

## PAIN IN THE NECK

Ifeoma Odiinye should be congratulated. *Pain in the Neck* is an extraordinary achievement. Meticulously and vividly written, her haunting portrayal of intolerance, inhumanity, and innocence abroad should be required reading for every woman. Finally, a talented writer in Africa has taken up where Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* left off. Direct and unflinching, Odiinye's deeply-felt presentation of young Nigerian women lured into the Chinese flesh trade is impossible to put down.

### Sue Matheson

Associate Professor of English, University College of the North, Manitoba, Canada  
Book Review Editor, *Journal of Popular Film and Television*  
Vice President, Awards Popular Culture Association

*Pain in the Neck* by Ifeoma Odiinye is a thought-provoking literary fiction which captures the reader's interest from the start. It depicts the decadence in our contemporary world where the home and the society at large have failed the persons they ought to protect. The use of imagery and suspense in this literary work is profound. Sadly, there is Adanna in almost every home and community today, until we begin to be more proactive in the defense of those who are misjudged and abused, many more Adannas will continue to emerge!

**Nkiruka Nonye ENYINDAH**  
Quebec, Canada

Ifeoma Odiinye, in this novel, *Pain in the Neck*, courageously brings to the fore a highly disturbing and thought-provoking issue of our 21<sup>st</sup> century world. Written in beautiful flowing prose, she skillfully invents the grisly and toughing experiences of Adanna – her protagonist. She artistically weaves the story with a passion that speaks to our consciences, and as well, submerges her readers into the pain, the burden, and their accruing consequences – all precipitated by the sordid prevailing conditions of existence of the female character's society. Invariably, Odiinye interrogates what she perceives as a dire proof of man's inhumanity against the girl child.

**Ifeyinwa J. Ogbazi**

## ABOUT THE BOOK

The novel, *Pain in the Neck* is a poignant story of Adanna, a charming young Nigerian girl who has been a victim of incestuous sexual assault, homelessness, slavery, prostitution and trafficking. Running away from unfavourable sexual oppressive circumstances at her father's house, Adanna realizes that no place is safe. She is drawn to obstacles standing between her and her happiness.



**Ifeoma Odiinye** is a lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria. She studied at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Nigeria; Ramon University of China and Xiamen University, China. She is happily married with children.



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**Ifeoma Odiinye**

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IFEOMA ODINYE

# **PAIN IN THE NECK**

**By**

**Ifeoma Odinye**

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## **Dedication**

To the girl-child who is a victim of molestation,  
sexual abuse and trafficking.

## Acknowledgements

My gratitude goes to God Almighty for His endless grace and mercy in my life throughout the period of writing this novel. May His name be praised forever.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### *WHEN CONSCIENCE SPEAKS*

Adanna had never been a happy child. Her experiences on the road of life had been tortuous and heart-wringing. The trauma of her family background and past painful experiences had caused her untold depression. Her personal recollections as well as the events surrounding her life had taught her a bitter lesson in life.

The Eve of her traditional wedding generated an atmosphere of confusion and anxiety. At the back of the huge building somewhere near the deserted small mud house, Ada stood gazing and listening as though she was being lectured by the silent wind. I noticed her cold attitude towards everyone that evening. The moment I arrived at her father's compound that fateful day, I knew that something was wrong. Adanna was trapped and lost in her thoughts. She could barely notice voices high and low in swift joyous mood. She did not hear people jolting, shouting and discussing in loud voices. My friend, Ada was just nineteen but her experiences did not match her age at all.

I had always been an inquisitive person. That indeed had given me different nicknames. I am unworried because I had been very sensitive to people's plight. This was one big flaw that had put people off about me.

'My name is Chika, but my friends call me *Amibo!* This is a white truth! Yes, I know! I did not learn it at all. It is just a natural gift from above. Talking is my hobby and I enjoy it very well. It has saved me a lot of stress throughout my journey in China. That is my life and I cannot run away from myself. People always tell me, 'you

are beautiful, but you talk like a parrot.’ Sometimes, I am weighed down by this comment, but the fact remains that I am myself and cannot run away from being me’. Chika muttered, swinging her eyes from one side to the other.

‘My mother has warned me about this several times but nature does not lie at all. Grace is what I need, that’s all! I have made many New Year’s resolutions but I still find myself back to square one! Is talking too much bad? Can’t people accept me the way I am? The fact remains that I don’t steal and I don’t fancy lies at all! My journey in life might be rough and crooked, but I guess there is still a good portion of humanity left in me! My only glaring weakness is ‘talking too much!’ Hummm mmm! People are indeed funny. Complaint here and there! My own is only to talk and talk! What can we say about young girls who snatch old women’s husbands, young girls’ boyfriends and fornicate as though sex is food? Which one is a lesser evil?’

This was the very question I asked my mother after one long night of advice on this particular issue. She simply held me tight with her two arms and said, ‘Chy, *nwam*, hei! Don’t say that again! Please, don’t try that at all. You are unique the way you are. You are a good child’, my mother muttered!

That was the very first time my mother appreciated my imperfection. She looked straight into my searching eyes, caressed my head with her motherly palms and said, ‘*Nwam*, you are wonderfully made!’

At that moment, I knew that my mother’s love for me was deeper than what I ever imagined. I used to think that my mother hated me more than my other siblings, because she would scold me, beat me and decline giving me money as a result of my talking habit. But that day, she

revealed the deepest secret of her heart to me. She told me that talking too much was bad and could put someone into a big trouble.

My mother said something that shocked me to the bones. ‘You talk too much, yes I know, but you always said them just the way they happened! Talking too much has no medicine my dear, but you need to be very careful so that you wouldn’t put yourself in great danger!’ She said smiling broadly.

That was the candid advice my mother gave me that night. I was very happy and the respect I had for my mother deepened the more. That was the best advice I ever received in the world which taught me the best way of coping with my bad habit. I did all within my power to avoid talking too much. The more I tried, the more I failed.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### *THERE'S BLINDNESS IN TRUTH*

‘Evil must not continue! The truth must be told and evil exposed! Ngozi must be exposed! I must do my part and leave the rest to God! God does not use spirits to reveal secrets, he sends his angels and these are people. Yes, I mean people like you and I! My friend must not be humiliated again! Enough is enough!’ Chika said moving towards the huge building.

Ngozi had once threatened to ruin Adanna’s marriage. Chika knew that she would resort to cheap blackmail if nothing was done. She sounded very convincing the day she issued the threat.

A group of girls sat in front of the huge building chatting in their usual girlish manner. Ngozi sat in the middle busy with her black berry phone. She was silent. Unusually silent and calm! She only scrutinized the cheerful faces of the girls who were busy talking. She wished there was a way she could know what happened after her meeting with Emeka. She had envisaged problems, problems that would put an end to Ada’s marriage. Smiling mischievously, Ngozi looked at Adanna. She thought, ‘this marriage must not happen! Not today! Not tomorrow! Never! *Ashawo na Ashawo!* Once *Ashawo*, always *Ashawo!*’

Ngozi felt an encroaching restlessness as she watched Adanna talking to an unknown caller. At first, she had enjoyed the company of the girls talking about Adanna’s suitor. But she soon became bored and worried, half listening and half present. I always had a peculiar discomfort about Ngozi’s presence in Adanna’s house.

Her facial expression and action said something about her hatred for Adanna. She slipped her phone into her bag and left the girls. She was indeed strangely angry about something. She hurried to the small mud house close to the low kitchen stool where Ada sat.

Ngozi looked at Adanna's screwed-up face and asked, 'what's the matter? Why do you look so tensed and erratic?'

'I'm shocked and so nervous now!' Adanna said striding up the tight steps of the new building. As she entered the big building through the narrow backyard door, Ngozi reviewed her interaction with Emeka. She remembered how she had racked his brain to believe all her truth and lies. On that very day she spilled the venom of her bitterness, her room had no peculiar smell. In that hot afternoon, her room smelled of nothing, only neglect and frustration. Her face only showed a rare blend of jealousy and hatred as she stared at Ada's mini picture on her phone. That afternoon, she did her best, the very best she could do to sow a seed! A seed of discord, endless discord! She took her phone and called Emeka.

'Marry Ada and regret later. Marriage is a lifelong journey ooo. If you want more explanations, come to my house!' Ngozi shouted in a tone that startled Emeka and switched off her phone.

'What else could I have done? I told him lies and truth to sever their relationship. Ada made me kill my fiancé! I killed Nedu because of this useless girl!' Ngozi muttered to herself.

She could still remember how Emeka's eyes dropped like that of a hurt dog when he entered her room. His face resembled a rat its small head had been battered by hungry looking children.

‘Where did you get this sudden news from, Ngo?’ Emeka asked.

‘Or are you now doing what I hear some young ladies do to destroy their girlfriend’s personality? Ada is beautiful, stubborn and smart, but very descent. I’ll not let you insult and humiliate her.’ Emeka said automatically stunned by her silent gaze.

‘What is this for? Eh? You have disorganized me now!’ Emeka’s eyes bulged. He moved forward and backward with his fingers clenched, as if to attack Ngozi and then stopped.

‘Cool down’, Ngozi shouted.

‘Don’t mention it, talk, talk, talk!’ Emeka shouted, grumbling bitterly. Ngozi stood up and adjusted her mini gown.

‘Let’s sit down and talk if you don’t mind, I would like to make a few more frank comments about your girl. Who would want to marry an abused girl from childhood? Who would even want to be the husband of a loose woman? We are not sisters, we are just friends! We are not related by blood. I hate Adanna. I simply hate her! I am afraid, she is not your kind of woman’. Ngozi repeated, her voice rising, and tears filling up her eyes.

‘I’m sorry Emeka, you can’t marry that hopeless girl,’ she said.

‘What is the problem?’ Emeka asked, looking into her watery eyes. Why don’t you tell me what the problem is? From your impromptu performance now, I would rather say you are a good actress. That’s quite a strong allegation from a friend against a friend!’ Emeka shouted.

‘But I am shocked that this would come from you. You know what’s going on in my mind?’ Emeka asked, ‘Why don’t you tell me your story?’

Ngozi continued. ‘Adanna is an emblem of sexual exploitation and rejection. She is an orphan whose body has been battered by men’s hungry urge for sex. Her alluring beauty has been a web used in manipulating men. My fiancé was one of her victims! Yes, he was!’ Ngozi shouted.

‘Adanna was a victim of incestuous rape. She was continuously raped by her father at a very tender age. This ushered her into series of rape and sexual exploitation. In fact, she was a local and international prostitute. She slept with men for money! Yes, she did everything for money! She wanted it more than her life!’ Ngozi said pouting her lips.

‘I can’t believe that Adanna had slept with hundreds of men! I can’t believe we are here to discuss Adanna, the only girl that got my poor heart beating!’ Emeka lamented.

‘Calm down my dear’, Ngozi said. ‘I am not here for you to lament over my friend’s betrayal. I am only here to save your life, your lineage and your future. I want my revenge! My mind will only relax when I have fully exposed her. She is an unrepentant prostitute without a living womb! She seduced my fiancé, slept with him and virtually everything in trousers! Adanna is an embodiment of disgrace. *Tufiawa!*’

Emeka could sense anxiety in his muscles over this heart racking revelation. He wondered whether he had heard Ngozi correctly, or whether her bitter hatred for Adanna had made him dizzy. He guided his knees from right to left, flashed a glance at his sliver wristwatch, and

hissed. Emeka could never have imagined that such an austere young lady could be a prostitute.

‘This is mere fiction! I’m convinced that this is not true. It cannot be my Ada! No no no no!’ Emeka’s usual warmth had deserted him. He seemed tongue-tied, and unable to look into Ngozi’s eyes. He suddenly felt like fainting.

‘Are you changing your mind?’ Ngozi interrupted tongue-in-cheek.

‘Stop asking that nonsense question!’ Emeka sounded irritated and angry.

‘This news is eating you, Emeka. Why are you so angry? Oh, well I forgot that Adanna is your sweetheart, your *Tomatoe Jos*, your *Akwa nwa*! Let’s go and eat. You need some food and drinks if you are feeling dizzy.’ Ngozi mumbled.

Emeka quietly walked to the entrance through the narrow passage full of his own thoughts. He climbed down the sloppy cemented stairs, entered his car and zoomed off. Everything had happened as planned. Ngozi alone knew what irritated Emeka. She lifted up her head from the text message she was reading, in the direction of the speeding car, wondering what would become of Emeka’s marriage plans with Adanna. Ngozi could sense the anxiety in her muscles as she pondered to understand Emeka’s reaction. Ngozi looked at Adanna’s picture on her phone, her oval-shaped face and pointed nose radiated a rear beauty that rekindled Ngozi’s anger.

An ominous air hung over her room for the rest of the day. She could not eat, or watch television. She felt visibly uneasy and couldn’t sleep a wink that night.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### *VOICES FROM WITHIN*

As time passed without seeing Adanna coming back to the girls, I became very worried. What was keeping her away from the girls for so long? Apart from my anxiety over Ngozi's questionable behaviour, I needed someone to talk to. Someone to reveal the dirty secret that burdened my heart. I felt a little weak and leaned against the cemented wall close to the mud house.

Suddenly, Emeka, Adanna's fiancé meandered through a group of guests in the compound, strode towards the mud house and demanded to know more about Ada. He was furiously angry and lacked the usual patience that he had been known for.

'Thanks for concealing evil! I've heard everything! Indeed, all females are mysterious, big and small. They are like a big ocean, deep and unfathomable!' Emeka said confronting Chika.

Chika stared at him for some minutes and then turned away.

'Don't tell me that you are here just to confirm the malicious lies someone told you about your fiancée. She is just a victim of circumstances.' Chika said irritably.

'Tell me what you know and save me the long sermon. I simply need the truth! Final!' Emeka shouted at her.

'It's alright. Don't worry, I will tell you,' Chika said. You will hear all you seek to know and judge her by yourself. But remember what happened the day you came to the shop, that very day you proposed to her. She wanted to open up to you about her life but you declined. The love

you had for her blinded you. You refused to allow her utter a word. All you wanted to hear was her ‘yes’, her formal acceptance of your marriage proposal. I will tell you what I know about Adanna, but that must start by narrating my own ordeal because our friendship started in a foreign land. Our path crossed in China, not Nigeria. You really need to be patient to make a good judgment.’

‘Ok, go on,’ Emeka snorted.

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Ada had often told me about her unlucky and unhappy life, especially her childhood experiences through adulthood. Many times, Ada had said to me, ‘life is cruel and people are wicked!’

I did not understand until I became submerged in the wickedness that nearly ruined my life. My dream of learning the Chinese language had become a mere illusion and my fate had become so twisted and wasted. The only option for me was to become a skilled apprentice in order to patch my broken life until God sent me a helper.

Chika began to walk around the mud house, carefully avoiding the broken pieces of palm kernel that lay scattered on the ground. Her mind went back to her journey to China. She darted to the cemented wall and sat down on a half broken block. She was unable to take her mind off that journey. That experience at Beijing terminal created a lasting memory that triggered many bizarre memories. While narrating the story, Chika remembered all the times her mother had sat her down begging her not to bring disgrace to their family. That evening, before her departure to Lagos, her mother had told her to make a firm promise that she would concentrate on her studies and be as modest as she could be.

‘I want a promise from you,’ she said gazing deeply into Chika’s watery eyes.

‘What promise *Nnem*?’

‘A promise to remain a good girl I raised you! A promise to face your studies squarely! A promise to avoid evil association and illegal activities!’

It was the type of promise Chika expected. She held her mother’s right hand and gave her a soft kiss. She could not avoid her mother’s gaze as she waited for her to make the promise.

‘I will make you proud! *Nnem*, I will make you proud!’ Chika said.

‘I trust you, my daughter’, Mrs Ugah said. ‘May the Lord lead you safely to China. May He guide and protect you! May you be a success in all areas of your life!’

‘Amen!’ Chika shouted. But her voice had lost a force that usually accompanied her speeches. Again, Chika returned her attention to the Beijing Airport. She shut her eyes tightly and screamed bitterly.

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Chika fought back her tears as she wandered at the Beijing Airport terminal. People were streaming down the immigration section for the arrivals’ clearance and check-in. She seemed so confused and frustrated amidst the yellow and white skins. She could barely speak as a feeling of inferiority waved in her drumming heart. The piercing eyes of the Chinese travelers generated in her a feeling of hatred for her dark complexion. At that moment, she wished she was white skinned.



‘*Zhe ge shi ni de toufa?*’ (Is this your hair?) A cute young Chinese lady asked! As Chika tried to comprehend what she said, the young lady asked again.

‘*Shi zhen de haishi jiade?*’ (Is your hair real or artificial?) Touching her neatly braided long hair. At that moment, it dawned on Chika that she was different from the people around her and a totally confused stranger. She was thrown into a state of confusion since she could barely understand what the young lady said.

‘Pardon? What did you say?’ Chika asked.

‘*Wo?*’ (Me?) The young Chinese lady replied smiling broadly. Judging by her facial expression, Chika felt she was very polite and friendly. Stretching forth her right hand she said.

‘I’m Chika from Nigeria’. What’s your name?’

‘Soly,soly,soly, *buhaoyisi*’ my engirish is nootu good !’(Sorry sorry sorry, my English is not good.) The young Chinese lady hurriedly replied drawing backwards as if she was being chased by someone. Chika was puzzled and rooted to the ground as she saw the young lady hurrying down to join a very long queue. She merely looked in utter confusion and surprise.

‘What’s wrong with this yellow pawpaw? Why is she shying away from telling me her name? Ooooooh! *You sabi!*’ Chika muttered in her Anambra accent as she carried her heavy bag to join the queue.

‘*Chei! Chei! Chei!*’ *China mara mma ooo!* (China is beautiful ooo!)’ She glanced from one end of the terminal to the other. Her friend’s father had once told her that ‘China is undeveloped with the largest population and that everything in China is fake and very inferior!’ She was also told in Nigeria that ‘Chinese people are ugly, flat nosed, very short with big heads, short hands and legs.’

Before coming to China, Chika had already painted in her mind the assumed picture of China and her citizens. To her utmost surprise, none of these descriptions matched with reality. All she could see were cute faces, very stylish and well-marbled buildings.

The Beijing Airport building was very classy, magnificent and fully furnished with big TV screens on the marbled walls. Judging by the shiny floors, she would have sworn the airport was newly built by the Chinese government. Chika slowly walked down the big beautifully decorated high towered hall to join the line. She could hardly believe what she saw. Her mind raced back to the Murtala Mohammed International Airport at Lagos, the old and scantily furnished two storied building, the noisy arena, the rush, and the clumsiness of the airport workers as people check in their luggage. Chika could not hide her sense of anger, shame and hatred for the poor state of her country. Once again, her thoughts were interrupted by the immigration officer.

‘Please, may I help you?’ Chika turned immediately. She saw the young handsome Chinese smiling down at her.

‘Oooooooh! No, noooooo! I was about joining the queue!’ Chika replied.

‘Are you from which country?’ The handsome tall Chinese asked with a clear Asian accent.

‘Nigeria’, she muttered.

‘Nigelia?’ He repeated as if he was confused.

‘You mean Africa?’ The young man asked.

Chika told him that ‘Africa is a continent and not a country.’ He simply told her that they assumed all Africans were black in complexion, so they never bothered themselves about their different countries.

‘*Hao hao hao*,okay la!’ (Okay!) The officer said nodding in affirmation.

‘Are you a student?’ He asked.

‘Yes, I am a new student. It is my first time in China’. Chika answered!

‘*Zhen de ma?*’ (Really?) *Huanying dao Zhongguo!* (Welcome to China!) China is a very peaceful and beautiful place. Please enjoy your stay here.’ He said.

The conversation was interrupted by another immigration officer who demanded to see Chika’s passport for verification. To her astonishment, Chika noticed that the female immigration officer could speak good English with no Asian accent. Her eyes reverted to the long column of officers attending to the passengers at the arrival section, their faces looked very cheerful and calm. They seemed to be enjoying their work unlike the Nigerian officers whose faces looked angry and tired.

She noticed the officers were all young people approximately below the age of thirty-five. They were smartly dressed in their uniforms and had a charming look that swept Chika off her feet. She wondered why in Nigeria the case was different. There were many old people working in the airport. There were no rules concerning the airport dress code, the older workers wore *Agbada* while the younger ones wore uniforms half tucked in with little or no smartness.

‘Your passport please’, the female officer cut in. As Chika stretched out her hand to present her passport, her lovely dark fingers brushed against the cute white skinned officer’s hand who gave her a warm smile.

‘Have a happy and crime free stay in China’, the female officer added.

‘Thanks!’ Chika replied heading towards the  
Exit passage

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### *UNKNOWN JOURNEY*

The Airport was a very huge one with different adjacent revolving doors and direction signs written in Chinese characters. Walking down the exit, Chika felt a pressure below her abdomen. She looked for the direction signs but could not read the written Chinese characters inscribed on the sign posts. She approached a middle aged female Chinese mopping the marbled floor.

‘Please, where is the toilet? Chika asked. The woman looked at her and muttered something she could not comprehend while concentrating on her cleaning. She thought the Chinese woman didn’t hear her clearly. So she repeated her question.

‘Please ma, could you show me the toilet? I am very pressed!’

The woman simply smiled back at her and said, ‘*ting bu dong!*’ (I don’t understand). Chika was totally confused and frustrated that she nearly messed up her pant. As she stood there trying to guess what was written on the sign posts, she saw a dark complexioned man walking down the exit passage with a young Chinese man. She quickly ran to him and asked for the direction of the toilet, luckily for her the young man and his friend led her to the rest room and waited until she came out! When Chika came out, she was very surprised to see the dark complexioned man and his Chinese friend standing outside the public convenience. She looked at him and said in the usual Nigerian pidgin accent.

‘Maka Chukwu! Bro, I for don die or even shit for my pant if u no save me oooo!’

*'I bu onye Igbo!'* (You are an Igbo person) The dark complexioned guy shouted in surprise!

*'Nwanne m! Welcome to China'*, he added.

*'What's your name?'* The young man asked.

*'I'm Chika'*, she replied.

*'Okay! I'm Chinedu. You can call me Nedu boy.*

*I am from Igbukwu town in Anambra State. This is my friend, Chang. He is from Guangzhou in Guangdong Province.'*

*'Nice to meet you, Chang. Waooh! I am also from Anambra State, precisely Agulu'*, Chika said.

*'What brought you to China? Is this your first time here?'* Chinedu asked.

*'Yes oooo! I have come to study Chinese Language in Beijing Foreign Studies University.'*

*'Are you also a student?'* Chika asked.

*'No! I am a businessman. I do business in a city called Guangzhou. Can I have your phone number?'* Chinedu asked.

*'Oh! I have two numbers. One is GLO and the other one is MTN. Which one do you want?'* Chika asked.

Nedu looked at her and had a long stretched laugh...

*'Haaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa! Ewo! Adanne, MTN and GLO no dey work here ooo! Na only China Sim card go work for China!'*

*'But they told us in Naija that MTN is everywhere u go'*, Chika added.

*'For China no bi so! Na China u dey ooo! Things dey different here ooo! So get prepared ooo!'* Nedu told her. He gave her his complimentary card and asked her to give him a call whenever she settled down. Shortly after that, he left with his Chinese friend to Check-in their

luggage for their trip to Guangzhou. Chika was indeed very happy that she met someone from her country. She carefully put the card in her small *Aba* wallet and headed out to board a taxi to her destination.

She saw a long line of new cars parked at a section she assumed was the taxi stand. She would have mistaken them to be owned by private individuals if not for the inscription on the new cars written *Taxi*. Again, she looked at the long line of people as they entered the bus without any form of rush, fighting or pushing.

‘*Na waooh!* Which kind country bi this oooo ? See how people just dey relaxed, *no rush rush, no pushing pushing, no talk talk!* This one na China wonder! No bi American wonder again oooo! *Ewooh!* No bi small tin ooh!’ Chika muttered.

She saw a long queue of Chinese people waiting to board the taxi. Chika joined the queue and greeted them but none of them responded to her greetings. They simply looked at her from hair to toes. Their faces looked confused and their eyes searched her body in astonishment. She saw them pointing at her and saying, ‘*hei ren*’ (black person). She was confused, ashamed and angry! The worst of it all was that she did not understand what they were saying. At that particular moment she thought of racism.

‘Are these people racists? Why are they looking at me like that? What is wrong in being black?’ She murmured! She felt like disappearing and longed for her dear country Nigeria.

‘Indeed, there is no place like home! Home is home, no matter what!’ She again muttered. A wave of

inferiority engulfed her as she glanced from one yellow skinned Chinese to the other.

‘*Chei!* This is a mass of great injustice to Africa! Look at their smooth yellowish skin, pointed noses, curved figures and slim bodies. I thought they said the Chinese are ugly, short, flat-nosed and shapeless! *Nawa ooooooh!* See their long dark hair! See ooo! They don’t have buttocks but their shapes and curves are indeed something else!’

Her thoughts were interrupted by the taxi man who demanded for her destination.

‘*Ni qu nar?*’ (What’s your destination?) The taxi man asked. Chika could hardly understand his statement. She told the man that she was going to Beijing Foreign Studies University but the man quickly said, ‘*ting bu dong!*’ (I don’t understand) and went for another Chinese passenger.

Chika stood there lost, angry and frustrated. She tried speaking with some Chinese people at the taxi park but all shied away saying ‘*ting bu dong*’ (I don’t understand) in their usual Chinese manner while covering their mouths with their palms.

Chika stood there depressed and dejected. She wondered why they covered their mouths while answering her back.

‘Could it be that I smell? No, it can’t be! I brushed my teeth, cleaned up and sprayed my perfume when I used the restroom. I smell fresh. What could be the problem?’ She contemplated.

‘Hallo’, a voice cut in. ‘Where are you foloom?’ Stretching forth her hand to greet Chika.

Chika looked at her and wondered the type of person she was. Instead of asking for her name, she asked



for her country. At first, Chika was infuriated but on a second thought she replied.

‘Nice to meet you! I’m Chika from Nigeria.’  
What’s your name?’

‘Callu me Wang! I am a student at Peking University. You are from Aflica?’ Wang asked.

‘I’m from Africa but Africa is not a country. It is a continent for God’s sake!’ Chika added! She wondered why they referred to all black people from different countries as Africans as if Africa had become a country and not a continent. Chika was not in the mood for any conversation. Her greatest concern was to take a taxi to her destination.

‘Please, I am a new student! I want to board a taxi to my new school but I’m not fluent in Chinese language’, Chika said.

‘*Whatu isee your new school?*’ Wang asked.  
‘Beijing Foreign Studies University’, Chika answered.

‘Okay la! *Bei Wai*’, the young Chinese shouted! She told Chika to enter the next available taxi and she spoke to the taxi driver in a language that sounded so funny and curly.

Wang waved at Chika and said, ‘Welicome tu China! Pye pye’ (bye bye). Chika waved back at her and the noiseless taxi sped off the airport road.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### *THIS WORLD IS DIFFERENT*

Chika fought with her conscience. Her eyes searched the Beijing streets in amazement, and she could see high towered buildings on both sides of the road. She could barely hide her astonishment.

‘Ewoooo oh! *This na building abi na toy house?*’ She exclaimed!

The roads were very wide and clean. The sides were beautified with colourful flowers and she could barely see people walking about in the street. She wondered what the problem was. Again, she glanced through her watch and shouted.

‘What? 4am? This is impossible! Maybe something is wrong with my wristwatch. But I bought this watch just two days ago and it was okay.’

Her eyes reverted to the time set in the taxi and it was eleven o’clock. She could not understand at that time but assumed that something was wrong with her wristwatch. Chika sat nervously at the edge of the car seat. Again, she glanced at her wristwatch and the time set in the taxi and hissed. She wondered why they had not reached their destination. Her heart was drumming and she could feel it. Just then, her stomach made a rumbling sound and she felt a very sharp pain at the center of her belly. Tension and fear gripped her. She felt some watery substance coming out of her anus. She tightened her anus and perched her buttocks at the edge of the taxi seat. She was clutching her stomach with both hands as if to prevent the liquid substance from passing through her anus.

‘O God, please save me from this shame and humiliation! Why did I even eat those pilipili food they served us in the airplane? Why did I even allow my longer throat to put me in this piteous condition?’ Her memory again went back to when they were in the airplane. She could remember how she yearned to taste all the drinks and continental dishes served in the airplane which never satisfied her hunger. She could still hear the soft voice of the air hostess singing like a mosquito in her ears.

‘Tea, coffee, juice, soft drinks, beer or water. Marched curry potatoes, beef rice, blended rice, fruit salad. Which one do you care for?’ The pretty Chinese hostess asked smiling politely.

‘I want marched curry potatoes, fruit salad and juice, pleaseee!’ Chika replied.

‘Ok, wait for a moment’, the hostess said.

The aroma of different types of dishes saturated the plane. The aroma was very inviting that she felt like emptying all the food in her stomach. She eagerly waited for the food and drinks to be served. She could see some white people in the first roll of the plane cabin munching and licking their lips. Again she salivated and felt like tearing the food away from them. Chika was terribly hungry to the extent that her stomach was rumbling and drumming like a huge drum. She had no supper before leaving her cousin’s house for the airport. She hurriedly moved into the busy streets of Lagos so that she would not miss her flight. She was so hungry but refused to buy food or drinks at the airport because she heard that things were expensive abroad. She kept the little money she had and went on hunger strike for hours.

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## CHAPTER SIX

### *NEWNESS IN UNCERTAINTY*

The journey to the university was very long and tiring. Chika sat at the back seat of the taxi angry and tired. A sense of sadness and frustration waved in her heart as a result of her twenty-one hours' journey from Nigeria to China. She looked at the driver whose face never showed any emotion but yawned at internals.

A strong garlic smell brushed Chika's nose, causing her to squeeze her face and hold her breath. The driver continued to gape uncontrollably. Chika did not like the smell at all. She shifted her gaze to the window. She noticed that the streets were clean and the roads were very smooth with no potholes. There were no hawkers on the streets and high ways calling out for customers. Immediately, her memory reverted to high ways and streets in Nigeria where different groups of hawkers and beggars positioned themselves calling out to travelers in moving vehicles.

