



GIFT FORAINE AMUKOYO

# *The Invalid Citizen* and Other Stories

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Foraine Amukoyo Gift

**The Invalid Citizen And Other Stories**

«Tektime S.r.l.s.»

## **Gift F.**

The Invalid Citizen And Other Stories / F. Gift — «Tektime S.r.l.s.»,

The Citizen Journalist- We often forget how much power the bureaucrats have over the media. The first step towards population control is to control the media. It gives you power over public perception. The corruption in these areas is worse than ever. This story is extremely relevant to the corruption and politics that currently exists within the United States. I'm with Kola on this, there should be only one way to report the news – the truth. The Invalid Citizen- Another poignant and politically motivated story. In our greed, expansion, and desire for innovation we often overlook the consequences on the environment. It is easier to forget the extent of this when you live in an urban area that has been developed for centuries. A woman was in labour. Some people on the street could hear her screams. Those who could empathize with the excruciating pains she must be feeling took some moment to say a little prayer for the patient while others spared glances at the hospital. After hours of prodding labour, the nurses and doctor delivered the woman of a baby boy. The baby was very big. The woman had a big tear in her vagina. She bled irrepressibly. She fainted several times and the doctor reinstated her with shocks. She was losing lot of blood. She was a believer that blood transfusion was not of God. Her husband prayed for God's intervention. "Mr Jason, you need to agree to this transfusion in order to save your better half. You do not want your first child and this new born to be without their mother," Doctor Greg said. Mr Jason pondered for some minutes. "No, I do not want to lose my wife. I cannot bear it. Please give her a blood transfusion," he said. Mrs Jason was adamant, "Jason, why are you of little faith? I don't want a blood transfusion."

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# **Gift Foraine Amukoyo**

## **The Invalid Citizen and Other Stories**

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**Short Stories**

**Gift Foraine Amukoyo**



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**For my grandma,**

**Esther Willie Awerije**

# One

## IMira Won

scrawled my signature on the first page of the document and paused. The pen slipped off my sweaty fingers. It was not easy for me to put an end to one's life.

Mira stared at me. Her eyes were remote, "If you truly love me, just sign it. You are the only family I have to permit this hospital to end these sufferings," she said.

"How can I? I do not want to lose my only family. You are the only one I have in this world."

"I cannot stay this way. I am troubling you."

"Stay with me. I do not mind. Stay as long as you can. I do not want to be your murderer. I will not be a party to this."

"It is not murder. It is suicide. I am killing myself. Do it, Tejiri."

"I will not let you do this. Mira stay with me," I held her pale fingers.

"Tejiri, you do not have a choice. Everybody will die one day. I am just going to die today."

"No Mira, I do have a choice."

"You should choose a sensible choice. Do it, and get back to your life. I am killing you with my illness. Tejiri, look at you. You are losing weight. I look chubbier than you are."

I laughed. "You wish, you wish Mira," I held her thin wrist, "yes, you look healthier than I am. That is why you should come home and take care of me. I miss all your soups and snacks. I wish a miracle could happen."

"I would have been rid of this illness a long time ago if it exists. All the fruitless dry fasts, vigils and prayers on the mountain showed I am unlucky to get healing. Miracle does not exist. If it does, then its healing hands have forsaken me. Oh, the wonders of heaven and earth, I need a healthy second chance to breathe without fear it might be my last. The thought of leaving you is the only thing that scares me." Mira turned her face away to hide the tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Mira, I am so scared of being without you. I will be so alone." I cried.

Mira wiped her tears and turned to face me. She sniffed, "stop crying like a little boy. You are now a full-grown man. Those manhood balls and beards are not for fancy. Tejiri, do not be careless. You resigned from your job to care for me. I have asked your boss to withhold your resignation letter. He did a dying woman a favour, and gave you leave for a week. You have five days left. Tejiri, sign those papers and get back to living your life."

Mira coughed blood for ten minutes. The sight was unbearable. I saw sorrows in her eyes and something mixed with an urgent plea. I picked up the pen and scribbled my final signature. A haughty nurse took the document away. Her smile and gait was triumphant. The near outcome of my action distorted my mind.

The doctor and two nurses returned with a lethal injection, "this would be fast. It is painless," the doctor said.

