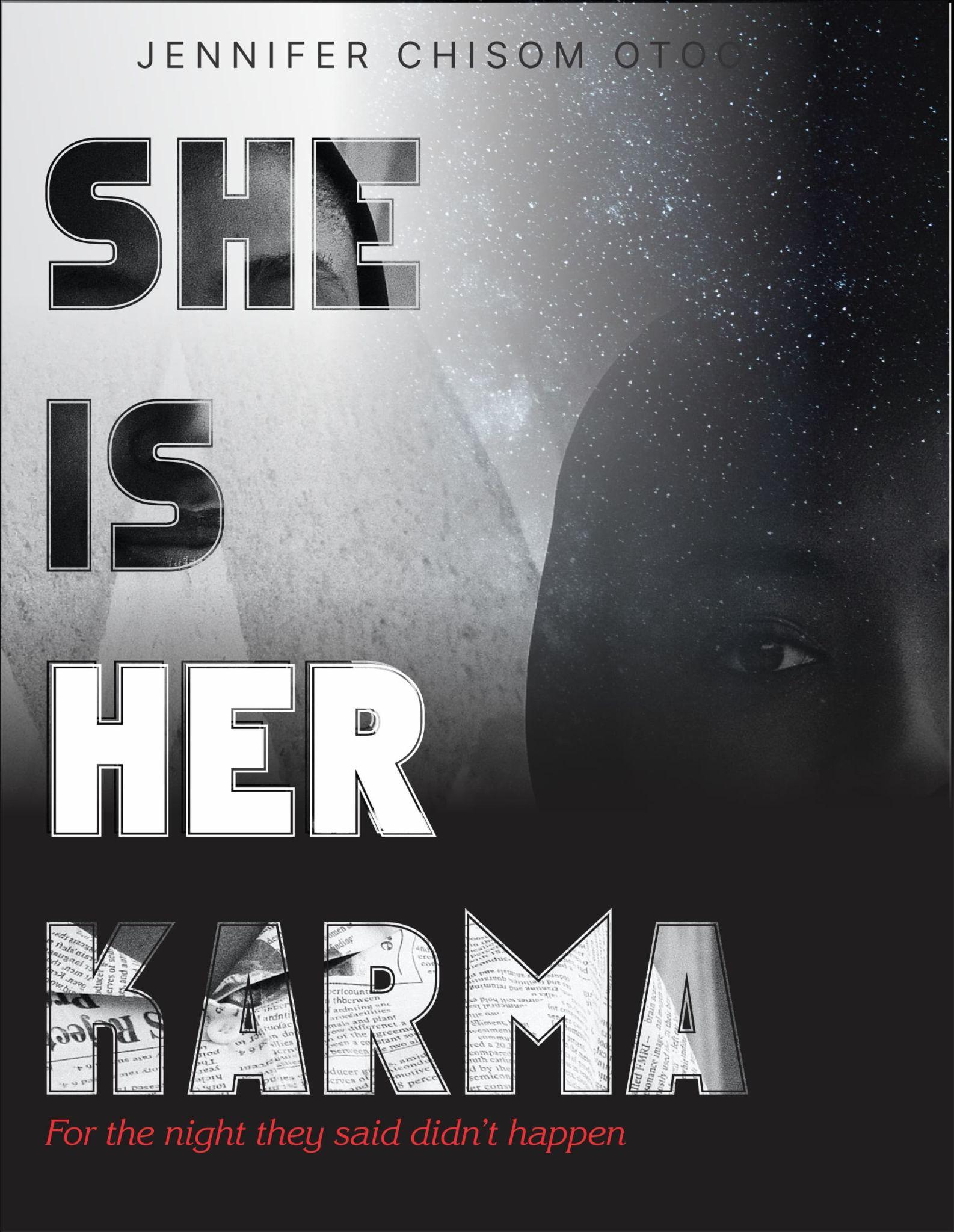
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SHE IS HER KARMA.

In memory of those we lost on 20-10-20.

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jenniferchisom.otoo@gmail.com

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# DEDICATION.

For the hopes and dreams that have been lost to cruelty and police brutality in Nigeria.

# 

# 1.

Screams, cries of pain, chaos, people scrambling and pushing against each other, and in the midst of all these, Nina knelt on the blacktop, crying silently and trying to breathe through her nose; she shook from the cold night air. She closed her eyes to block out the terrible sounds of the night and the sight before her, but it was already imprinted on her mind and playing in a loop behind her closed eyelids. There was no way she was ever going to forget the sight; every time she closed her eyes from here on out, she was going to be haunted by the terrible things she had seen.

She cracked open her eyes and looked at her brother’s body in front of her; blood from the bullet wound in his chest was already seeping into her jeans, where she knelt on the blacktop, but she made no move to stand up or move away. She felt oddly detached from herself, as though she was watching the scene from somewhere outside her body.

“They’re going to pay, all of them. I’ll make them pay,” she muttered to herself.

Her brother’s hand was growing cold in her tight grasp, so she began to rub her palm on his hand to try and keep him warm, even though she knew at the back of her mind that it was pointless. It was a futile effort; Chika was dead. He was long gone. But that didn’t deter her vigorous rubbing.

Nina was vaguely aware of someone doing a live video somewhere where they were all huddled together, a celebrity of some sort or something, she didn’t know anymore. All she knew was that her baby brother was lying dead in front of her.

“Was Nonso not enough for you people? Was it not enough that you people took my twin brother? Did you people have to take my baby brother too?” she seethed bitterly as she remembered her twin brother’s death just the year before.

SARS, they called themselves. Her story was similar to every other story out there in its brutality and pointless waste of human life.

Her brother was stopped and shot on the roadside when he went out at night to get an inhaler for their asthmatic mother while she was having an attack. Her mother had died. Her brother was killed. Chika was the only family she had, and now, she had no one left.

Peaceful protest

It was supposed to be a peaceful protest.

It was a peaceful protest.

But, they had come under the cover of darkness and unleashed terror on them. Her brother was among the first people to go down. One second, she was holding his hand and screaming “End SARS,” the other hand waving the Nigerian flag; the next second, he was falling, and then chaos sparked all around.

What was that news she had seen on Twitter just the day before?

“Wave the Nigerian flag in the air, they won’t shoot. They are bound by honor and law to not shoot,” they said.

So, most of them had gone out that day with the Nigerian flag.

Fat lot of good that did them.

The people they were fighting against had no honor, neither did they fear nor respect the law.

So Chika had gone down with the Nigerian flag clutched tightly in one hand while the other hand held onto his sister because he didn’t want to lose her in the crowd.

Nina stayed rooted to the spot when Chika fell; she didn’t run. Despite the screams of fear and pain around her, she didn’t move. Was there any point anymore? Where would she run to? She didn’t want to live again.

It was so noisy around her, but she felt quiet inside a mind-numbing stillness. Everything felt surreal to her; she was still grappling with accepting the past hour as reality. Nina hoped and prayed that it was a horrible nightmare; she willed herself to wake up from the nightmare. She did not have any delusions that she could survive the death of her last family member. Hysteria and shock battled inside her mind.

Her brother’s hand was very cold now, but she still wouldn’t let go.

Someone was saying something but she didn’t care. They started dragging the dead protesters’ bodies to the front, to the army. She wanted to ask what they were doing and tell them to stop. Whatever they were doing, it was a bad idea, but she couldn’t find the strength in her to talk. And besides, who would listen to her?

She felt something snap inside her; she couldn’t explain it. It was like some kind of link or connecting bridge in her mind snapped into two. What was the bridge linking to? She didn’t want to know.

“No. I’m not going to die here; someone has to make them pay. Someone has to hold them accountable,” she murmured to herself, sudden resolve solidifying in the core of her being.

She knelt there, frozen; there, but not there at the same time.

Two guys came to drag her brother’s body away; she raised her head and stared at them without blinking. She knew she looked terrifying. She probably had blood on her face from wiping tears off her face with her blood-stained hands, and her mouth was twisted into a snarl; plus the unblinking gaze, they slowly backed away from her to the next body, leaving her alone with her brother.

Chika’s eyes were still open; his beautiful black eyes had no life in them, but she still stared into them and tried to will life back into them. Obviously, it wasn’t working.

Another round of gunshots rang in the night air, and screams followed.

“Stay low, stay on the ground,” someone was shouting at them.

Jokes on you, I don’t plan on getting up anytime soon, she thought darkly.

Nina lost track of time, just kneeling on the floor and staring into her brother’s eyes. She wasn’t aware of her surroundings or the people. She felt drained and gutted, but she also felt an odd drive pumping in her blood.

Suddenly, someone shoved her, and reality slammed back into her; she felt like her soul was snatched from somewhere outside her body where it was floating and shoved back into her. Nina looked up and saw people running around her; she heard more gunshots around her.

The sun was just beginning to rise in the sky.

Nina imagined the sun staring in wonder and disgust at the carnage that had happened behind her back. She imagined the sun being shocked at the plethora of dead bodies that had not been present when she bid them good night a few hours ago.

Pain seared through her heart, setting every nerve on fire.

“Get up and run,” someone said and tried to pull at her, but she didn’t budge, so the person left her and ran off.

She ignored the pandemonium around her and turned to look at her brother again; she slowly reached out and closed his eyes, then kissed his cold cheeks and forehead.