Again her thoughts were disrupted. She could see groups of yellow skinned people moving towards the same direction with umbrellas. She couldn't understand why people were holding umbrellas under a very good weather. Chika also noticed the skimpy wears and short pants that revealed some parts of their bodies. She looked at the driver and he was wearing a light blue shirt.

'They said that *obodo oyibo* is cold and that people always wear jackets and rain coats to shield them from catching pneumonia. *Ahaaaaaa!* Why are these people wearing pants?' Chika mumbled.

She critically looked at herself and the heavy sweater she was wearing. Chika was neither cold nor hot. She hurriedly removed her sweater and folded it neatly into her big black ‘*Ghana-must-go*’ bag. Her attention was again disrupted by the sudden halting of the car in front of a huge gate. The statues of two giant lions boldly stood at both sides of the gate. Behind the statues, were the pillars and above them was the inscription written in bold letters *Bei Wai* (Beijing Foreign Studies University, China). Chika could see people trudging in and out of the gate. Some of them sipping juice and munching fruits while others chat in an unusual manner. The taxi driver said, ‘*women dao le!*’ (We have arrived)

Chika looked confused. But for the inscription on the entrance of the gate she would have believed the school was a king’s palace.

‘How much is your money?’ Chika asked. The driver did not reply but pointed to the meter in the taxi. Chika’s eyes reverted to the meter which read hundred Yuan of Chinese currency. She hurriedly searched through her hand bag and brought out a hundred naira note. She quickly offered it to the driver who waved his hand and said.

‘*Bu bu bu! Bu yao!*’ (No no no. I don’t want)

‘But, this is hundred naira! Please sir, take it! That’s what your meter reads.’ Chika said.

The driver brought out a neat reddish pink and white rectangular shaped paper and said, ‘*dis one moni, moni, one hondreedi yuan! Givu mii, givu mii!*’ he said angrily.

Chika looked in confusion and replied, ‘see me see trouble ooo. I just gave you a hundred naira but you refused. What else do you want?’

Turning away from the scene, Chika glanced at a group of people looking sheepishly towards their direction. A young light skinned lady in a lovely pink and white short gown walked up to them and began to talk to the driver. She had promised to give the driver the taxi fare. The young lady opened her wallet and brought out the same reddish pink and white rectangular shaped cut paper initially displayed by the driver. She handed it over to him as they talked in what sounded like Mandarin. With some efforts Chika controlled the aching urge to flare up. She kept her mouth shut and silently watched the driver enter his taxi and drove away.

All the same, Chika had learnt from her bitter foreign experience. She looked at the jostling crowd in front of the school gate and was overwhelmed by a strong wave of shame. She turned to the young lady who paid her taxi fare as she heaved a sigh of relief. She said gently, '*Hummm!* Thanks for saving my face! I am very grateful. I gave the driver this hundred naira note from my country, he declined accepting it.' Chika brought out the roughly folded money from her bag and showed the lady.

The lady's face brightened. 'Don't trouble yourself! There's no problem. I guess you are new here? My name is Jessica.' The young lady said stretching her right hand towards Chika.

'I am Chika. This is my first time out of my country. Could you please direct me to the students' registration building?'

'Sure!' The young lady replied leading the way.

The school environment seemed very strange to Chika. It was like a fairy world displayed on a television set. Nobody at the school looked like her. She saw some mixed colours of people who had long silky hair like the

Chinese but none of them were as dark as her. Each of them gave her a broad look as she thrashed her way to the registration hall.

The walk to the New Students' Registration Hall lasted a little over thirty minutes because of the vast landscape of the school. Huge buildings stood neatly at different corners. They were very intimidating buildings nicely decorated with transparent glass windows, brick blocks and porches. The lawns and flower gardens in front of these buildings were neatly cut and well maintained. The roads were broad and the path ways neatly marbled and carved. Students were seen going about their usual business.

'This is a beautiful place.' Chika muttered to Jessica.

'Wait until you settle down', she replied with a simple smile.

'China is a beautiful country and the Chinese people are very industrious and traditional. They are also kind and friendly.' Jessica continued walking towards a giant building.

She entered the building and Chika followed her silently noting with admiration the Chinese flower pots, neatly curved panes and the sparkling stair case.

No description would have made it easy for Chika to locate the building-all the buildings in the school look alike. Their patterns were similar except for the inscriptions written in Mandarin Chinese character.

A lanky Chinese young man wearing what seemed like a Nigerian police uniform opened the glass door wide enough to let them in and at the same time muttering something that sounded awkward.

‘*Huanying!*’ (You are welcome.) He said standing like a tree.

Chika thought that was even ridiculous, greeting without any display of emotion. The young man looked cute in his sky-blue shirt, black trousers and well-polished shoes. Some ideas were already springing up in her mind... Her thoughts were interrupted by Jessica who beckoned her to follow closely.

‘Please pardon me,’ Chika said walking towards the lobby. Chika stood in the lobby of the huge building watching students file one by one in the hall. The sign above the counter read: ‘New Students Registration Office’. It was a Tuesday mid-day, supposedly the most tedious period for the office attendants. The line was long and filled with new students who probably had arrived as freshmen in the school. Their bags and other belongings were kept at one corner of the building. No one was smiling. They looked as if they had all come from a funeral. Their faces were squeezed and long that you could sense their frustration and disappointment. In fact, there was a horrible sense of sadness that overwhelmed the hall.

‘Please come back at 2pm. We are on break!’ One of the office attendants said locking the main door leading to other offices. Jessica glanced at her watch and heaved a sigh of frustration.

‘Sorry, the office is closed for now! It’s 12 noon sharp!’ She said.

‘What do you mean? It’s just 12 noon and they are on break?’ Chika shouted a deep sign of disappointed written over her face.

‘Yes! That’s the tradition here! Chinese people do things differently. They have their *modus operandi*. They



go to work at 7am, take a break from 12 noon to 2pm and then close at 6pm.’ Jessica explained.

There was a horrible sense of loneliness and sadness that enveloped the hall. Many of the students headed to different directions. Some of them walked out of the revolving door as if the whole world had collapsed on their shoulders.

Chika, irritatedly stomped around the huge building. Each minute that passed meant a lot to her. For several hours, she had not showered and had been without any good food. Her mind jumped from one thing to another. Chika stared in front of her for a second and stepped out of the building.

‘Studying abroad is not an easy task’, Chika was thinking to herself. Her coming to China marked the beginning of a new life of struggle without her family or relatives. Jessica was surprised to see Chika behaving in that awkward manner. She felt like leaving Chika alone, but cautioned herself and strode towards her.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *WHAT I NEVER KNEW*

Chika had gone through stress to meet each of the requirements as a foreign student. Lying on her bed at the international students' hostel Chika suppressed a yawn, stretching out her arms to hold back sleep. The journey had been very hectic for her. The twenty-one hours' journey and the new students' registration process had shortened her hours of sleep. There was a vacuum in her life, an absolute emptiness without family, friends and home. Chika liked the campus, the high towered buildings with marble-laced walls and the sophisticated environment adorned with flowers. She liked her room which was fully furnished like a hotel. She was lying down on the bed. Suddenly, she got up and stood looking out of the only window onto the surroundings. She gazed admiringly out of the window. Chika turned around and firmly tugged the robe of the thick white curtain to allow in the cool evening air. She picked up her *Ghana-must-go* bag from the floor and made for the wardrobe. She wanted to unpack before going out to eat dinner.

Chika was stopped by a loud knock on the door. She peeped through the small security opening and she saw, standing there in the door way, Jessica.

Jessica stood solidly by the doorway, with lowered eyes. Chika knew the reason for Jessica's visit. She felt as if time was playing a fast game on her. She opened the door and Jessica walked in.

Jessica gasped. ‘Are you ready?’ She asked.

‘What? *Gini*?’ Chika asked in her usual Anambra accent. She looked angrily at Jessica. She wanted to unpack and rest yet there was that gnawing in her stomach that had become familiar. She was hungry and desperately wanted to quench it.

‘You are not in Africa, come on let’s go for dinner before the school canteen closes. You can’t afford to eat outside the school. It’s quite expensive! Come on, be quick. Let’s go! Come on Chika, let’s go for our food.’ Jessica said.

Chika did not utter a word. It saddened her that she had not settled before Jessica arrived. She quickly grabbed her bag and her electronic room card on the bed and headed outside with Jessica.

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The first time Chika went to the school canteen, she was really fascinated and intimidated by different shades of students who trooped in to have their dinner. Chika looked again at the jostling crowd in front of the food counters. ‘Can’t we exercise some patience? There are many people lined up for food’. She said again feeling so reluctant.

‘We don’t have to stand there forever. Look, there are many counters over there! Come on.’ Jessica said pulling Chika by the hand.

Chika stood watching and absorbing everything. And then and there was Pretty Wu, a tiny Chinese lady. Pretty Wu with her ancient look, her panda shaped eyes, short scanty hair and yellowish skin seated at the front table of the school canteen with a smile that suggested something. She was so tiny and was wearing a brownish tight gown that made her buttock look like a flat board. She smiled often and constantly covered her mouth with her two palms. She looked so small and childlike that Chika could not ignore her. Chika, half smiled in sympathy followed Jessica to join a line of students.

It was indeed a tedious day. Chika had walked past students sprawled on the nicely carved wooden chairs in the canteen. Different types of food were displayed in glass covered containers below students' canteen menu sign written in Chinese characters and English. Chika flinched when she saw a full fried toad-like creature in one of the containers. In that tensed still second she saw the toad-like creature, she flinched.

‘What’s this?’ she asked Jessica.

‘A toad or what?’ Chika asked again.

Jessica simply looked at her and smiled through the corners of her lips. She opened her small blue purse and brought out her student card. She then turned to Chika and said, ‘try the frogs, they are really delicious!’

‘Toads or frogs? Tufiakwa! We don’t eat toads in our country! They can be very poisonous!’ Chika replied with an air of indignation.

A firm female voice from the school canteen counter, with a clear Chinese accent, asked, ‘*whatu do youu want to eatii?*’

A silent sigh, like air, swept through Chika. She opened her mouth and tightened her lips. She pointed at the silver tray containing white rice and another one with red tomatoes stew. She raised her hand to the waitress indicating that she did not want any other food. Jessica ordered for some rice with chicken curry and some long uncut vegetables. She placed her card on a telephone-like device and paid the bill. Chika was puzzled by many things but she had learned not say too much to save herself from constant embarrassment. She silently followed Jessica to a table looking around, as though seeking for someone.

It took Chika and Jessica just five minutes to collect their food. The queue was long but the students were well mannered and organized unlike in most Nigerian universities where students continuously jumped the queue, fought and engaged in verbal attacks. In most cases, constant pushing and elbowing became a norm.

Chika grumbled as she ate the under-cooked rice and sugary stew. She abruptly stopped eating when the sugary taste became unbearable.

‘Damn these people!’ She cried as she dropped the spoon on the table.

‘What is this? Sweetened red stew? How could these people cook food with sugar? In Nigeria, this is not done at all! This country is funny. Sugar and tomatoes

*kwa? Eeeh?* They have terrible cooks here! *Hummmmm!*  
Chika said with disgust.

‘It’s not the fault of the cooks. This is a special kind of food for most Chinese and other foreigners. You made a wrong choice here. Next time please tell me what you want so that I would help you choose your food. In China, we do not judge any food by looking at it, we always like asking the flavour and taste. I’m so sorry dear.’ Jessica put in.

Chika pushed her plate away and declared she was going to her room to eat the biscuits with a bottle of coke she bought from a mini supermarket in the campus. She stood up. Chika was about to leave when she was interrupted. A girl next to her, face well rounded and flushing pink-red, burst out pointing at her, ‘*Hei ren!*’ (Black person).

‘*Ni kan zhe ge hei ren!*’ (See this black person) The girl said to her friends.

Chika looked at the ugly rounded-face Chinese girl to see how the word ‘*hei*’ got connected to her. Again, the girl unafraid pointed at Chika the third time a vague terror freezing her compressed facial features into a scornful-smile.

‘Please do not get angry dear’, Jessica said.

‘They are my coursemates and they are puzzled seeing a black person as dark as you with long braided hair.’ Jessica pleaded with Chika.

‘Try and make friends with them in a spirit of true friendship. But make sure you remain friends with

other Africans, as this would help you keep your ego high.’ Jessica muttered holding her Chinese chop-sticks in the air.

There was a pause. Chika looked deeply at Jessica.

‘Is that all?’ Chika asked.

‘What do you mean? Jessica asked

‘What is *hei ren*? Chika asked.

‘Black person or dark complexioned individual. But it is not derogatory dear. The thing is, each time Chinese people say the word, it hurts Africans’, Jessica said.

‘They should stop identifying people with their colours. I mean, the word, ‘*hei ren*’ is derogatory. I think it’s insulting to spill it out.’ Chika said.

‘I don’t think it’s always hurtful. I think it depends on the intention of the person saying the word. I don’t think they mean any harm. They are simply fascinated seeing a black person’, Jessica cut in.

Jessica and Chika were wrapped in a minute silence. Then a tiny ringing voice rose from one of the girls who clustered around the wooden table. She walked towards Chika touching her dark skin to ascertain the extent it had been covered with dirt. The other girls threw their heads back and roared with laughter. Tears clustered in their eyes leaving traces of wetness on their cheeks. They stopped laughing when they noticed that Jessica and Chika were staring angrily at them as if they had lost their minds.

‘You are from Africa, right? She asked extending her right hand to Chika.

‘Hi. I’m Mei. I’m from Xiamen city, an island city in the southeast China’s Fujian province.’ Mei had a peculiar comic air of a person who could amuse people while having a serious discussion. Chika was frowning and silent. She did not answer the question right away because she was very furious.

‘Yes. I’m Chika. I am from Nigeria not Africa! Africa is a continent with many countries just like Asia.’ Chika replied with great difficulty. She dropped the ceramic spoon noisily on the plate and looked at Wang with narrowed eyes. She stared at her for want of what to say. She took a deep breath and said to Jessica, ‘I want to be alone. I’m heading straight to my room.’

‘No you are not going anywhere now.’ Please don’t be offended. You need to finish your food.’ Jessica pleaded.

Chika walked over to Jessica and placed her right hand on her left shoulder.

‘I want to be alone,’ Chika said in a low voice. ‘My head is buzzing and throbbing. I feel so dizzy and my body is seriously aching.’

Chika withdrew her hand and adjusted her trousers. She took her purse, lifted her plates and headed to the washing sink. Chika knew that she was going to have a serious problem with the derogatory word. She felt so dejected, inferior and alone in the world. She left the school canteen and sat down close to a flower garden.



After some minutes of pondering, Chika walked back to her room. She opened the door and sat on her bed. She was feeling so unhappy and it was very difficult to put her thoughts together. She went to the window and focused her gaze on the small artificial river in front of the hostel. She gazed at the river because she wanted to escape from her world. Again, Chika went back to her bed but found it difficult to sleep. The short encounter with those tiny Chinese girls had reminded her of racial discrimination, a common topic discussed in African literature. She hoped she would be able to cope with the humiliation that awaited her.

It was unfair for those girls to point fingers at her calling her a black person. She gently placed her head on the white pillow and shut her eyes to forcefully usher sleep in. She however resolved not to be hard on herself. After all, she was all by herself here. Her friends and family were too far away to cheer her up. She had just arrived and a wave of inferiority complex and loneliness had overwhelmed her whole body. Chika remained on the bed. Her stomach fluttered. She couldn't believe that the incident at the school canteen would make her so nervous. Again forces inside her took over, one telling her to remain calm and sleep. Another faint voice inside her was warning and spurring her to retaliate. She had been humiliated and intimidated by those students.

Chika remembered many people telling her that Africans were not respected in foreign countries because they had been classified as third world people. The remark

by the girls had hurt her badly. The girls didn't know the difference between someone's natural complexion and being a dirty pig. In their thinking, 'all Africans are dark complexioned because they were very poor and dirty.' This was the story circulated by many Chinese grandparents who had no glimpse of what Africa looked like. Jessica was different because her father had African friends who patronized his business at Guangzhou. Jessica also had many African friends who had helped to improve her spoken English. She always had a soft spot for African students because they were free and very open, unlike the Chinese people who were more conservative.

Chika remained silent. She remembered her decision to make her mother proud.

'I must keep my ambition alive! I must not allow these yellow skinny Chinese girls to intimidate me and thwart my dreams.' Chika said to herself. She had stopped thinking now and was gazing at the Chinese designs on the ceiling of her room when sleep snapped a shot on her.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *PAINTING BEIJING IN CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE'S WORDS*

Beijing, in the summer, was very hot and humid. Chika liked the temperate and continental monsoon climate, the noiseless crowds and the sophisticated high towered buildings sequentially lined up on the clean streets. The quiet but foggy air that smelled more of green teas, garlic and ginger nauseated her and prevented her from taking deep breaths. Beijing had a peculiar strong scent of garlic. The streets smelled of garlic, and every corner smelled of garlic-ginger. She liked watching the locals especially the aged exercising their bodies outside the streets every morning. She liked the campus, the architectural modeled lion and dragon designs on the buildings and school gates that looked rather gothic. She liked the way everything was transformed linking the day to the night except for the darkened skies. She liked her new freedom, her life of affluent ease, someone whose study expenses had been taken care of by the Chinese government.

But she did not like that she was the only dark complexioned girl in the school- few black students had been seen in the school but they were so light-skinned and silky-haired that they could be called black Americans not minding their originality. The Chinese were so obsessed with America, so black Americans were as good as white, red and yellow Americans. No Chinese wanted dark complexioned babies. They believed that blackness

signaled two things: poverty and dirtiness. Oftentimes, blackness was associated with foul odour which explained why some Chinese who covered their noses on meeting Chika expressed a deep sense of awe at the sweet Raspberry fragrance emanating from her body. The constant compliment on the sweet smell that accompanied her body had always been a major topic of conversation.

‘*Ni de xiangshui hen hao!*’ (Your perfume smells good) They said.

Chika still wondered why black irritated most people. In Nigeria, most men wanted fair girls for marriage. Dark complexioned girls were always consoled by that common slogan, ‘black is beautiful!’ The craziness for fair complexion had so enriched many businessmen and caused various kinds of skin diseases to unsuspecting girls in a bid to look shiny. During Chika’s first month in Beijing, when she walked the streets, entered a bus or took the subway, she was struck by how mostly ugly Chinese ladies would point at her and would shout ‘*hei ren*’ (black person). They would gather around her giggling and touching her skin to check if she indeed coated herself with black paint or charcoal. She had not thought of them as ‘morons’ because that would be a bad judgment according to her friend, Jessica. So she always struggled to banish inferiority complex from her mind whenever a similar incident occurred.

Again, Chika faced another problem that troubled her so much. Her long braided hair had been a strong

attraction that fascinated many Chinese people. The braided hair now looked more like dreadlock or twine ropes. They would point at her and laugh. Others who had the boldness to confront her, would touch her braids pulling it to know if it was a wig. They reminded her of the story told about white men who first visited the African regions. On seeing those white people, Africans thought they were ghosts. That was the picture that was painted on Chika's mind whenever a similar incident occurred. In fact, she was not angry but presumed they were naïve and uncivilized.

One day, a rude old woman in the supermarket outside the school – who was haggard, short and small- lipped had intended to offend her by shouting and following her around but had instead insulted herself. The old woman who consistently shouted '*Feizhou Ren*' (African person) while following Chika was accosted by the security guards who ousted her out of the supermarket. That was the very first time Chika heard the word, '*Feizhou*'. That word kept her thinking for a very long time. She did not think of her hair most of the time, but constant embarrassments had pushed her to look for places where she would braid her hair.

She did not like that she had to travel so far to braid her hair. It was so unreasonable to expect a braiding salon in Beijing. There were few black people that had stubborn and hard hair like Chika. So the only option was to cut her hair or travel to Guangzhou city just like Chinedu said. She had never cut her hair as a young lady and would not

do it now that she had many challenges. She wondered why there were a few black people in Beijing. She also wondered why many Africans settled in Guangzhou. She began to plan and dream, to travel to Guangzhou. But as the weeks passed, she knew she would never be sure.

China was strangely wrapped in gauze. Chika could not understand many things. She greatly missed her home. Sometimes she worried about the possible consequences of returning home without fulfilling her dream.

‘Assuming I encounter a huge problem here or enter into trouble of any kind?’ Chika would mutter to herself, tongue-in-cheek. The idea of returning home without finishing her studies haunted her greatly. She started developing weak knees when she was only at the starting blocks of a reeling marathon. Her mother had cautioned her to avoid anything that could result in love relationships or cause troubles. Many thoughts had triggered off other brainwaves. Her choice of studying the Chinese language had begun as one such brainwave. Learning the language seemed an ideal avenue for assisting most Igbo rich people who patronized the Chinese people. She believed that her role as an interpreter would fetch her more money and eventually help her secure a good job. ‘China is becoming very powerful’, the mother would say to her back then in Nigeria. As usual, hope resurrected in her as she recalled her mother’s kind words and encouragement. Chika heaved a sigh. She was thinking of going back to the classroom to revise what had been taught. The first five weeks of stay in China had been

tedious. Studying Chinese language seemed very difficult and demanding. Many hours of lecture with Chinese teachers who rarely spoke English weakened her more. She barely understood the words they pronounced while lecturing.

At that time, she confessed that learning the language in Nigeria was easier and elementary. During her certificate classes at the Confucius Institute, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, learning was quite easy and fun. The Chinese teachers were liberal and lenient in every aspect. They were friendlier and cared less about the teaching hours and students' attitudes. They never displayed an uncommon attitude of 'mind your business' or a stern look which overwhelmed the students with constant fear. All offices were always accessible at any time and students could easily enter any office of their choice to discuss or chat with the teachers. Beijing Foreign Studies University of China was quite different. The opposite was the case, teachers were serious minded and rarely had a serious chit-chat friendly conversation with the students. Chika had criticized many things and had consistently threatened herself until she began to take her studies seriously.

Constant revision and study would be better than nothing, she had reasoned. She was the only African in her class. All were Chinese students except for two students who came from Ukraine and India. Apart from her anxiety over her studies, Chika needed someone to talk to, someone to tell her that she would overcome her

challenges and emerge victorious in the end. She had been thinking and wondering what her results would be like.

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## CHAPTER NINE

### *A DIFFERENT LIFE IN A DIFFERENT WORLD*

Studying in China was not quite easy for Chika, classes were demanding and being dark complexioned made her situation worse. Everything was provided by the Chinese government, so she never worried over buying or borrowing textbooks during classes. She concentrated more on taking notes in the class and reading them later. Her new friend, Jiali, a thin young girl who always worked around with umbrella and avoided the sun, often saying ‘it affects my skin and eyes,’ would help Chika with her coursework and other issues related to her studies.

Jiali was a very timid person with unsophisticated look. Her quest for knowledge and great interest in learning the English language kept her glued to any foreigner. Jiali was not a difficult person, a childish young girl who was so naïve that Chika often thought her stupid. Jiali wore a constant mourning demeanour, her body language and facial expressions made others think less of her. She was dark-yellow complexioned and always talked low of herself which suggested something, a rural peasant background. She spoke English to a considerable extent, but her strong Chinese accent gave it a different tone that was rather funny. Jiali was intelligent but not smart. At first, Chika disliked her, responding to her was a very difficult task. Chika was cold to Jiali during her first week of study in the class, determined not to indulge in the

affairs of a peasant Chinese girl who looked rather less sophisticated. But she had come, with the passing weeks, to care for Jiali due to her challenges.

Chika thought often of her classes. After each lecture, she would leave the classroom in search of a peaceful spot to revise what had been taught. She constantly buried her face in her book to keep her ambition alive. Chika had suppressed the anger in her heart. She had decided to ignore the insolent look that greeted her every day. She was used to people pointing and looking at her. She needed to work out many things about her studies. She needed to come up with a new strategy. She also needed to study hard for good grades.

Chika needed no one to tell her that she would find it difficult to make good grades. She kept thinking of the best way to help herself.

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It was now fifty minutes after the first class which ended since 11am. Chika was in a garden, in a small garden near the school canteen. Jiali was with her. They were sitting on a long wooden carved chair, each full of her thoughts. Chika was trying to make sense of what had been taught in the class when Jiali interrupted.

‘Look at this, Shika,’ she said.

‘Look at this woman from Africa,’ she said again pointing at the picture displayed on her phone.

‘She is so dark-skinned like you. This is very stunning! Do Aflicans paint themselves to be so dark complexioned? Why are you so dark?’ Jiali asked. Chika did not laugh. She was firm staring back when Jiali starred. She did it rather coldly and indifferently.

‘Yes, she is,’ Chika said. ‘She is just as dark as me, only that she is skinny with projected forehead. We never created ourselves. God made us black and we are not complaining! Why are you worrying over it. That young woman is not from my country anyways. She is from Kenya. She is from Africa and not Aflica! Africa is a continent and not a country. We might have the same complexion but we are from different countries. It’s high time you stopped referring to Africa as a country! Africa is a continent, please!’ Chika said.

‘Please Shika, don’t be offended. I don’t understand why all black people are called ‘*Feizhou Ren*’ (An African) in China,’ Jali said.

‘The word, ‘*Fei*’ in the Chinese dictionary has negative meaning.’ Aflica ... mmmm Africa is called ‘*Feizhou*’! Is Aflica evil? Are the people evil? Please tell me’, Jiali asked almost pleading.

At first, Chika disliked Jiali’s questions, responding to what she thought was Jali’s disturbing questions became a difficult task. She was careful not to show Jiali that she was angry and disappointed. Suddenly, Chika put down her book, calmly walked past Jiali, leaving her behind without any comment.

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Chika sat down on a black chair near her bed in the hostel and tried to figure out the possible way to answer Jali's questions without showing her resentment. She needed her companionship. She needed her to remain her student-teacher. Chika smiled with satisfaction as she flipped through the pages of her notebook. It was very important to know much about China and to collect as much information as possible in order to cope with difficult situations. She was particularly happy that she did not overreact when Jiali interrupted her reading with bizarre questions. Chika would have felt bad going ahead to shun a girl who stood by her in difficult times. Jiali indeed had helped her to keep her sanity in situations much more complicated than the questions she asked.

'Studying in China must be a harrowing experience for many black people', Chika muttered to herself.

'What can we do?' Chika asked despondently.

'We didn't create ourselves! We are Africans. We cannot run away from our identity. We are mocked everywhere! We live everyday with a strong stench of stereotype which has weakened our self-worth. Chinese people can at least be reasonable in their acts. They should stop embarrassing black people by moping and pointing at them everywhere. I think they should be reoriented to change this unfair tradition.' Chika said.

Chika assured herself that everything would be okay. She was greatly relieved that she had controlled her emotions at the nick of time.

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## CHAPTER TEN

### *SOLITUDE IS MY COMPANION*

Chika looked out of the window. She felt so lonely and homesick. There was a unique kind of solitude that crept into her life, a stark emptiness, without relatives and friends. She wondered what she knew about Chinedu apart from his name and that he lived in a city called Guangzhou and that he was a businessman.

Chika remained silent. She was thinking of the best way to wriggle out of the solitude that crippled her happiness in China. She assured herself that she would visit Chinedu in Guangzhou very soon.

‘How could I visit a man I merely met at the airport?’ Chika queried herself, pouting. She knew nothing about Chinedu except the one he had told her. She knew he must be very rich, but something about him intimidated and scared her leaving a big question mark in her tender heart.

‘To tell the truth, I know nothing about this man. I don’t know the kind of business he does over there. As for the kind of business he does for which most Nigerian men are often associated with, I could not tell.’ Chika said.

Chinedu sounded genuine and convincing, but a faint voice inside Chika was giving her a stern warning.

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Chika pulled out her phone from her small black purse and then suddenly slipped it back with an air of frustration.

‘I don’t know why Chinedu refused to call as he promised. I will go and see him wherever he is.’ Chika said. Her eyes melted and her face collapsed into despair.

Chika watched a tiny black ant crawling on the silver window panes in front of her, perhaps wandering about in search of food or shelter. She was thinking deeply again. Life would be boring for her during the ‘Chinese Golden Week’. She would never be able to tour round Beijing now that Jessica and Jiali had gone home for the Chinese National Day. She would have travelled with Jiali or Jessica to their hometown but decided to stay behind after receiving a call from Chinedu. She went back to her bed and sat down, unable to take her mind off her thoughts. The strenuous classes she had affected her adversely that she needed to move to a different atmosphere for fresh air.

She remembered vividly the day Jiali had spoken to her about the Chinese National Day. It was during her first month at Beijing Foreign Studies University, when she had many difficulties and struggles. Jiali would often stare at Chika like a young man who had suddenly lost the boldness to woo a young girl. Chika could remember how she looked her straight in the face and said in simple Mandarin (Chinese Language), ‘*ni weishenma kan wo?* (Why are you looking at me?)’ Chika asked.

*'Ni hen hei ! You look so dark! Why are you so dark complexioned?'* Jiali asked looking so astonished. Chika remembered her words to Jiali after receiving that thrilling question from her.

*'I am not ashamed of my body and complexion. I am not responsible for the way I look,'* she had told Jiali.

*'I don't like worrying about things I can't change or control. You and I were not given the opportunity to choose our countries or complexion. But I can choose not to let all these bother me!'* Chika said half serious, half smiling.

Jiali looked her straight in the face feeling so sorry and said, *'I am sorry for being rude but I must confess, you are beautiful, Shika. Please, may I be your friend?'*

Chika accepted her friendship request but was only interested in classwork. Chika was very thirsty for knowledge, and so determined to understand her courses which were purely taught in Chinese. Jiali told Chika to come to her whenever she had problems. She also taught Chika how to use her phone to search for words in Chinese. Jiali came into Chika's life when she was feeling low, when some Chinese people ridiculed and embarrassed her. She was indeed a good a companion in time of need.

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One moody afternoon, Chika visited Jiali in her small room in the Chinese hostel. She had tearfully begged Jiali to help her with one of her Chinese courses. Teacher Lui had told her that morning to ask Jiali for help as she



was his best student. It was comforting to see how Jiali accepted and helped Chika. It was during that visit that Jiali asked Chika to travel with her to Xiamen, her home town.

Jiali felt that Chika was lonely. She wished she could help her live a relaxed life in China.

‘I will be going home on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September to celebrate the Chinese National Day with my parents. I am the only child of my parents. I must visit them and enjoy a full one week with them. Do you care to go with me? They will be pleased to meet you?’ Jiali asked smiling broadly.