I could not witness Mira's death. I walked out of the room, thinking if my final decision was right. It had been unbearable to watch her suffer day and night. Mira's belly pain, unswerving nausea, and vomiting had left a painful twist in my heart. The cancer punctured holes in her intestines. Mira fed through pipes, she excreted on the bed. Sometimes, when the waste welled up in her bowel, the feces passed through her mouth, nose, and anus at the same time.

Mira's illness irritated some of the nurses. They were reluctant to attend her room. Once, I had heard a nurse gossip that I had lost my sense. *'He is swelling with her sickness. How can one person comfortably breathe in this foul corpse?'*

Mira had been my guardian angel. She was the shield that protected me after I lost my parents. I was fifteen year old. They died while protesting unpaid salaries and arrears. According to police report, stray bullets killed them. They were the backbone of the solidarity protest in Lagos. I had overhead Mira telling a colleague my parents were victims of a conspiracy.

My parents died as poor medical practitioners. Their professional and personal oath was to save life. They paid the hospital bills of strangers. After my parents' burial, none of their relatives was willing to be my guardian. They learned my parents' private hospital was bankrupt. Mira adopted me. She was a matron in their hospital.

I was weary. I shut my eyes. My head ached. It pounded to hear the confirmation on Mira's death. I did not hear any footstep towards me until a hand touched me.

"Tejiri, we won. The Judge has granted you permission to take Mira home until she passes," Kome said.

This news from Kome, my barrister gave me joy. I shed tears and hugged him tight. I ran towards Mira's ward. I called out to the doctor to stop the procedure.

I was panting by the time I reached the room, "stop doctor, your hospital has lost. You and your entire management have lost. I have won the case to take my Mira home. She is coming home with me."

My lawyer came forward with the injunction letter, "please, release the patient to my client. Henceforth, he is her caregiver."

My smile was radiant on hearing that statement, "yes, give my Mira to me. I know you all must have told her despicable things to make her hate herself and sought death as succour," I touched Mira's cheek.

She smiled weakly, "you are a fool. Oh, Tejiri, this is a foolish move. The stench will be so offensive in your home. After I am gone, the apartment will ooze for a long time."

"Yes, Mira, that is what I want. I want your fragrance to linger forever," the nurses' faces hardened as they cleaned up Mira, "hey nurses, I know none of you want to do this. Shed these long faces, do it with some smile. This is Mira's final departure from your hospital. I will take my Mira to an island. It would be Mira and me in paradise."

"I cannot wait to see this paradise," Mira said.

"It is just a small beautiful house on an island in Epe. Oh, Mira, you will love it."

\* \* \* \* \*

We were at the balcony. The morning sun cascaded upon us. The sun was like a healing balm. I was very cold last night; the mild heat soothed my skin. Mira felt at home. She was on a stretcher bed. I propped some pillows to support her back and arms.

"Tejiri, you are the greatest caregiver. I promise, I will not trouble you."

She looked fragile. Most of her hair was gone. Her eyes were the colours of a green river, dull and sad. I could not see the happiness her face used to exude. I opened a bar of chocolate and took a bite.

"Tejiri please let me have some."

"Mira, you are diabetic. This is sugary."

She scoffed, "Tejiri, Tejiri, can a dead body die?"

"No way, I am sorry. You can have this Mira and the rest in the fridge."

I opened the chocolate wrap some more and gave to Mira. She ate the soft chocolate with relish. She smiled. She savoured the taste and took another bite.

"Mira, it is time for you to have your bath."

"Tejiri let me be. I love it here," Mira snuggled deeper into the soft bed.

“I knew you would love it here. I had always said I would build a personal island for you. I am sorry it came so late.”

Mira sighed deeply, “Tejiri, you have done enough. I am so proud of you. You are now a successful Petroleum Engineer. Cheers to more wealth,” she gave a tiny piece of chocolate to me.

I took it and ate. I faced the pacific view of the island. Gush of fresh wind fanned my face, “this wealth means nothing without you to enjoy it.”

“Go, get those chocolates, I want to eat every bar you have in that fridge.”

“Okay Mira, I will get the chocolates.”

“I love you, Tejiri.”

“Mira, you know I love you very much.” I pecked her on the forehead.

My bladder was full. I went to the toilet. As I urinated, a cold breeze caressed my legs. I shivered at the sudden chill. I wondered where it came from because the toilet temperature was warm. I looked at the closed door and window. I shook my head, flushed the toilet, and washed my hands.