“They’ll pay, Chi. I promise you. I’ll make them pay. I don’t want to leave you here, but I have to live, to make them pay. Say hi to Nonso and mummy for me,” she kissed him again before she groggily got up to her feet, or at least tried to.

Her knees wobbled beneath her before they slammed back onto the blacktop, her hands shot out reflexively to break her fall and prevent her head from hitting the blacktop.

She groaned in pain.

Kneeling for so long had cut off the blood supply to her legs, and they were limp. She rolled onto her back and stretched out her legs on the ground; people darted around her to prevent themselves from stepping on her. Her legs burned and tingled as the blood flow began in a rush.

Nina lay there for a few moments before she tried again. She slowly got to her feet and began to limp away. People jostled her as they ran, but she tried to stay upright and not fall on her face. After a few painfully long seconds, she picked up her pace, and soon she was sprinting away.

She looked around wildly for an escape, somewhere to duck and hide and wait out the madness that was the Nigerian Armed Forces, but there was no cover or hideout she could see.

Her gaze was drawn to the water.

The water, her mind echoed back to her.

She would be safe in the water.

Nina was a gym rat; she was very fit. She had even taken self-defense and taekwondo classes because the trainer was cute, and she had a crush on him. It seemed like such a long time ago.

She was almost at the railing when she saw him. A lone army officer with his back turned to her. She detoured and was running toward him before her brain registered the decision; her Nike Air shoes muted her footsteps as she approached him. When she was close enough, she leaped into the air and landed on his back; he let out a yelp of surprise at the contact.

Nina was a petite girl, just 5’3 ft and slim. Her brothers always teased her about it. But, the suddenness of the impact sent the army man toppling to the ground beneath them. She pinned his arms with her knees, grabbed his head, and began to slam his face into the road. She wasn’t sure what she was doing, but she couldn’t stop herself; she didn’t know if she wanted to stop at all.

A sudden calm descended on her; she couldn’t hear or see anything; her whole being went into the simple motion of lifting the army man’s head and slamming it back onto the blacktop.

The man’s screams and struggles died out after a few minutes, but she continued the assault.

The feeling of something hot whizzing past her ear shattered the bubble of calm that was around her; then she heard gunshots; she whipped her head around and saw two army men running towards her. She scrambled off the body beneath her and again took off towards the bridge. She heard gunshots ring out around her; she ducked and ran in twists until she got to the bridge.

Nina paused and looked back at the men running towards her. “I’m coming for you all,” she screamed at them before she climbed the railing and fell backward into the water below.

The ice-cold water shocked her and knocked her breath out of her body, but she quickly recovered and swam to the underside of the bridge; she stilled her movements.

Bullets rained into the water moments later at the spot she had jumped into the water. The bullets continued pouring in for a minute before they stopped. She listened as the soldiers on the bridge barked out orders in Hausa language, and then there was silence after she heard them running off, probably to go and shoot at some other unlucky protester.

She stayed under the cold water until her lungs began to burn from the lack of air. Then, she swam to the top for air.

Seven minutes. She was in the water for seven minutes. She had trained herself on how to hold her breath underwater; who knew that it would come in handy?

Nina’s limbs felt heavy as she began to swim to the shore; she was tired and wanted to crawl into a ball and cry. She refused to think about what she had done to the army man; no, she would get to safety first.

This was just the beginning.

**~~~~~\*\*\*~~~~~**

Captain Bello Muhammad screamed at the lieutenant to ceasefire, but the damned idiot kept firing until he had to shove him away from the edge of the bridge. The lieutenant scowled at him with anger blazing in his eyes, and he stared back at him.

“Stand down, soldier,” he commanded, letting anger seep into his voice. He hoped the soldier would defy him, his fist was tingling, and he wanted to punch the creepy look of satisfaction on the retard’s face off his face.

“She is dead anyway,” the soldier muttered under his breath in Hausa before stalking off; he let the idiot go, but he remained.

He peeked over the bridge to see if he would see the girl. He hoped she was not dead. He couldn’t bear the thought of another death he couldn’t prevent in the last ten hours.

Bile rose fast and hot on his throat; he leaned away from the bridge and threw up the contents of his stomach. The sounds of gunfire, chaos, and bodies dropping echoed in his head.

Blood.

There had been so much blood, more than he had seen outside a battlefield since he joined the army seven years ago. Captain Bello wasn’t a squeamish man, far from it; he had also been in his fair share of wars. But he didn’t sign up for the massacre of defenseless and unarmed civilians. No, he didn’t sign up for that.

He remembered the crazed look in the girl’s eyes as she screamed at them, and he shivered involuntarily. That scream was going to haunt him to his grave. He remembered her bashing the soldier’s face into the ground; he didn’t pity the soldier; he wouldn’t pity himself if that were him under her. When you push someone too far, they are bound to snap and take out everything they can, and the girl he had seen had definitely snapped.

“They were peaceful protesters for fucks sake. None of them were armed, this was a fucking massacre,” he muttered to himself.

When the order to shoot came, he couldn’t refuse. He couldn’t disobey a direct order from the major general, especially not right in front of him. So, he had opened fire, but to the skies.

Captain Bello was done, he was going to retire from the army and go home to his family in Katsina state. He understood the protesters, and he was on their side. He knew the menace the SARS was; he knew the innocent lives they had taken.

But this was Nigeria.

After a few minutes, he got up from the ground and wiped his mouth. He peeked into the water again, but it was still. He turned his back to go, but his eye caught something on the surface of the water, and he froze.

Bubbles.

Bubbles were rising to the surface of the water.

He smiled sadly at the water.

“May Allah preserve your life and give you peace,” he murmured, then turned and left the bridge.

# 

# **2**.

Michael was driving home from the Lekki Toll Gate when he saw her. He had gone out immediately. He could see the first hints of the sun in the sky to see if he could be of any help.

He had watched in horror as a man died on an Instagram live video a few hours ago, unable to do anything but scream at this phone.

Unable to sleep the rest of the night, he had sat in his living room, his eyes glued to his phone as he tried to keep abreast of any little tidbit of information that got out of the Tollgate.

He was supposed to be at that toll gate the night before but had to drive his friend who twisted his ankle home. He had barely taken his bath and changed into clean clothes when he began to get calls asking if he was still at the toll gate. He didn’t understand what was happening at first because everyone who called him ended the call immediately after he confirmed he wasn’t at the Tollgate. So, he had to check his Twitter feed to get the full gist.

After the live Instagram video was cut off, his anxiety had almost shot through the roof. He was out of the house at first light. Maybe he could find someone to help somehow. He knew shit would hit the fan soon, so he was also in a hurry to get off the streets.

That’s when he saw her.

She was stumbling along the road like a character in one of the zombie games he played at home. When he got closer in his car, he noticed that she was wet and shivering; she was staring straight ahead.

He slowed his car to a crawl beside her and rolled down his window. “Hello, do you need a ride?” He yelled to get her attention.

The girl was startled by his voice; she tripped on her legs and fell to the ground.

She pushed off the ground, sat down, pulled her legs to her chest, and wrapped her hands around them.

Then, she began to cry.

She was crying and screaming.

Michael was confused for a minute, and he considered driving off, he didn’t want any attention on him.

On second thought, he came down from the car and approached her slowly.

“Hello, are you okay?” He asked in the most gentle tone he could muster; the futility of his questions was not lost on him.

“They killed him. I was holding his hand and they shot him and he died. They have killed them all, I don’t have anyone else. They have killed them all,” she was crying and screaming the words over and over again.

Michael immediately realized that she was in shock.

He had seen a lot of movies where the character was in shock, so he had a small idea of what to do; he knew that she probably couldn’t hear him nor even have an idea of her surroundings. It was a poor comparison, but he had nothing else to go by.

Nothing in his life had prepared him for this kind of situation.

He approached her and removed his jacket; he disentangled her arms from her legs and then wrapped his jacket around her. He picked her up bridal style, and she shook in his arms. He used one hand to press the key fob to open the passenger side door, then put her inside his car.

He ran around and got back into the car. Her teeth were chattering, and she was shivering so severely, that Michael cranked up the car heater to maximum before he began to drive to his house. He kept his eyes on the road for any other person who might need a ride, but there was no one else. He briefly considered taking her to the hospital but changed his mind.

This was Nigeria.

He couldn’t put it past them to try and take out the survivors of the massacre to bury the event. The government was cruel that way; they were merciless and wicked.

Michael got to his house a few minutes later. The girl in his car had stopped screaming, but silent tears were streaming down her face while she muttered, “They will pay” repeatedly. He got out of the car and ran around to the passenger side; he opened the door and carried her into his house.

He took her straight into his bathroom, dropped her into the tub, and pulled off her shoes. He turned the fob to hot water and then turned on the water. The girl wrapped her hands around her knees again and sat motionless in the bathtub, staring dead ahead at the wall. He watched as the hot water ran down her body and steam rose off her body; she didn’t stop shivering, though. He carried her out of the shower after a few minutes; he was then faced with the dilemma of changing her out of the wet clothes.

“Hello? Can you change out of your clothes?” he asked slowly, but she remained silent, staring off into nothing without blinking.