‘What do you mean by Chinese National Day? When is it celebrated?’ Chika asked.

Sitting on the brown wooden table, Jiali put an arm across Chika’s shoulder and said softly, ‘Chinese National Day is celebrated on October 1<sup>st</sup> every year to commemorate the founding of the People’s Republic of China. On that very day, many activities are held nationwide. The seven-day holiday is marked from October 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> and it is called the ‘Golden Week’ by the Chinese. During this period, many Chinese people travel to stay with their loved ones.’

Jaili asked. ‘Do you want to travel with me or visit the Tiananmen Square to witness the grand ceremony?’

She continued. ‘Every 1<sup>st</sup> October, impressive military reviews had attracted people from both home and abroad who came to watch. There were other parades by other Chinese citizens who express their patriotic feelings.

The Military Review and Parade had been organized in small scale every five years and in large scale every ten years. This year's parade is going to be a big one. Other activities like flag-raising ceremonies, dance and song shows, firework displays, painting and calligraphy exhibitions are also held to celebrate the National Day. If one loves shopping, National Day is a great time for many shopping malls to give huge discounts', Jiali continued looking so excited.

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As time passed without Chinedu visiting, Chika became worried. What was keeping him away for so long? Apart from her anxiety over Chinedu, she needed someone to talk to, somebody to help her wad off solitude. She herself would have to do something. She still had one more day to go before the 1<sup>st</sup> of October. She was thinking deeply and very pessimistic again. This one-week holiday would be so boring for her if Chinedu did not visit. And this would mean the end of her dream, the dream of touring round Beijing and Guangzhou.

The school environment was becoming unusually quiet. Chika looked from one corner to another. Some young Chinese men were staring at her, but they did not see a young girl who was sad and lonely. They saw a young black girl, whose complexion astonished everyone and left passersby turning 360 degrees to have a full glimpse. They all laughed, except Chika. She tried to hide

her face by looking into the opposite direction. Yes, she was really sad and forlorn. Chika remained alone in the Foreign Students' lounge, not until the holiday was over could she see students moving up and down. The hostel almost looked deserted and the environment wore an atmosphere of renewed solitude. She simply got up and headed back to her room.

Chika stopped lamenting over Chinedu's absence and simply lumped herself on her bed and gave way to a glorious grief. Tears poured down her face like rain. She was all alone by herself wallowing in her moment of self-pity when suddenly a knock was heard. She listened and peeped through the security hole on the door to feel safe and sure. It was difficult to see clearly the face of her visitor. The knock came again, but she ignored it, completely encapsulated as she was still deeply hurt by Nedu's absence. Chinedu banged the door harder with so much force that Chika immediately became startled.

'Who is that? Who are you? What's wrong with you?' Chika asked almost frightened.

'*Nne*, it's me Chinedu! Don't be afraid, come and open the door.' Nedu replied, in a voice so soft that it was apparent it was meant for her ears alone. Chika recoiled on her bed and did not reply.

'Please darling, come open the door for me! Please, please please! Nedu pleaded.' Chika mumbled her reply and got up, almost colliding with everything in her room to show her frustration.

What was the matter with her? Chika wondered. She was upset about Chinedu, that was clear, but she herself could not understand what it was that was making her restless. She grabbed the door handle mopping the tears from her face.

‘Look, are you asleep?’ Chinedu asked. ‘What’s wrong with you, Nne?’ He repeated.

‘Aren’t you expecting me? So what you are going to do is to stand there and stare at me right?’ Chinedu said almost disappointed.

‘But how could you leave me alone without communicating your travel details?’ Chika asked almost crying.

‘Sorry about my attitude.’ Chinedu said. Her stomach fluttered. She couldn’t believe that Chinedu was making her nervous. Perhaps it was his sudden appearance that caused her current state. Chinedu placed his right arm on Chika’s waist while apologizing for his behaviour. Chika was feeling so uneasy. She wriggled her way out from Nedu’s firm grip and sat on her bed. She tightened her legs and placed her pillow on her laps because her legs were behaving funny. She suddenly became too shy to look Chinedu in the face. A wave of timidity and inferiority overwhelmed her. Forces inside her struggled as she sat looking at him like someone who had been hypnotized. A very strange passion possessed her, a stimuli so powerful and alluring. She knew she liked him the very first day they met at the airport. He was very handsome, tall and dark complexioned. His straight nose,

well shaved beards, bushy eyebrows, pink lips and sexy fish-like eyes attracted Chika. His masculine perfume saturated the entire atmosphere leaving a feeling of passion which consumed her. She stealthily looked at Chinedu before moving to the direction of the window.

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### *NO PITY IN ROMANCE*

Chinedu stood at the door of the wardrobe, watching Chika prepare for the outing. He kept his eyes glued on her well curved buttocks as if daring it. Almost some months after they met in the airport, the same feelings still kept him yearning for Chika.

‘Sorry for keeping you in the dark sweetheart’, Chinedu admitted. ‘I was only trying to give you a pleasant surprise.’ Chinedu said, his jutting Adam’s apple rising and falling as he spoke.

Chika remained standing and silent. Her stomach was earnestly fluttering. She still couldn’t believe that Chinedu was making her so jittery. She was thinking of what to say. Her lips formed a smiley shape. Chinedu’s words had taken control of her vulnerable emotions. She seemed to have lost the skill in handling the situation.

‘Don’t stand there like a tree,’ Chinedu said. ‘Come to me! I really missed you! I have been longing to see you for some months,’ Chinedu continued. ‘I came here only to see your beautiful face again. I knew you would be on holiday. So, I’m here to see you sweetheart.’

Chika stealthily looked Chinedu over. It was still very difficult for her to look people in the face. She went and sat on her bed, not because she was tired but because her emotions had taken control of her body. A feeling of timidity and love moved like current over her body. She wished Chinedu was not so handsome and alluring. She

had a secret reason for wishing that. Forces inside her were gradually subdued by his mere presence. Her principles and girly ego were gradually waning. Unquenchable and uncontrollable stimuli engulfed her body and made her quiver. More like the emotions accompanying love at first sight kept her heart beating and pounding uncontrollably.

‘I love you Chika! I simply do! I am damn serious and I mean it!’ Chinedu smiled and patted the back of his head. His head was nicely shaped and neatly carved. His fine face and clean appearance gave him the manly gaits of some American romantic actors that left Chika day-dreaming as a young girl. Chika got up from the bed and headed towards the window. She was not unprepared for his visit, but his sudden confession took everything from her. She had thought so much about him and had longed to be with him. For the past few days her heart had been grossly occupied with the thoughts of Chinedu’s visit. She still could not believe that he was in her room in flesh and blood.

Again, Chika was struck by a feeling of insecurity. ‘I hope this guy is not expecting me to respond without knowing him well.’ She said. She knew nothing about him and merely knew a little truth about his stay in China. She then summoned up courage and decided to ask him.

Chinedu gently gazed at her and smiled at her question. He seemed to be very calm and always smiling. He moved to her direction, and said, ‘Chika, I’ll be so happy if you become the love of my life, my future, my wi...’

‘Who are you? And what do you do for a living in this country?’ Chika cut in refusing to display her emotions.

‘I’m a businessman in Guangzhou! I have lived in that city for fifteen years, and I export goods to different countries.’

‘What exactly do you export? Chika asked’

‘I’m into male and female wears, furniture, jewelry and money exchange. In fact, I’m into any business that can yield profit,’ Chinedu said clenching his fingers.

‘I will take you to my factory and warehouses in Guangzhou to see for yourself dear. Tomorrow, we will travel to Guangzhou to spend the rest of the holiday there. I have many Chinese friends over there. It is my second home sweetheart! I tell you, there is nothing to fear! I simply love you. Yes, I do!’

Chika knew nothing about Guangzhou and China but she knew that Chinedu must be very rich if he had business scattered everywhere in China.

‘We have wasted too much time already,’ she heard Chinedu mutter to her. He was worried about her emotions. The more they stayed indoors, the more their discussion, especially his business experiences would open more avenues for distrust and inherent conflicts. Chika stooped and, lifting her white laced shoes, sat on the bed and placed her right foot on a small stool.

‘Can I help?’ He asked with a gentle voice bending towards her. While Chinedu was helping Chika with the shoes, he caught her admiring him from the left side of his eyes. It pleased him greatly to see that pleasant and radiant look on her face. She stared at him and he returned her gaze romantically.



After a long silence, Chinedu said, ‘Chy, I love you so much. The feeling is so strong and I mean it! He held Chika’s small face and kissed her full lips with indescribable passion.

Chika responded with earnest hunger and passion.

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Chika mumbled something and stumbled out, colliding with almost everything and everybody on her way. What was the matter with her? Chinedu wondered. She was indeed nervous about something, that was very clear, but Chinedu could not identify what it was that was making her so nervous.

Chika lumped herself at the foot of the staircase of her hostel, to give way to her emotions. Tears poured down in torrents. And she did not care about anything anymore. Chinedu was standing behind her, but she completely ignored him and yielded more to her emotions. She had lost her moral stance in a short time and could not withstand losing herself to a man she barely knew. Her mother’s stern warnings were literally lost to her. She was so deeply engrossed with passion that it was difficult to remember anything. She was too young and inexperienced to control her emotions. As a girl, and the only daughter of her mother, she had never been allowed to do what she liked, and anyway she was too young to be left with making decisions on her own. Her mother was friendly but well principled, if she were told her experience on the phone would surely have high blood pressure and die. It was so clear to Chika that she needed to grow up and face life courageously. She sat there, dry-eyed now, starring hard into the atmosphere without actually seeing anything.

She was silent and completely absorbed in her own troubled thoughts.

‘Chika, I think we need to go back to your room. You need to be stable before we go out!’ Chinedu said softly almost whispering. She looked up in the direction of the voice to see Chinedu standing behind her, a disturbed expression on his face.

‘You wanted me to come and here I am! Why should you be disturbed by what happened between us? You know as well as I do that we feel something for each other! I love you deeply and nothing will ever change that!’ Chinedu assured her. Chika could say nothing to explain herself. She merely gazed at him there, standing tall and very handsome. His fish-like eyes piercing lovingly into her eyes melted the hardness that was beginning to form in her heart. Chika remained silent. She was learning a few things from Chinedu’s words. His words were quite consoling and blunt.

‘Please, Chika,’ Chinedu said, his voice very soft and almost pleading, don’t do this to yourself. Don’t crucify yourself because of nothing. I love you, more than I’ve loved any lady before. I will make you happy, sweetheart. I bet you will never regret it dear!’

Chika wondered what her mother would say about her sudden relationship. She had never lied to her or hid things from her. She felt her mother’s presence every. She remembered her mother’s advice, ‘nothing is secret that shall not be made manifest, neither anything hidden that shall not be known and exposed.’ Chika was very tired, physically, emotionally and mentally. She needed some time to settle her feelings.

‘What was the matter with you dear?’ Chinedu asked again, this time sounding more romantic.

Something in his voice made her look up once again as they stride the staircase. How could she explain that she had offended her mother by not yielding to her advice? How could she tell him that she needed to be careful so that her studies would not be marred by any eventuality? She took refuge in her occasional sobbing once more and remained silent.

‘Do you want me to go?’ He asked.

Chika turned to him and suddenly shook her head. She did not want him to return to Guangzhou without her. But should she tell him that ever since the first time she had met him at the airport she had not stopped thinking of him. She had always pictured him in her mind, feeling so excited at the sound of his voice whenever he called and longing to see him soon. How could she tell him that she needed him, that she was lonely and the only dark skinned student in her class? How could she tell him the humiliation she had suffered here as a dark complexioned student and many bizarre questions that made her feel less human? Her eyes mirrored her thoughts and she felt like sobbing again. She wrapped her hand on his waist and buried her face on his chest. He raised her head and searched her upturned eyes, noticing their redness, the pain in them and the tears springing up.

‘What’s wrong? Why are you so unhappy? Why do you cry so much about nothing? My presence is supposed to bring you joy, but the opposite is now the case. From now, I will make sure that you only shade tears out of happiness, not pain or sadness.’ Chinedu promised.

He held her closer, not caring whether her breasts were pressed tightly on his chest. He wanted her more than anything. She was all that mattered to him now. As he held her to his broad chest, her body shook, from fear and from

some feelings which she could not explain. Chinedu gave her a stroke and dipped his nose into her natural hair which smelt of Rapse Berry fragrance.

‘You smell good.’ Nedu said.

‘Thanks.’ Her reply was more of a whisper.

He slowly ran his long fingers over her back. She told him that she felt funny. She could feel her heart pounding and beating very fast. He placed his palms on his cheeks, raised her chin and kissed her thick lips passionately. She allowed him to take over. He seemed more experienced, gentle and so caring. Her fear was slowly giving way to new sensation filled with passion and joy, especially as she noticed that Chinedu called her ‘Nwunye’, meaning ‘my wife’. She did not mind becoming his wife. She would like to marry a man like Chinedu. If only he was good as he displayed. There was nothing for her to do but to relax in his arms and cherish the moment.

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

### *LIFE IS A DREAM OF MANY YEARNINGS*

Chika lay on her bed and drifted into a fitful sleep. Her mind was still unsettled and gloomy by her sudden outburst of emotion. She had never been so close to a man. She had never been kissed deeply by a man except the occasional childhood romantic displays exhibited by some of the boys who lived in their former yard at Awka. She felt so sad and moody. She pretended to be strong but human conscience always had a way of haunting somebody who had erred.

Chinedu had ordered some food and bought her everything she needed for the evening. He patiently waited for her to wake up. He sat beside her on the bed and put his arm around her. He caressed her bosom touching her soft but firm breasts with the tips of his right fingers. Chika could not resist but felt her body going funny. She was afraid of Chinedu who took her right palm and placed it in-between his thighs, which was hardening and thrusting forward like a medium sized cucumber placed horizontally on the table. She saw his eyes clouding, and knew that he was already emotionally drowned with passion. He held her tightly and asked her what she thought they should do.

‘Tell me, do you truly love me?’ Chinedu asked, his voice very faint and whispery.

His soft hand fondled her more in a desperate manner. She gave a subdued cry, and held him tightly. His

softness and alluring nature had completely overpowered her after last night's emotional outburst.

She placed her little finger on his pink lips, not knowing where the boldness suddenly came from. She was indeed growing into a young woman.

‘Shssssssh! I love you deeply more than...I love you! I simply love you, Nedu! I don't even know any man. There is no other person for me in this world, Nedu. You are my first boyfriend and I wish you will become my last....My future hubby!’

Chinedu did not know what else to do. He carried her gently and started kissing her like white people do in most of their romantic films. Chika knew that she was almost close to the love affair reenacted in the famous Titanic movie. She knew that she was supposed to enjoy every bit of that experience but was too scarred not to allow him consume the forbidden fruit.

‘You will be mine always!’ Nedu whispered into her ear, his voice so coarse and heavy that she could swear it was from another man. She was worried about what might happen next, so she pulled her mouth, telling him that she was very famished and would like to eat. It would be rude to push him away, so she deliberately fabricated the story of not being able to eat the Chinese food in order to deceive him and bring down his rising emotion. She desperately wanted to leave the room to avoid building up emotions. She felt that they were moving too fast and needed to take things slowly.

‘Could we go out for dinner?’ Chika said with her eyes lowered. She did not dare look up. Chinedu might see the passion that still lurked in her eyes. So many things had happened to her in just a few hours, so many emotional displays which she did not understand. From her childhood, her mother, aunts and uncles had drummed into her ears that the only honourable path for any young lady was to abstain from illicit sexual relationships. This advice struck her like a thunder and had greatly influenced her perception about men and relationship.

It offered a ray of hope to Chika when Chinedu agreed to take her out for dinner.

‘That’s very reasonable.’ Chika thought. She was indeed emotionally relieved of her fears. She needed some space and time to search her emotions and come out clean in her decisions.

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In the taxi, Chika wondered just how she would persuade Chinedu to book a hotel for the night. Her head was aching and she never wanted him to claim her fully. To her, sleeping together in her room could result to more romantic emotional outburst.

‘How would he react to her suggestion?’ Chika spoke slowly, as if she was weighing each word. She stared in front of her for some seconds and asked.

‘Which hotel dear?’

‘Beijing Friendship Hotel, sweetheart. It is only 1.0 miles from Beijing Foreign Studies University. I chose

this hotel to seal our friendship and love.’ Chinedu pointed out.

‘Oooohhh, I see!’ Chika said.

‘I don’t know this city well. So you must take me round to have a glimpse, right?’

‘Don’t worry, Chy. I will definitely take you to spotty places.’ Chinedu moved towards Chika, gripped her shoulder gently as though to embrace her. The taxi had just stopped at a building with very sophisticated designs. Chika stared out of the window, half listening thinking how beautiful the building was; the entrance gate artistically decorated with colourful flowers.

‘Here we are’, Chinedu said.

‘Hummm! This place is pretty good’, Chika said alighting from the taxi. She imagined spending her night here with him. Her stomach fluttered again and sent a sensation down her spine.

‘This is not good. I must not be foolish to succumb so easily.’ Chika muttered to herself, her tone pacifying and sad. She climbed out of the taxi which packed in front of the building. The security man was staring at her, eyes narrowed. The young man looked cowed and confused. He was so surprised to see dark complexioned people in a hotel mainly populated by Americans who actually came to take a virtual tour of Beijing.

Beijing Friendship Hotel was located at No. 1 Zhongguancun South Main Street, Haidian District. It was a classical Chinese garden type hotel built a few decades ago. The main buildings and grounds around the hotel



were quite impressive. The complex had dining options as a result of the huge number of international guests staying in the hotel. The hotel site also had an American style Fridays Restaurant with special delicacies and no local beer. Chika was resigned to the fact that things would be different that night, but had not bargained for anything more than the emotional twist that almost carried her away.

As they entered the building, people looked up from whatever they were doing. There was a concerned expression on Chika's face as she glanced from one onlooker to the other. She was not just that fussed about people looking at them, but was worried about the motive behind their bizarre attitude. Suddenly, Chika realized that Chinedu was talking to her.

'Dear, are you so shy that you cannot move again?' Chinedu asked.

After a moment's hesitation, Chika mumbled to herself: '*Mba oooo!* (Not at all)'

Chinedu looked at her appealingly, then quickly starred at the receptionist who motioned to them to come forward. Chika was aware that they were now being watched by people as they were surrounded by human silence. Chinedu exhibited no signs of being conscious of the onlookers' scrutiny. He was waiting to book a room. All he wanted to do was to take her away to the hotel room where they would see no one. He realized that his fantasies were drifting his mind when Chika said something.

‘People are staring at us, Chinedu,’ she mumbled rather fussed. The receptionist was very nice and friendly. She spoke good English and displayed a considerable knowledge of the African environments.

It was a comfortable hotel within easy reach of the metro. They were quickly checked into room 237 in building No 1, the main building of the hotel. The room was a little small, being a standard size room, compared to other hotels Chinedu had stayed in Shanghai, Xiamen, Guangzhou, Jiande and Hangzhou. However, the room looked tranquil and comfortable. There was a large double bed, small flat TV, desk, coffee and tea facilities, reasonable bedside reading lights and plenty of storage spaces. The bathroom was a little cramped with WC, bath and shower combined. It also had a sliding door. There was an opaque glass window between the bathroom and the main room. The only problem was that there was no constructed rail to hang towels, sponge or washed panties.

Chinedu booked the hotel for two nights. The main buildings and grounds around the hotel were quite impressive. However, the rooms were 5 stars at best and a little sophisticated. The hotel had dining options, although it had huge number of international guests. The food was plentiful in quantity with variety of options available.

The American style Fridays restaurant, an outdoor site located at the hotel had a summer promotion which ran from May to October. Chika and Chinedu were informed about the restaurant by the hostess who briefed them about the promotion. The outdoor area displayed

different types of food and beer stalls. They ate heavily, drank and enjoyed sitting out with some friendly locals who bombarded them with funny questions about their love affairs and country.

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The emotion that grazed Chinedu's body startled her. The sudden effect of the local beers consumed in the restaurant, in fact without apparent warnings left them tipsy. While heading back to their room, they were slightly drunk, almost staggering as a result of the drinks. Chinedu's action was telling her that she could never escape this night without the day witnessing a special romantic bond. She was indeed trapped in the intricate web of her emotions and her staggering body. Her fuddled body and mind synchronized to ignite the fire in her. They were indeed excited and cheerful. She could hear Chinedu's voice murmuring in rhythmic tune. She could barely understand the melody, but only succumbed to its lyrics which sounded good. Her heart ached and tears began to well up in her eyes because she felt that this time, she would be trapped into an act that would have an everlasting impact on her life.

Her mind yearned for Chinedu, and so did her body. She deeply loved him in her heart, and knew quite well that her love was not as a result of infatuation. She opened her mind, body and soul to claim the emotions that had been lurking at the corner. Clenching and unclenching, they became exhausted, and drifted away.

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### *THERE'S NO SWEETNESS IN GUILT*

What appealed to Chinedu more was the gentle helplessness about her. Chika was beautiful, in fact her innocence and chastity made her more attractive. She slept so peacefully on the blood stained bedspread that Chinedu could do nothing but only admired her. What puzzled him most was that she had all along displayed her emotions without telling him that she was a virgin. He again studied her and wondered whether she was crying and at the same time sleeping. He knew that she would be emotional when she finally woke up from slumber. The guilt that she had been deflowered would hang on her neck like an albatross.

It was with a sense of heaviness and drowsiness that Chika woke up that morning. Without any facial expression, she dragged herself to the bathroom. The bitterness Chika was feeling had gone beyond tears. She remained unusually silent. She had heard people say that one's mother was one's best friend and could not deceive her in making decisions. She felt so ashamed of herself for throwing away her mother's advice so cheaply on the mud. After the shower, she felt light and better for she needed to clean up the mess from yesterday's emotional jamboree. She indeed looked helpless and moody. Chinedu could feel her heart beating fast. She had stopped humming a song, and her eyes were busy probing his.

‘Good morning Angel! Hope you slept well?’ He asked trying to free himself from the guilt that overwhelmed him.

‘I’m well!’ She answered brushing her scattered hair with her right fingers.

‘I must go to my school now!’ Chika said.

‘I never planned to sleep in this hotel with you! Please take me back. I really need to go. I am a huge disappointment to my mother. I’ve failed her indeed!’ She said tears welling up in her eyes.

‘All right my babe! You are not a disappointment to anyone. You are indeed a blessing to me! I will obey your wish, but first of all know that you are so precious to me. You are indeed my missing rib, my love, my wife to be!’ Chinedu said.

Chinedu quickly wore his shirt and told Chika to zip her nylon blouse which was bare open at her back. Chika’s mood did not improve as they entered the elevator to exit the hotel building.

With the way she walked, legs slightly spread in ‘A’ form, one would think that Chika had hurt her legs, or that a huge boil had settled on her laps making movement so tedious and slow for her. She managed to enter the taxi and sat down breathing quickly, her eyes flashing with pain.

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Chinedu could feel her pains. A kind of dizziness overcame him. When they arrived at her room in the university, Chika was feeling tired and feverish. There was no need for Chinedu to wait any longer. At that moment he murmured to himself that something needed to be done to arrest the situation. He quickly dashed out to the nearest pharmacy and bought some necessary drugs for her. At least, she would be relieved of pains in no distant time. He shuddered and waited patiently until sleep claimed her once again.

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This time Chika woke up emotionally stronger and stable. It was not too long since he had left her to buy the food they would eat. He went straight to her, held her shoulders and gently gave her a peck on the forehead. She did not say a word. She simply looked at him and smiled.

‘Have you ever seen a person who was given a cube of sugar or honey to lick and he spits it out?’ No, Chy! Not at all! You are my honey. I can never stop having you! Without you, I’m incomplete!’ Chinedu said.

Chika stared at him but her mind was not focused on what he was saying. Chinedu looked like a man drowning in the river of love. Chika whirled around and wept unashamedly into Chinedu’s chest. Every single drop of tears from her eyes seemed to hit him like the sharp end of a needle. They stayed quiet and silent as they listened to each other’s heartbeat and breathing.

Chinedu brought the food. He fed her gently and carefully like a baby who had no skills in feeding herself. He was a little surprised that she could have enormous appetite after the fever and pains that nearly crippled her in the morning. He jokingly called her ‘Nwa baby’ (small baby) as he continued to feed her. They giggled as they ate and she looked more beautiful and placid.

‘You are not to worry. We shall visit some places today. I want you to feel the freshness of today and embrace happiness! I want you to feel loved and cherished because you are indeed priceless!’ Chinedu said chuckling.

He took her in his arms once again and kissed her lips to show how precious she was to him.

‘You are strong! Thanks for being strong for me! I have never slept with a virgin! You are my first and you will be my last! Chinedu promised.

Chika was listening very hard, but her mind was too emotional to react to everything Chinedu said. All she knew was that she had disobeyed her mother to love this man, and that there was no going back. Chika had a very embarrassing experience that threatened her mind and health in the morning, but she had used her imagination to work out a strategy she hoped would work to keep her sane.

It offered a ray of hope to know that Chinedu felt something for Chika. He cared so much for her that any change in her demeanour would automatically obstruct his happiness. Chinedu had told her several times how thrilled



he would be if she would gladly accept him as her future husband. He had told his friends that he had found the girl of his dreams, and they had been looking forward to seeing her.

Chika could not resist the opportunity of touring Beijing despite the pain she experienced. She reminded him of his promise to take her round Beijing.

‘Oh dear, never mind,’ Chinedu said. ‘We will soon leave for the sightseeing.’

Chika heaved a sigh of relief. She desperately wanted to have a fresh breath outside. She needed to look around and refresh her mind. She needed it urgently because it was a route to fleeing from the thoughts of her mother which haunted her like a ghost. Chika was indeed convinced that the outing would relieve her spirit from the emotional torment she had experienced after the love affair. For the first time in her life, Chika had defied her mother. She consoled herself with the fact that her mother was very far away from her and would not know what had happened to her if she had not told her. She again sneaked a glance at Chinedu, who was still busy eating. She now realized, judging by the manner he munched the food that hunger had dealt him a solid blow. He perhaps sacrificed his hunger to see her well and happy. It was indeed his self-indulgence that melted her heart more. His facial appearance, caring and humane nature got her attracted to him. Now, sitting there on her bed she admired him and blessed the day she met him.

Chinedu finished the remaining food. He rose and took the plastic takeaway plates and pushed them into the trash can. As he walked back to where he sat before, he noticed Chika staring blankly at him. It implied that her thoughts had been occupied by something. He knew that yesterday's experience had kept her mind occupied with different thoughts that her attention became so divided. Chinedu breathed a sigh.

‘Chy, I’m done! Are you ready?’ He asked.

‘Sure!’ She replied heading to the wardrobe to grab her bag.

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### *HISTORY IS A CLOSE FRIEND*

A Tuesday afternoon in September was fast approaching the time of sunset, and the splendors of Beijing Tian'anmen Square still occupied Chika's mind moment by moment. It was indeed the last day of the month, the thick stretch of whitish blue clouds suddenly turned dark shutting out the sky like a tent. Tian'anmen Square had been the spiritual heart of China, the world's most populous country. The square had been serving as the stage for momentous historical events, like the demonstrations on May 4<sup>th</sup> 1919 that inspired young Chinese to fight imperialists and warlords, to build a strong independent country. Since October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1949 the day Mao Zedong, the founder of the Communist Party of China (CPC) climbed atop the 'Gate of Heavenly Peace' which gave the square its name, it had become a scenic place where national holidays were celebrated. Most days Tian'anmen Square had been filled with sightseers and kite-flyers. During the national holidays, it was usually festooned with banners and floral decorations.

Many people, especially the Chinese visit there to see elite People's Liberation Army troops conduct flag raising or lowering ceremonies. On the north end of the square was the 'Gate of Heavenly Peace' which led to the 'Forbidden City'. Above the gate hung the famous picture of Mao Zedong, the Chairman of CPC. On the left side of the gate was the inscription, 'Long live the People's

Republic of China' (PRC) and on the right side was written, 'Long live the People of the World.' The wide view of the square ascended to the top of the gate where Mao Zedong proclaimed and founded the PRC. Also, in the center of the square was a 40m-high Monument of the People's Heroes, an obelisk with friezes depicting revolutionary heroes and calligraphy by Mao Zedong and former Premier Zhou Enlai.

Again, south of the Monument was the Chairman Mao's Mausoleum, where people could peer at the embalmed figure of the Great Helmsman in his casket. At the square's south end, behind the mausoleum was 600-year-old Qianmen, one of the few remaining Ming-era city gates. The building on the square's east side housed the Chinese Historical and Revolution Museum.

On the west of the Tian'anmen Square was an imposing edifice called the 'Great Hall of the People' which became the home of China's parliament, the National People's Congress. The hall was said to have been built within ten month in 1958 to 1959. The hall's grandeur was seen in its 5,000-seat banquet room, 10,000-seat auditorium which had a large red star on the ceiling outlined by 500 light bulbs and the National Theater, a futuristic bubble of titanium and glass resting on an artificial lake. The theater was built on an area directly west of the Great Wall of the People.

Summer Palace was another scenic spot that captivated Chika the most with its handsome buildings,

pretty scenery and tumultuous history. It was located at Haidian District, Beijing.

Summer Palace was indeed a wonderful place to explore. The vast Summer Palace compound centered on Kunming Lake, visitors were seen on a boat exploring the lake. The highly photogenic 17 Arch Bridge linked the lake's eastern shore to the South Lake Island. Chika and Chinedu had a pleasurable moment by strolling on the willow-shaded paths and arched bridges that encircled the lake. They also took memorable pictures on different walkways to remind them of the beautiful time they spent together.

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Chika returned tired and sleepy. She slumped on the bed and dozed off instantly. She did not know for how long she laid there unconscious, but she was awakened by the cool breeze that entered the room through the opened window. When she tried to rise from the bed, her feet became very heavy and she fell back on the bed and rested her head on the pillow. That morning, her body was stiff and she could feel pains on her joints as a result of yesterday's sightseeing. She sat there staring into vacancy, thinking of nothing, aware only of the approaching sunrise. The hotel room was indeed tranquil and the artistic designs on the walls gave her a unique Chinese feeling that catapulted her mood to yesterday's happiness. She smiled and shot her eyes to savour the moment once again. She indeed relished yesterday's

experience except that she was grossly fatigued and worn-out.