I took my time to unwrap all the chocolates in a tray and covered it with a cloth. On my way to the balcony, I kicked my foot and yowled. I injured my big toe. I ignored the pain and hurried to the balcony.

Mira was relaxed in a pleasant position. She had put a pillow under her feet. Chocolate smeared her lips. I smiled and put the tray on a table. I knelt in front of her. “Mira, here are many chocolates. You are going to have a feast!”

Mira was silent and motionless. I took her hand. Her body had grown cold. Her eyes remained open. I closed her eyelids and sniffed. Mira did not wait to say goodbye to me. Tears rolled down my cheeks.

## Two

### JThe Transitional Title

Jessa was born in Jagua. When the oldest man in the village died, he looked forward to ascending the position. He received shocking news from the coronation council, that Jagua was not his real origin. Hence, they could not crown him as the Okpako-oldest man in the village. His ancestors had been wanderers. Jagua was hospitable and they had settled in the community.

Jessa's first-born, Jaja, was very angry. He vowed to sue the community to court. He wanted to prove them wrong that his clan from the fourth generation were not outsiders.

Jaja argued that when an individual had stayed in a particular geographic territory for decades, they naturally become citizens of the state. Migrants were accepted and respected as communal citizens. They had equal advantages despite there was no legal documentation of their citizenship in the past. Jessa talked his son out of going to court.

However, Jaja was adamant and filed a case. He told his father that the public denouncement of their clan was deplorable, "Tomorrow, I will ask questions around the village." Jaja said. "I shall trace our root."

The next day, Jessa went for an evening stroll. Jaja was waiting in the living room when he returned. Jaja stood up and guided Jessa to a seat. He placed his father's walking stick against the wall.

"Where have you been?" Jaja asked. "You look exhausted. I will get a cup of water for you."

Jessa drank the water slowly and finished it. Jaja took the cup and put it on the table. "Thank you, my son. What did you find out? You stayed out too long." Jessa said and brought out his snuffbox. He put some of the powder in his nostrils. He sneezed and tweaked his nose.

"Father, I have traced our lineage to Ebitu. It is four villages away from Jagua. That was where your great-grand father migrated. The people welcomed me warmly. Father, they recognized the birthmark on my cheek. They said your great-grand father had the same mark." Jessa nodded excitedly, "I will go and build a house, a new home for us," said Jaja.

Jessa was not happy about this news. He did not want to leave Jagua. This land has been his heritage, "why build a new house so soon?" Jessa worriedly asked. He took the cup and put it between his thighs.

Jaja saw his father was unhappy. "Father, why are you sad? You should be happy we have discovered our real identity. By leaving Jagua, I know we will lose many things-some properties and precious memories. I would love we stay back, but the community have ridiculed our family honour. Do not worry father. It is never too late to start afresh. The worst harm should have been we were not able to trace our hometown. The good thing is that our kin still reserved some portion of land for us in Ebitu. I will leave for Ebitu tonight. We have much work to do. I called my siblings on my way back from Ebitu. They have sent money for the building materials." Jaja knelt in front of his father and touched his feet. Jessa patted his shoulder. Jaja took the cup to the kitchen and went to his room. Jessa looked grave.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the morning, Jessa took a stroll around the village in brooding silence. He went to the riverside, where he had spent most of his time; swimming as a toddler, and fishing as an adult. The river was good to him. It was in its beautiful white sand he had found a large piece of diamond.

Jessa did not covet it for himself, the whole village benefited after he sold the diamond. He sent his children and other children of the community to school in the city. His children were doing well in their careers. Four of his children lived in Europe, only Jaja, based in Jang, a town after Jagua.

Jakpo, Jessa's bosom friend walked up to him, "I saw Jaja this morning. He told me everything. Jessa, why do you want to leave? The people of Jagua have not asked you to leave. Are you very sad you cannot be the Okpako? Jagua cannot confer the title on you. You are not a real citizen of Jagua, which is why you cannot be the eldest member of the community. This title is like kingship. Jagua cannot give this title to an outsider."

"No Jakpo, you are mistaken. This title is honorary to a man that has seen many years on earth and in a territory. This title is not a legacy within a royal household. It is a transitional title for the everyday man. Any worthy individual can earn it. Do you know how many decades I have been in Jagua? I was born here. I am eighty-eight year old. It is a privilege, when the gods bless a man's black hair to become gray. You cannot melt diamonds into gold. I have earned this honour. The coronation council thinks they have snatched my joy, but they are wrong. It does not matter whether the community bestows the title on me or not, by nature I have earned this right." There was silence for a while.