Michael drew her into his bedroom, went to his wardrobe, and removed a hoodie and a pair of joggers with drawstrings. He walked back to her and stood behind her; he pulled off her top, unhooked her bra, and then put the hoodie on her. The hoodie reached her mid-thighs; he was a big guy, and she barely reached his shoulders. he moved to her front and pulled off her jeans, taking care not to lift the hoodie; he put the joggers on her before he sat her on the bed.

Her teeth were still chattering, and she was shaking; he laid her down on his king-sized bed and covered her with the thick duvet.

“Poor girl, who knows what you’ve been through.” he whispered as he switched off the lights and headed into his living room.

Michael paced in his living room, unsatisfied with his care of the girl and the unanswered questions that plagued his heart. What if she had an internal injury he couldn’t see, and she died in his bed? He had zero idea about how to care for a sick person.

Twenty minutes later, unable to sit on his hands any longer and hope that everything turned out okay, he grabbed his phone and called his next-door neighbor in the estate he lived in. He was a doctor and also the closest thing he had to a friend because he had just moved in, so he was the only doctor he could trust.

“Guy, you fit come my side now?” He said into the phone when he heard the connecting click.

“Why? Wetin happen?” Segun asked suspiciously. Michael was known to like his personal space; he rarely invited people into his home.

“Come first. No dey ask me questions.”

“Are you okay?” Segun asked again, switching his tone to concern.

“My guy, come here first,” he replied.

“Okay, I dey come,” he agreed before ending the call.

Ten minutes later, he heard a knock on his door. He hurriedly opened the door and bolted it after Segun stepped in. That raised Segun’s suspicions again.

“Guy, why you dey lock door?” He asked, regarding him carefully.

“Come, follow me. I need your expertise on something important.” Michael replied without answering his question.

He walked straight towards his bedroom; he could hear Segun’s reluctant footsteps as he followed behind. He stepped into his bedroom and waited a few seconds for him to enter, then gestured to the girl on her bed.

She had stopped crying and her eyes were closed, but she still shivered, and her eyeballs moved around quickly behind the closed lids.

“Can you check if she is okay?”

“What? Who be that?” Segun asked.

Michael looked from his friend to the girl on the bed; he knew he had to tell the truth so that she could get the right check-ups and treatment if necessary. But he was also very skeptical about revealing her identity.

“I went out early this morning and picked her from the road. I think she was one of the protesters at the Toll gate last night. Can you check if she is fine?” He finally said, deciding that her health was more important.

Segun was shocked into stillness for a few minutes. “What did you say? Why would you pick up a random person from the road? What if she dies here?”

“That is why you are here, to check up on her and make sure she doesn’t die,” he replied with a shrug.

Segun stared at his new neighbor and almost friend. In the few months he had known the guy, he’d seen that he was wild and impulsive. He often acted without thinking about what the potential consequences could be, but he was not a bad guy. Michael was one of the most genuine men he had met in his adult life.

“I’ll go and get my things,” he replied with a defeated sigh.

**~~~~~\*\*\*~~~~~**

Nina opened her eyes slowly and lay still on the bed she was lying in. The room was dark, and she didn’t remember going to bed. Her mind was blank, and she felt weird. She vaguely remembered swimming, but she wasn’t sure where she had swam to. Was she home? She doubted it; the room felt off to her, smelt different, and the bed was a lot softer than what she was used to.

Her eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness, and she could make out some shapes in the room: a large rectangle she assumed was the wardrobe, a table, and two doors. She got off the bed; the clothes she was in were very big and didn’t feel like hers.

She reached for the door beside the bed and stepped into the light. Her eyes burned and watered; she had to blink repeatedly to clear her eyes and see. She tried to wipe her eyes and cried out at the soreness of her eyes. What was wrong with her eyes? She wondered.

Nina walked down the hallway towards an open doorway; she stepped into a large living room and turned around in a slow circle, taking in her environment. Wherever she was, the person was loaded with cash; that was the only thought in her head.

The living room had a high ceiling, and a beautiful glass chandelier hung from it; the walls were painted a dark blue, black comfortable looking couches sat in the corner, and a low wooden antique table chair with decorative carvings took its position in the middle of the room, and the beauty of them all, a gigantic Tv on the far wall. How many inches was it? She couldn’t even tell. The softest rug she had ever walked on lay beneath her feet, and she dug her toes in as she walked around. A raised platform on one end of the living room showcased a four-person dining table with antique black glass and metal decorations. Dark blue curtains that looked very thick covered the windows and doors.

Two doors led out of the room; she walked towards the one she guessed led to the kitchen. She opened the door and stepped inside. Immaculate white tiles greeted her eyes; the kitchen was a contrast to the dark theme the rest of the house seemed to have going on; it was like she had stepped into a different house.

The island had two tall stools on its side and was clear of clutter; in fact, the whole house was arranged and spotless. A fridge was on one wall, with a counter running to the end of the wall, where a state of the art oven and gas cooker stood, a cupboard was at the top of the wall, above the counter, two more doors were in the kitchen, one she guessed led to the pantry or store room, the other she couldn’t imagine.

A man was on the island, with his back to her, drinking something from a cup with his eyes glued to his iPad; she was sure he hadn’t heard her yet. She walked further into the room and cleared her throat, but the man didn’t look up.

“Uhmm, hi,” she called out with a slightly raised voice; her throat was raw, like she had been screaming for hours without a break. That came as a surprise to her.

The man jumped a little and spilled whatever he had been drinking on the spotless island. He turned and sprang up from the stool, then he stared at her for some time with deep brown eyes that seemed alight under the harsh fluorescent lights above that still burned her eyes; his lips were slightly opened in surprise, almost as if he hadn’t been expecting her.

She shifted her weight from one leg to the other awkwardly; she didn’t remember the man in front of her from anywhere or what she was doing with him in the strange house.

He finally blinked after a while and smiled nervously, then he moved to the counter and fished out a rag, which he used to wipe off the spill. “Hey, you’re awake. Come, have a seat. Do you want some tea?” he rushed out in one breath.

Nina smiled and nodded. She allowed herself to be drawn to the other stool on the island and hopped onto it. The man went about mixing milk and milo into a ceramic cup; she noticed he poured in a generous amount of both into the cup, dropped in a few cubes of sugar, and then poured in hot water from a kettle sitting on the gas cooker. He stirred it with a spoon.

He brought the cup to her, and she picked it up gingerly; the cup warmed her hands immediately, and she brought it close to her. The steam blew on her face, and she took a small sip; it wasn’t too hot, just right.

“So, what’s your name?” The man asked after she took a generous sip of the tea.

“Uhmm, what?” Nina asked, looking up from the sweet beverage in her hands.

“Your name. What is your name?” He repeated.

Her name.

What was her name again? Nina felt panic begin to build in her mind; how could she forget such a simple question? She had a name, didn’t she? She widened her eyes, looking at the man in front of her for help; her mind was a mess as too many thoughts raced by at one. She tried to calm her breathing, which had started to come fast. I know my name, she thought to herself; I just have to remember it.

Nina grabbed onto that thought and held on to it, then forced all the other thoughts away until it was the only thought in her head. The answer appeared in her mind.

“Yeah, sorry, my name,” she laughed awkwardly before she continued, “My name is Nina,”

Immediately the name escaped her lips, the whole ordeal of the night before and early that morning came back in a rush. It was like flipping a switch in a really dark room and having sudden clarity or a dam breaking and water flooding the entire place. She slowly put down the cup in her hands; she was feeling suffocated all of a sudden.

With the sudden clarity came mind-numbing grief that threatened to pull her under.

EndSars, gunshots, chaos. EndSars, gunshots, chaos.

Her mind got trapped in a loop that she couldn’t pull free from.

# 

# 3.

Michael had been startled when he heard a soft feminine voice behind him. It had been such a long time since he heard a woman’s voice inside his home. He’d broken up with his girlfriend a few months before he moved to this new apartment.

He hastily got up from the stool and turned to face her. Despite her red and swollen eyes, the girl was gorgeous; that was the very first thought that came into his mind.

Her natural hair was braided, but it seemed long, and he imagined what it would look like falling to her shoulders; he could see that she had a nice shape and curves even through the oversized hoodie and joggers. He caught his train of thought and mentally scolded himself. Focus, Mike, don’t get distracted.

He let out a nervous smile before he turned his back and fished out a rag to wipe off the tea he had spilled on the island top.

He took her by the hand and led her to the stool opposite the one he had just vacated; she didn’t resist him. He prepared tea for her, adding a lot of sugar and milk again, then passed the cup to her. He watched as she took a tentative sip, probably to make sure it wouldn’t burn her tongue if it was too hot. Then he asked her name; he wanted to know what had happened the previous night.

“Uhmm… what?” The girl asked, looking up at him.

“Your name, what is your name?” He asked again.

Micheal watched the girl in front of him; he noticed the confusion after he asked her name, followed by fleeting panic he was almost sure he had imagined, then a sort of clarity.

“Yeah, sorry, my name,” she repeated, then let out a short, nervous laugh. “My name is Nina,” she finally said.

Michael had his eyes fixed on the girl who had just introduced herself as Nina; that was why he saw the exact moment she shut down. There are no other words he could think of to explain what happened.

Her eyes went blank, and tears pooled in her eyes quickly; her lips began to tremble. He was scared she was going into shock again.

He hurried up from his seat and rushed over to her on the other side of the kitchen island. “Hey, hey, hey, don’t cry. Calm down please,” he said in a soothing voice, or at least what he hoped was a soothing voice. Michael had never had to console someone before, let alone a woman.