As she laid there on the bed, the revived feelings of their past passion hit her like a wave. A heartfelt passion glowed in her now, and she leaned forward as if about to put her face towards Chinedu's cheek.

'Oh no,' Chika said, intractably moving to the other side of the bed.

'What am I trying to do?' She asked herself.

'Perhaps I am becoming too forward!' She said looking at Chinedu who was deep in sleep. She sighed, it was no ordinary sigh, but a sigh which awakened her consciousness of time and shook her like a shiver. She dashed towards the mini table in the room and grabbed her wristwatch.

'Oh no! We will be late. It's already 9.00 am! Wake up Nedu, our flight is at 11.00 am! We will be late! I don't want us to miss our flight.'

Chinedu merely got up from the bed because he was very tired. He shook his head at her.

'I know you too well sweetheart! I know you too well. You are pulling my leg dear!' Nedu said half asleep, half awake.

She seized the moment, and throwing herself playfully on Chinedu to disrupt his sleep, said with a smile, 'Honey, look at the watch and see for yourself!'

Like a hop-frog Chinedu jumped out of the bed and headed towards the bathroom.

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Beijing on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October was very busy and clustered with people. The broad streets and houses were decorated with golden and red buntings signaling a festive period. Chika was happy to bask in the National Day celebration as she glanced from one side to the other through the taxi windows. She was nevertheless developing into a courageous character. She was just desperate to escape the loneliness that once engulfed her. Much to Chinedu's surprise, Chika was eagerly looking forward to exploring Guangzhou.

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They arrived in Beijing Capital International Airport at 10: 00 am and immediately dashed into the building to check in before the closure time. The 'terminal 2' served the China Southern Airlines which also had its headquarters in Guangzhou and other cities.

The Airline was among the most famous Airlines in China. Many passengers booked tickets in advance before traveling, and formed a long queue at least an hour prior to departure to confirm their airfare. Chika and Chinedu joined the queue in the terminal and patiently waited for their turn. Chinedu had booked their tickets online before visiting. That day, Beijing Capital International Airport was unusually crowded, very busy with people walking up and down in different directions.

During National Day, more Chinese people go traveling around the country. It led to a sea of people at the airport, train stations and attraction sites. During that period, flight tickets were usually expensive and train tickets also difficult to get.

Chika again could not hide her excitement. She looked forward to landing at Guangzhou Baiyun Airport which Chinedu had talked about several times. Chika's face flagged. She was traveling to a new environment; not with a friend, but a stranger that captivated her heart.

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The air space between Beijing and Guangzhou was just 1,231 kilometers (about 765 miles). The flying time was about two and half hours. Guangzhou Baiyun Airport had glorious hangars of people watching from different corners. The airport had a ludicrous design which displayed the black face of Usain Bolt, the black sprinter and other black faces not recognized by Chika. The security lines were wretched, long and snake-like. Getting from one terminal to another was a massive pain. It took an hour to clear immigration. It took also another one hour just to obtain arrivals forms before immigration processes began. There were five manned immigration booths, but only one was processing passengers at a painfully slow rate. Frustratingly, other immigration officers seemed to be on a permanent break at their desk.



Many black passengers who were probably traveling to different destinations were seen taking off their shoes, socks, belts and hair clips through the metal detector. It was assumed that most black guys were likely to be carrying narcotics, as a result thorough checks were conducted on them by the security guys. One tall dark man was pulled out of the queue and taken into an interview room by a couple of mean looking Chinese guys presumably because he fitted the profile of a drug mule. After a couple of phone calls to verify that he was telling the truth, the guy was finally released. The Chinese security guys were said to be soulless but clean and efficient in discharging their duties.

Another dark complexioned guy was stopped four times in the airport for carrying suspiciously large amount of electronics in hand carry luggage. The guy's experiences put across a moral lesson that traveling with too many electronic devices could raise suspicion. Chika had seen enough within hours of arrival in the airport. She could feel the tension between the Chinese security guys and the black Africans. She was tired, hungry and at that moment beyond irritated. One of the security men came with a supervisor 20 minutes after the guy with electric devices was released, took one look at Chika, then told her to follow them. She was ushered down a hallway, before walking with them to a door. She asked them what was going on.

‘Why are you here? What have you come here to do?’ The short mean security guy asked.

‘I am here to spend the holiday with my newly found friends. I am a new student at Beijing Foreign Studies University. This is my first time here sir!’ Chika answered almost shivering.

‘Welcome to Guangzhou young lady. This is a very hot zone. Please stay safe and take good care of yourself okay!’ The security men both echoed.

Thank you very much sirs! I am so grateful! Chika said heading towards the door.

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## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### *LIFE IS A TEACHER*

Chika's first experience in Guangzhou, China's third largest city situated in the Guangdong province was quite different and less challenging. She wondered what to expect from the city.

'What will it be like here? Is it really the case that none speaks English here? Will there be crowds of local people wanting to take a picture with her?' Chika questioned in her heart.

'Why are you silent sweetheart?' Chinedu asked and turned to Chika who was busy glancing from one corner to the other as the taxi drive past through different streets.

'Nothing so serious dear! I'm just tired and hungry.' She said almost whispering. The streets were littered with many black people who walked up and down without any definite destination. Chika saw dark skinned Chinese locals selling phones and other items along the neatly decorated streets beckoning to tourists and foreigners to patronize them.

She remembered what Jessica told her about buying phones on the streets of Guangzhou. 'Don't buy phones on the street! Even if they are real when they are shown to you, the one in the package may not be the original! It might be fake!'

Chika gazed at the local sellers, the environment seemed quite different from Beijing. It was indeed full of mini markets clustered with sellers and buyers. Chinedu noticed her surprise and sudden fear of insecurity and said: ‘this city is extremely safe, there are no pickpockets, and there are a lot of surveillance cameras.’

She wondered how many the cameras could be to monitor everyone’s movement.

‘How many could they be? Well certainly more than we expected, as every pole and street corner has one!’ She said, glancing from one end to the other. Chika also remembered seeing cameras everywhere at Beijing. She became less nervous and relaxed to explore the surprises the city would offer.

They left the airport a little earlier before sunset, so Chika was very hungry and tired. She enjoyed looking around but was occasionally carried away by sleep. Finally, she drifted away. The first thing she saw when she opened her eyes was enormous skyscrapers and an extremely green city. The bridges were covered in artistic Chinese flower pots, many alleys, parks with ponds, greenery, and a lot of people exercising in the parks. There were many local and foreign tourists in Guangzhou, visiting the Liuhuahu Park, Chimelong safari, circus, water and other entrainment parks. Most of the foreigners came for business. The parks were impeccably clean. Not even the smallest leaf , cellophane bags , papers, sachet water bags or other condemned materials where seen on

the ground. The parks were mainly filled with old people and young children.

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Chinedu spoke Chinese fluently but he spoke English in a very funny way to the driver. Chika thought that his efforts were useless as most Chinese cab drivers at Beijing didn't speak English.

'Driver, me go down down! Chinedu said in Chinenglish pointing towards a direction. The cab man quite understood what he said and moved to that direction. Chinenglish was the common mode of communication used by Chinese traders and African businessmen in their transactions in Guangzhou. The manner Chinedu expressed himself in Chinenglish was so unusual that Chika became very amused.

'Ahaaaa, there are many Englishes in this world oo! British, American, South African, Nigerian, Chinese...Hummmm! Nawa ooo! Chika said half smiling, half laughing.

Chika had heard horror stories about China and its major cities. Foreigners were warned not to travel alone because they could be kidnapped and their liver, kidneys or other vital organs would be harvested for private use without permission. She also heard that most Chinese people could not speak English at all, and all sign posts were written in Chinese characters. It came to Chika clearly now that many of the things said about China were not true. Wherever Chika turned her head, she would see a sign in English and Chinese with the station name and map.

Chika was so much impressed about the Chinese people who integrated high tech into their daily lives; they were quite different from Nigeria where many things depended on hearsay, fate and destiny. She also noticed that air pollution wasn't as bad in Guangzhou as in Beijing. The evening of their arrival was indeed yellow gray that she anticipated having a lovely holiday in the city.

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Chinedu's house was close to Baima Market, a popular market opposite Guangzhou Railway Station. It was the largest Railway Station in Guangzhou, located at Huanshi Road West in Yuexiu District. His apartment was situated in the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of a beautiful giant building. The flat was very spacious, in fact, the description of a perfect home. The sitting room and other rooms were well furnished. The kitchen was fully equipped with a flat-screen TV with cable, two huge refrigerators, microwave and other necessary facilities. Each bedroom was fitted with a cable TV and air conditioner. The balcony features a massage chair with garden views.

Chika walked into the visitor's room carrying her small black bag. After a while she said, 'Nedu, do you mean that you own this flat? Are you sure that you are not living with your family here?' Chika asked glancing at the shiny marble on the floor. When she raised her head, she

looked at Chinedu and asked again, ‘can you tell me the truth? Are you alone here?’

‘Yes dear! Sure! I am all by myself. That’s why I look forward to you becoming my wife!’ Chinedu said smiling.

As Chika listened to him talking about his apartment and the loneliness that had gradually overwhelmed him without a wife; she thought of her mother once again. She had grossly disobeyed her mother, and neglecting her principles was a thorn in her flesh. She wondered whether distance had the tendency of stripping one of some moral qualities. Back home, the fear of her mother was the beginning of wisdom and doing wrong was out of her dictionary. But here, her mother’s absence had paved way for a new way of life and challenges. As lonely as she was, would her mother have minded if she did something morally wrong to feel loved or have companionship? She already knew the answer to the question as she could only see the image of her mother warning her sternly about men and their troubles.

Chika gazed at her reflection in the mirror. She had reduced from her normal size, but looked more shapely and lighter in complexion now.

Admiring from behind Chinedu said, ‘you are sexy!’

‘You are cute and sexier.’ Chika replied.

Chinedu told her that he had not been attracted to any African lady before. It indeed amused Chika that a handsome man like Chinedu had never admired any young

girl before. She wanted to argue with him but changed her mind to maintain a peaceful atmosphere.

‘Well Chy, right now we are going to be spending a lot of time together for the next five days, to get to know each other.’

‘Ooooooh, okay,’ Chika said, slightly dispirited. A wave of jealousy crept into her mind and left her thinking of other unknown young ladies who must have graced Chinedu’s bed before her. At that moment, Chika ran into his arms holding him so tight.

‘Promise that you will love me forever, honey. Promise that you will be mine and mine alone!’ Chika said almost sobbing.

Chinedu first looked surprised, and then his face stretched into a tight smile. His surprise about Chika’s questions reminded him of Ngozi, a boss lady that wanted to get him entangled in her delicate threads of romance. Ngozi was his business partner who had also lived in Guangzhou for more than fifteen years. She was his saviour when he first came to China and had no one to turn to. At that time, she was the only black girl he knew, an adventurer who loved exotic night lifestyle and partied constantly until the early hours. In those days, they often joked about marriage, but as time passed he realized that they were not meant to be together.

Chika was soft. Her skin was glowing and smooth. A sense of emotion overwhelmed him and he began to touch her rapidly. How quickly she had become used to his touch that she slipped out of his arms onto the bed. He



followed her immediately increasing the tempo and searching her all over with his amorous hands.

Indeed, words could not describe the kind of love making and romance that kept them fondling for so long.

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Guangzhou was indeed an organized and busy place, and there were many foreigners especially Africans. It was known to be full of people who came mainly for business. Chika came to love Guangzhou for its clean air and busy streets populated by Africans. It felt more like home bursting with green flowers and all shades of human beings.

Chika was famished and needed to have a taste of African dishes after a long time. She needed Igbo local soup and *fufu* to regain the strength lost during her short stay in Beijing. She needed the taste of *Nsala* or Bitter leaf soup to regain the sanity stolen by eating food flavoured with garlic and ginger. She needed it urgently.

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Chika enjoyed the familiar taste of *Nsala* soup with cat-fish and *fufu*. She scooped the soup straight from the ceramic plate with her bare fingers feeling relaxed and more at home. It was her first real food after some weeks of food torturing. Madam Louis African restaurant gave Chika the feeling she had lost on arriving China. Her

peppered Nsala soup tasted just like her mother's soup. The long room in which the restaurant was situated shook with hilarious laughter from some guys who watched Chika licking her fingers without any air of pretentiousness. Chinedu also laughed, a long-pitched laugh that startled Chika.

'What's the problem?' Chika asked looking so serious and at the same time licking the back of her fingers. Her action generated a new ripple of laughter that dispelled her question. Chika surveyed the room, taking note of the people who were there so that she would know what caused the laughter. The room was mostly occupied by black Africans. Many of the guys there spoke Igbo and were very noisy. Six men and three young ladies were sitting together on a rounded table eating hot-chicken pepper soup and drinking different brands of alcoholic drinks. Empty bottles lay scattered on the big rounded table as they talked in loud voices. Two men sat away from the others. They were drenching themselves with strong alcoholic drinks while smoking. In a whining tone, one of them complained of being neglected by a beautiful young girl who worked tirelessly to make sure that everyone was well served and satisfied. She smiled often but behind those smiles was a hint of nervousness that always kept her on her toes. The man let out a dry cough and motioned to the young lady to come.

'Ada, bia ebe a sharp sharp!' (Ada, come here quickly!) One of the men said.

‘Adanna or what is she called? Come here and attend to me’, the man repeated hitting her buttocks romantically with his right hand. The other guy touched her well rounded and projected breasts with a claim of ownership that sent shivers down Chika’s spine. Adanna could not say anything to defend herself. She merely gazed at them, standing tall, beautiful and expressionless. Chika shook her head sadly as she watched Madam Louis pleading with her customers to forgive the young girl’s rude behaviour. Other men in the restaurant found what happened as a welcome diversion and started to heckle and jeer. Chika forgot about her delicious food and could only picture herself in her mind’s eye, telling them to leave the young girl alone. But how could those men leave her alone when their illicit behaviours were condoned by the owner of the restaurant? If she did not interfere in her life, only God could tell what would become of her in a restaurant situated in an underground floor with unpredictable guys.

‘What did that girl do to you guys? Chika asked.

The men simply looked at her and laughed. Madam Louis told her not to bother herself with Adanna’s trouble because it was bigger than her.

‘But I am a witness to what happened,’ Chika continued almost bursting into anger.

Chinedu calmed Chika down and signaled her to remain silent. Chika told him that what she felt for the girl was pity. Chika explained that the girl had been humiliated and nobody spoke or defended her.

‘This is China, Chika! You barely know anybody here. Nobody can be trusted here too! Please dear, don’t start a fight you cannot finish. Let’s eat our dinner and leave this place, okay. How sure the young girl didn’t come here for prostitution? You can never know sweetheart.’ Chinedu told Chika in a voice that sounded more like a whisper.

Chika sat there very angry now, following the movement of the young girl as she tried to obey the men one by one. Chika’s spirit was indeed troubled when Madame Louis held one of the girl’s ears and dragged her into the inner room and locked the door behind her. Chika was absorbed in her own thoughts as she tried to figure out what a beautiful young girl was doing in a hostile environment.

It was surprising that a young beautiful girl like Adanna looked helpless in the midst of humiliation. She indeed looked like one who had been stripped of her self-worth and freedom. Heavy footsteps thudded into the restaurant which was quite long and spacious. The long hall was imperfectly illuminated and the tiny coloured bulbs were merely fixed to hide the identity of the customers. Chika could not see the faces of men who entered the inner room because the restaurant was gloomy. Suddenly, there were strange voices, men’s voices, diffused with a portentous sense of pressure. Other girls were seen parading the hall with trays either serving drinks or cleaning the table. Those girls were different from the young Adanna. They looked wild and fearless. Their

carefree attitude signaled one thing-prostitution. They flirted with many guys that came to fill in their stomachs with drinks or food without feeling ashamed. They knew the game so well that many customers responded without much difficulty.

Chika was tired and her body ached and the restaurant had begun to irritate her, with its stuffy air and too many guys.

‘Why couldn’t these Nigerian guys keep quiet for once? Why are they so noisy and silly? Chika’s food was almost finished, only a small portion was left on her plate. She was eager to leave.

Chinedu looked at her, with an expression that made her uncomfortable, because she was not sure what his eyes held, and then he got up to leave the restaurant.

‘You need to get over what happened here’, Chinedu told her.

‘It’s okay love. I will be okay.’ Chika said as they made their exit at the opportune time.

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## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### *NO WORDS ANYMORE*

Visiting Guangzhou did not become a test for Chika's taste. She did not only eat her popular choice for dinner, she quite enjoyed it. Chinedu told her that she was extremely lucky to have visited Madam Louis African Restaurant, as her food was the tastiest in Guangzhou.

Chika thought about the girl in the restaurant. She remembered the situation that had made Adanna so nervous. Madam Louis had threatened to throw her out of the restaurant for not allowing their customers fondle her. It was Madam Louis' threat that made Chika feel pity for the young girl. Chinedu told Chika that Madame Louis was often violent. She was also known in the restaurant for insensitively enforcing rules and for demanding strict obedience to her decisions. It was rumoured that she used to employ girls who had been trafficked to work as sex slaves in her restaurant. Chika could not believe what Chinedu told her. She gasped and quickly stepped backward. Her chest heaved up and down in an increased tempo.

'I said it, Nedu. That girl may be one of them! She has been forced into prostitution. She has been deceived and lured into illicit acts.' Chika said almost choking with anger.

An hour later, when they came back from Madam Louis restaurant, Chinedu's friend visited.

‘It has taken you ages to visit, Tunde,’ Chinedu said. Tunde was sitting on a long white sofa next to Chika who was now sitting on a cushioned Chinese chair.

‘But you don’t care to know why I had been scarce for some time now,’ Tunde said as courteously as his bitterness would let him. He put his phone on the transparent glass table at the center of the sitting room and rested his back on the soft sofa to get his breath back.

‘I arrived here some hours ago,’ Chinedu said, ‘and I’ve been away for some time now. I travelled to Beijing to bring my fiancée. Sweetheart, please meet my friend, Tunde from Ondo State.’

‘Oh, nice to meet you sir! I am Chika.

‘It’s my pleasure! Are you a student at Beijing?’ Tunde asked.

‘Yes sir!’ Chika replied.

‘I hope you would concentrate on your studies and ignore some wealth driven Igbo girls that left their studies to make quick dirty money. I guess you are different! Please flee from them and do something meaningful with your life. I am a Yoruba man. I know that Yoruba people love money too, but they are not controlled by it! Igbo people, haba! How many Yoruba guys do you see on the streets of Guangzhou? Everywhere, Igbo guys and girls! Everywhere, Imo and Anambra people! Haba! What is really happening? Please dear, education is indeed power! Face it squarely and thank me later for this piece of advice!’ Tunde said with a tone of seriousness that got Chika worried.

‘Thanks, I appreciate,’ Chika said.

When Chika remained seated, Tunde asked if it was her first time of visiting and continued with his unending story of Igbo people and their lifestyle in Guangzhou.

‘Igbo people are very noisy. Chinese people know their place and are very orderly. But you see these Igbo guys and girls; they are too materialistic, carefree and noisy! They enjoy causing troubles on the streets, shouting and always fighting their brothers! They can even kill their blood relations for money. One day, they will cause riot in Guangzhou. Beating, smashing and looting might become the order of the day.’ Tunde said angrily.

‘You see, many responsible Chinese citizens are not happy with them because they deceive their girls and marry them just to have legal business in China. They give birth to children who are neither Chinese nor Nigerians. And they travel back to Nigeria to begin a new life with their Igbo wives. Then, tell me what happens to those Chinese women they married? What will their children do? This is indeed a serious problem ooo! Go to all the streets, you will see black people everywhere! I don’t even know if I’m in Guangzhou or Africa!’ Tunde said.

‘Tunde, you no like Igbo people at all!’ Chinedu said smiling sarcastically.

‘No, no no! If you think I so much hate your people, please go to the streets of this city and confirm. You rarely see any Hausa or Yoruba man on the streets misbehaving or in the pub drinking beer and making unnecessary noise. Igbo people are very industrious. This I know, but too



many hands spoil the soup! A lot of bad eggs! They are all interested in money, money, money!’ Tunde argued.

‘Many Igbo girls left school for money. I mean girls who were on scholarships! I mean Chinese government full scholarship! They are all here loitering the streets as prostitutes. Some innocent ones who have been deceived and trafficked are soliciting for help in one way or the other. They have no legal papers here! They move around more in the night! They are mainly night crawlers! Those girls are bought and manipulated by their pimps to do their biddings. They are often threatened with death to succumb to their traitors’ wishes. They are forced to sleep with many Africans, men or women who come for one business or the other in Guangzhou only to survive. These girls are really suffering ooo! They make little or nothing from these illicit activities. They only enrich their pimps. They are in great danger of exposing themselves to organ harvesters, killers, drug barons or chronic diseases. I just pity the innocent ones! Not those wild eyed girls roaming the streets unrepentantly! See ooo, most of these Nigerian guys or girls are panders. Please be careful whenever you are in this city. Trust no one!’ Tunde warned Chika bursting into anger.

‘You are very lucky dear, no normal young woman would think twice before accepting Chinedu as her boyfriend,’ Tunde continued. ‘Chinedu is handsome and mega rich. He is cool and gentle. That’s why many young girls in this city admire him! But don’t be jealous, he is not a casanova! He is a good man! I am only worried about you! I hope you will stay true to him? All the same, I wish you good luck!’

Chika listened to all that Tunde said which actually confirmed her suspicion. ‘Madam Louis might be a pimp.

Ada is indeed her stooge!’ She murmured to herself. She didn’t like some of the things Tunde said about Igbo people, but his observations were right. She became emotionally weak and almost cried for the poor girl. She shook her head sadly and headed to her room leaving Chinedu and his friend behind in the sitting room.

The sitting room shook with laughter from the two friends who had not seen each other for some time now. They were obviously teasing each other about something so interesting or appealing to them. Tunde laughed the loudest, his voice resonating like the Yoruba Ifa priest. His laughter was not noisy, but the tone was a happy one obviously more of a compliment. Chika was not happy. The thoughts of Adanna kept clouding her memory. That night Tunde narrated the ordeals of many Nigerian girls, Chika stayed on her bed alone and was restlessly tortured by her thoughts.

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The following morning, Chika woke up with a splitting headache. She got the headache as a result of the long hours of waiting in Guangzhou Airport and Adanna’s trouble which kept her thinking all night. It was indeed a cold and wet day in October. Chika was feeling so unwell and unhappy. She hoped that there would be a way of escaping the sadness that had suddenly crept into her life. She needed to be happy for her to enjoy the holiday.

That morning, Chinedu took an unwontedly long time to return from where he went leaving Chika alone and tortured by her thoughts. She was thinking again about Adanna. She was always on her mind since yesterday’s encounter. Chika hated to displease Chinedu, who had been remarkably courteous to her. Her eyes narrowed in

deep thought as she tried to make plans that would save Adanna. She wanted to help the poor girl, but didn't want to appear ungrateful to Chinedu. Chika moved softly out of the room when she heard the sound of someone's footsteps.

'I knew you would be the one dear.' Chika said almost afraid. She hugged Chinedu and sat down on the sofa to relax her back. She thought deeply, Chinedu was the sun that brightened her lonely life in China. 'I can't afford to make him regret ever meeting me!' She had told herself many times.

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The weather that afternoon was beautiful and very tranquil. As Chinedu and Chika stepped out of the apartment to walk down the streets of Guangzhou, they were greeted with a sea of people. Locals and Africans roamed the decorated streets in full holiday spirit. Some of these Africans didn't reside in China. They had shops in their countries, but occasionally came to Guangzhou to select goods to ship back home. Many of those black people never cared about the quality of their goods or the brands. They loved to bargain low-end products which were the characteristics of large groups of African businessmen especially those from Nigeria. The Europeans and Arabs were just different since they maintained the habit of purchasing high quality goods. Nevertheless, Africans' demand for cheap products had interestingly opened up many new areas in China. It had allowed the processing factories around the outskirts of Guangzhou to prosper. The expansion of Africans' export business had also spawned the emergence of African

restaurants, African interpreters, African trafficker, African trafficked, African beggars, African destitutes, African prostitutes, African fraudsters and other supporting business. Life in Guangzhou was invariable affordable for the rich and the poor.

Some African guys were seen pouring drinks on the streets and chanting noisy songs that attracted onlookers. Their behaviours were quite out of place for most people who had never encountered the African communal life and attitude. Most of the guys wore white polo and sea green shorts. They all seemed uncultured and very wild raising the Nigerian flag in an unpatriotic manner devoid of passion for Nigeria. They only chanted the Nigeria National Anthem to celebrate the October 1<sup>st</sup> which coincided with the Chinese National day. It was for them a double celebration for two countries directly opposite in many things. The guys' unkempt dreadlocks and perforated ears grossly decorated with earrings made them look more irresponsible and assumedly insane. Nobody behaved normal. They were all under the spell of noisy lifestyle that spelt more misfortune than fortune. They indeed had nothing to celebrate about a country that had plunged its citizens into abject poverty, insecurity and daily migration of helpless youths to many countries in search of greener pastures.

Chika wondered what atrocities those guys must have committed in a bid to making life less miserable for themselves and their families back home.

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Chika was fascinated by the famous Guangzhou 20 stories tall shopping centers with architectural Chinese

designs. A young Chinese woman wanted a picture of them and herself together, so she gave her friend her phone to take a snapshot. She looked very excited that Chika and Chinedu were so tall, neatly dressed and behaved differently. Due to her limited English language skills, she couldn't express further what exactly ignited her excitement. She simply stood there waving and shouting, 'pye-pye!' (Bye-bye)

Another group of people really wanted to snap with them. When Chika and Chinedu saw them approaching, they disappeared quickly into the most famous Pan-Pan African Hotel and Restaurant. The restaurant catered for a large expatriate community in Guangzhou. It was a well-known classic restaurant. The racist coverage by some Chinese journalists who criticized African customers for eating with their hands, a tradition across the continent attracted many Chinese and other foreigners to the restaurant. Many Chinese visited the restaurant only to explore African dishes. Some Chinese men believed that African dishes had the tendency of building your body muscles and could help in enhancing sexual performance which was fast becoming a hot topic in China. The assumption was strongly connected to most Chinese girls marrying or befriending African guys leaving young Chinese guys fuming with rage and loneliness. Despite the unruly behaviour exhibited by many Nigerian men, some Chinese hot and rich babes still yearned for them which had led to constant heartbreaks and fraud stories.

The dining experience was good and very new to Chika. The environment was more sophisticated and not mainly populated by Africans. It was indeed more expensive when compared to Madam Louis Restaurant.

The least African dish was not below 200 Yuan which explained why only rich African business moguls patronized them. Some beautiful black girls who wore skimpy clothes were seen serving food to black men who needed services like massage and other intimate fondling to calm their nerves. It was indeed a high-class brow restaurant with classic rooms for quick relaxation.

The restaurant was opened by an American who married a Chinese woman in order to bridge a gap between cultures. It was rumoured that he hired different nationals to prepare their local dishes to the taste of their customers. Stephen and Zao for years had concentrated more on Africans who always had tough times whenever they visited China. So they had tried to entertain them with their home food. The restaurant for many years had been a comforting refuge in a foreign land. Stereotypes against Africans were evident but the owner of the restaurant had employed more beautiful African girls to attend to his customers. Apart from constant eating, drinking and flirting which were very common, the restaurant faced more police scrutiny than its neighbouring restaurants. It was believed that drug barons from different countries had transformed the restaurant to their meeting place. As such, it had become a very hot spot where drug addicts were nabbed.

Chika could not help thinking that Adanna and the other African girls with skimpy wears were similar in some ways. She believed that they were totally different. Those girls looked wild and fearless; Ada looked very timid and naïve with all her alluring beauty. The African girls in the restaurant threw themselves at men and they were constantly on the move all the time. Adanna was

indeed different. She was pushed and intimidated by her madam to yield to men's desires.

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Chika felt that she had a burden that was too heavy to bear. After all, 'a toad does not run in the noon day in vain.' This expression appropriately described her situation. She had been terrorized by her disobedience. Her inability to obey mother's advice kept her tortured. She had not called her mother for some time now. She knew that her mother would be worried by now. Chika walked into the visitor's room to call her mother. She sighed. Why was she torturing herself? Memories and some experiences must be buried to live life freely. The phone was ringing steadily and her mind was beating fast.

'Hellow, Onye?' (Who is calling?) A voice asked.

'Mama, it's Chika ooo! She said clenching her fist. She was so nervous to continue the conversation.

'Ah, Chukwu daalu oo! (Thank God). Your silence kept me thinking for a long time! Hope you are well?

'Yes ma, I am doing great! My only problem and challenge is too much study! Chinese language is too difficult and very challenging! Mama, please pray for me ooo! I am indeed facing a lot here!' Chika said in a serious tone.

'Chy, I pray for you every day. You can do all things through Christ that strengthens you! This should always be your confession my daughter. Don't squash your dreams with fear. You are born to conquer and rule. You must succeed my dear. And no weapons or distractions of the enemy against you shall prosper. You are blessed my daughter.'

‘Amen, amen and amen!’ Chika replied feeling light and happy.

‘Are you enjoying the weather over there?’ Her mother asked.

‘Yes of course, the weather over here is not as cold as I thought. Perhaps around December it might be so cold. But mama, this country is too beautiful ooo! I love it! I simply love it. I have not been to America but I think it beats America hands down.’ Chika told her mother.

Chinedu came into the room and Chika looked at him, the ferocious expression on her face had warned him not to utter a word. He remained silent and sat on the bed with her.

‘Okay Mama, don’t ever worry about me okay! I will not be calling often. It’s quite expensive to call from here. Also, I have good Christian friends who take good care of me over here. They have lived here for over fifteen years. So ma, as you can see, I am happy and relaxed.’ Chika told her.

‘Ooo, nwa m! (Ooo my child) Take good care of yourself ooo! I am also fine except for the occasional BP issues that come up randomly.’