Jakpo cleared his throat and chewed his brushing stick; he spat some particles and chewed the stick again. "I am next in line. The people of Jagua will crown me Okpako."

"Yes, congratulation, my good friend and may the blessings of your ancestors dwell with you. We never dragged fishes in the river. There were enough fishes for every fisherman or fisherwoman to catch. We will not fight over a title. I wish you all the best my friend."

"Jessa, you should not go, you are a great part of this kingdom. Your ancestors live here."

"My ancestors also dwell in Ebito. I will use my last days on earth to offer libation to my ancestors. I have not known them, let me go and worship them in Ebito. Jakpo, I must go. Let me go back to my root. I pray I have a pleasant homecoming. I am positive my own people will not weigh me with scornful scale. Who knows, my friend? The gods have given me a chance to reconcile with my root. My children's offspring will not be a lost generation. They will not face denial from family. I just wonder who revealed this knowledge after many decades. I never knew I was not from Jagua. Who knows my history more than me?" Jakpo looked away, "Jakpo, do you have any idea of who revealed I was not originally from Jagua?"

Jakpo laughed nervously, "No my friend, I have no idea who that person is," he said quickly. "I hope you change your mind about leaving. Jessa, your decision is wavy like this river. I know you want to stay in Jagua."

"My heart will always be with this river, this water has lived in my vein, let me test the water of my origination. If it were up to me, I will grow older and die in Jagua. My children want us to leave Jagua for good. I have to obey my children's requests. A man is not afraid to walk naked in his own house. Only a guest has to be cautious around the house. I have a line of guests in Jagua. Let me take them back home. My children will feel like total strangers when I am gone. What is the essence of lingering in Jagua when the people showed us our place is not here? The heritage I pride in is not my children's identity. Let me take them home so that they can wear their badge with pride."

Jakpo looked beyond the river with a feeling of nostalgia, "You remember how we chased a rabbit into its hole," he said.

"We sealed the hole. We went to fetch firewood in the forest with which to prepare the bush meat and we could not find our way back." Jessa said.

"We considered ourselves bush meats when that wolf charged at us," Jakpo said and laughed.

"We were lucky the hunter killed it before it mauled us," Jessa said and snorted.

The two old men laughed. They recalled memories of running around the community as little children. Their smiles faded as reality set in.

“The days are grey and harsh.” Jakpo said. “I will miss you old friend. When you are gone, I will be so alone. These youngsters do not have time for old grumpy men. Who will keep me company?”

“Who will come to visit and take care of me if I stay? I will lose Jaja and my other children if I do not go to Ebito. They have made up their minds. They want to leave Jagua forever.” Jessa carefully bent down and picked a pebble. He clasped it and felt the coldness of the stone.

Jakpo nodded, “You have a great son in that young man, Jaja. I wish one of mine came back home. Decades of memories will drown after your departure. Farewell my friend, see you on the other side.”

“I will miss you. I cannot tell you how much, you cannot see how well, my eyes are too dry to cry,” Jessa hiccupped. He wished Jakpo well and left him by the river.

“I wish you will change your mind and stay my friend. I did not know the situation would become this ugly. I just wanted what was rightfully mine,” Jakpo wearily said after Jessa’s vanishing figure.

Jessa walked back home. Some children came around to play with him and he shared money among them.

\* \* \* \* \*

Before daylight, Jessa and Jaja were ready to leave for Ebito. Jessa looked at the direction of the stream with longing. He imagined himself and Jakpo walking down with their fishing tools.

“It is not easy to detach from these memories,” Jessa looked sad.

“Come father, you have said enough goodbyes. We should leave before the sun set, the road is not friendly on rush hour.”

“Yes, some roads do not recognize old wheels that have always travelled on it. It does not have preferential treatment. Let us leave. We are no longer welcome here.”

Two weeks later, the village elders had a meeting and concluded to use Jessa’s house as their new meeting venue. Jessa had bequeathed the house to them. On the day of Okpako Coronation, bulldozers arrived.