“They killed him. They killed him, and now I’m all alone; I don’t have any family now. They killed my brother, caused my mum to die, and now they killed Chi, too. They killed my baby brother. I was supposed to protect him; I was supposed to be his big sister; they shot him, and he died, and I couldn’t save him...” The girl continued muttering the same words over and over again; she seemed to have lost all sense of her surroundings again and was inside her pain.

Something about the vulnerable state of the petite girl in front of him tugged at his heart; he picked her up from the stool, placed her on top of the island, and then wrapped his arms around her as she cried and muttered to herself.

Michael knew from the short time he spent with his cousins that sometimes it was okay to just hold someone when they were crying. “Hugs are magical,” Dani, one of his female cousins, would always tell him. “And you give the best ones,” she would always add.

He didn’t try to stop her; he didn’t even know how to begin to try to calm her, so he just held her as she cried and cried until she was no longer crying.

**~~~~~\*\*\*~~~~~**

Nina cried until she remembered her promise to her brother.

*“They will pay, Chi, I’ll get revenge for our family,”* she remembered promising to her brother.

So, she clamped down the grief and allowed rage to fill her mind. Crying wasn’t going to get her vengeance; crying wouldn’t bring her family back. She focused on the rage, feeding it with everything she had; all her ability to feel was directed into feeling rage.

No, she was done crying.

When her mother died, she cried.

When she found out the truth about Nonso’s death, she cried.

Now, Chika is dead. She wasn’t going to waste precious time and energy crying. Not when she could make them pay or die trying. Tears had never helped her; it sure as hell wasn’t going to help her now.

So what was the point?

She slowly became aware of her surroundings again, and the first thing she noticed was the strong arms wrapped around her. She breathed in deeply, and the strong scent of male perfume filled her nose. She also noticed that she was no longer on the stool but on top of the island.

She gently pushed at the arms holding her and was released immediately. She stared at the man up close; he sure was handsome, she noted at the back of her mind.

“Are you okay now?” the man asked gently, his kind eyes squinted as if he thought she would burst into another crying fit the next second.

“They are going to pay. I’m going to make them pay,” Nina replied instead

She didn’t care if she sounded crazy. Of course, she wasn’t okay; she had lost her whole family. If she was anything, she was a girl with a mission.

She looked at the man to see if he thought she was crazy, but there was no emotion on his face.

“Who is going to pay?” He asked.

“The government. Nigeria. Everyone. Someone has to pay for what happened to my family.”

“Okay, fair. I can understand that. But how do you plan on doing that?” He asked again.

“I’ll kill them all,” Nina replied without missing a beat. “They killed my whole family, so I will kill them all.”

“How exactly?”

Nina tried to mask the surprise on her face but failed. She thought he was going to try to calm her down, talk her out of whatever she had in mind, even though she didn’t have any plan of action, but there was no judgment in his eyes. Just understanding and maybe pity to help her.

“I don’t have any plan yet,” she replied in a quiet voice, looking down past her feet that dangled from the kitchen counter to the shiny white marble tiles.

“That’s okay too, I’m sure you’ll think of something. But, until then, how about food, yeah? When was the last time you ate? We can talk while you eat. Good enough?” he asked. Nina nodded because she didn’t trust her voice to say anything reasonable. “I’m Michael by the way, Micheal Adewale.”

“Nina Orji.” She responded.

So, while Micheal prepared something for her to eat, she narrated her life story, from the very night her brother, Nonso, was sent out for an inhaler, her mother’s death because the inhaler was not delivered, and Chika’s death. She left out killing the army man; for some reason, she didn’t want Michael to look at her with disgust.

“Can I borrow your iPad? I lost my phone in the chaos and I need to contact my friends, tell them that I am safe. They must be very worried about me,” she asked when they were done eating.

“Of course, lemme get the other one for you,” he answered without hesitation and left the kitchen,

He returned a few minutes later with another iPad in his hand. “It will automatically connect to the WiFi when you switch it on,” he added when he handed her the iPad.

The iPad looked relatively new; she suspected that he didn’t make much use of it or it was probably new. She powered it on and waited while it booted; when the home screen came up, Nina saw the time and let out a barely audible gasp. It was 9 PM; where had the whole day gone? It had already been 24 hours since she lost her last family member.

Nina didn’t have the number of any of her friends of by heart, so she quickly logged on to her Twitter account, and notifications flooded in. She wasn’t quite popular on the streets of TwitterNG, but she had several friends and followers, which had grown significantly since the protests started. She had been on the streets since day one and had kept her followers updated.

She checked her messages and replied to some, but they were quite a lot, and she knew she couldn’t reply to them all individually. So, she made a tweet to send the message that she was okay and to thank them for their concern.

Then she went on her T.L. to see what was happening. She was following a lot of influencers. The likes of SavvyRinu, who she absolutely adored her mettle and spirit; that girl was fire; Dehkunle, the stunning influencer with cute lips she had fancied kissing; Duke of Ibadan, the down to earth influencer with mad clap-backs; the comedian DeboMarcaroni, who had surprised everyone and shown that he was one of them; AprokoDoctor, the doctor from heaven who was an embodiment of humanity and everything it stood for; Ejikem, another doctor on the T.L. who was well known saying the things other people were afriad to; Four-eyed Edo boy, whose wittiness had made her follow in the first place; DannyWalta, the cute shoe vendor; ShankComics, the dude was hilarious; Aisha Yesufu, who had won her heart with her sheer bravado and guts in the face of the criminal police force during one of the protests in Abuja; TroubleMaker G.O., well, you wouldn’t need a soothsayer to know what he was about; Smithie, the violenceFC president, and the rest of them.

These people had stayed on the frontlines of the protests in different locations, the Soro Soke leaders. These were the always spoken about “leaders of tomorrow,” but those old people in government refused to step down from power. It was one old clown after the other.

She saw the wreck that had become of Lagos State, and she felt a little happiness swell in her. Yes, in the wake of the massacre, the thugs in Lagos State had gone completely ballistic and wrecked the state; she couldn’t say she felt sorry. It didn’t soothe the pain of losing her brother, but there was an odd comfort in knowing that the state was bleeding and burning.

The BRT bus terminal, the Oba’s palace, a news station, and other buildings were vandalized; they had even set a hospital on fire for refusing to administer treatment to someone with a gunshot wound when he died.

This was just the beginning; she was karma, and she was thirsty for blood.

When she looked up from the tablet, Michael wasn’t in the kitchen, but she could hear noise from the living room, so that’s where she headed. She saw him sitting in front of the television, watching the news. She sat down on one of the couches; she was right; they were hella comfortable.

“I’ve not thanked you for saving my life, Michael,” she began, and he looked over to her immediately after turning the T.V. volume down. “I don’t know what would have happened to me while I was in shock, so thank you, but I’d like to go home,” she said.

“It’s no biggie. And, I understand that you want to go home, but Lagos State is on lockdown now, it was just announced on the news. You can stay here until the lockdown is lifted, I have plenty of room here and you can use the iPad for whatever you want.”

Nina considered the options: she could leave, risk the possibility of getting arrested or shot on sight to get home and probably wallow in grief and self-pity, or she could stay here where she had company, albeit a cute one, and plot her revenge. It was a no-brainer; her mind was quickly made up.

“I need to take a bath, and I need a change of clothes,” she replied, and Michael smiled at her obvious decision to stay.

“I’ll get you some of my sweatshirts and shorts, and I’ll show you to one of the guest bedrooms,” he said and got up. He walked towards the hallway she had first gotten out from, and she followed. He flipped a switch, and light flooded the hallway; she was that. There were three doors on each side, and the hallway ended at the door she had walked out from. He led her to the door closest to the door. “You can stay here; I’ll get you the clothes,” he said, then he walked out.

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The lockdown lasted for two days, and in those two days, Nina tried to think of a way to get her revenge. She didn’t want one person; she wanted them all. The Nigerian government was like a hydra; you cut one head off, and three grew to replace it. She wanted to uproot the hydra, set it on fire, and pour acid in the place so that another one wouldn’t grow to replace it again.

It wasn’t enough to take out just the leaders; she wanted their seconds and thirds; she wanted their immediate families. The sons and daughters who flaunted stolen and embezzled national funds on social media without shame, who left the country at will and laughed at their suffering, who claimed ignorance and watched their parents frustrate the nation’s youths. Karma wanted blood; she wanted blood; she wanted her own pound of flesh. No, she wanted the whole body.

But how was she going to achieve that? That was the million-dollar question that was the reason she had barely slept the past two days. She had an idea of what she wanted to do, but it would require a lot of manpower; only she and Michael couldn’t cover the large-scale man-hunt she was going to start.

She was also placing a lot of trust in the people to be able to take charge once the clowns they had as leaders were out of the way. She hoped that the youths, those soro soke leaders, would be able to step up and take charge. Nina didn’t want power; she didn’t want recognition or fame; she just wanted her revenge.

When the lockdown was lifted, Nina wanted to go home. She didn’t know if she could live in that house alone, but she needed to see it again. Maybe collect the necessary things and sell the house. Her family house had too many memories, and she was afraid they would suffocate her.