‘Ndo, Nnem! (Sorry mother). It is well! I will keep praying for you, okay! Send my greetings to Chibuzo and Chibunna. Tell them that their lovely elder sister is saving towards surprising them with their articulated and unarticulated wishes. Tell them that I love and miss them every day. Tell them to remain obedient and focused in their studies because an uneducated man is a fool in this generation.’ Chika said laughing loudly.

‘May God bless you my daughter! May He shine His light on you!’



‘Amen! Bye-bye mama. My credit is finishing oooo! Love you, mama. Bye-bye!’ Chika cut the phone with so much difficulty that left her heart weak. She had grown to love and fear her mother deeply. The death of her father many years ago left the poor woman struggling to make ends meet. She staggered to her feet and fell back on the bed. Her knees were riddled with numbness because of the way she positioned her feet while discussing with her mother.

Chinedu laughed at her, and held her tightly on the waist until she began to scream. She quickly pulled away shouting in a low voice. She went into the kitchen and locked the door. Chika did not want any intimate fondling. At least, not after talking with her mother. She felt that her mother’s prying eyes were everywhere watching her actions. Chinedu gazed at the kitchen door surprised and speechless. He simply went to the sitting room and sat down on the sofa swimming in an unquenched passion.

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‘Come and sit here, Chika.’ Chinedu said, patting the space beside him on the sofa.

‘I am fine standing here sweetheart,’ Chika said. She remained standing. She was thinking of the best thing to say. It would be better to tell him a lie about her mother’s ill health she thought. Chika looked at him again and was about to say something when Chinedu interrupted.

‘I guess you are missing your mother.’ Chinedu said. He smiled and scratched his well carved beard. It was as if a faint voice inside him was warning him to be careful

with her now. He remained silent. He was trying to understand her and was indeed learning a few things about her. She was becoming more emotional.

‘Please, Chika,’ Chinedu said, his voice gentle and pleading, ‘don’t shut me out of your problems. ‘I love you, more than I’ve loved anyone else. I am ready to share your problems with you. I swear dear. I’ll definitely be of great help.’

‘That’s reasonable,’ Chika thought. She needed to tell him about Ada, the girl in the restaurant. She was mentally exhausted but was ready to welcome any discussion on Adanna’s plight. Chika was standing near the kitchen door. Apparently, Chinedu hadn’t been able to persuade her to calm her nerves and avoid becoming too emotional.

‘Calm down and let’s talk over the matter amicably,’ Chinedu pleaded.

By now, her squeezed facial expression had lost its strong grip and paved way to a faint smile that radiated her beauty. Chinedu watched her silently as she walked from her position to where he sat on the sofa. He was imagining what she must be thinking about. He looked at her, making a mental assessment to know the problem that was eating her up.

‘She is a girl like me. People are indeed heartless!’ Chika said shifting her position from one leg to another, wondering how best to present the issues that had troubled her without making Chinedu angry.

‘Who are you referring to dear?’ Chinedu asked looking straight into her eye.

‘But you already know her dear,’ Chika said softly. ‘You know her sweetheart. You know her dear!’

Chika strode behind Chinedu. ‘Please dear, let’s help her. She will continue to suffer if she is not saved.’

Chinedu turned and faced Chika. ‘I am afraid dear. I don’t know who you are talking about.’

Chika visibly nervous, stood behind him unable to say a word. She said, with her softest voice, ‘Nedu, please let’s help Adanna. The girl we saw in the restaurant the other day. I am really feeling bad about her situation. I don’t think she is desperate like the other girls we saw. I think she has been lured and deceived. She is pushed to live a lifestyle that she hates. There is something about her that is troubling my conscience.’

‘I will see to that sweetheart. But we don’t know this girl. We don’t know who brought her here and the agreement they had before her journey. This is indeed a very difficult situation ooo! This is China, and not Nigeria ooo! So we need to be very careful. Just like I said, I will see to it dear! I will do anything for my darling! I mean everything for you dear!’ Chinedu said pulling her right hand.

‘Let’s go into the room,’ Chinedu said holding her hand in soft grip as he led the way. Chika was caught in between gratitude and her rapidly growing emotions. She clutched his hand tightly determined to achieve her purpose.

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## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### *EMOTIONS ARE COLOURS*

Guangzhou climate was overly warm and humid. October was indeed the best time to visit a city devoid of clear divisions of the seasons. Chika was happy that she did not visit when the weather was extremely hot. Countless tourists were seen roaming the streets. The air smelled mostly of garlic and turmeric. Here everyone was busy heading to different directions. It smelled of tourism, business, more of foreign businesses. It dripped, also of drug business and sex business. Chinedu said that he didn't chase ladies in Guangzhou because he didn't want to be a suspect all the time. Most African young ladies in the city had been mysteriously seen as prostitutes or drug agents. Guangzhou had trading in its blood. It had been the hub of trading products in and out of China.

The streets were littered with blocks of marketplaces. These marketplaces range from electronics to gadgets, to home and gift, to clothes and bags! The marketplaces had factory and a product line where commodities could be produced and sold in large quantities. The factory representatives had marketplaces where people could see samples of goods before booking for more. Guangzhou was known for the 'non-electronics'-such as textiles, shoes, bags and home products. Chika and Chinedu wandered around Guangzhou for days and Chika had been awe struck at some of the architecture and sights that she had seen. She enjoyed going round the Canton Fair. The Canton Fair was the oldest trade show, and the famous in Guangzhou. It was a long trade fair which occurred twice a year, in spring

time (April) and fall (October). She was happy to have participated in that year's trade fair but was lost in thought as many of the traders spoke in Cantonese.

Guangzhou was the heart of the old Canton era. Many locals spoke Cantonese, not Mandarin, not English. The rest of China especially those in the North had fully adopted Mandarin Chinese while Guangzhou and other Cantonese cities of the south were still holding tenaciously to their mother tongue. The influx of foreigners for business had pushed more for English and Mandarin as the major modes of communication. The Uber car services had resorted to using Chinenglish to communicate with foreigners who could not speak Cantonese or Mandarin as they rendered their services. Most foreigners had dedicated their time to learning Mandarin Chinese which had been the official language of China and the dominant language for the long haul.

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On that lucky Friday, at the top of Baima Market, Chika ran into Adanna. Chika was very excited and ready to get going with her plans. She was pleasantly surprised that fate had favoured her plans to hear from the horse's mouth.

'I'm sorry dear about what happened that day,' Chika said. Adanna was carrying a mini bag on her right shoulder. She heaved a sigh and folded her arms across her chest.

'Never mind sister! You won't understand!' She said looking at Chika's face.

'What do you mean? Chika asked. She held her left hand and looked inquiringly at her.

'Were you not sad about what happened that day?'

‘No dear, I was not. I never felt anything. I was just there like a piece of furniture owned by everybody. What happened to me that day was nothing! Worst things had happened to me there, but I’m not bothered anymore! I’ve resigned to fate! I am simply waiting for the future to unleash more hardship and thorns of pains into my life! This life is indeed cruel.’ Adanna said with an air of total indifference that left Chika speechless.

‘Are you happy there? Chika asked.

‘Who is talking of happiness in a cruel world? Happiness has developed wings and had since vanished into the thin air. My happiness does not count anymore. My madam’s happiness is my ultimate goal now. The fear of my madam is the beginning of wisdom. Her word is final! Her decisions are binding dear!’

‘And so? You want to die there? You want to be a pawn in the hands of those ruthless Igbo guys that have no respect for women? You want to die there ruthlessly without liberating yourself?’ Chika asked almost choking with anger.

‘My body is an engine now! It does not rest from men’s constant touch and abuse. You will not understand dear! My story is a long one. My childhood is not different from what I’m experiencing now. Sister, to tell you the truth, I don’t care anymore. If you care so much about me, tell your fiancé to come and pay at least two thousand RMB to my madam as her customer. She would be glad to release me for a whole day without thinking twice. Then, I will come over to your place and narrate my ordeals to you. I am a controlled prostitute. My time is money for my madam.’

‘Not today, Ada,’ Chika said. ‘Tomorrow, maybe.’

‘Don’t forget, sister.’

‘I won’t, Ada,’ Chika promised and hurried on to meet Chinedu who was busy selecting clothes in a nearby shop.

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That night Chika lay on her bed awake. She remembered how Adanna’s buttocks were touched by one of the guys in the restaurant. She stirred and turned to face the wall. Sleep indeed eluded her and hours passed as her mind wandered into the past. The events of that day came clearly into her thoughts. She had not taken kindly to Adanna’s idea of living a life of slavery and sexual exploitation. She turned severally on the bed and lay on her back. She stared at the ceiling, her eyes following the white and silver Chinese design that projected the beauty of the room. She began to trace the lines and the artistic connections that produced such a master design. She thought about Adanna, about the holiday that would soon end, about the loneliness that would soon envelop her in Beijing and about her tedious studies in Beijing Foreign Studies University. A part of her wanted the easy life in Guangzhou, another part of her was scared and urged her to face her studies squarely.

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Guangzhou was indeed a chocolate dream land for many Africans especially the Igbo people who thought life would make a turn for the better. Nonso, an energetic 29-year-old guy from Imo State, arrived in China very desperate to become rich. After hearing of China’s rise and many business opportunities available for foreigners, he sold off the goods in his shop. He also sold his father’s

plots of land, bought his airplane ticket and paid a local visa dealer to get him to China. He thought his life was going to change only to be trapped in a tight web of disillusionment and poverty. As the oldest of his five siblings, he was responsible for caring for his family since their parents passed away. His condition had raised his concern for the siblings he left behind in a search for quick money.

Life in Nigeria was indeed very challenging with less job opportunities for many vibrant youths. The continuous quest for money, heightened poverty and excessive materialism had led to constant migration. The Eastern region of Nigeria had been losing many of their sons and daughters to migration mostly to Europe and some parts of Asia. Chinese border restrictions had been easier than in Europe or North America as a result of the free trade policy between China and many African countries. Guangzhou had become a hub for African migrants, traders and entrepreneurs.

Nonso's new life didn't turn out the way he imagined. He struggled to feed himself and had no job that would fetch him money. When his three months visa expired after unsuccessfully looking for job, he resorted to constant hiding in the day. Night became his day and day time, his night. Since he sold off his few assets-optimism replaced his desperation as he tried to scrounge enough money to go home. Indeed the dream Nonso hoped for, the better opportunities, better life, were not there. It was just a mere dream that was nowhere to be seen in China.

Nonso's experiences in China as a migrant depicted a hard life with no hope for survival. Nonso and other migrants lived in cramped apartments where they had to take turns to sleep because there were not enough



beds. They spent their days hiding inside their apartments, afraid of being caught by the police with expired visas. They struggled to get enough water and food in order to survive. The solidarity of other Igbo guys helped to sustain them. The Igbo traders whose papers were legal contributed seven Yuan a day for food and water supply. Sometimes, they brought left-over food from African restaurants packed in plastic bags for Nonso and other migrants to quench their hunger.

Each day that passed meant less food for Nonso. And he could not leave the apartment in the day for job haunting. For several years, he had walked the streets of Guangzhou in the night in search of home services or restaurant jobs. He was ready to accept any job as long as it would put food on his table.

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That Saturday night, Chika's eyes sparkled as she listened to Nonso's tale of struggle. She didn't believe he had passed through a lot.

'Oh, God, this is too bad to be true, Chika muttered. She felt like crying and offering a help, but was very careful not to make a promise that would consume her relationship. She asked Nonso to call Adanna who was busy attending to noisy customers in Madam Louis restaurant. The customers' inconsiderate demands were becoming increasingly irritating. Chika couldn't understand why she was allowing her emotions to control her. It would be unsafe for her to delve into a story that she was not too sure of. Chika folded her arms under her armpits. She had only seen Nonso for the first time that night. He was busy clearing the once occupied table where

a few customers ate before she called his attention. She had asked him about Adanna and the kind of job she had been employed to do in the restaurant.

‘Job is job dear! How I wish I had many customers like her. The lives of young ladies are quite easy here! A mere opening of legs gives them a good amount of money in a day! What do you expect a pretty young lady like her to be doing here? Washing plate? Smiling? Or... Nonso said laughing mockingly.

‘Every young lady in this restaurant is a prostitute. None has legal papers. They either migrated to China on their own accord or were deceived and manipulated. So don’t bother yourself asking too many questions.’

Nonso helped Chika call Adanna as she waited for him in a dark corner of the restaurant. It was in Guangzhou that Nonso started his new bizarre life of prostitution, not with single girls but with older married women and men who were ready to grease his palms with a good amount of money. He would send the money to his siblings as a proof of his hard work in a faraway land. Prostitution was indeed the only way he could make fast money to enable him maintain his prestige at home. He had admired Adanna for her beauty which attracted more customers to her. He had in many occasions helped Madam Louis in arranging for men who took Adanna home for the whole night and brought her back the next day after paying a huge sum. It was from Nonso’s narration that Chika first heard that prostitution was not only meant for girls or women. Boys and men also threaded on that path. Booking Ada for the night was easy as a result of Nonso’s involvement. With a little sum of 300 Yuan given to him by Chika, he was able to convince Madam Louis to release Adanna for the night. Chika gave him 2,000 Yuan to settle

their madam and left the restaurant with Adanna before idle businessmen who lived oily lives in hotels would demand for her.

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Chika slumped into the revolving chair close to the dining table, held up her forehead with her two hands, and shut her eyes. Adanna sat on the sofa in the sitting room, took a deep breath, and shut her eyes too. Neither of them spoke for some minutes.

‘What brought you to this city?’ Chika broke the silence.

‘I hardly know how to tell my story without expressing my grief,’ Adanna said. ‘I never had the privilege of living a decent life of innocence. My childhood was full of pains and sorrows. I have spent my life living in fear and agony! Hummmm!’ Adanna paused.

Chika pondered as she swung round in her chair. She hoped to nose around, to find out more about Adanna and her family background.

‘Come on dear! Spill it! Chika said, ‘don’t prolong the suspense! I heard the guys in the restaurant call you Ada-Awka. Are you from Awka?’ Chika asked.

‘Yes sister.’ Adanna replied floating back to the sofa to ponder over the question and her past bizarre experiences.

‘Anything can happen in a society characterized by pedophiles and rapists. Life for me is meaningless and unfair. My childhood had been wasted by men who had no pity for my fragile nature. My father was the first male that started this chain of abuse.’ Adanna said tears welling up in her eyes.

‘You mean your real father?’ Chika asked.

‘Pardon my asking, but this is unbelievable! I shudder! Chika shrugged her shoulder and beckoned on Adanna to continue her story.

‘When I was barely six years old, I was consistently molested by my father. I was indeed scared and alone, and didn’t have anyone to complain to. My father was a night watchman in a firm and would return home early in the morning before leaving again in the night. My mother was a trader who would leave home in the morning only to return very late in the evening. My father would wait for me to come home after school and would consume my strength like a man who had not eaten for some days. He threatened to kill me if I would let the cat out of the bag. He used to beat my mother and demanded for sex even when she was tired and seriously sick.’ Ada sighed a sigh that was nearly a groan.

‘My mother loved my father dearly and would do anything to make him happy, but my father despised her a lot because she had failed to give birth to more children. I didn’t tell anyone because I was too scared to light more fire that would consume my mother. I was upset with what was happening but lacked the willpower to face the consequences. My father molested me almost on daily basis. He would touch my small buttocks and bare chest and would always close his eyes like somebody who was waiting for spiritual inspiration. And for years, I didn’t say anything to anybody. Then, I was newly admitted into secondary school. One day, I came back from school and was feeling hot, and I had to go to the bathroom. When I came out he was waiting right outside the door for me with his long gun pointing directly into my small face. I lost my senses and fear gripped me. He pushed me into the big bathroom and locked the door. He took his clothes off and

forced me to do the same. He raped me ruthlessly, and then told me that if I tell anyone he would kill me and my mother. I died and woke up. I didn't tell anyone. I only nurtured my pain in the secret chamber of my little heart. Then a day after my 11<sup>th</sup> birthday, I started feeling weird and fainted. My body hurt so badly and I was taken to the hospital. It was confirmed that I was pregnant with my father's baby.'

'What?' Chika interrupted.

'I felt that I was going to die. So I subconsciously confessed what transpired between my father and I for years. I heard my mother cursing, shouting and pacing around in confusion. That was the last time I heard my mother's voice. I was later told by my mother's friend that my mother could not bear the shame so she drank rat poison and died. That was the first time I told my story of being a victim of incest and sexual abuse. My father was arrested and jailed because I thought he would do something to me for telling the truth. I had a traumatic attack, and my mother's friend took me away with her because I was severely depressed. Two weeks later in aunty Chinwe's house, I became so ill as a result of the pregnancy which threatened my existence. I agreed to abort the baby because I hated my father. That was indeed the beginning of my pain and sorrow. I became painfully hurt and sexually active at a very young age. I felt as though it was my entire fault that this awful thing happened to me. I kept my mouth shut for years and I had very low self-esteem, and didn't care what happened to me. Instead of running away from men, I ran to them.'

'Why did you run to men? *Haba!*' Chika exclaimed.

Adanna continued. 'Fate played a funny game on me as Chinwe's husband and house boys took their turn for years molesting my body without mercy. I had no other choice, but to run away after series of abortions that nearly killed me. People were very sympathetic to my situation and helped me secure a job in a saloon. I was barely sixteen when I left. The owner of the saloon was not so kind to me. She treated me more like a slave and called me all sorts of names. It was in the saloon that I met Auntie White, the fair complexioned lady who introduced me to Michael. Michael who was also called Mike was the one that processed my papers for the journey. Auntie White paid my flight ticket to China and promised to introduce me to a friend who would employ me. If it weren't for God's grace and mercy my dear, I don't know where I would be today.' Adanna said looking very depressed.

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## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Chika lay wide awake in bed thinking about Adanna. She wondered why fate had decided to play painful games with her life. She had thought that it was wrong for a young girl of her age to be submerged in wicked circumstances that thwarted her dreams. Adanna had come into the world as the only child of her parents. Men's continuous stemming irresponsibility on her had left a deep wound which could not be cured. This was not what she truly wanted. She truly wanted a home that would offer her protection. She wanted a decent life that would give her the peace to face her education. But these dreams were out of her reach. They were dreams suppressed by men's wicked manipulations and selfish desires.

Chika stirred and turned to face the ceiling. Adanna's story had indeed weakened her. She tried to concentrate on manipulating herself to sleep. But sleep eluded her and hours passed ushering her into deep thoughts. In her state of deep thoughts, her mind took flight to unknown destinations.

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The holiday was almost over. Chika arrived Beijing late due to an internal flight delay. The rush that Sunday morning at the airport was something else as many Chinese needed to resume school or work on Monday. Chika was not so excited and ready to get going with her studies. She had only been in Guangzhou for a few days and the thought of Chinedu left her empty.

She needed some rest to enable her attend classes early tomorrow. Classes ran from Monday to Friday

starting at 8am and finishing at 1pm or 4pm depending on whether or not there was an afternoon class. Chika stared at her small bookshelf and lost the inner strength to face her studies. Her mind had been occupied by many thoughts, thoughts of Chinedu and Guangzhou. She now had responsibilities, to maintain her new relationship and to put more efforts in her studies.

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The start of classes after the holiday was the most difficult period for Chika, as this time was spent adjusting to the content of the course outline and the teaching method. The class was slightly higher than Chika's ability and recognizing Chinese characters was indeed a difficult task. Chika was unable to grasp the basic grammar structures and a large vocabulary that would help her in comprehending her courses. There was no other African in her class. It was incredibly diverse with the majority of students from different parts of China who mainly spoke in mandarin. Chika remembered the nervous atmosphere of her first class with Wu Laoshi who was very mean and intolerant of students' inability to give good answers to his questions. That class alone caused her blood pressure to rise leaving her frustrated and hopeless. Another teacher, Tao Laoshi was very unique and different. She cared so much about Chika and helped her settle into life in the university as well as gave her grammar lessons that would aid her in her studies. Chika had five classes: reading, listening, speaking, grammar and character writing with different class teachers for each course. Each class was around one and half hours long with a twenty minutes break in the middle. It was indeed very hard for Chika who



worked incredibly hard just to have good grades since poor grades would affect the renewal of her scholarship.

As time passed, Chika became more accustomed to speaking Chinese. Words she had heard from her teachers and talented classmates during classes suddenly began appearing in her vocabulary.

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The first winter was Chika's worst season of waiting. The real China she felt in Beijing was indeed very cold and freezing. Winter was the coldest season in China across one year from December to February. Beijing had a very cold and dry weather. The chilly cold feeling left her so nervous during the period of her examinations that she yearned for the Nigeria weather. The air was indeed cold because Beijing in winter was full of gusty wind and less sunshine. The streets and roofs were covered with white, displaying a beautiful snow city sight. The trees and flowers also wore thick white snow coats once admired by Chika in television during Christmas period. It was indeed a dream come true.

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December 25<sup>th</sup> was like other normal days in China. Christmas was not a public holiday. Students and workers were not allowed to enjoy a day off. On Christmas Eve, Chika and some of her Chinese friends went to the church to perform some religious activities. People were seen trimming and lighting the Christmas tree, sending cards and gifts, and holding parties without attaching more importance to the reason behind the celebration. It was indeed quite different from home. For the first time, the feelings attached to Christmas season eluded her. She was

so lonely and empty. Different popular commercial streets and shopping malls were well decorated and the festive music was heard everywhere. The lyrics of ‘Jingle Bells’, ‘We Wish You a Merry Christmas’ and ‘Silent Night’ awakened in her a feeling of nostalgia that left her feeling sad and lonely. The only thing about Christmas celebration that Chika enjoyed was the discounts and small gifts offered by most department stores, supermarkets and other on-line shops to their customers. Her visit to some exciting places left her feeling bored and tired. To her, Christmas in China was more of a carnival.

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Chika’s mind went to the past. Her forays into her experiences in Guangzhou always ended in mixed feelings, yet she couldn’t subdue them. No moment passed without her thinking of Chinedu and Adanna. It had been two months since she had returned from Guangzhou, yet it seemed like yesterday. Memories like these should be buried. But how could she forget, when bizarre stories of Nonso and Adanna emerged every moment to add to her frustration.

‘Why should a young girl be subjected to a life of molestation and prostitution? What is the justice in a situation where a sexually exploited girl, is also molested in a place where she ran for shelter?’ Chika muttered feeling so sad.

Chika felt that she had a huge burden that was too heavy to carry. She was indeed terrorized by Adanna’s stories and felt she had been molested herself. In the past, Chika was awed by people who went abroad but now, her perception had changed. There was something about abroad that made her almost hate it: the helplessness of migrants, constant police monitoring and an air of

superiority that made Africans so nervous. China indeed was not free of restraint, internet services, walking on the streets without attracting comments – not indeed free of monitoring. Life in China did not take the familiar shape of life in Nigeria. It was pleasant and direct, but there was no privacy at all. Everything was strictly monitored with cameras.

Chika would remember her final moments in Guangzhou in a blur, Chinedu refusing to go to Madam Louis Restaurant to avoid being connected to Adanna in any way. He had warned her to be very careful of girls who had no legal papers and background. He was indeed not happy about Chika's decision which left him with the option of sleeping in his friend's house that night. After Chinedu left the apartment that night, Chika told herself, 'there was a feeling I wanted to feel that I did not feel. It was true that I loved him deeply, but Adanna's helpless condition had awakened in me the spirit of agitation and revolution. I do stupid things when I'm curious, but there must be important reasons for my actions. Adanna's situation calls for one. She is from Umuogbu Awka, a place very familiar to me. I must help that poor girl.'

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Life in Beijing was quite different and challenging. Chika liked Sunday mornings, the only day she would collect some charity gifts donated by white people heaped at the church entrance and see different shades of dark people from different continents. The church was not a conventional building but a private hall situated in a hotel hired by pastors to accommodate foreigners who were Christians. For months, Chika stumbled around trying to place her usefulness in a church that was totally controlled

by white people. The church indeed bored her. People did the same thing every Sunday; chatting, singing, eating, drinking juice and laughing without purpose. Preaching seemed more like a friendly chat with less force or emotional condemnation which was quite uncommon in Nigeria. The pastors had no authoritative control over the congregation and never cared much about money for weekly thanksgiving. Perhaps it had always been so in many foreign countries.

The hall in the hotel used as a church was in a cluster of buildings. The environment was carefully landscaped and decorated with colourful flowers at the corners of the building. In fact the perfect metaphor for the environment was a park. Every Sunday, white and black foreigners were seen dramatically looking around. White foreigners' eyes were unusually averted and precarious as though to seek a response to questions that haunted their imagination.

Chika was new to the church, the people and environment were unfamiliar to her. She longed for other foreigners, and she longed to hear the experiences of other people in China. Panicked, Chika took a step and approached a young beautiful dark complexioned Jamaican who merely stared, arms folded without responding to her greetings. She remained silent and her eyes communicated one thing: disdain. Chika stood in perfect silence, staring at her, flabbergasted by the hardness of her eyes which sustained a fixed gaze in front of her without turning to any direction. Chika felt humiliated and very sad. She simply moved away looking around the surroundings, as though seeking for something. She raised her palms and pressed her natural coarse hair to hide her frustration. Her natural Negro hair was very thick,

full and dark. Actually, she had not singed her hair straight like many black girls did. Chika had bound it with black elastic buntings in Afro style. She looked less sophisticated and abnormal to the white foreigners who gazed consciously at the coarse hair that had not been smeared with relaxers. Chika had rocked her natural hair since she returned from Guangzhou because there were a few African saloons in Beijing. She did not patronize them because they were very expensive. Most black girls' hairs were silky and long. They had used relaxers and hot electric appliances to straighten their hair. Chika looked more natural and African. The way she pressed her woolly hair with apt attention attracted some white people who were curious observing her.

'Can I touch your hair?' Kerry, a very lanky beautiful white lady who controlled the children's service asked.

'Yes,' Chika said, even though she did not like the idea. Her hair was quite different and had a very hard texture. An unusual numbness spread swiftly through her as the lady stretched her hand to touch the hair.

'Look how thick and coarse your African hair is. Is it really natural or artificial? How do you cope with lice and dandruff? It must be very tedious and frustrating to keep your bushy hair tidy. I don't envy you at all! I am damn serious. This is one hell of a trouble!' The lady said heading to the convenience to wash her hands.

Chika felt the familiar sadness and tightening of panic in her chest. She followed the white lady almost immediately and spilled the venom in her heart. 'I don't envy you too! I like my hair. It is natural and very unique. No lice, no dandruff! Say what you know and remain

where you are! Please, next time, don't go looking for trouble where there is none!

'Thank you,' the lanky lady said, and tried to unfreeze her long face which was almost turning purple-red. Chika was very happy that the words came out at the right time with a swift eloquence that displayed her courage and self-worth.

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The problem of race was still a major issue which haunted Chika like a ghost. Beijing had been set up to make the issue of race, colour and superiority very glaring. All dark people were labelled Africans without any formal introduction. People's complexions defined their nationality and continent. Most of the dark complexioned people from Europe who attended the church had an air of superiority which placed them above people from Africa. They were very unfriendly and unapproachable. They hated everything about Africa and avoided any form of association with them. Chika was left only in the company of people from Rwanda, Ghana, South Africa and Kenya whose English she barely understood. Complaints came from most African students who visited the church often. Their stories of discrimination were similar and very pathetic. Black people were monitored and suspected. Black people couldn't enter the church without submitting their international passports for scrutiny. This was indeed very humiliating and stereotypical. Nothing was done in China without your passport. In fact, 'you can't get anything in this country as a black person without your passport,' one of the girls from Rwanda told Chika with a tone of finality. In Beijing, racism existed but in different forms. Chinese racists were very common and often refer to a dark

complexioned person as *hei ren* (black person). Their constant use of that word was more derogatory and unrefined. Perhaps racism was more experienced in their use of language during assumed friendly conversations.

‘So why do many Africans seem so unhappy in China? Why do they have similar stories to tell? If they had come for studies or business in China, then why are they always looking so guilty, nervous and disturbed?’ Chika asked Meme-lee, a young girl from Rwanda. Meme-lee laid her long dark hand on one of Chika’s hands, her reddened eyes focused on Chika to caution her to be silent as church service was still in progress. Despite Meme-lee’s warnings to Chika, some little African instinct in her told her to reassure Chika that they would continue their conversation after service.

At first, the feeling of inferiority overwhelmed Chika. The woman sitting in front of her was a white woman, and her voice was filling Chika’s ears with curly sounds that left her more emotional. Chika had grown up knowing that the church was a sacred place, talking was not allowed in any form. The white usher was staring at her, eyes narrowed. She had been warned severally by the white man to stop talking. Chika looked reluctant. Here, she felt that anything was possible, white people could do or say anything without any consequences. Black people were expected to always sit and watch the superior people direct their affairs. Chika struggled to grasp the unspoken. Why had black people become so weak? Why had black become a taboo? Why did Chinese people and other Europeans disdain Africans?

‘Chinese Blackie!’ Meme-lee teased Chika. ‘You are looking at things with African eyes. Here, life is

different! You have to adapt and relax! Just relax and face your life. We are Africans! We are different!’

Chika stared out of the window, half listening, thinking how unreasonable white people were by looking down on blacks in the church; church populated with black students who were eager to participate actively in different activities. She was waiting endlessly for the service to end. Of her mixed unrelated feelings, she only felt sad and humiliated. Throughout the service, Chika did not speak, but only acknowledged people’s greetings with a cold nod.

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After the service, Meme-Lee and other Africans joked about a young African guy who had dedicated his time to holding the microphone for pastors and other church officials during Bible study. Kofi was a Ghanaian with the darkest skin Chika had ever seen. He spoke more formal English like the British and carried himself like an important personality. He ignored other Africans and greeted them as formally as he could without any friendly gestures. Chika was indeed puzzled, and she wondered why anybody would go through that trouble just to associate with white people. An angry sense of disdain and betrayal overwhelmed her. She shrugged and headed towards the bus stand. Chika did not ask questions again, but the thought was there in her mind, muddled but persistent.

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## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### *COUNTING MY THOUGHTS*

Chika laid her small hand on her forehead, for a while the sad expression on her bloated face disappeared. Her eyes focused on Chinedu's picture on the reading table, the corners of her eyes formed small wrinkles and her face brightened. Living on the university campus protected her a little from the devouring eyes of some Chinese racists and the to and fro of the city. She picked up her small travelling bag, which she had placed on a chair before leaving for church service and adjusted it on her left shoulder before leaving her room.