So, as she bathed and dressed to go home, she wondered where she would stay. She didn’t know if she could come back to Michael’s house; she wasn’t going to assume, and she didn’t think she could out-rightly ask him if she could move in. Nina dreaded being alone; she knew she would do nothing other than wallow in her loss and feel terrible for herself. She knew that isolation wasn’t what she needed, but she also had nowhere else to go.

It had been her and Chika since their mother and Nonso died; she didn’t have any friends she could move in with until she could figure out what she wanted to do or where else to go.

When she was done, she walked into the living room, where Michael was waiting for her on a couch. “I’m ready to go,” she announced. “Thank you for having me here and for all you have done, you literally saved my life.”

“Okay. You’re welcome,” Michael replied, getting to his feet. “So, what next? Are you going to stay at your house alone, or do you have a friend to crash with?” he asked.

Nina looked up at him in mild surprise, wondering if he might have been a mind reader. “Uhm… no. I don’t know,” she replied unsurely, her voice trembling slightly at the end.

“That is fine; it is okay to be unsure and lost. You just lost everything,” he said gently, taking a step towards her but maintaining enough distance so that she didn’t feel crowded. “You can always come back here if you want. I wouldn’t want to be alone if I was in your shoes, there is more than enough space for two here and I could use the company too. Plus, I need to be sure that you are okay, and we have that little matter of your revenge plan to work on. I want to help with that,” he finished with a smile.

Nina didn’t know someone could say so many words within a few seconds. She stared at him wide-eyed for a second, then her eyes misted over as tears filled her eyes. Was he a mind reader or something? She had never been one to look a gift horse in the mouth, so she immediately agreed; there was no need to pretend she had other plans. “That would be so nice. You’re a God sent, Michael. What am I going to do without you?” she said; and Michael smiled at her, she smiled back.

Well, that problem is solved, she thought. “And I think I have an idea of how we are going to get rid of the plague that is our government,

“Okay, tell me all about it in the car?” Michael asked as he grabbed his keys. She nodded, and they left the house together.

Nina vaguely took notice of the sleek black car that they entered; she wasn’t a car person, so she couldn’t identify the other two cars in the compound; it only solidified her guess that Michael was a wealthy guy. She wondered what he did for a living as they drove out of the compound.

# 4.

On the drive to Epe where she had lived with her family, Nina told Michael what she had planned. The plan was still abstract and more than a little far-fetched, but it was a start. Michael pointed out all the loopholes and flaws in the plan; he didn’t do so unkindly or mockingly but with a genuine interest and effort to make the plan more plausible.

However, as they got closer to her house, Nina began to fall quiet; her grief threatened to overcome her. It was like the fact that she was all alone in the world was finally dawning on her. *“No, this is not the time; I can feel sorry for myself and mourn as much as I want after I have gotten my revenge,”* she thought to herself.

They soon pulled into the neighborhood she had lived in all her life. Their house was just around the next corner on the road, and as they turned the corner, her breath caught in her throat. She pressed her lips together to stifle a cry.

The squat yellow one-story building was where her father had lived after he married her mother, that was before he had run off with another lady when her mom was pregnant with Chika. She was just six at the time; she and her twin brother, Nonso, had watched their mother break down before she picked up her life and devoted every waking hour to her children.

Her father had died three years later, AIDS, they said; she hadn’t pitied him for a second or mourned him; he got what he deserved, according to her.

Nina had held her mother and watched the life leave her eyes when Nonso hadn’t gotten back home with the inhaler on time in the same house. The pharmacy where he had been supposed to pick up the inhaler from was just a few streets away; she remembered the hate that had filled her heart when she thought her brother had gotten sidetracked by something else and had let their mother die.

Then, she realized the unimaginable guilt and grief she felt when she realized that while she held their mother, her brother had been bleeding to death all alone on the road, with the faces of the devils that shot him the last thing he would see before his death. She regretted that while her brother struggled to live, she had been hating and cursing his soul to hell and damnation.

At least, her mother died at home, in the arms of her daughter, who she had no doubt loved her. Nonso had died alone and cold on the roadside. There was no loved one to hold his hand or tell him everything would be okay. She couldn’t imagine what was on his mind as he breathed his last, knowing that his death was going to result in the death of his mother, and his sister and younger brother were about to be orphans and alone.

Chika hadn’t been home; he had gone out with friends and had spent the night with them.

Nina had held Chika while he cried and blamed himself in the same house. Yes, he had blamed himself for not being home, insisting that things would have been different if he had been home.

Maybe they would have, maybe the menace that was SARS would have gunned him down too; they would never know, and that was something she was comfortable with.

She had watched Chika withdraw into himself, avoiding his friends and wallowing in regret. Sitting by himself on the ratty couch they shared with rats and cockroaches in their living room.

The protest was the only thing that had drawn him out of the shell he had retreated into. She had tried to dissuade him at first, but he wouldn’t hear it. And so, she had gone out with him; if he was going to be out in the streets because of the death of his brother, well, he had been her twin, it was only sensible that she go out with him.

The first night SavvyRinu and DeboMacaroni had slept outside, she and her brother had been with them. That was when SavvyRinu had won her admiration; despite being petite, the girl was barely 5’3 ft like her, and very young, she had stood her ground and demanded for her rights.

The protest had drawn her brother closer to her than ever, solidarity in the face of a greater evil and a shared grief and anger. She had made friends on the protest grounds, she had shared her story, and people had mourned for her; she had heard more grotesque stories that left her speechless, like the story of Chijioke and the alarming brazenness of the Awkuzu SARS.

Nina had found kindred spirits among the protesters, people who were no strangers to loss and the evil the SARS had perpetrated across the country, and other people who had only heard the stories but were outraged all the same because they knew that it could be them tomorrow.

She had witnessed first-hand the love Nigerians had for one another, the capability to coexist peacefully with each other. She had understood the “one Nigeria” mantra for the first time. She had marveled at how funds were generated for essentials needed. She had seen Nigerians rally to raise funds for a prosthetic leg for two amputees who had joined the protests with their crutches, raising over five times the required amount in a few hours.

The Sunday people donated food items, and a massive feast was prepared on the streets for the protesters. The artists that came out with them into the streets, the massive crowd Small Doctor had pulled to the Alausa protest ground, the candlelight memorial for all the lost youth that had lost their lives to police brutality in one way or the other, the camaraderie that melted hearts when the Christians had surrounded their Muslim brothers while they said their prayers.

Falz coming out to call out the governor of Rivers State on his poorly thought-out ban on protests, the frenzy on TwitterNG when one professional government-employed liar and bigot sued Jack for providing a donation link to help the protest after the government shut down the accounts being used and Jack shutdown Twitter all over the world to give them the EndSars emoji, the counter lawsuit on the professional liar.

The time when the government brought thugs to the protest grounds, the thugs were beaten up, treated, bound, and sent off, the time Peruzzi stopped the robbery incident, the surprising fact that nothing was stolen from anyone at the protest grounds, lost items were recovered, people shared their power banks with total strangers.

No, not strangers. They were comrades in the misery that united them.

Even WiFi was made available.

It had seemed surreal and too good to actually be happening, the first such occurrence and show of brotherhood among the Nigerian youths.

But, she had been a first-hand witness to all of these and more. The protest had been good and worthwhile. But, the government had to ruin it with the massacre; they had to spoil everything. They were going to pay.

Nina mechanically got out of the car and headed into the house. She was aware of Michael trailing her, but she couldn’t be bothered to acknowledge him. She refused to allow herself to feel anything; she was afraid that she would slip into her grief, and she didn’t have the luxury to mourn. She packed her clothes into her box, gathered the picture albums, and stuffed them into another bag; then, she was out of the house and locking the door behind her.

No, she couldn’t linger. The memories would get her; she would come back later.

Yes, later.

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The drive back to the island where Michael lived was filled with charged silence. Michael was itching to say something. Anything to soothe the emotionally distraught girl sitting in front of his car. But everything he could think of seemed inappropriate and insensitive. He could read the turmoil on her face, but she was trying very hard not to lose her composure. He admired that about her; she was quite strong.

He couldn’t imagine going through her loss and remaining sane, losing his entire family to the sheer wickedness of a select group of people. He just couldn’t wrap his head around it.

Being the only child of his aged parents who were in England, he didn’t know anything about siblings’ love. Still, he couldn’t imagine losing his parents, one after the other, to the sheer carelessness of the government and wickedness of armed men who thought themselves to be gods and invincible.

He remembered the time he had lost his dog when he was eleven; it was a poor comparison, he knew that, but he had no other experience with loss. He remembered the grief that seemed like it wanted to end his young life; he imagined she was feeling that grief in hundreds of folds.

Michael silently drove back to his place; he didn’t want to say the wrong thing and ruin whatever delicate understanding that was between them. When he pulled into his compound, she hastily got out of the car without taking her boxes and ran into the room, where she locked the door behind her. He carried the boxes inside and placed them in front of her door, and then he went into the kitchen to whip up a hot meal for them.

Food made everything a little easier to bear.

Well, at least for him, it did.

# 5.

There had been a lot of times in Michael’s twenty-nine years on earth when he’d heard people say something out of pain and anger, then promptly give up on what they said when they were calmer. As a matter of fact, he believed what people said in the heat of the moment should not be taken to heart.

That was why he was surprised when Nina was still hellbent on her revenge seven months after the massacre at the tollgate.

Michael was shocked time and time again by the seemingly infinite amount of determination Nina possessed; she never complained for one day or wavered in her resolution. Her brilliance was another source of surprise to him; the detailed plan and step-by-step enforcement of it were uncommon to him.

The first few plans she’d mentioned to him scared him. He didn’t know a normal human being was capable of that kind of thought process.

But then again, was Nina normal? Her mother and junior brother had died in her arms. She had identified the lifeless body of her twin brother on the street before her house after he was murdered.

No human being would remain normal after going through those traumatic experiences.

He knew there was no limit to her thirst for revenge. He also knew she needed him to be the voice of reason; she needed someone to save her from herself, the thing she was becoming. She was losing herself in her thirst.

Nina sat in her room, staring at the evidence board on the wall in front of her. It was filled with photographs, documents, and newspaper clippings. Each item on the board had been collected and carefully pinned in order; they represented how much she knew about her targets and the best way to gain access to them.

One evening, as they reviewed the latest findings, Nina slammed her hand down on the table, her frustration boiling over. “We need to do more, Michael. We need to make them pay. I can’t wait any longer.”

Michael watched her from the doorway, concern etched across his face. Nina was being consumed by her quest for justice, and he worried that it was taking a toll on her well-being.

“Nina,” he said gently, “you’ve been at this for days. You need to take a break. You’re pushing yourself too hard.”

She didn’t respond, her eyes fixed on the evidence board. Her fingers absentmindedly tapped on a photo of her family, her face a mixture of sorrow and determination. It was her reminder of what she was fighting for, of what she had, what had been taken from her,

Michael walked over and placed a hand on her shoulder. “We knew this wouldn’t be easy, but you can’t let it consume you. We need to be careful and strategic.”

“I can’t stop, Michael,” Nina replied, her voice quivering. “I can’t let them get away with what they did to my family. They need to pay for their crimes.”

Michael understood she was in pain, but he also saw the danger in Nina’s single-minded pursuit of revenge. “I’m with you every step of the way, but I don’t want to lose you in the process. You haven’t left this room in days, you haven’t even eaten today.”

Reluctantly, Nina stepped away from the evidence board and turned to face Michael. She took a deep breath and said, “It’s been eight months, Michael. Eight months since my brother was murdered right in front of me and I’m no closer to getting justice for him than I was the night he died.”

“You knew this was not going to be easy or fast,” Michael replied.

“Yes, I knew that.”

Michael smiled softly, relieved that she was willing to take a step back. “So you need to have more patience. Be kind to yourself, we’ll find a way to balance it, Nina. Let’s take a break, clear our heads, and come back to this with a fresh perspective.”

She clenched her fists, her voice trembling with anger. “Patience won’t bring my family back. These people ruined our lives, and they’re still out there, living freely. We need to make them pay.”

The smile fell off his face, and Michael took a deep breath, trying to keep his composure. “I understand your pain, Nina, but revenge won’t bring your family back either. It won’t heal the wounds. So if you lose yourself too, it would all be for nothing.”

Tears welled in Nina’s eyes, and she pushed her chair back, standing abruptly. “You don’t understand, Michael. You weren’t there that night. You didn’t see the flies over my brother’s body or the lifeless eyes of my junior brother. I can’t just sit back and let them get away with it.”

She marched out of the room, leaving Michael to watch her retreating figure, a heavy feeling of helplessness settling in his chest.

There was a certain distance between them in the following days despite living in the same house. They ate together and watched the news together, but there was tension in the air. There was a noticeable change in the tone of their conversations as well.

Michael struggled to balance his promise to help Nina get revenge with his concern for her well-being. When they started this together, he didn’t expect that he would come to care about her as much as he did. He was scared she was going to get herself in trouble to do something she would regret forever. He wanted to protect her from herself.

Then, late one night, Michael found Nina standing in front of the evidence board in her room. Her shoulders were slumped from exhaustion, and she swayed gently on her feet. He approached her. “How long have you been standing there?” He asked gently.

“I don’t know, a few hours?” She replied, but it sounded more like a question than an answer.

“Nina, you need to rest. You can’t go on like this,” he pleaded.

She ignored him, but he noticed how she forced herself to stand slightly straighter. The gentle swaying didn’t stop. “I can’t rest, Michael. Not until we have enough to bring them down.”

Michael walked forward until he stood beside her; his concern was evident on his face. “Nina, please listen to me. You’re letting this consume you. I’m afraid you’re losing yourself to this need for revenge. We can’t let it control us.”

She finally tore her gaze away from the documents to meet his eyes. Her expression was a mix of desperation and defiance. “Michael, if we don’t do something soon, if we don’t expose them, then what’s the point of all this? I can’t just let it go.”

Michael sighed, his heart heavy with the weight of their situation. “I don’t want you to let it go, Nina. I want you to find closure and justice. But I don’t want you to lose yourself in the process.”

Nina’s shoulders slumped, and she looked vulnerable and lost for a moment. “I don’t know if I can, Michael. I’m drowning in anger and grief. I don’t know how to escape this darkness.”

Michael took her hand in his, his touch warm and reassuring. “You’re not alone in this, Nina. We’ll find a way through together. But we have to find a balance. You need to eat. You can’t become an instrument of revenge only, it’s okay to live too, you know. It’s the only way to honor your family’s memory.”

Tears welled up in her eyes, and she nodded slowly. “How can I live when they are all dead.”

Michael knew better than to try and push further. He pulled her into a gentle embrace, holding her close. “We’ll figure it out, Nina. We’ll find a way to make them pay and give you your revenge, I promise you that.”

In that moment, with the weight of her emotions pressing down on her, Nina clung to Michael. Somewhere along the line in her quest, he had become her only tether to the real world. He was her reminder that she was not crazy and had not imagined the past few years of her life.

Michael was the one solid and present person in her life; she couldn’t afford to lose him.

# 6.

The plan took another five months to finally be ready to be implemented. They had gone over it a lot of times, finding faults and eliminating them, creating alternatives for unknowns and emergencies. Nina worked her butt off, her grief was her driving force, and she never ran short of it.

She wasn’t in a hurry; after all, revenge was a dish best served cold, they said.

The government was lulled into a false sense of having gotten away with the massacre; the hashtag had stopped trending, and people only mentioned it in passing.

But to Nina, 20-10-20 was branded into her brain with a smoking hot iron; she had even gotten a tattoo of the date, a permanent reminder of the day she lost everything.

How could she forget? The absence of Chika echoed in her empty heart. In the few seconds, she lay in bed alone before sleep claimed her, she felt a phantom of his presence in her dreams; she saw him in the faces of people she passed on the road. Nina heard her mother’s voice in the market women she bought groceries from; she saw her toothy smile in them, her kindness and openness; she felt the broken bond that was between her and her twin; it was like she was holding out her hand to him to take it and her palm felt the absence of his.

She had lost everything, she couldn’t forget.

No, she would not forget.

If she forgot, who would make them pay?

How could she even hope to move on with her life when her junior brother’s corpse was out there in the world? Unclaimed and unburied. Left to the devices of whoever it ended up in their hands.

No, she would not forget.

She could not.

She had to remember; she had to fuel her hate and rage with memories of her loss.

It was the only thing she had left, the only thing that forced her awake in the morning and pushed her to continue living,

She had no idea what would be left of her if she forgot.

So, she didn’t forget.

She carried the horror of that night every second she was alive.

Nina’s first act of revenge was setting the Epe police station on fire. It was not part of the plan, a spur-of-the-moment act that almost cost her everything.

By some sheer coincidence, she had been home alone and watching the news on Channels News when she saw a Twitter screenshot on the TV screen. At first, she ignored it, uninterested in the contents, but her gaze caught on the last sentence and her interest was piqued.

She immediately went hunting on Twitter for the handle on the screenshot; it didn’t take long to find it and the tweet that caught her attention.

As she read the thread, dread and bitterness filled her stomach.

The story the handle was talking about was eerily familiar.

They told a story about a fateful night a few years ago when they had been coming back from the club and met some policemen harassing a young man in the streets of Epe, Lagos. They mentioned the name of the street and the date the incident occurred.

They wondered what became of the young man. According to the thread, the poster had recently gone to the Epe Police Station for a civil dispute and recognized one of the officers from that night.

Nonso was that young man.

Her brother who had been murdered and left on the dirty street with stinking gutter water.

Nina had often wondered what became of the policemen that killed her brother. She wondered how their lives were going and if they just went on living without care or remorse about the life they ended.

At that moment, she knew.

Her brother’s killers were alive and well, living like nothing happened.

She also knew what she had to do.

So later that night, she snuck out and caught a late-night bus to Epe. Then she walked to her family home and waited.

Nina waited until it was almost 3 AM, then walked the short distance to the Epe police station.

Her plan was simple.

Let it all burn.

So that was what she did. She set fire to the building.

It was easier than she imagined. Almost all of the officers were drunk and passed out; the only thing she had to do to start the fire was scale the low fence and throw a burning rag into one of the offices.

Then she retreated into the distance and watched the fire rage.

It started slow and small and could have been easily extinguished if the fire service arrived on time, but Nigeria’s corruption and lack of working systems worked to her advantage.

Nina waited until the whole building was enveloped with fire, then she turned around and walked back to her family home without looking back once.

There, she laid down on the raggedy couch and went to sleep.