Chika stood on the tarred road in front of the university waiting for the taxi that would convey her to the train station. It was a great feeling visiting Guangzhou after busy months of studying. Her heart yearned for Chinedu's love. The thought of him created a special happiness that left her weak and trembling. She was happy that her examinations ended well and learning Chinese had enabled her get behind the scene while expressing her feelings. It filled her with confidence, hope and excitement as she was going to be surrounded by the buzz of a rapidly growing city. She could see surprises on taxi drivers' faces when she spoke Chinese bargaining the taxi fare with them. She hoped for a great adventure and dreamed of more romantic moments with Chinedu.

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Travelling to Guangzhou by train was not convenient at all. As the busiest rail transport hub in China, Beijing had five main train stations and many railway trunks leading to almost different cities of the

country. It took no more than 10 hours to Guangzhou by high-speed train. The busy rail transportation made it difficult to get tickets, especially during major holidays such as Chinese New Year and National day when it was highly recommended that travellers book tickets as early as possible. The Beijing-Guangzhou High speed Railway is the longest high speed railway in China with a total distance of 2,298km (1,428 miles). It connects Beijing West Railway Station and Guangzhou South Railway Station, passing through twenty-eight cities. The D type trains were mainly overnight sleeper trains available only on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and Mondays.

Chika had never travelled by train. She had never seen a sea of people like the one she encountered in the train station. Her surprise reminded her of the Beijing Airport – the first impression she had about the Chinese people. She thought that most people in Beijing were rich and elegant, but it did not occur to her to think that both the poor and the rich exist to form a balance in society. It terrified her, to be unable to visualize the situation she found herself. Chika had wanted to disappear from the yellow, dark-yellow, pink-yellow and white-yellow crowd who were so engrossed looking at her. She indeed was at war with the crowd, and stood each minute feeling emotionally bruised by their comments. Chika had wanted to fight the ugly peasant Chinese lady who made fun of her hair and complexion but did not retaliate because she was at war with the crowd. She simply moved to a corner, reclined her arms on the table and sighed.

Chika had never been a good fighter. She sat at the table with some Chinese migrants, watching people hurry past while pointing at her. Two Chinese guys whispered into their friends' ears saying '*hei ren*' (black person),

perhaps wondering what a black young girl was doing alone in a train station. The two guys looked alike, with narrow eyes that were slightly closed. Their Panda-like shaped eyes and thick eyebrows that almost touched resembled that of the ancient Chinese emperors displayed on television. Chika laughed when she discovered how similar the facial expressions of those Chinese guys and the ancient Chinese emperors had been. She stood there watching and laughing until the arrival of their train was announced.

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At first, Chika forgot that she was in China. In the train, a tired thin-faced yellow woman in official uniform requested for her ticket and led her into a compartment with strong stench of garlic and ginger. Three Chinese people were already resting on their bunks in a slightly-lighted compartment of a third-class train. The compartment was dark and unaired. Chika imagined herself staying in a steeped upper section for ten hours without clear air. From inside the compartment, a middle aged woman was groaning heavy and weird sounds. They were the throaty sound of a woman who had not slept for many nights. Her body seemed lifeless and the sound frightened Chika.

‘That’s your section’, the woman said in English flavoured with a Mandarin accent pointing at the number written on the ticket.

‘Ok, thanks! Chika said very reluctant. She fought the urge to escape from the compartment that had automatically changed her system. She wanted to vomit but was left with the only choice of suppressing the nausea. She put her hand into her purse and brought out the chewing gum that was shared in the church that

morning. The flavoured chewing gum did the magic and she regained her sanity.

‘Where are youuu fromm?’ A young pastoral looking young man suddenly asked alighting from his bunk.

‘Nigeria.’

‘You mean Africa?’

‘No, Nigeria!’

‘Isn’t there a war going on in that country?’

‘Aren’t people there killing themselves? I saw that on CCTV last week. Guess you are a refugee student right? Oh, poor you!’ The rustic looking young man said fixing his gaze on Chika.

‘Can I see your International Passport?’ The train attendant suddenly asked interrupting the stiff conversation that nearly choked Chika with anger. Chika opened her small black bag and pulled out her Green Passport.

‘Have it ma!’ She said.

Glancing at the International Passport the attendant asked, ‘How do I pronounce your name?’

‘Chika.’

‘Pardon?’

‘Chi, Chi, ka, ka... Chika.’ Chika almost bit her tongue.

‘Ooh, I see. Shika!’ The attendant said with an air of superiority that amused Chika.

‘You have a student visa. Guess you are heading to Gaungzhou where your silly African brothers reside. I hope they won’t corrupt you over there. There are a bunch of naughty African guys roaming the streets of Gaungzhou without legal papers. Please be careful and guard your passport jealously.’ The attendant warned Chika sternly

before returning the passport to her. Chika had opened her mouth as though to say something and then closed it, aware that there was something significant about that statement.

Chika had assumed that things were not too bad in Guangzhou, although she realized now that the train attendant issued a warning mentioning the noisy Igbo guys and their illegal activities in Guangzhou without details. The attendant's warning rang in her head.

'Thank you, ma,' Chika said heading towards her bunk.

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The compartment smelled more of garlic when Chika entered. She walked in and glanced at the young man who was sipping hot spicy water from a small plastic plate containing noodles. Chika merely stared at him, she could not think. There was something about the young man that made her want to react, but her mind was occupied with thoughts. His constant gaze and frequent scornful remarks made her angry and irritated.

Chika hurried past the young man's bunk and towards her bunk, knowing that her emotions could fail her at any further provocation. The bunk smelled of cold dust in winter. She liked that her bunk was the last, closer to the roof of the train where nobody would disturb her. She liked the bunk, the height above average human height and the dark upper layer that transformed everything into darkness. She liked most of all, that in the bunk, she could recoil in disgust when faced with uncertainty. But she hated taking deep breaths there. She liked watching the Chinese Gothic buildings with their dragon design-laced wall through the medium sized window in the compartment.

Chika did not like that she had to go to Guangzhou feeling sad. The rude Chinese man in the compartment had intended to offend her but had instead prodded her to think. She began to plan and to dream about the Chinese Spring Festival because it was her first experience. Her Chinese friends had told her that Chinese New Year also called the Spring Festival was an important annual event for Chinese people. It was a festival celebrated according to Chinese twelve animal zodiac signs. It was also a traditional festival that united family members for centuries; similar to Christmas celebration. During this festival, many Chinese workers had at least seven days off work, including three days legal holiday. Students would take one whole month before school would resume. Happiness seemed to have descended from somewhere onto her heart. Chika could feel it and never hurried to escape from it. She wanted to enjoy her holiday in Guangzhou; all she wanted was Chinedu's heart and happiness, and as long as she had those there was little else she desired. Chika became so engrossed in her thoughts that she drifted away.

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Some hours later, when Chika woke up, she found her black bag on the floor. Luckily, she hid her wallet, phone and passport inside her tight elastic underwear before sleep took her away. The train was filled with Chinese from different backgrounds, so it was obvious that thieves would be having their targets attacked during the festive period. Chika noticed that her mini laptop had been stolen. She alighted from her bed, picked up her bag from the floor and headed towards the complaint section.

‘I was robbed while sleeping!’ Please, help me catch this thief. He must be here! Please, please!’ Chika said to the train attendant almost sobbing. She sounded curious and was so afraid.

‘I don’t think it is possible now, the person must have escaped with the stolen items. We have already covered many cities and I guess the person must have alighted. I’m so sorry. Please, next time be very careful with your precious items,’ the train attendant told Chika.

‘But you have cameras in this train! You can replay the cameras to catch the thief! Please help me!’ Chika cried.

‘There are no cameras mounted in the compartment. We respect the privacy of our customers. I am sorry that I cannot help you.’

For the first few minutes, Chika sat on the bare floor of the train sobbing. All her vital documents were stored in the mini laptop that Chinedu bought for her. ‘*This is unbelievable! This is unbelievable!*’ She told herself often, and again, endless thoughts of what had happened churned in her head. Many Chinese migrants clustered around Chika watching her like an alien that was imported into their planet. Chika searched their gestures, faces and words, for a sign that showed pity or concern. They looked no different from their expressions before. There were no sympathetic gestures, no special concern or efforts to catch the thief. Suddenly, Chika noticed an unusual thing which was not common in Nigeria. She saw traces of slippery secretion which lay spattered on the floor. She immediately got up and was heading to her compartment when an old woman blew her nostrils. She was spattered with smelly thick mucus that almost made her vomit. She

did not tell her anything but headed to the convenience to clean up the mess.

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On her bunk, morning came too soon. It hung on the small window like a threat, ready to shatter her happiness.

‘*Wo men dou la!*’ (We have reached our final stop). A man in official uniform shouted standing at the entrance of Chika’s compartment. The man was very short and chubby. Obviously, the man was talking to Chika who was the only person left in the train. Indeed, yesterday’s experiences left her emotionally wrecked and plunged her into a deep slumber. When Chika got up from her bunk, she looked him over, sizing him up in self defense, then she smiled and said to him in Mandarin.

‘*Zao shang hao!*’ (Good morning). I’m sorry, I overslept.’

‘*Mei guangxi!*’ (No problem).The man said heading towards the door.

Chika’s heart prickled and a tingling sensation of discomfort overwhelmed her as she carried her bag to leave the train. Her world was wrapped in Gauze. She could see a sea of people moving to and fro in the train station. She told herself, ‘a journey of ten long hours has finally come to an end. Thank God I wasn’t kidnapped ooo!’ As soon as she alighted, Chinedu hurried to her and carried her in his arms touching and kissing her. His touch was warm against her skin and she felt normal again. They left the scene and headed to where Chinedu packed his SUV. In a sluce of seconds, they entered the car and drove off.

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Chika had a singular insight into life, considering that she had never experienced some bizarre aspects of it. She was a young girl who for the first time in her life had fallen madly in love. The last time Chika and Chinedu met, he had told her how much he loved her and his desire to return to Nigeria with her for their traditional marriage ceremony.

Chika was resigned to the fact that things happen too fast in life and that she should not go too far without proper marriage. Chinedu had missed her greatly, his voice sounded tearful and quite sexy. He was ready to make her his wife. He had told her over the phone while in Nigeria of the discussions he had with his father, mentioning the points he knew would make her happy and put her mind at rest; that she was a beautiful girl and that she came from a good family. Chinedu's visit to Nigeria was not in vain. His two months in Nigeria after many years in China gave him the opportunity of making good inquiry about Chika. His visit to Chika's house at Awka where her mother and other siblings reside created in Chinedu a new feeling of eternal bond. He could not wait to marry her and cherish her family like his own. The motherly advice and gentle nature of Chika's mother had in a very short time filled the vacuum created by the death of his mother. Happiness once again returned to him with deeper roots.

'I love you deeply my sweetie. I really missed you. You have taken all of me. I am now helpless!' Chinedu confessed while driving. Chika listened with her face lowered. She had not brushed her teeth and so did not dare look up. She was too shy and lacked the confidence to speak into his face.

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Chika watched the crowd silently. The period was the busiest time for the Chinese people. Many Chinese living away from their ancestral homes were returning to celebrate the Spring Festival. And so airports, railway stations and long distance bus stations were fully crowded with returnees. The celebration was accentuated with religious ceremonies and worship in honour of family ancestors and different gods. The animal sign celebrated in the lunar calendar was the 'dog' which was virtually used as a design pattern on every item in China. Different buildings and streets were decorated with golden and red buntings to signal a festive period. To many Chinese people, inability to decorate a house with red and golden buntings was a taboo that could usher in bad luck.

The Chinese Spring festival was like Christmas in Nigeria. Chika could not wait to experience it for the first time. She was imagining what people must be feeling about the festival. Not knowing what to say, she took a deep breath and only stared at the crowd.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY

### *I DIDN'T SEE IT COMING*

‘What a long journey sweetie! You look worn-out but very pretty.’ In the living room, Chinedu smiled and moved closer to Chika. She was very erratic, obviously anxious to wash her body clean. Chinedu had to incline his body against the wall to avoid being pushed down by Chika. He held her small face and looked thoughtfully into her eyes.

‘I’m not sure you love me the way I do. You look good, any day – any time. I like you the way you are... fresh, dirty.... I simply love you! What’s wrong with you? Did I offend you?’ Chinedu asked.

Chika gave him a surprised look. Her eyes were a bit simplified but radiated a strong passion that ignited powerful emotion in Chinedu. She indeed loved him, and the unmonitored freedom he gave her. Chika opened her mouth as though to say something. Chinedu placed his fingers over her lips. He placed his hands on her waist and swung her up, kissed her and nuzzled her neck. He laid her gently on the sofa and took off her blouse and bra. She laid bare chest on her back moaning softly. His long fingers caressed her soft rounded breast as he prepared to claim her fully. Her fingers clutched his head, as he lowered his body to meet hers. Chika looked straight into the open space. She did not see anything. Something in Chinedu’s voice made her dance to the rhythm of their emotion. She was not capable of putting the sweet sensation into words. She simply held him tight and allowed tears fall on her cheeks.

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Chinedu did not bother to tell Ngozi who it was that had put on his boxers and slept on his private bed. It was Ngozi, who had been entitled to such a privilege in the past. Ngozi did not believe her eyes. Since she met Chinedu, she had wanted to be his wife but wasn't lucky enough. Chinedu never loved her, but accepted her friendship as a result of the favour she did to him in the past.

Chika was fast asleep when Ngozi entered the room. Ngozi touched Chika's right leg; yet Chika did not stir. Ngozi bent over her and peered into her face to check if she was really asleep. She took a glance at the mini brown table in the room and saw a lady's handbag. She bent over again to see if Chika was still asleep before tiptoeing to the table. She picked up the bag and opened it to check the content. She was surprised to see a Nigerian passport in the bag. Ngozi opened the passport, flipped through the pages and hid it inside her tight jean trouser pocket. She was indeed very furious. She darted a glance at Chika who was deep in sleep and muttered, 'don't get flip with me or I'll knock you into next world!'

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'Chinedu! Chinedu! Hummmm! She is your new girl friend, right? A student at Beijing! You are very ungrateful and shameless! I don't really blame you! You have done your worst! Now watch me do mine, you shameless idiot! You are an ungrateful brat from a poor lineage!' Ngozi said pacing up and down. She grabbed her travelling bag and dashed towards the door. Suddenly she turned and said, 'before evening get that little brat away from this house!'

‘It will never happen! She is not just my girl friend. She is my wife to be! She is my true love!’ Chinedu said feeling so irritated.

‘Who said so? You haven’t seen anything! You have indeed touched the tail of a tiger. I cannot sleep until I ruin you and that girl. You know what I’m capable of doing. Guess you have forgotten so soon! Let that girl disappear before I return to this house this evening or else, I make her roam the streets of Guangzhou like a criminal without a passport. You know me...’ Ngozi grabbed the door handle and exited.

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‘Nawa ooooo, marriage na by force? I no wan marry you bi say, I no wan marry you! What kind of arrant nonsense is this naw? What have I really gotten myself into? What a crazy lady; spoilt girl without a living conscience! How could I marry a girl that had the heart to sell one of her kidneys for money? How could I marry a drug baroness, pimp and an evil genius? *Tufiakwa!* (God forbid!)’ Chinedu shouted in heightened anger.

Chinedu had no intention of leaving Chika. She was indeed everything to him; he did not want her to suffer for what she did not know. He sat on the sofa and shut his eyes tightly and groaned in pain.

‘I guess that girl is up to something! I must defend my true love.’ Chinedu said, more to himself than to Chika. Chinedu silently went to the room, he was very happy that Chika was still in deep sleep. The argument between him and Ngozi had not disturbed her sleep. Immediately, he returned to the living room very worried and tensed. He thought about his life and journey in China. He did not like the threats in Ngozi’s voice and eyes. He

remembered the first day he met her at Ukanna's shop at the Baidu Shopping Complex. He had come for business and needed to make more contacts for Chief Akaego's goods. At that time, his life was full of struggles and he didn't want to go down the path of his father who struggled all his life as an ordinary labourer without achieving much.

In those days, money was a stranger that rarely visited their house. Chinedu's mother died when he was very young because they had no money to make a huge deposit that the hospital demanded for before her surgery. They were indeed 'cut up' in that situation until the ruptured vermiform appendix killed his mother. Before her death, his father had borrowed enough money from his friends using his lands as collateral. He had borrowed too much money without any foreseeable means of paying back that his friends had refused to lend him more money.

The day Chinedu's mother died, his father wanted to use him as collateral to one of his friends, a businessman who was living at Onitsha to raise money for his wife's surgery. Chinedu could still remember the shock on his father's face when the doctor pronounced his mother dead at the surgical ward. It was as if nothing existed again in the world. He had made plans to go to Onitsha that very day in order to seal the plan between Chief Akaego and his father. Unfortunately, his mother died when he came to behold her face before travelling. His mother's death had signaled one thing: her resentment over the decision they made. She never wanted her husband to commit such an abominable act just to save her life. She chose death over that humiliation. That singular episode of Chinedu's life had pushed him to his present situation. He had vowed to drink money like water. He

definitely wanted to put a smile on his father's face. He wanted to prove to him that wealth could smile at them. After his mother's burial rites, his ambition took him to Onitsha Main Market where he served Akaego with dedication and complete loyalty. Chinedu became his eye in his absence and handled his business like his own. Akaego was very pleased that he decided to put him in his other line of business. Akaego was not just a wealthy businessman but also a drug baron. He wanted Chinedu to be his eye in Guangzhou, monitoring the activities of other guys and giving him feedback. Akaego loved him so much that he never wanted him to join the other guys in transacting and transporting drugs. He needed him to stay alive for his father and other siblings. He wanted him to watch his back over there just like he did at Onitsha in his absence.

Chinedu's trip to China was fully sponsored by Chief Akaego. He had been told that he came to China to oversee Chief Akaego's business just like he did at Onitsha. He never expected the circumstances that surrounded his life in Guangzhou; though he never bargained for such a lifestyle. Barely three week he arrived Guangzhou, Chinedu met Ngozi at Baidu Shopping Complex. Their meeting was divinely arranged by God. Indeed his story would have been different without her support. That was the first contact they had before the incident that nearly marred his life. Chinedu was in charge of Chief Akaego's account and transactions in China. His master had business scattered all over China which he used as camouflage to cover his drug business. Chinedu's master was brutally killed in Nigeria three weeks after he travelled to China. No one told Chinedu about his death. Nothing indeed gave him a clue. Akaego

died tragically in the hands of hoodlums sent by his detractors who wanted to control his drug money. Chinedu's presence in China was a threat to Chief Akaego's associates who connived and killed him. The same people who murdered Akaego plotted to implicate Chinedu with drug related issue.

They had secretly planned to get rid of him by planting cocaine in the bag packed with money as he headed to deposit them in China Bank of Industry. That particular day, the spirit of his mother was disturbed. Her mother's spirit was stirred to fulfill the promise she made on her sick bed. That day, she had told him that women would always come to offer help to him in time of need. That promise indeed came alive when Ngozi maneuvered and thwarted the plans of other drug dealers to save Chinedu's life. His mother's words were true. Her spirit evoked pity and love in Ngozi's heart.

Chinedu had already carried the bag and was ready to enter a taxi when Ngozi stopped him. She quickly took him by the hand and headed towards his apartment. She forced the bag open and displayed the content at once. That very day, life had a different taste for Chinedu. He would have embarked on a journey of no return but Ngozi's intervention saved the whole situation.

Chief Akaego's detractors had alerted the police who had laid siege for Chinedu, but his dead mother's prayers on her sick bed availed. Ngozi took the drugs and flushed it down the toilet before the police could track Chinedu down to his house. They stayed up there in his room waiting for the next action.

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Ngozi was a classic prostitute, a young baroness and a pimp. She had her people everywhere both Chinese



and Africans. She was barely fifteen when she came to China for business. Her mother was an Edo woman who divorced her poverty-stricken Igbo husband and absconded with her only child, Ngozi. Ngozi's mother doted on wealthy classic women who had excess money through prostitution. She also became very rich and influential after joining the cult of prostitution. Her influence grew and her daughter's initiation at a very tender age earned her more powerful status. Ngozi was a replica of her mother. Her mentality was no different from hers. Ngozi's boldness and subtle nature had favoured her greatly in this business. Her beauty was exceptional – this she got from her mother. Again, her mother's slim body and well curved hips were also her best attraction.

The very day Ngozi saved Chinedu's life was also the day he lost his freedom. Chinedu could still recollect the despondence in his voice and the utter frustration that seized his body after Ngozi's sudden revelation which got him emotionally trapped to her. The thought of being killed for the crime he did not commit got him depressed and afraid. There and there, in his own room, Ngozi took advantage of Chinedu and robbed him of his innocence for he had never touched a woman before. It was not in Chinedu's nature to admire or feel something easily for a girl, but Ngozi's presence in his life had awakened the beast in him. He could play occasionally with other girls any time Ngozi travelled out of China.

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Chinedu knew that Ngozi's story was very complex to narrate. It was not the type of story that any reasonable young man would hear and ignore. The story

of Ngozi's life was a common knowledge in Guangzhou; a place where the African community shared their pains and sorrows like siblings. A chocolate city populated with Nigerians, mostly Igbo people who could betray or offer protection to their own.

Ngozi had no good moral background. She was nurtured by a wayward mother who left her husband's house to live a free life of prostitution. Ngozi grew in her mother's house at Edo. She took her mother's family name and grew up to regard her grandfather as her biological father. Ngozi enjoyed dangerous adventures. She was not afraid to take risks at all. Chinedu had always been bothered about the issue of marriage. His mind had been plagued by many bizarre thoughts of Ngozi.

'How could I possibly marry a loose girl who sold one of her kidneys to venture into drug business? This is very impossible! I cannot marry a drug addict and a baroness! How could I allow one incident which I had no control over ruin my life. I must forge a new life. I must socialize and create a new future for myself. Ngozi cannot stop me. No, it's late now!' Chinedu said determinedly.

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Chinedu had been unable to work out how to tell Chika what transpired between him and Ngozi without revealing her threats and warnings. He had not even introduced her to Chika for the first time.

Chika noticed a change in Chinedu's demeanor that evening at Madam Louis Restaurant. His demeanor made Chika suspicious of something. It was supposed to be a lovely evening, the Eve of the Chinese New Year. Chinedu had wanted a different restaurant for the evening outing but Chika's persuasive nature left him with no

choice. He knew that Ngozi would be at the restaurant to see the girls she indirectly recruited now she was in the country. She would give them money, perfumes, skimpy lovely gowns and shoes like the Good Samaritan or Dorcas in the Bible who took good care of the less privileged. The girls were usually happy any time she came visiting because of her supposedly acclaimed generosity and love for them. She would give Madame Louis some huge amount of money as a bailing charge in order to take the girls to different hotels where they would satisfy her Arab friends who came for business.

Ngozi loved Adanna because of her rare beauty and calm nature. Adanna's psychological makeup had been grossly affected by past traumatic events that she had no willpower to resist any humiliation. Of course, Adanna's will was often regulated by Ngozi's reason. In fact, she submitted to Ngozi's will without any display of resentment. Ngozi entered the restaurant with Adanna and the other girls. She began to urge them to smile and treat their customers nicely. And as the urges threatened to turn into shouts, Chinedu quickly told Chika that he had to go to the convenience to ease and tidy himself.

'Ok my love, and don't leave me so lonely here. Go and come back quickly before something happens to me ooo!' Chika said sarcastically.

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Chinedu stifled the urge to tell Chika the truth, to reveal to her that her life was in danger. He suppressed the temptation, remembering that Chika was very emotional and outspoken. He knew that Chika's reaction could trigger up issues that could create complex problems for her.

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Adanna walked happily to the restaurant, thankful that at least she had been released from the clutches of those Arab guys who nearly devoured her. She used to enjoy their company, but her body had betrayed her. She had been feeling feverish and weak. At least that day, she had been allowed the freedom to relax and move around without being monitored by Madam Louis unlike the days when she had been chaperoned by Nonso. Adanna feigned indifference to Ngozi's orders. She ignored her call and went straight to Chika's table. She pulled one of the plastic chairs and sat very close to Chika who was busy looking at Ngozi as she gave her command.

Adanna clucked. 'You don't know Auntie Ngozi. These girls will continue with their work ooo. As for me ooo, I am done today! Anytime Auntie Ngozi comes around, my level changes. She gives me good food, shoes, clothes, perfume and...The most interesting part is that she does not allow me to satisfy all those local Chinese and African men who never treated me nicely. She takes me to very expensive hotels to satisfy her wealthy friends from Europe. I mean clean, handsome and caring men who cherished me more than the local ones. They handle me with so much love and gentility that I can never regret having fun with them. They are also very generous with money. They could give me twenty thousand RMB just for a contact. These men are mega rich. They are well known drug barons with immunity. I enjoy their company and feel high whenever they are around.'

'What are you talking about? You enjoy prostitution?' Chika asked. She shook her head as though Adanna were mad. 'Ada, honestly, sometimes I don't understand you.'

‘You will not understand Chy. I don’t like what I do, but I think I have the right to enjoy what I cannot change. I have enjoyed them for three years now. And I have changed my myopic belief that all men are rapists. I used to hate men before, but now my opinion has changed.’ Adanna said smiling broadly.

‘This is really absurd! I think you are a self – saboteger! You don’t really know what you want dear. I was feeling pity for you. I couldn’t sleep or have rest of mind because of your bizarre experiences and you are here talking about men who handle prostitutes with love and care. That’s quite absurd! Chika said so irritated.

‘Chy, you will not understand. My own father was a beast! He hurt me several times and threatened to shoot or kill me whenever I displayed resistance. He was indeed a monster in human skin. These European guys are very caring and gentle. I have never enjoyed sex with Africans or Chinese guys because they treated me more like a slave. They are merely interested in satisfying themselves to utilize the money paid for my services. Sometimes, they would pull my hair, use objects on me or force me to use my mouth on them. My dear, you will not understand. Experience is the best teacher. I can tell the story best. I have totally resigned to fate to direct my life. Ngozi has been nice to me in this business and I truly owe her my trust and obedience. She has been sheltering me in her house ever since I entered this country. I live in her well-furnished duplex while doing my job. She has taken it upon herself to renew my stay here. She is with my passport now and I think it is safe with her. Ngozi is so wealthy and influential. In fact she is highly connected and a guru in this business. The difference is that she is classic

and international. We are cheap, helpless and very local. She loves me and wants me to be like her.’

‘Where did you meet this Ngozi?’ Chika asked.

‘Here! The lady who brought me to China introduced her to me. She told me that Ngozi would help me find a better job, but for the mean time I should be helping Madame Louis in her business since she is desperately looking for helpers. Ngozi accepted me like her own and brought me to live in her mansion. I was indeed very happy, and felt at home.

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Other girls were aware of what they had come to do in China. As long as they were still under Madam Louis, they must work. The girls never determined the number of men they would sleep with in a day. As long as men kept coming, they made their bodies available to them. Ngozi’s love for Adanna was different and very peculiar. No other girl had ever been accorded such privilege. Since she came to China, her life had been revolving around men. This was the type of venture into which many Nigerian girls seemed to be rushing as the country moved towards hardship and constant unemployment.

Chika could not help thinking that though Adanna and the other girls were very alike in yielding their bodies to men, they were not the same in many ways. Adanna was very calm and gentle. She liked solitude. She still had a conscience and could readily listen to your advice if you had cared to offer one. She had once told Chika that she wanted to study if she could get a better job. She had a

positive mind that could change her life within a minute, but the people surrounding her were not helping matters.

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Chinedu was moving towards the table where Chika sat when Ngozi suddenly walked over to him and put an affectionate arm around his shoulders.

‘I want you to come to my party,’ she said. I’m so sorry for being so rude to you. I was jealous. You know I love you dearly. Please forgive me sweetheart. I left the country for some months now. I didn’t expect this to happen so soon. You didn’t tell me about your new girl! You left me in the dark. You took me unawares, so I overreacted. Please forgive me, okay! You can’t afford to miss this year’s Chinese New Year party in my house. Pleaseeeee, forgive my bad attitude.’

‘Ok, I’ve heard! Please, next time try to control your emotions and behave in a mature manner. Do not brew up tension where there is none, okay!’ Chinedu said patting Ngozi’s back.

‘I won’t haunt your girl. I won’t hurt her as threatened. She is free to be with you. I have withdrawn my words.’ Ngozi said moving towards Adanna and Chika.

Chinedu withdrew his arm from Ngozi’s back and straightened up to meet Chika who was gazing at him frowning. He was in no doubt that he was going to have problems with Chika if he had not withdrawn his arm. The signs were already there on her face. Ngozi had noticed too. Ngozi stepped forward and held Adanna’s shoulders to make a formal introduction.

‘I guess you still remember Adanna, the girl that lives in my house.’ Ngozi said glancing at Chinedu.

‘Really? I’m not too good at recognizing people. Of course, you recruit many girls every year to work for you. How could I have recognized her?’ Chinedu asked sarcastically. Ngozi glanced at Chika, her face clouded with jealousy and smile.

‘What’s your name dear?’

‘I’m Chika, Chinedu’s fiancée.’

‘Oooh, that’s your new girl Nedu! Ngozi muttered.

‘Yep’, Chinedu said and sat down on the chair.

‘I guess you will be coming with her tonight. They seem to be locked in their discussion. My dear, you are warmly invited. Your new friend here will keep you company. You will have more time to chat and enjoy yourselves. Nedu is my very good friend. He is a good man. Please, handle him with special care.’ Ngozi said smiling broadly.

Chika sat in perfect silence, staring at Ngozi, fascinated by her beauty and facial expressions which glued her attention.

‘Ok, see you tonight,’ Ngozi’s voice echoed as she turned to leave the table.’

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### *THERE'S DEEPNESS IN THOUGHTS*

Ngozi's house looked quite expensive and sophisticated. It was indeed a well-built western modern duplex. Chika liked the airiness of the living room, with its unique decoration and arrangement that gave it a classic look. It resembled the kind of houses found in western magazines which caught Chika's fancies in the past. The fully rugged staircase that led to a small balcony decorated with colourful flowers also fascinated Chika. Growing up, she had fancied some of the houses displayed in foreign magazines. She thought they were mere drawings until she came to China.