In the morning, she went back to Michael’s house.

Michael was pacing in his living room when Nina walked in with an eerie smile on her face. The smile fell off when she noticed him waiting for her. He stopped in his tracks and watched her carefully as she took off her shoes and sat on one of the couches.

“Hello?” He finally said when she didn’t say anything after a few minutes. “Where were you all night? I was worried about you.”

“What? I can’t go out when I want to?” She asked without looking at him.

“That is not what I asked or meant, and you know that. You can go wherever you want. but you have to tell me you’re going out so I don’t get worried,” he replied.

“Fine, I’ll let you know when I have to go out again,” she replied with a shrug.

“Good, so where did you go?”

“You just said I could go wherever I wanted,” Nina said and looked up.

Her eyes met Michael’s piercing gaze, and she quickly looked away.

“I know what I said and what I asked. There’s something off about you, so I want to know what you were up to.”

“Nothing.”

“That is not true.”

“What is this? An interrogation?”

“Why are you being so defensive? Where did you go, Nina?”

“I have personal issues to take care of.”

“What exactly consists of that personal issue?” Michael pressed.

“That is literally none of your business,” she retorted.

“You’re right, it’s not,” he agreed with a nod of his head, “But I still want to know. So, what was it?”

“It’s nothing,” Nina replied through gritted teeth. “Leave it alone, Michael.”

“See, that just makes me more curious. I won’t stop asking until you tell me.”

“Fine, I set the Epe Police station on fire,” she yelled at him.

Silence fell in the room as he tried to process what he just heard. “You did what?” He asked after a few seconds.

“I set it on fire,” she replied.

“That was you? Why would you do that?” Michael asked with wide eyes. “It’s all over the news.”

“I found out that the officers who killed my brothers are from that station, so I set it on fire.”

Michael stared at her like wings had suddenly unfurled from her back, and she was hovering a few feet in the air. He couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “You didn’t think to tell me about it first?”

“It was a spontaneous decision,” she shrugged with a half smile.

“Do you even have any idea what it is you’ve done?” Michael asked in horror at her nonchalant attitude.

“Yes, I got revenge for my brother.”

“What about the plan? I thought we were going to get revenge and justice with the plan?”

“Yes, we are. Nothing has changed,” Nina replied with a confused frown.

“Of course something has changed, Nina. twelve people died in that fire, and only two of them were police men,” he snapped.

That seemed to make Nina pause, and then she shrugged. “They were in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

Michael was floored by the reply. “How are you say that to me?”

“I don’t know what you want me to say,” she yelled at him.

“You just murdered twelve innocent people.”

“Ten, technically.”

“Nina, do you understand the severity of your actions?”

“I understand that two people involved in the death of my brother are dead,” she snapped.

“How are you so sure? For all we know, they might be innocent policemen.”

“That is where you are wrong, there are no innocent policemen.”

‘Okay, let’s say you are right. Let’s say I agree with you; there are no innocent policemen. But what about the other ten people who are dead because of you?”

“Like I said, wrong place, wrong timing,” she replied quietly.

“Can the same thing be said about your brothers then?”

Nina shot to her feet and got in Michael’s face. “Don’t you ever say that about my brother,” she warned in a menacing voice.

“What? You don’t like the sound of that? Well, guess what? Those people you killed are people’s family members too and I doubt they would enjoy you saying their brothers or husbands or sons were in the wrong place at the wrong time,” Michael snapped, staring her down.

They held their positions for a couple of seconds; the tension in the room could be sliced through with a butter knife. Then Nina looked away and took a few steps back.

“No, they wouldn’t,” she conceded. “I didn’t think there would be other casualties.

“I don’t believe you thought at all because common sense would have told you that police stations almost always have innocent people detained inside.”

“I’m sorry, what do you want me to do?”

“Do you think it would be enough for you if the policemen who killed your brother and caused the death of your mother apologized?”

“No, it…” she started to say but was interrupted.

“Exactly. No,” Michael snapped again.

“What do you want me to do?” She asked in a small voice after a few seconds passed.

“I want you to stop,” he replied.

“Stop? Stop what?”

“Everything. The whole revenge plan, you need to stop.”

“That’s impossible. Everything is ready, I can’t stop.”

“Yes, you can. I’m telling you to.”

“Look, I’m sorry about the fire, but I…”

“I’m really not the person you should be apologizing to, you didn’t just murder my family members,” Michael cut her off.

Nina winced, and then she started again. “Is that it is? You can’t stand me because I started that fire? You want me to leave?”

# 7.

“I don’t want you to leave, I want you to stop.”

“You know I can’t do that.”

“Why not? Why can’t you stop?” Michael asked, stepping into her personal space.

Nina took two steps back. “Someone has to make them pay. I have to make them pay. They killed my family,” she replied in a chilling tone.

“Yes, they did. I’m sorry you went through all of that, but this has to stop. It has gone on long enough.”

“I don’t know where Chika’s body is, did you know that? I don’t know if he was buried or thrown into the sea. He could have been dumped outside for the vultures to feast on. Worse still, he could be sent as a cadaver to any university in Nigeria. My baby brother will be cut up as an experiment by students who barely know how to wash their butts,” she continued in that same quiet and chilling voice. “Do you have any idea how that feels?”

Michael paused. He had not expected that question.

“No. No, I don’t know how that feels?” He replied in a calmer voice.

“No, of course you don’t. “Have you ever held anyone and watched them die? Have you ever actually seen someone die?”

“No, I haven’t.”

“No, you haven’t. Well, I have. Twice.”

Silence fell in the room, and Nina’s words hung in the air; the only sound was the soft hum of the AC. Michael made a mental note to get the AC checked out; it was getting too loud.

“I won’t stop, Micheal. I can’t stop. I can’t stop until I’ve seen everyone who had a hand in my misery buried,” Nina said slowly.

“That’s the issue. You can’t. It’s simply not possible.”

“I don’t care whether it’s possible or not. I’m going to do it,” Nina insisted.

“The world doesn’t care what you want, Nina. The truth is that it’s not possible for you to get the revenge you want. Not like this.”

“Well, I don’t care about the world. No one is going to stop me, not even you. So if you want me to leave, I’ll leave. But I won’t stop. I can’t stop,” she replied, her voice breaking and her control slipping.

Michael paused and looked at her. Really looked at her, past the defiance in her eyes and the facade of being in control. He looked past the defenses and walls she had surrounded herself with and saw the broken girl who was still mourning the deaths of her mother and siblings.

He saw the pain she was in, the grief that was chipping away at her soul and sense of self. All she had to fill the gaping hole that was left was anger, hate, and revenge.

“Something can stop you,” he whispered. “Death. You will be killed. You will become another number to add to the statistics, another name to add to the neverending list of lost youths. Worse still, your death might go unnoticed and unannounced. There will be no one to mourn or remember you. Or your brothers and mother. Is that what you want?”

“They don’t know it’s me. I…”

“No, they don’t. Not yet. But if you don’t stop, they will find out. They will find you. Maybe the day they will come for you, I’ll be with you and they will kill us both. I ask again, is that what you want?”

“I’ll leave your house, I don’t want to put you in danger. I’ll go back home and work my revenge from there,” she replied, stumbling over her words.

“You’re not going anywhere, I can’t let you leave when I know you’re planning to throw your life away,” Michael said.

“You can’t stop me if I want to leave,” Nina replied defiantly.

“No, I can’t. But I won’t let you leave to throw your life away.”

“How exactly do you plan on stopping me?” She asked, challenging him with a glare. “Tie me up and lock me inside your house?”

“Don’t be silly, you know I won’t do that to you,” Michael replied with a frown. “Is that how lowly you think of me? That I would what? Kidnap you to have my way?” He didn’t bother to hide how hurt and offended he was.

“What do you want?” Nina asked; her control was slipping more and more, and she could feel the sting of tears at the back of her eyes. She looked down at her feet to avoid Michael’s piercing gaze. She wanted to escape, hide, and cry like she had been doing the past few months, but there was no escape. She felt cornered; Michael stood in front of her like a mountain.

“I want you to stop,” Michael replied. “Your thirst for revenge is eating you up from the inside out. You are going to lose your life to this, do you understand that?”

“I don’t care,” she snapped with a quivering voice.

“I think you do. But even if you didn’t, I do. And I’m sure your mother and brothers do.”

“Well, they are not here to tell me that, are they?” Nina scoffed. “You know why? It’s because they were all murdered.”

“But, I am here. I am telling you. Do you think your mother and brothers would have wanted you to throw your life away to this?” Michael asked, taking another step forward so that he was in his personal space again. “Do you think Chika would want you to give your life to the same people who snatched his away? What about Nonso? Or your mom?”

“Dead people don’t have wants,” Nina replied as the first tear slid down her left cheek.

“Dead people used to be living people and they had wants,” Michael countered. “And I’m not dead. I want you alive, Nina. I want you to be happy without this burden of revenge you’re carrying.”

“That is not possible,” she replied, wiping the tears that were now pouring down her cheeks.

“Yes, it is. But first, you have to stop.”

“I don’t know how to,” she replied, her voice breaking. “I see Chika’s lifeless eyes whenever I close my eyes. Every night when I go to sleep I see Nonso’s body on that dirty street and I can feel my mother stop breathing in my arms. How can I be happy when those are the memories that haunt my sleep and waking hour?”

Michael didn’t know what to say to that. He couldn’t pretend to understand her grief because he quite simply didn’t. He had no adequate experience that could make him relate to her pain and anguish.

“I… I’m so sorry you lived through that, I promise I will do everything in my power to help you. But, you have to stop, Nina. You have to or you are going to die. Who will remember your brothers and mother if you die? Please, Nina, stop. Please.”

Nina knew he was right; she knew it was only a matter of time before she was caught and killed. She knew there was no way she could cause enough damage and hurt to the people who had wronged her. She knew there was no way to get to them, the people on top who gave the other.

She had always known all these things.

But still, she had fought. She had hoped. That by chance or sheer luck, she would see an opening or get the opportunity to exact the revenge she wanted, to bathe in the blood of her enemies. The people who murdered every member of her family.

Nina had hoped and fought.

And now, it was time to give it all up. It was time to properly mourn her losses and pick up the pieces of her life. It was time to start living again.

Michael was right. Her mother would sob bitter tears if she saw the monster her daughter had become. She would wail and tear her clothes if she knew the horrendous acts her precious, innocent, and lively daughter had committed.

And Nonso? He wouldn’t believe it. Nina was the happy one, the positive one. She was the person who always cheered them up.

Chika would cry with their mother.

It was time to stop.

“I…I…” she stuttered, then she clamped her lips shut. She had no idea what to say.

“Please, stop,” Michael repeated, taking another step to close the small distance between them.

Nina breathed in deeply and held her breath for a few seconds, then she breathed out. She imagined that she was letting go of her anger, hate, and vendetta with that breath.

Then, she collapsed into a sobbing mess.

Well, she tried to.

Michael was close enough to catch her and gently lower her to the floor.

For the first time since that night at the tollgate, Nina let herself feel. She let herself feel her loss and the grief she has been avoiding. She confronted the gaping chasm that had replaced her brother’s place in her heart.

And she cried.

She mourned her brother Chika

She mourned the loss of Chika’s body.

Nina cried until she passed out in Michael’s arms.

Three weeks later, Michael had a passport ready for Nina and a flight booked.

# 

# 8.

Ten years passed after Nina and Michael left the country in search of new beginnings and peace of mind. Michael had thought it was best if he removed Nina from the environment that had caused her so much pain and loss. In the weeks leading up to their departure, Nina had been so sick that Michael had actually feared she would die. It was the most scared he had ever been for anyone in his life.

It was a quiet morning in a quaint town in Norwich, England, where Nina and Michael had made their new life. A few months later, after they were fully settled in, Nina returned to the person she was before her rage and hate consumed her, and she decided she wanted to return to school.

Nina had buried herself in her studies, channeling her relentless determination into her education. She had chosen to attend law school, a decision fueled by the injustice she had suffered in Nigeria. She wanted to be there for people in a way no one was for her when she needed it the most.

As the Saturday morning sun filtered through the curtains, Nina shuffled back and forth in the kitchen as she tried to get started on breakfast for her family.

Michael entered the kitchen, holding their three-year-old twin children in his arms. A smile lit up his face as he set them down at the table. “Good morning, my loves,” he said, leaning down to kiss Nina gently. “You should have woken me up to help you.”

They’d gotten married five years ago.

“You were sleeping so peacefully, I didn’t want to disturb you,” she replied with a smile. “Take a seat, food is almost ready.”

“You’re the boss,” Michael replied and kissed her on the lips again before taking a seat between the twins. They weren’t allowed to sit together at mealtime; otherwise, it would end in a food fight.

Within minutes, Nina served the meal. Pancakes, sunny-side-up eggs, and maple syrup.

After breakfast, they put the kids down to play while Nina went into the bedroom to fold the laundry she’d removed from the dryer before she started cooking. Michael joined her, they did most of the chores together since Michael worked from home and he loved spending time with her.

“Something is on your mind,” he said a few minutes into the chore. It had gotten easy to read his wife over the years; he knew when she wanted to say something but didn’t know how to approach the topic.

“Yes,” she replied.

“Do you want to talk about it?”

Nina lowered the cloth in her hands and met Michael’s gaze, her eyes reflecting a mixture of emotions. “Michael, I think it’s time. It’s time to go back.”

“Go back? Go back to where?”

“Home, Michael. I think it’s time to go back to Nigeria,” she explained.

Michael was stunned. You could have given him a thousand guesses, and he would get them all wrong. He slowly sat on the bed and pushed aside the cloth he was folding.

“That’s very sudden. Why do you want to go back?” He asked, but he almost regretted the question when he saw a familiar glint in his wife’s eyes.

“I just think the time is right,” Nina replied with a slight shrug.

“Okay, but right for what?” He pushed.

“Right to finally get my revenge,” she replied in a small voice and looked down at her feet.

“Nina, we’ve built a new life here. We have family and kids to take care of, everything is going so well. Are you sure you want to upset this balance for your revenge? What you are suggesting could be very dangerous,” Michael asked with a tired sigh.

“Yes, I’m sure it’s what I want to do. I have a plan,” she replied with unwavering determination in her voice.

“Okay, let’s hear the plan,” he replied, opening his palms in a sweeping motion as if to say, “You have the floor.”

“I’m going to sue them,” she replied.

“What?”

“Yes. That’s my plan. I’m going to sue each and everyone of them. Well, as many as I can.”

“I don’t understand,” Michael replied with a confused frown.

“Think about it. Each and every one of them has skeletons in their closets, and I know I won’t have to dig deep before I find what I need. I’m going to sue them and win and make them serve time for the crimes they’ve committed.

“I don’t know, Nina. That sounds easy enough, but nothing is ever that straightforward,” he replied with a shake of his head.

Nina placed a hand on his, her touch reassuring. “I’ve thought about that too. We’ll take all the necessary precautions. I won’t do anything that’ll put the twins in danger, you know that.”

“Except that is exactly what you are trying to do,” he replied, then walked out of the room.

It took months of back and forth before Nina was able to convince Michael that it was safe to go back and pursue her revenge with her new plan. Then, over the course of the next couple of months, they meticulously planned their return down to the most minute detail. They were not willing to leave anything to chance.

Upon their return, they set up a modest home in a quiet neighborhood in Enugu. They were not ready to jump back into the hustle and bustle of Lagos State, and they felt their kids would be safer away from the madness of the whole state.

Within weeks of being back, Nina had her first target. The Inspector General of the Nigerian Police Force.

The IGP was a man with a reputation for corruption and ruthlessness; his influence and connections extended far. Nina knew that taking him on would be one of the hardest things she had ever done, but she was prepared for the task ahead.

But the first order of business was to get a license to practice law in Nigeria.

Weeks morphed into months and years as Nina built a solid and ironclad case. She amassed evidence of embezzlement, abuse of power, and human rights violations perpetrated by the IGP and his associates. She made sure to consider all possible loopholes he would try and wiggle his way out, and then she closed them all off.

When she was finally ready, she filed her case.

The news spread like wildfire across the country. There was an influx of support and encouragement from all over, but there were also threats and intimidation attempts.

As the day of the first court hearing approached, Nina couldn’t help but reflect on the journey that had led her to this point. It had been more than a decade since that tragic night when she lost the last member of her family. When innocent Nigerians were gunned down like cattle in their hundreds.

Now, she was standing at the cliff of justice, ready to challenge the very system that had failed her family.

On D-day, Nina presented her case carefully, laying out the evidence of corruption and abuse of power that had plagued the IGP’s tenure. Her arguments were compelling, her legal expertise shining through with every word she spoke.

The defense had grossly underestimated her. They had no idea how long she had prepared and built her case. They were unprepared for her.

As the trial progressed, Nina called witnesses who had suffered at the hands of the corrupt police force. It wasn’t very hard to find them. When you break someone over and over again, they stop fearing you.

Their testimonies were heartbreaking and tear-evoking; they painted a grim picture of a system that had failed its citizens. Nina saw more than a few people crying silently as the witnesses told their stories.

The support for Nina’s cause grew, and her pursuit of justice symbolized hope for many who had been victims of the same system. It was the only thing anyone talked about, and once more, the people were united against their common enemy.

The day of reckoning arrived as the judge delivered the verdict. The IGP and several of his associates were found guilty on several counts of corruption, abuse of power, and human rights violations.

The whole country erupted in cheer, a collective victory for all those who had suffered at the hands of the corrupt police force.

As Nina stepped out of the courtroom and into her waiting car, her heart swelled with a mix of emotions. She had taken the first step in getting revenge for the crimes committed against her family.

But for her, it wasn’t just about revenge anymore.

It was about creating a lasting impact, a change in the system that had failed so many. It was about being the shield for the common people, a shield she had wished she had. It was about saving Nigeria from itself. It was about justice for those who don’t have a voice of their own.

She knew that her fight was far from over, and she was prepared to dedicate her life to reform and justice.

With Michael by her side and their two children waiting at home, Nina had come full circle, from a girl consumed by the need for revenge to a woman who had found a way to channel her passion into a force for good. She had transformed her pain, hate, and anger into a powerful pursuit of justice.

In doing so, she was finally honoring the memories of her family. She had also become a beacon of hope that their oppressors would not go scot-free.

She was Karma.

And it was finally time for her enemies to get what they deserved.

This?

This was just the beginning.

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