On arrival, she stood on the balcony watching people move up and down. The ground floor was fully crowded. There were many Africans, Chinese and Europeans. It was not an ordinary party; it was an adult party.

Chika glanced often at Chinedu, like a jealous lover who was monitoring her man to see his facial expression while greeting other beautiful guests that graced the party with their presence. As Adanna spoke introducing Chika to her friends, Chika nodded continuously as though Adanna's words made meanings to her. Her thoughts were occupied with her relationship with Chinedu. She could not afford to lose him now that she had fully surrendered her heart to him. Other girls nodded thoughtfully, as though Adanna had said something very interesting, but Chika recalling herself said, 'I'm not sure I understand what you said, Ada.'

‘Let’s go and high ourselves!’ Adanna said.

‘What does that mean?’ Chika asked a little confused.

‘I mean, let’s join others to eat, drink and celebrate the Spring Festival. This is your first time, right? Come along, you will enjoy and meet Africans from Beijing and other parts of China.’ Adanna said dragging her downstairs.

The music blared through the loud speakers and Chika’s aching feet signalled her to have a break from dancing. They had been at the party for a few hours and were having a great time. Chika shouted to the waitress, ‘I need a glass of Chinese wine or juice.’ Chinedu had introduced her to drinking wine claiming it was an alcoholic beverage made by fermenting the juice of grapes.

As she waited, she saw Ngozi and a group of guys discussing. Ngozi approached her and smiled broadly at her. ‘You look beautiful dear,’ she grinned, inspecting her up and down. The waitress suddenly appeared and poured the drink into an empty tumbler and handed it to Chika.

‘Thanks,’ Chika smiled, sipping from the tumbler. Ngozi and Chika got chatting about the party and her experiences in Beijing as an African student, minutes later Chika’s legs started feeling heavy.

‘Strong wine,’ she figured!

Adanna saw her staggering and came over to see if everything was okay. She took Chika by the hand and headed to the dining table.

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Ngozi's terraced private home, with its well preserved carpet green grasses that led to the front door smelled of Chinese beer and strong wine of different brands. Chika wondered if Chinedu had so completely absorbed his own liquor just like she did. She was seeing double and nothing made sense to her. She could barely recognize Adanna who sat sipping her strong alcoholic drink. Chika looked around, as though seeing everybody and everything through new eyes. The dining table was a riot of different types of dishes, wine, meat, vegetables, sweets, fried rice, nuts, cakes, puddings and fruits. Chika stared into her glass. There was something definitely wrong with her. She did not know what it was, but her body felt very strange and weak. Something was indeed wrong with her. She was gradually drifting away as a sense of restlessness overwhelmed her. She got up from her chair staggering in an uncontrollable manner. It was so serious that Adanna and her friends carried her to the guest room, and headed off into the crowd. She lay on the bed drunk and weak. For a long time afterwards, her body was still and pilled-up.

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It was now hours after she came into the room. Chika was lying helplessly on the bed trying to make sense of the world around her. She stood up and tried to figure out what had happened to her when a dark figure stepped forward and slammed the door shut behind him. Horrifyingly, Ngozi heard Chika's scream and rushed into the guest room. She switched on the light to confirm the victim and left without any word. It was obvious to Chika that it was a planned rape. She was obviously drugged to be raped by unknown men. The man slapped one hand

over her mouth and nose and the other against her head, and pushed her to the cold ground. Chika started shaking uncontrollably. She couldn't scream. All she could do was stare at the ceiling, tears dripping down her cheeks. The man tied a rough rope around her ankles and wrists, and yanked her limbs together behind her back. He then wrapped the thick rough rope around her neck stifling her breath. Her breath came quickly and unevenly.

'You are going to be here for a while, baby. My friends and I are going to savour your body. We will relish you till you drop dead. We are not going to leave you the same, baby!' She remembered him saying as he tore her underwear, unzipped his pants and penetrated her until he ejaculated in her. The man sat on the bed, breathing heavily. Chika's head started spinning and her body had turned into jelly. The pain and dizziness made it hard to focus. Suddenly, another man entered the room, grabbed Chika's wrist and pulled her back on the floor as she struggled to free herself. She screamed for help as she could hear voices outside the room. But nobody came to her rescue.

'Please, stop!' She cried.

The second man lowered his hairy chest on top of her. She tried desperately to push him off, but had no strength. Drifting in and out of consciousness, Chika kept crying, screaming and yelling. With his hands gripped tightly over Chika's mouth, he raped her.

Chika panicked and nearly convulsed when she saw the third man bending over her. His large fingers gripped her rounded breasts and pinned her tightly on the cold floor. The guy was on top of her thrusting hard and recklessly. A shudder ran down her spine. She couldn't relieve the horror. She no longer felt like herself.

Again a tall dark man suddenly appeared, forced her legs open and stuck his finger recklessly inside her. Chika did not remember anything after that except that she couldn't breathe. She passed out at once.

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The bitterness Chika was feeling had gone beyond tears. She had heard it said often enough that the river never swallowed somebody who did not visit its shore. Had she known all along, she wouldn't have attended the party. She knew that something was wrong but couldn't actually point to a particular thing. The sudden dizziness and the irregularity of the whole situation stunned Chika into puzzled and shocked silence.

Heavy footsteps thudded outside the room, and there were strange voices, male and female voices suffused with an ominous sense of pressure. A female voice was screaming and the scream intensified when the guys yanked the door open.

'Here is the stupid whore who slept with your man! We caught them in the act, so they cannot deny it. Chika heard a male voice announced.

'So you slept with my man!' Ngozi's voice thundered. Adanna! You mean you had the courage to seduce my man without thinking twice. You deliberately did it to humiliate me right? You have no respect for me eeh? After all I did for you! You have also joined this small rat here, a girl who should have concentrated on her studies to drag my man with me. Okay, let's see where all these will lead two of you!' Ngozi shouted furiously.

'Please...please Auntie! It's not what you think!' Adanna pleaded. I was drunk and high...I needed...

‘Shut up little brat! Ngozi shouted obviously fuming in anger.

Chika could hear Chinedu’s voice in the living room, thundering and raging like a mad dog probably colliding with something as he tried to make his way into the room. Adanna was also trying to find her way out of the room when a muscular pair of arms grabbed her neck and lifted her off the ground unto the bed. He roughly grabbed her rounded full breast and started to squeeze and hurt her.

Chinedu forced himself into the room. The realization of what he saw weakened him. Chika was almost a limp girl in need of revival. He dashed forward in anger to untie the robes. Ngozi’s guys held him and threatened to beat him for proving stubborn. Ngozi looked at Chinedu very angry, burning with jealousy she commanded the guys: ‘do whatever you want with the girls. I don’t really give a damn!’

Suddenly, one of the guys hoisted Chika roughly into the air and dropped her face down in a plank position and raped her from behind. Chika’s back arched and her bound hands were almost paralyzed. There was no use struggling and she could not scream because the guy stuffed a smelly sock in her mouth and covered it with duct tape. She died and resurrected in her pains. She was simply silent, eyes tightly closed.

The sadistic acts of violence and the humiliation meted out on Chika moved Chinedu to action. At once the self-control that he had left him. He grabbed an empty wine bottle beside the bed and hit the head of the guy who was raping Chika. The guy shouted holding unto his blood dripping head. Another guy struck Chinedu a few frontal and side blows. Ngozi took the flower vase on the table

and hit his head. She saw that Chinedu was sprawling on the marbled floor, in a pool of his own blood. She screamed and hurriedly left the room to fetch a thick towel. When she returned, a trickle of blood was escaping from his gaped mouth and his body lay lifeless on the floor. Ngozi was now standing up on the floor speechless. Her mouth was wide open. Her eyes stared at Chinedu, as if she had seen a ghost. Everything seemed meaningless. She simply shouted, 'take him away,' and bolted from the room crying in deep sorrow. The guys hurriedly carried Chinedu's body and left the room. The whole incident did one thing to Chika; it caused her to lose consciousness.

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Chika had faced serious health problems, from nerve damage in her arms to paralyzed cold hands caused by bad flow of blood. Her neck was very stiff and in great pain. On a day like this, one could almost believe that God did not exist, but the soft spirit in her persuaded her to utter a prayer of distress to God. They had been left in the room for long hours without food or water. There were no shadows at all. The room was gloomy and unusually silent. The death of Chinedu frightened them and left them sad and morose. Adanna's hands were also tied with thick ropes and her legs were chained to the window protector to prevent her from escaping.

After sixteen long hours, the guest room door swung open and feet shuffled inside. The guys' hideous abuse continued. They took away their clothes and raped them one after the other and left them on the floor to freeze for some days.

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Days rolled into weeks and weeks into months. Adanna and Chika were raped again and again, sometimes six or seven times. Each day, they were constantly punched and starved for long hours before they would be served with boiled eggs, locally made soya milk and *mantou* (Chinese steamed bread). They could not describe how much pain they suffered in the hands of those guys. Chika got pregnant during the three months she was under house arrest. The guys punched her until she miscarried the pregnancy. Every day was pure torture and pain. They thought they were going to die, but grace kept them pushing through the difficult times.

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Chika and Adanna were kept for many nights as prisoners in Ngozi's duplex. They had endured brutal beatings for months before they were allowed to move out in the nights under strict monitoring. Everything changed for them one cool afternoon. They were in the guest room when somebody inserted a key and opened the door. Ngozi stood at the door moping at them. Her face did not display any emotion. She walked in and sat at the edge of the bed. She asked them if they knew why she came. After nodding no, she asked them to listen attentively to her story.

'I do vaguely remember when Chinedu and I met. He was just a novice, a timid teenager brought from Nigeria to manage his Oga's business. He was very innocent and dedicated to his master. He would have died for a crime he did not commit but I personally saved him from the hands of some drug barons who planned to implicate him with cocaine. That day, I became a god that he worshipped. He pledged to love me forever, for better, for worse! On that very day, we sealed our love with a



unique sexual oath that was more spiritual than physical. That was my own peculiar way of oath taking. That same day, I told him that the consequences of not keeping to his promise would be very tragic or severe depending on how he defaulted. I recalled telling him about my life and the risk I took in my business. As you are seeing me now, I'm getting closer to my grave. I sold one of my kidneys to establish the business Chinedu and I were enjoying. The only kidney left in me now is having complex issues. Chinedu accepted me as his girlfriend and promised to love me forever.' Ngozi stopped while battling to control herself, then took up the story again.

'I was emotionally disturbed and completely devastated when I came back from Dubai after some months of business trip there and visited Chinedu only to see you fast asleep on his bed. That very day, the demon in me surfaced. I stole your international passport and threatened to hurt you. I warned Chinedu to send you back to Beijing but his love for you made him revolt against me. I soon mapped out a new plan of action to humiliate and hurt you. I faked my apology only to calm his nerves. I did not want him to suspect my actions. Everything worked the way I planned it, but his sudden death was indeed a huge mistake. I never planned it.'

'Chika, you've caused me great sorrow. Your presence has altered my life. You are now under my watch. You have no say in any matter concerning your life in China. I am now fully in charge of your life. You have automatically joined the other girls in this business. You have nothing to say! My decision is final. Don't try to play smart. If you try it, you will blame yourself forever. My men will haunt you down, implicate you with drugs and hand you over to *Ndi Eke* (Chinese police). You know that

means death sentence by hanging! Be very careful, my eyes are everywhere. I am watching you!’

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Since that day Ngozi exposed her secrets to Chika and Adanna, life in Guangzhou became a living hell for them. They walked the streets of Guangzhou in the night, selling sex to African men, Chinese men and other foreigners who came for business. Sometimes, they were forced to sleep with their fellow women just to make more money. Many times Chika refused to cooperate when female customers came to patronize her, especially when they demanded to sleep with many girls at the same time. In most cases, Ngozi’s men would beat and gang rape her for hours as a way of punishing her for her stubbornness.

Chika walked the streets of Guangzhou mostly at night for three months. She was expected to turn in at least twenty thousand RMB every week. For Chika, there was no hope or means of escape. They were constantly watched and strictly monitored.

The thought of returning to school was very far from her mind. All she wanted was to return to her mother and siblings. She desperately wanted a second chance in life to correct her mistakes. She simply wanted her freedom back. Chika’s current predicament had squashed her dream of studying the Chinese language. She had indeed deviated totally from the right path and had been forced to live a life she never dreamt of. Apart from her anxiety over her studies, she needed someone to talk to, someone to tell her that all would be well in the end.

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Life in Guangzhou was, hide and seek. Guangzhou, an international metropolis was populated by African immigrants, mostly Nigerians and their mixed-

blood offspring with Chinese women. Many Africans feared the police like plague due to their invalid papers. These Africans remained in the city illegally after their visas expired, as China's one to three visas often did not provide enough time for individuals to conduct their business. In solidarity, Nigerians coined the word, *Ndi Eke* (police) to signal the presence of Chinese police to their African brothers who had no legal papers whenever they came to raid spotty areas populated by Africans.

Many Africans went into hiding in the day as a result of strict immigration enforcement by Chinese authorities. Nigerians, especially Igbo people roamed the streets of Guangzhou hustling to make ends meet. Many of them came to China because of the economic pressures at home and the depreciation of the Nigerian currency. Drawn to China's economic boom, these Nigerians flocked Guangzhou to explore and make quick money. In many cases, China's loose orientation to inferior and cheap products gave them the opportunity of making money while acting as middlemen between Chinese factories and other businessmen in Africa. The frequent and increased police raids had contributed to a toxic atmosphere. Foreigners, mostly Africans were often stopped by the police or Foreign Affairs Bureau to present their international passports. Africans were disillusioned and disappointed as harsher penalties were introduced for illegal workers and overdue visas holders. Fear and tension increased as every street had several police stations and security checkpoints to effectively monitor foreigners.

Some Nigerians came to Guangzhou for short periods to buy goods which they shipped back to Africa. Some of them settled in the city and had business or

restaurants. Many Africans found themselves in the city after being scammed with promises of factory jobs. Many of those duped were girls and women who as a result often go into prostitution to survive. These African prostitutes catered for the sexual demands of African and Chinese communities. At least fifty percent of their clients were Chinese men curious about sexual experiences with African women. Such was the predicament that confronted Adanna when she arrived Guangzhou.

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As Chika and Adanna walked down Madam Louis Restaurant, they saw a crowd of African people in front of the restaurant. Their hearts missed a bit. In panic, Chika's eyes roved far and near searching for signals. She knew that her road to freedom was near. Having been tortured for a long time, freedom became valuable to her. The freedom to rule her life once again, the freedom to be herself, the freedom to be free!

Chika had stayed away from the noisy crowd as she watched Nonso and a Nigerian guy fighting. That night, the weather was chilly and unusually cold to cause shivering.

'You are brothers! You shouldn't fight in a foreign land! Adanna said to the guys. She gently pulled the dark guy's shirt to liberate Nonso who was already gasping for breath.

'Leave me alone you ashawo!' His face bereft of the usual smile found on his face. The Nigerian guy was one of their regular customers who could not do without sex every night. A scuffle followed with the guy trying to push Adanna down. He slapped Adanna with some force

and pushed her to the ground. Adanna darted forward and held the guy's shirt screaming.

'You shouldn't treat her like that,' Chika shouted.

'What crime did she commit? She wanted you to stop the fight, which was her only crime! You are shameless and very unreasonable! Wait until you alert *Ndi Eke* (policemen), then you will see what you've done to yourself and others. Stupid boy! You are useless and senseless!

'It's all right Ada. Let's enter inside,' Chika said holding her right hand.

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Some minutes after the fight, Chika tucked away as she contemplated a new plan to escape her present condition. She was evidently very embarrassed and ashamed of doing this work. The job took its toll on her that it was beginning to affect her psychologically. In many cases, she had been a popular target for muggings while leaving brothels. She always felt nervous carrying large sums of money after a long night of sex with different customers. She would feel horrible after doing the work. Most of her clients were between thirty and fifty-five. Chika's clients were not simply affluent, but very wealthy, and cocaine was very popular among them. They could stay for hours demanding for sex which often turned aggressive.

Chika needed no one to tell her that in this situation, she would find it difficult to survive if she was not rescued. She was still in deep thought when she heard, '*Ndi Eke! Ndi Eke! Ndi Eke!*' Everyone ran helter-skelter. Nonso and the other girls hurriedly locked the main door of the restaurant. They switched off the lights and sound

systems motioning everyone to remain silent. Chika knew that the moment had come, the moment of liberation and revolution. She silently gazed at Adanna to figure out her reasoning. Adanna's eyes were sunken and her body gripped with fear.

‘Surrender now or perish!’ A voice sounded.

Chika buried her face in her hand as the voice kept repeating the same statement. Everyone in the room kept silent. Chika remembered the stillbirth of her ambition, the agony of her life as a prostitute and let out a frightening scream.

‘Please, don’t kill us. Don’t let me die here! I surrender totally. Don’t shoot us please! I beg you, don’t shoot us! I want to go home! I really do...’

Immediately, Chika darted to the door and flung it open. She was only seventeen at the time when she vowed to liberate herself. She had indeed suppressed her fear and grabbed her freedom with her bare hands.

At once, Chinese men in uniform pounced on them and clamped handcuffs around their wrists. They were very vicious and unsympathetic. That cold night, peace returned to Chika's heart as the policemen whisked them off to a police station and later to the detention centre. Her long dreamt journey home had begun. Her nights of endless traumatic sex had finally ended. Life assumed a new phase, and a new chapter was opened for her. The horrors in Guangzhou brothels, the constant rape in Ngozi's apartment, and the humiliation of working as a prostitute plagued her conscience. There had been so many times in the past when she had longed for this to happen, so many wishes of escape that kept her traumatized and disillusioned. And now it felt like a new path to freedom. Christiana, one of the girls had flung

herself on the ground with perfect dramatic display and begun to cry. She did not believe that this had happened. The policemen stood behind, watching them with stony piercing eyes.

‘Stop screaming you blackie! Hey you girls this side! Guys this side’, the policeman said.

‘Take off your chains, earrings, rings, shoes ... and hand over your phones.’ The policeman took their phones and switched them off. The girls were led to the ladies’ cell under the watchful eyes of female wardens.

Nonso and the other guys were forcefully dragged to another cell after displaying some acts of resistance and violence.

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Adanna hardly said a word since she entered the cell. She only stared and pulled her braided hair with her right fingers. The cell was small, with patches of brown dirt on the wall. In the cell many girls were already there, no white foreigner; only black Africans. Most of them were Nigerians. They were apparently tired of telling their stories. Now new girls had arrived, they said little and stared at the ceiling in silence that radiated deeper reflection.

The cell had two chambers, the indoor chamber where detainees sleep and an open roofed outdoor chamber where they could walk and exercise during the day. There were limited chances for inmates to escape from the cell, except when summoned by the wardens or interrogators. Visits from family or friends were prohibited, only lawyers could visit if the detainee was not in the investigation stage.

In the tiny room called the indoor chamber, there were two surveillance cameras mounted on both sides of

the room to monitor the inmates. Hygiene conditions were terrible. Thirty girls were packed in the tiny room with limited air space. The toilet stunk. The whole room was always saturated with smelly odour of unwashed bodies. The wardens never cared about the inmates' health conditions. They were there only to prevent them from violence. The cell harboured inmates that committed serious or minor offenses such as theft, fraud, illegal or expired visas, drugs, rape, murder and others.

Chika hated mosquitoes. She could not endure the itching sensation that would leave her skin with black round bumps. She continuously jammed her palms to whisk away the mosquitoes. This very act irritated and infuriated older inmates who were begging sleep to claim their bodies.

'Who brought this small pikin here? Why are you disturbing us? Please stop that nonsense and give us the peace we need.' A fat dark complexioned inmate shouted.

'Sorry, the mosquitoes were feasting on me so....'

'So what? We don't give reasons here! You must handle your problems without disturbing other inmates' peace. We all have challenges too! So don't be selfish! The lady said.

Chika had suppressed the sudden urge to engage her in a battle of words because she feared the inmate would attack her as a dog would attack an intruder.

'Take it easy on her! She is just a young girl! Don't be too hard. Please learn to accommodate people,' Beatrice, another inmate cautioned the fat one.

'Come here young girl! Come closer and please don't mind her. She is always like that, very saucy.' Beatrice said.



Chika got up and moved to Beatrice who adjusted to accommodate her.

‘You are too young to be here little girl! What really happened to you? What brought you to this place?’ Beatrice asked looking worried and concerned.

‘Ma, it’s a long story. I’m grateful to God that I’m still alive today. The story of my life is pathetic, but my friend’s story is bizarre and very humiliating.’ Chika said.

‘Who is your friend?’ Beatrice asked.

‘Adanna.’ Chika said pointing at Adanna.

Beatrice beckoned on Adanna to come with her fingers. Adanna obeyed without hesitation, without protest.

‘She is also young. What happened? Were you trafficked?’ Beatrice asked.

‘No! I was not, my friend was trafficked. I came to study at Beijing and ended up in this prison. I have indeed betrayed my family. I am so ashamed of myself. I can’t boast of anything now. I am a huge disgrace.’ Chika buried her face in her hands, tears streaming down her cheeks.

‘Chinedu has ruined my life. Men are wicked, cunning and very secretive. They will love one woman; marry another while wooing an unsuspecting young girl on the street. Ma, my life is shattered. I am finished. My body is filthy and wickedly ravaged by men who constantly worshipped at my temple and poured their sexual offerings. I am indeed a victim of twisted fate! I’m a victim of misfortune and disgrace.’ Chika shrugged.

‘Haba! Please don’t talk like that at all. You are still very young and beautiful. Your experiences are nothing compared to most of us here. So don’t crucify

yourself. Just relax and be positive in life. Things will definitely turn around for you. Beatrice said.

‘Ma, you will not understand. I am a student turned prostitute. I just turned seventeen but my story is horrible. I didn’t have much sexual experience when I was forced into prostitution. I had horrible experiences that were very pathetic and scary. I didn’t know that my life would be spared after experiencing all those traumas. Every night, I went to brothels and had no idea what I would encounter behind the doors. I was always scared because I dreaded being gang raped by both men and women who used objects on me. I can’t forget my struggle with STDs, the Chlamydia that nearly drove me mad through constant itching and burning sensation. My clients were mainly married men or those in relationships who were starved of sex as they claimed. In the morning, I would feel horrible after my night outing.’ Chika sighed.

‘In fact, there are many stories to tell about my mental health issues, constant rape, brutality and my drug addiction. My encounter with a cocaine-friendly client was the most frightening episode of my life as a prostitute. My client took 15 grams of cocaine within a few hours. He forced me to do so and I overdosed. Suddenly my heart stopped beating regularly. I was sweating profusely. I wanted to escape but he locked the door and raped me until I passed out. He waited for me to recover after some hours. When the owner of the brothel knocked to inform him that his payment had expired, he just opened the door and paid for more hours. That day, I visited hell. It was horrible! My story is really horrible and pathetic. It can be a good fictional piece.’ Chika said sobbing.

‘Was your friend also in the same predicament?’ Beatrice asked .

‘My own is even worse ma.’ Adanna cut in.

‘I’m still young and I’m already sick of sexual abuses. It happened in my house, outside my house and in a foreign land. As a child, my own father sexually assaulted me. This was a common occurrence I rarely discussed. My father molested and raped me that I suffered a panic attack and was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. I was a little child when I noticed my dad’s attitude towards me. He would insult my mother for not being able to conceive after giving birth to me. He also transferred his anger on me. He would beat me and tell me how wicked and horrible I was for sealing my mum’s womb thus preventing other children from being born. My father would tie me up on a chair, beat me up and fiddle with my tiny breasts. I remember that time, I was just a mere child. I was too young to understand. My father would pull at my small breasts...I was not developed at all...it indeed hurt me. I would scream, but my mum was nowhere to save me.’

Adanna broke down crying quietly. She was trying hard to keep her anguish under control and Chika was doing her best to comfort her. Beatrice’s heart sunk when she heard this, Ada’s cry melted her heart and erupted in her an emotional feeling that triggered past painful experiences.

Adanna continued. ‘The first time my dad abused me, I was too young and scared. I remember crying in the toilet. It hurt so much when I peed. My father would sneak into the house whenever I come back from school. He would rape me two or three times before my mother would return from the market. He raped me those times, anally and vaginally. I passed out severally. He gave me pain killers to alleviate the pains. He lied to my mother several

times that I was hurt or knocked down by a car, truck or motorcyclist just to cover up his deeds. He made me go naked in the house in my mother's absence. He would unzip his pants and would keep me on top of him.' Humm! Adanna sighed.

'He forced me ...And would stroke me down there. In fact, his threats, tortures and abuses affected me psychological. I was always afraid and absent-minded in the class. I became so withdrawn, unusually calm and silent all the time. He threatened to kill me and my mum if ever I report him to anybody or tell what he did to me. He most times threatened me with his gun or kitchen knives. He instilled more fear in me when he made a small deep cut on my wrist with razor threatening to end my life. When my mother asked, he covered it up with a brilliant lie. Sometimes, he would buy me sweets and biscuits to lure and make me happy. I would have no choice, but to accept. My father loved sex like food and alcoholic drinks. In the night, he would fight my mother, beating and raping her severally. In fact, I never had a peaceful childhood. My mother who was a trader loved my father so much that she never wanted to divorce him. So she stayed in that abusive marriage enduring all the ill treatments. The last straw that broke the camel's back was the day I almost died, that day the doctor revealed that I was pregnant. I thought I was going to die and I confessed to my poor mother that my father was responsible for the pregnancy. That was the last time I saw and heard my mother's voice. I fainted in the hospital and I was later told that my mum drank rat poison and died. The shame and humiliation were too much for her to bear. My father was handed over to the police by my mother's family who sent him to

prison. Till today, I have never heard from him. I don't really know if he is alive or dead.' Adanna said sobbing.

'In fact, this childhood incest paved way for adult rape. It continued even when my mother's friend took me to her house at Asaba, Delta State. Her husband and the boys who were serving him took turns to molest me for years. Day and night, they sexually abused me every day, any time; in the kitchen, room, toilet, veranda, bathroom.... Everywhere! I was an already cooked meal for them. They ate me like gluttons and were never satisfied. Just like the deer panted for water, that was exactly how they desired me.' Ada sighed, looking so sad.

'I was indeed helpless because of their physical threats and torture. I was afraid of being thrown away. I was indeed afraid of my life. I dreaded everything, everywhere! After my Junior Secondary School Examination, I ran away because I could not cope with their abuse again. I got pregnant several times and was forced to abort it. The last abortion nearly killed me, so I had to leave the house. Then I was already psychologically stressed. I never cared about anything anymore. I was ready to drink life to the last. I was ready to face life or die outside while struggling. Adanna said staring into the space, her face unusually expressionless.

'For days I slept in different uncompleted buildings at Asaba. I was raped severally there, and was further toughened by those experiences. My heart hardened! Later, I approached a woman who hawked on the streets, we reached an agreement and I stayed with her each day selling oranges and *kpekere* (plantain chips) by the roadside. We worked hard, often standing in the heat for hours and I indeed enjoyed her companionship. My happiness dried up when the woman was killed by truck

carrying cement. My world shattered again. I became disillusioned. As a lonely teenager without direction, I got a job in a salon. One of customers, a beautiful fair lanky and sophisticated jovial young lady I called *Auntie White* was very passionate and concerned about me. She used to give me gifts of clothes, money, perfumes....In fact, she cared so much about me. Hummm!’ Ada paused and then continued again.

‘She told me that she was a business woman. She offered to take me to China to work as a salesgirl or marketer for her friend who had a factory that manufacture female wears. I was indeed happy and I readily accepted. I was indeed excited by this utopia vision of a luxurious life abroad. My madam in the salon did not want me to go, but I was adamant because of her attitude to me. She was a wicked woman who would nag from morning to night. In fact, people came to patronize because of me! In the airport Auntie gave me an international passport that had my picture on it, but with a different name. I became confused. She told me that the name, ‘Shelly Mbah’ was given to me to match her friend’s surname. That she lied that I was her sister. So, I agreed and boarded the airplane with her. I trusted her because she was nice to me. After twenty-one hours’ journey, from Nigeria to Dubai to Beijing and finally to Guangzhou through Southern China Airways, we went to a house where I was taken to a room in a beautiful duplex and told to rest. The next morning Auntie White told me that there was a problem with the factory that I was supposed to work for, they did not need me again. That was how I came to live in Auntie Ngozi’s house. Auntie White was with me and some other girls until Auntie Ngozi returned from her trip. She told us to

assist Madam Louis until she could get a better job for us.’ Ada paused again looking so tired.

‘So, what happened?’ Beatrice asked.

‘We obeyed! Madam Louis was ruthless and very money conscious. Nothing came between her and money. So she never cared about us, but about his customers at the restaurant. Men used us as playing objects. They molested us under her vey watch. She forced us to give her customers sexual pleasures and collected money on our behalf. In fact, the rest of the story is very bizarre. Madam Louis told me that she gave Auntie White the money she paid for my travelling expenses, that I owed her a lot of money for the travel to China and that I must pay her back by working for her. Every day men would come into the small rooms in the underground restaurant, sometimes five, six or ten men to satisfy themselves. The only escape I found in that condition was in my hardened mind. My eyes would stare at the ceiling without any peculiar thought. I would be blank, totally blank! My spirit would leave my body floating around the space until they had their way. Days, weeks, months and years passed. It never stopped until the night we were rounded up by the police. There was a time I escaped and they brought me back to Madam Louis. Indeed, they had a strong network. Their people are virtually everywhere, she told me and she was right. Many plans of escape, but none worked. I was so disillusioned that I resigned to fate. It dawned on me that I had been trafficked, and that they had taken advantage of my poor background and my sincere desire to explore new opportunities.’ Ada sighed again looking sorrowful.

‘I am tired now! I have seen enough! I have been molested enough! I need to return to my people alive at least to see my father’s uncle who wanted to adopt me

after what my father did. He was a good man. I need to tell him my story to end the horrible chapter and begin a new one. I am young but I have many untold stories to tell. Thanks to my friend, Chika whose wits and courage saved us. If not, the slavery would have continued.... God knows when.... Adanna said almost calm now. Her emotion had given way after pouring out her experience.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### *LIFE IS A WAVE OF UNKNOWN DESTINATION*

It was a Sunday morning, and the warden called, agitated and strained, though with a look of pity on her face.

‘Look at these small girls, very young and naive!’ She said pointing at Chika and Adanna.

‘Come here! Come out to the outdoor chamber and meet your lawyer. We know your story. We have investigated your cases. You shouldn’t be here at all. We have a lawyer and human rights activist that would help deport you to your country without delay. Your stories are quite pathetic. You have experienced enough! You need to leave this country soon. For your information, your travel expenses had been covered by a Religious Centre called SCOAN. For years now, their representatives had been consistently donating money to support those inmates who had been charged and acquitted to return to their countries without much difficulty. They have been so helpful to many foreigners here.’ The warden said.

‘I don’t know that Africans could offer help like this to people. African leaders are constant borrowers! They borrow from China, America, and Britain...Many countries in fact. African people especially Nigerians are so much neglected in many ways here. No help from their government in many aspects. This is the complaint we keep receiving here. But this religious organization has been consistent and dedicated. In fact, they need to be recognized and appreciated.’ The human activist emphasized.

Adanna and Chika had never heard about SCOAN before. They were showed the picture of a dark

complexioned handsome gentleman who was said to be the founder of the religious centre. The activist gave them each a sticker, polo, a pair of jean trousers, a book called *The Mirror* and a small sealed bottle containing water. On the bottle was written – *Morning Water RENEWS YOU!* Morning Water anointed by Christ to heal, bless and save!

The girls and other acquitted deportees received the items with thanks as they prepared to start their journey to Nigeria. Their hearts were indeed joyful. They knew that a new chapter had been opened in their lives after the activist who was a partner of the religious centre said some words of consolation hinged on the love of Christ and His saving power to the deportees. After they left that Sunday afternoon to the airport, they yearned earnestly to visit the centre that showed them great love without demanding for anything. They boarded the airplane full of joy, peace and gratitude.

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The airplane descended in the morning of the next day. The long journey was very smooth and safe. The airplane moved for a while on the runway and finally halted near an aircraft that had arrived some hours before. On the area of the airport, a group of dark complexioned men dressed in the same uniform waited to remove the cargo from the airplane.

Altogether, there were thirty-four passengers who were deported from China, ten females and twenty-four males. Most of the deportees frowned because they thought that the timing of their arrival was wrong and very inconsiderate. They preferred it to be night so that they could hide their faces in the darkness. In panic, most of the

deportees hid their faces in shame as they alighted from the plane.

‘Ah, she is so young! It’s a pity,’ a stewardess said pointing at Adanna, her beautiful face clouded with pity and great concern.

‘This way please!’ Another stewardess said motioning to some guys who stood blocking the way. Perhaps very upset that they were caught and deported. The young men obeyed, without delay and moved forward to the gangway.

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At the cabin door, Adanna had seen a group of people standing on the ground, some distance away. She was afraid that the police had been sent to arrest them for disgracing the country abroad. Fear gripped her as she stepped onto the gangway. She felt she was beginning a journey of punishments and perpetual suffering. Some Television and Radio reporters were all over the place videoing, taking photographs and asking unanswered questions. Chika and Adanna wobbled as they followed the other deportees down the stairs to enter an airport bus heading to the arrival section of the Murtala Mohammed International Airport which looked quite old and stuffy.

Anxiety, sadness, anger and disillusionment were written on the faces of the deportees as they alighted from the airport bus.

‘Come this way, please,’ Ada heard a female voice say. The woman was wearing a dark blue uniform. Chika and Adanna fixed their gaze to the floor of the Murtala Mohammed International arrival hall as they walked past immigration officers.

‘What a shame! What a pity! Nawaooh for these small small girls of today oooo! Everyone wants money money money! I wonder what they are going to do with money at their age!’ A female officer shouted.

‘Nawaoooooo! Nigerian girls and money! *Tufiakwa!* Look at them! Just look at them! What is this madness about girls and luxurious lifestyle? Don’t they fear death, foreigners, ritual killers and diseases? Don’t they have conscience? Above all, don’t they fear God? This is becoming too much! All hands must be on deck! Parents have really failed, individuals have disappointed their Creator, God and the society indeed has fallen apart. The center therefore cannot hold as the great literary giant, Chinua Achebe pointed out in the title of his well acclaimed novel, *Things Fall Apart.*’

‘*You and novel sef!* You can’t engage in any discussion without mentioning the novels you read! *Abeg I don do lol...*’ Another fair complexioned female officer said laughing broadly.

Three young women and two men took charge as they escorted all the deportees to the car park to board a bus. A white man was among the five people that came to take them away. They were wearing the same polo which was written SCOAN.

‘Welcome, good children of God,’ the white man greeted the deportees.

‘We received report from one of our partners in China of your willingness to visit the *Synagogue Church of All Nations (SCOAN)*. We received your words of gratitude with the mind of God. We therefore thank God for touching our hearts to bless people’s lives. All glory to Him alone. Now, since it’s your desire to visit our centre, we will take you to Ikotu were the church is located. The

church is open to everyone any time. Jesus Christ loves you more than anybody. So don't feel that your world has crumbled. He can give you a new life in abundance. The *Synagogue Church of All Nations* is there to help you grow physically, emotionally and spiritually. Our teachings of God's word will help to transform and change your lives. We do not just teach the word of God; we empower people to become better citizens of their country. If we have good citizens, the world we live in, will become a better world. That's why our motto reads: *Changing Lives, Changing Nations and Changing the World*. Therefore, do not grieve over your past experiences. These experiences are not meant to destroy you, but to make you stronger. In fact, they happened to draw you closer to God. So as we board the bus, may we all be in a sober mood of prayer asking God for forgiveness of all our misdeeds, asking Him to take all of us and give us more of Him.' The white Evangelist urged.

For a moment Adanna glared at him very sober, tears dropping from her eyes. Then she shielded her face and darted towards the bus.

A neat air conditioned bus was already waiting for them. On the bus was also written SCOAN (*Synagogue Church of All Nations*).

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Struck by the silence that overwhelmed the bus, Chika glanced at the busy streets of Lagos, nothing had indeed changed. Her thoughts turned to her mother and then her siblings. What were their conditions? Were they searching for her? Did they miss her? Did anything happen to mama? Were her brothers concentrating on their studies

without giving mama headaches? These questions occupied her mind on their way to the church.

The church residence was at Ikotu-Egbe, Lagos, Lagos State. The ancient architectural structure and design of the church resembled the layered massive archival buildings seen in the children Bible Story book that Chika enjoyed as a child. It also had striking similarities with the buildings displayed in the movie, *The Passion of Christ*. The street that led to the church was a very busy one. It was a good site for religious tourism. Groups of tourists were seen busy taking pictures and they looked relaxed and very excited.

Thousands of white, black, chocolate and white-yellow foreigners from different continents flocked the church to attend the church's weekly services. It was indeed a peaceful and welcoming religious village to behold. The church had different huge buildings and workers who function in different departments. The workers were from different continents. The environment was quite unique, well-kept and very classic. It indeed looked like the beautiful streets in China. CCTV cameras were seen everywhere. It was a mini *Obodo Oyibo village* (a foreign village) in Nigeria. In fact, it reminded Chika of the cameras mounted on every nook and cranny of Beijing. The workers were very organized, cheerful but very strict.

The bus halted in front of the huge architectural building. Suddenly, a cameraman wearing a polo written EMMANUEL TV CREW started covering the deportees' movement as they were alighting. The cameraman was deeply engrossed in capturing their faces while greeting, EMMANUEL! The deportees were told to respond EMMANUEL too as they sat down in a hall way leading

to the main church auditorium. Many of the deportees shied away so that their faces would not appear on Emmanuel TV, the SCOAN television station.

It was indeed a very long and tedious journey. An evangelist spoke cheerfully to the deportees welcoming them on behalf of the leader and founder of the church, Prophet T.B Joshua. The evangelist looked very graceful, smart, humble and beautiful. The swift and uncommon grace with which she spoke and carried herself was so alluring that all the deportees glued their eyes to her. She gave them so much hope in her short message before they were taken to the dining hall for lunch.

The dining hall was very unique, classic and very uncommon in Nigeria. Different kinds of continental dishes and non-alcoholic beverages were displayed on the counter for the deportees to make their choices. The deportees filed up cheerfully and each waited for his or her turn just to be served by the cooks and waitresses who greeted ‘Good morning’ while it was evidently afternoon.

‘It’s afternoon and not morning Auntie,’ Chika said to one of the cooks.

‘I know my dear. This is the way we greet here. It is a common greeting here. We believe that joy comes in the morning. So we greet morning to welcome the joy of the Holy Spirit in our lives.’ The cook explained.

‘Ok ma. Good morning ma!’ Chika greeted.

‘Good morning, Emmanuel, God is with us!’ The woman replied.

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The SCOAN hotel rooms were classic and well equipped. Chika did not believe that she was in Nigeria. The peaceful nature of the atmosphere was glorious, quite

unlike the Lagos she knew. One after another the workers walked to the hotel doors of the deportees reminding them of the counselling and prayer section with Prophet T.B Joshua. Chika desperately wanted to see the man of God who was a well-known philanthropist. She had been in Nigeria but never knew that such a man existed. She was surprised that one man could pull such a crowd because of his divine gifts, love for God and humanity. It had been almost four days they visited and had not been able to see the man of God because of his busy schedules.

When the workers came to announce the prayer and counselling section with him, Chika knew that the appointed time had come; a time of cleansing and salvation. At once, Chika prayed for mercy to locate her through the saving power of Christ.

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Chika looked from one person to another as they waited patiently for the man of God to arrive.

‘People are indeed suffering! What a wicked and painful world!’ Chika said when she saw a crowd of sick people waiting patiently for the man of God to pray for them. She envisaged herself in their situations and became very grateful to God for being healthy.

More people trooped into the church the moment they got the signal that the prophet was around. The prophet walked silently into the church with an air of gentility that displayed his calm nature. He looked at the deportees and smiled raising his right hand.

‘You are welcome my friends! Nigeria is our country. God will help us to make it better. We have all failed in different ways, but things will be okay when we



fully trust God and do our part as good citizens. Therefore, I salute you my friends for the determination to change your lives. All hands must be on deck as we work in the right path of righteousness. We must by God's grace strive for righteousness for the good of the society. I also encourage you to shun evil and do good. We have human nature that's why we need God's supernatural grace to live daily. Therefore, in everything you do, *Let Love Lead!* Love for God, love for neighbours and love for your country. My friends don't be disillusioned, you will rise again. The struggles and pains you experienced are not to impair you but to draw you closer to God. We will see what we can do to help you stand on your feet again. You are because I am and I am because you are. Let the love of God continue to lead our hearts as we live and serve humanity. God bless you all.' The prophet said.

Chika kept her eyes glued on the prophet's face full of great hope and dreams for the future. The previous day they were interviewed by the Emmanuel TV Crews, the deportees narrated their misfortunes and bizarre experiences. Most of them also expressed their wish to further their education, learn skills, venture into business or become evangelists. Chika was still in deep thought when the man of God pointed at her and said, 'you are too young! You are supposed to be in school by now! What happened? Do you wish to go back to school?'

'Yes sir! I really desire it now! I have disappointed my mother! I went to China to study but I derailed sir. I was forced to become a prostitute, sir! I don't know what to do now! I don't know how to return to my mum and siblings. She will disown me! At my tender age, I have experienced hell and I'm so ashamed of myself.' Chika said tears streaming down her cheeks.

‘Where is your mum?’ The man of God asked.

She lives in Awka, Anambra State, sir!’

‘Give us her details. We will invite her here. We will give you full scholarship to study the course of your choice in the university. Don’t cry little one, God is in control.’ The man of God said.

‘Thank you, sir, thank you, sir! God bless you, sir! Chika said leaping in great joy.

The prophet then turned to Adanna and asked, ‘Do you also wish to go back to school?’

‘No sir, my traumatic experiences affected my education. I stopped after my Junieur Secondary School examination. I can’t really cope with the classroom again, sir. I prefer skilled work like sewing clothes, sir.’

‘Okay, we will sponsor you to achieve your dream. Meanwhile, you need more of the word of God to refresh and renew you! All of you here must have some weeks of mentoring in God’s words to prepare you for the future. Just like I said, we will equip you physically and spiritually before we release you into the society again. For those of you interested in business, we will sponsor you all. Our partners are also ready to help in different ways. The funds will be given to you once you are ready to leave. Our partners in the city where you intend establishing your business will monitor and give us feedback. We are interested in helping people become better citizens for the good of the country. I pray that God will perfect all that concern you! Emmanuel!’ The prophet greeted and quietly left.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### *CHANGE COMES SUDDENLY*

The belief that life could harbour sour-bitter-sweet flavoured experiences had been a white truth. Chika's childhood had been memorable and fun. Her experiences few months ago had altered the good old memories she treasured so much. Apart from her childhood which was spent in strict innocence and happy moments, she had watched her mother suffer to train her and her siblings after the death of her father. Her recent experience had left her shattered and worthless. But her hope had been rekindled by the words of Prophet T.B Joshua who had promised to sponsor her education.

Chika knew that misfortune and disobedience had dogged her with horrific blows that made her ashamed of the person she had become. She thought about her mother, Mrs Ugah. The story of Mrs. Uchenna Ugah was a common knowledge in Umuogbu, Awka. She was a teacher and a well-known disciplinarian. She rose to the level of a principal before she retired from service. In many schools Mrs Ugah taught, she was known with one statement-DO THE RIGHT THING AT THE RIGHT TIME AND AT THE PROPER PLACE!

Chika's mother was well respected and feared by both teachers and students. She never supported evil, gossip, laziness or dehumanization of any kind. She was a very strict woman, but a kind mother who dedicated herself to helping humanity. She loved education and would frown when children hawk in the streets during school hours. She was very famous in the streets of Eke Awka for training the children of Ebonyi people who could not sponsor their children's education. With her

little income, she had proved her love for children by enrolling them in schools. Chika's mother was a mother for all. She never tolerated indecent dressing or wayward behaviours amongst teenagers. She would scold and reprimand any person she caught derailing from the right path. This particular act gained her the name *Mama General*. Some wild girls on the streets of Umuogbu Village, Awka never liked her and the unpleasant truth that gave them nightmares. Mrs Ugah hated seeing young boys and girls walk the streets holding hands romantically. She would scold them often, *'stop that, you children! Boys and girls cannot be very intimate friends. This kind of friendship is capable of brewing up problems in the future. Your body chemistry might make you to react and do the unthinkable.'*

Mrs Ugah would scold without mincing words. Her hatred for teenagers who drank alcohol was much. For her, it was a taboo to see that happen when many families could not afford to eat twice a day. In fact, anything bad irritated her and made her angry and so emotional.

Chika could still remember the incident that happened in their house long time ago. Her mother hated seeing boys around her. So that fateful day, Obinna who was a brother to Ogechi, Chika's friend came looking for his sister. Mrs. Ugah got irritated and chased him away with a cane.

'Chika, Chika, Chika! Please don't bring disgrace to me ooo! I didn't disgrace my parents, so you will not disgrace me.' Mrs Ugah shouted.

That day, Chika received the beatings of her life. Her mother became very inquisitive to know what they had been doing in her absence. Her curiosity hurt Chika

emotionally because she felt that her mother did not trust her.

‘Did he touch you?’ Chika’s mother asked?

‘No mama! What’s this naw? Why are you asking such a question? Don’t you trust me again?’ Chika asked sobbing.

Mrs Ugah grabbed her hand and pulled her closer. She pinched her lips with her right fingers to caution her.

‘You have grown to talk back at me in this manner eeh! I fed you with my two breasts and nurtured you to this level. So never ever talk back at me like that again! If you try it eeh, I will show you pepper. I mean it ooo. Don’t try me at all.’

Chika had been bitter ever since that incident happened. Since then, she acted as if boys were her bitter enemies. In fact, growing up under Mrs.Ugah was very difficult and at the same time pleasurable. She used to monitor Chika’s breasts to ascertain her innocence. She would warn her not to play with boys or sit close to them if she wouldn’t want to become pregnant. Chika’s mother would also tell her not to allow them touch her because that would also lead to pregnancy. Chika was never allowed to wear tight skimpy wears and trousers. Mrs Ugah believed that those clothes would make her attractive to boys. She bought oversized gowns and long loose skirts for Chika to protect her from the devouring eyes of men. But one thing was very clear, Chika never lacked anything. Mrs Ugah gave her all she could afford.

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Chika sat on the bed in the hotel room and stared at the busy streets of Ikotu through the window. Her room was on the fourth floor where the deportees were

accommodated. She wondered what her mother's reaction would be when her past experiences would be made known to her. She had often imagined the shock she would experience.

All the time she was away in China, her mother thought she was busy reading. Now, Chika imagined the nightmares her mother must have gone through since they had not talked for several months. The uncertainty of her whereabouts and the long silence must have been a painful torture that would take away sleep from her eyes.

Chika sighed faintly and stood up. Her shoulders sagged as she tried to envisage the huge problem ahead of her mother's arrival. The man of God had already invited her mother to visit SCOAN. Chika learnt that her mother was told that her daughter had been found after long months of being under captivity. She was also informed that her mother would arrive in two days' time.

Chika had envied Adanna for not having anybody that would be troubled, disgraced or ashamed of her past. She knew that her mother would be so surprised to hear her bizarre experiences within a short period of time. Chika remembered her numerous encounters with her mother, and feared that she would find it difficult to forgive her. She remembered the occasions when her mother would scold her for taking the second position in the class. She would often decline buying things for her because of that. It continued until her position changed. When she eventually took the first position, her mother became happier. She felt a pang of pain as she recalled what she suffered as a prostitute. She would be ashamed to let people know what she had passed through in Guangzhou, but her mother would be the problem. She

never spared anybody and would often use people's mistakes to warn others or give examples.

Chika became depressed since her mother's invitation was announced to her. During their seminar and prayer sections at SCOAN, her prayer points had been for God to touch the heart of her mother to forgive her. She would pray, *'Oh God, take all of my mother and give my mother more of You!'* That indeed was her earnest prayer of faith. She was sober and wished to remain at SCOAN, a family of God, so loving, caring and welcoming.

The days crawled and lazily passed by. Chika could not recover from the depression that had captured her mind. She would always fix her eyes on the Emmanuel TV Station while praying along with Prophet T.B Joshua. Her conscience would not allow her to concentrate on her prayers. The fear of her mother's reaction was indeed at the centre of her meditation. The memory of her past failures and experiences haunted her, but the worship songs by the SCOAN choir had lifted her spirit. There was something about the words and lyrics that had stirred her spirit. Chika would look at the ceiling and her thoughts would take flight to the past remembering the pain Ngozi caused her, the humiliation she meted out to her, the constant rape she organized just to punish her and the life of prostitution she subjected her to. Many times, she had cursed Ngozi and vowed to retaliate if she had the opportunity to do so. But since she came to SCOAN, her mind had been condemning her concerning her decisions over Ngozi. The words of the prophet had sunk deep into her heart. His preaching sounded difficult but full of wisdom. He would often say, *'leave it for God! Don't revenge! Forgive those who wronged you! Whether you are right or wrong, don't take offense!'*

As far as Chika remembered, it would be difficult for an ordinary human being to forgive a person who had subjected her to pain, constant torture and humiliation. Jokes aside, something was beginning to happen to her conscience as the hatred and planned revenge gradually started vanishing from her heart. Her heart became less heavy that she could feel inner cool breeze transporting her mind to purer thoughts.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

### *THERE'S HOPE IN LIFE*

Mrs Ugah had assured herself that she would not be biased in judging her daughter. She had used her elderly and motherly eyes not only to observe her physical appearance – the fact that she wore no make-up or jewellery – but to also penetrate her sober heart which now had a peculiar demeanour. The summary of what she saw convinced her that her daughter had passed through a lot and was ashamed of herself.

As soon as Chika stepped into man of God's office, she fell down on her knees and cried like a baby.

'Mother, please forgive me! I have failed! I have failed you. I have failed God! I have even failed myself! Mummy, please forgive me! I am so ashamed of myself! I know you are angry, but please temper your anger with mercy.'

Tears dripping down Mrs Ugah's cheeks, she got up and pulled her daughter to her chest without uttering a word. Silence indeed stood in between their private thoughts. Both mother and daughter were about the same height, above average for women. Chika was slimmer and darker in complexion. Her mother was slightly bigger without being overweight. Mrs Ugah gently pressed her daughter's head on her chest while sobbing continuously.

'I have listened to your story through the documentation made by Emmanuel TV crew. I am indeed deeply pained that you've suffered a lot within a few months of leaving my home. I have also failed dear. I shouldn't have left you to travel at a tender age without giving you the freedom to live an independent life. I drove your life like a vehicle and made decisions for you. I never

trusted your ability for once. I was always scolding and making demands that impinged on your rights. I didn't allow you to grow up. I am so sorry my angel. I have failed you and my late husband. In fact, I have failed as a mother because I didn't allow you to mix up. I suspected you all the time and neglected the basic truth I would have told you about the opposite sex. I guess my wrong advice pushed you into the hands of that guy that exposed you to the complexities of your bizarre experiences.'

Chika was very surprised to hear her mother's confession. She held her tightly as her emotions paved way to more tears. She was happy that her prayer worked. Her mother's confession was indeed a proof that God answers prayers. God indeed gave more of Himself to her mother.

'Thank you, man of God for your good deeds! I have been an ardent listener of your messages and prayers. God used you to change my life. Your messages kept me while I was brooding about my daughter's silence for months. I didn't run from God, I ran to Him just like you advised and I had peace. May God bless you, sir! May He give you the strength to continue in your good work in Jesus' name!'

'Thank you, ma!' The man of God said motioning them to sit down.

'Now you all have been saved, endeavour to make the Word of God a standard for your life! Don't run from God, rather run to Him. Always watch and prayer because a break in faith is a break with God. Pray as if everything depends on God and work as if everything depends on you.' The man of God advised.

‘Thank you, sir! More grace sir! More blessings sir! Mrs Ugah and her daughter chorused while bowing in appreciation.

‘No no no no! Don’t bow down to me! I’m not God! Men should only fear and bow to God! I am only a mere servant; a tool in His hands. All glory and praises must be reserved only to Him. Prophet Joshua said feeling quite uneasy about what they did. He continued, ‘the Emmanuel TV partners and I have decided to give your daughter a scholarship to further her education in any university of her choice here in Nigeria. She had already indicated her interest in studying law. We will sponsor her to buy JAMB form and afterward take care of her education.’

As the man of God was still addressing Mrs Ugah and her daughter, the workers ushered in Adanna who was very surprised to see a replica of Chika. At once, she knew that they were related.

‘I talk as I’m led by the Holy Spirit, madam. You may consider this queer, but I want you to be a mother to this young girl. I will support you to any length. She has suffered greatly and she needs a good and strong willed mother like you to overcome her challenges. She also came from Awka, Anambra State. You need to take her to her parents’ people to inform them that she is in your custody. As you obey this passionate call, God will perfect all that concern you.’ The man of said while giving them two brown envelops.

The two envelops were quite very heavy. Five hundred thousand naira was written on the envelop that had Chika’s name. The other envelop which had Adanna’s name was written one million naira. Mrs Ugah who could not contain her joy stood up and started singing in Igbo

dialect. Words were not enough to express her appreciation as she knelt down thanking God, thanking the man of God, obviously confused where here gratitude should go.

‘This little girl has indicated interest in skilled work. She precisely wants to learn how to sew clothes. Please, we want you to send her to a good fashion designer who will give her a good training. The money is for her dream business. May God bless you as you hearken to the call of helping humanity. Thanks for honouring my invitation.’ The man of God said as Mrs Ugah and the girls got up to leave the office.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

*YOU MAY NEVR KNOW....*

*Tell me the person for whom life is constantly peaceful and I will take off my cap for him or her.* This became my usual adage after fate dealt me a deadly blow. Ngozi thought that she would always remain on top without remembering the adage: *everyday is for the thief, one day is for the owner.* She never believed that karma existed when she was committing all those crimes against humanity. The devil that possessed her took away her human conscience and made her more vicious and unforgiving. Indeed, Ngozi was a pain in the neck!

We were in the house when somebody led her into our compound that fateful afternoon. I nearly fainted. She looked skinny and unkempt. I nearly sent her away in anger, but the words of Prophet J.B Joshua made me change my mind. We invited her into our sitting room where we sat in perfect silence staring at her, fascinated by the hardness of her eyes which maintained a steady gaze. Mama sat patiently listening to her story without any comment.

Ngozi talked at length blaming her mother for misleading her. She confessed that she was arrested by the police shortly after Adanna and I were deported. Ngozi narrated that Chinedu's corpse was discovered in a huge freezer in one of her client's apartment. The house was abandoned because of his corpse. The police suspected that something was wrong and raided the house. That was when they discovered Chinedu's body in the freezer. Ngozi was later released with the help of a lawyer who claimed that she had no hand in the death since the corpse

was not found in her custody. That was how she was released and deported without a dime.

Ngozi knelt down crying and apologizing for her evil deeds. She told mama that her life was almost ending since the only remaining kidney could not serve her for a long time. Ngozi confessed that she was also a victim. She narrated how a fake foreign agency promised her work abroad claiming that they would give her a job. During that period, body parts black market business was booming. The agency processed her travel papers and paid for her tickets. On arriving China, they forced her to sell one of her kidneys for \$ 120,000. That was how she joined the group in the business and other illegal business. My mum was indeed moved and got emotionally involved. We had no option. We all burst into tears and forgave her. My mother had pity on her and decided to lend a helping hand to her. With our consent she rented a room for Ngozi and gave her hundred thousand naira to set up her a business. That was how it had been until Ngozi decided to blackmail Adanna.

When Ngozi came shading tears, I knew that she had not changed. The devil in her surfaced when she asked Adanna to lend her the money meant for her sewing training. Adanna refused and hell was let loose. Since that day, she had vowed to make her life uncomfortable claiming that her action made her kill Chinedu. According to her, the intimate relationship Adanna had with Chinedu that night in her house was a huge slight on her.

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Since we came back from SCOAN I vowed to make mama proud. Mama on her part never reminded us of what we passed through. I was indeed determined to make her proud. I also wanted to regain the confidence I lost. The opportunity came when my JAMB result was released and I scored 300. The WAEC result I used in applying for scholarship abroad was also good, so my hope of gaining admission into the university and course of my choice was not dashed. My mother was indeed happy and made telephone calls informing the man of God about my academic success. I dreamed about nothing else except the day I would get into the University of Nigeria, Nsukka to study Law. I had previously gone to the university campus to confirm the requirements and wait till the new students would be invited to come for admission and clearance. Indeed, my dream of defending the girl-child had come true. My experiences had birthed this dream and my course of study would be a good platform to achieving that.

Adanna also was learning very fast. She could cut and sew many styles. Mama and I never patronized other fashion designers. We became her fashion models and attracted many customers who patronized her. We were in her madam's shop the day you came requesting Adanna to sew clothes for your mother. That very day Emeka, I knew your thoughts. I read you like ABCD....You constantly brought clothes to Adanna so that you would have the opportunity of wooing her. Adanna made efforts to tell you about her life but you insisted that her story never mattered. All you wanted was her love, pretty face, curvy hips and her soft sweet voice. These were the things you mentioned that attracted you to her.

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Emeka stood rooted to the ground, he could not utter a word. He was indeed speechless. Chika was sure now that Emeka, even in his confused state was blaming himself for being so harsh on Adanna.

Emeka sighed, 'where is Adanna?'

'Upstairs.' Chika replied.

'Okay, I need to see her at once', Emeka said and began to walk up the stairs muttering to himself.

Chika followed him immediately praying for God to intervene. Emeka entered the huge building and found Adanna in a small room close to the living room. He touched her shoulders. She turned to see who it was. Emeka was standing right behind her. She threw herself at him and allowed her emotions to escape. Exhausted, she expressed her wishes to break off the engagement and discontinue the ceremony. Emeka's jaws dropped and his lips parted in surprise.

'But I have not said so my love! I love you deeply. I sincerely do. Please, don't do this to me sweetie. Chika told me everything! Despite that, my love for you is endless!' Emeka said almost sobbing.

'Emeka, I have made up my mind. There is no going back. What happened today took away my power, my strength and my love, but I finally have them back now! It is not safe for me to marry now. I don't want marriage to be an escape route to my past. I need to see the world from a different angle! I need to work and fend for myself. Now I have a lot more confidence in myself. My new career has made me realize that I have a lot of untapped skills that would take me to many places. I need to maximize this opportunity. I have been with my madam for some months, but now I'm getting where I don't need



to work for anybody. I still love you, but marriage has to wait. The future will tell. I know the future will definitely tell. I have grown to know that people are often reminded of their past by the person they deeply love. This hurts deeply and sticks forever. My father hurt my mother several times until her death. You hurt me with your words. I don't want to repeat my mother's mistakes. I simply need time.' Chika said as she gently pulled her body away from Emeka.

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**The End**

## **GLOSSARY**

**Aba Wallet**    A wallet made in Aba city, Nigeria

Ada	Short form of the name, Adanna
Ada-Awka	Any female originally from Awka City
Agbada	A flowing, wide-sleeved robe wore by men
Amibo	A gossip
Ashawo	A prostitute
Akwa-Nwa	A compliment or pet name for a beautiful girl or lady
Chy	Short form of the name, Chika
Ewooo	Exclamation indicating surprise
Fufu	Food made of cassava or corn flour
Haba	Exclamation indicating disgust
Hei	Exclamation indicating surprise
Igbo	An ethnic group in the eastern Nigeria
JAMB	Joint Admission and Matriculation Board
Mama	Mother
Nawa oo	Exclamation indicating surprise
Nedu	Short form of the name, Chinedu
Nne m /Nne	My mother/ a pet Igbo name for females
Nwa m	My child
Nwanne m	My sister/ brother (used literally)
Ndi Eke	Policemen
Nsala soup	Soup commonly eaten in the eastern region of Nigeria (Igbo)
Obodo Oyibo	A foreign land
Pilipili	Onomatopic word suggesting something soft
Tomatoe Jos	A compliment or pet name for a beautiful Lady/girl
Tufiakwa	Exclamation indicating disgust
U Sabi	That's your business (U-means you)
WAEC	West African Examination Council