The vehicle operator’s voice boomed from a loudspeaker, “Everybody in this building should come out. In the next thirty minutes, this house would go down. At the count of twenty-nine, we would move in.” He started counting, “One, two, three, four...” On the nineteenth count, the building was empty. The bulldozer destroyed the house on Jaja’s instruction.

The people watched with sad faces as some men moved in with sledgehammers to break down blocks. No structure or block remained erect. A trailer packed the mashed cement and drove away.

“This is an unfortunate event. How can we hold the coronation ceremony in this ruin? We have to look for another venue or fix a new date for the coronation,” a young man said.

“But, where is Jakpo?” The Community Chief frantically asked.

“He has not showed up for the ceremony. Has he heard the news? This unfortunate incident will devastate him. His ceremony has come to ruin, it can no longer hold today,” an elder said.

“Jakpo must have heard the news. He knows everything. Was he not the one that discovered Jessa was not a real citizen of Jagua? He knows everything. After this meeting, we will proceed to his house. We will pay him a visit,” the Community Chief said.

They did not meet Jakpo in his house. They knew Jakpo was fond of the river and thought he might be there. On their way out of his compound, they met the little boy that takes care of him. The boy told them Jakpo had not been home since sunrise.

“That is a strange behaviour. Let us check if he is at the stream,” the Community Chief said.

They came to the river and saw him. Jakpo’s body was floating to the riverbank. They rushed into the water and dragged the body out. He was dead. They saw his pair of shoe, reading glasses and

a book under his favourite tree. Jeesa and Jakpo had carved some trees and made rooted benches by the river. His pile of belongings laid on it. The little boy fell down and cried.

“I guess he committed suicide. Oh, the dark realm has cast evil eyes on Jagua. Today is a very dark day in our history. Who will wake us up from this Omen?” A woman lamented.

“Look at this, Chief,” the little boy cleaned his tears with his arm and handed a note to the Community Chief.

“Where did you find this note?” The Community Chief astonishingly asked.

“Chief, what does the letter say?” The woman asked.

The Community Chief read the letter aloud, *‘I cannot live with myself after betraying my best friend, Jeesa. I am sorry my dearest friend. My great-grand father had told me about your history. I told the coronation council because of my self-indulgence to be the Okpako. It was a sin to be envious of your status. Please, forgive me. No one should weep for me. I have already wept for myself. **Jakpo.**’*

Because he committed suicide, the community did not hold a burial ceremony for Jakpo. Jakpo’s children carried him to the evil forest. They dumped his body for the beast of the wild to bury in their stomachs.

## Three

### I Will Bury My Father

The village town hall filled with tensed people. Everybody seemed to be at each other's throats with imaginary weapons. A muscular young man rushed at Ovie. Ovie poised to catch his balled fist and succeeded in twisting it until an elder separated their duel. The irate youth groaned and sat on the floor with drooping arm.

Ovie grinned, "Look at the weaklings that want to contest my decision. I will throttle anyone that dares me."

An old man came forward. He stared hard at Ovie and shook his head. He looked downward for a moment, stamped his walking stick, and looked up to him again, "Ovie, you should know the least one of our vibrant youths has only acted in a flash to repel your foolish decision. I warn you, more will come at you. An Army will defend your father's right."

"Let me see you all try. I will bury my father in Apele. He will be in residence at his mansion and nobody can stop me." In affirmation to the zealous statement, Ovie hit his chest, his chest was vibrating as if he had chest tremor.

"We shall see. We will prepare for our relative's burial rites. Watch how the lamp will find its way out of the wilderness to his shepherd fold." The old man said. He took a white chalk from his breast pocket and drew a circle. He looked to the roof and incanted inaudible words. His male servant brought a sick looking white cock. The old man untied the chicken's legs and incanted psalms around the body. The cock danced within the circle and fled outside.

The villagers left the town hall and Ovie remained resolute in burying his father in town. It was a custom for sons and daughters to lay in final rest in Godere. However, this city-bred child argued that since not every child was born in the village, it was not mandatory they follow the rules of the villagers.

Ovie turned to his uncle, Mamus, "Please, tell me how our distinguished guests will put up in the village. There are no hotels. There is not a single guesthouse to give them the least comfort. Those ridiculous invisible insects almost bit me to death when I first came here to fix a date for my father's burial. I will give my father a top society burial. The ceremony will be in grand style. Uncle, what do you think?"

"Ovie, do you seek my honest counsel?" Ovie looked away, "I thought as much, and you already know my stance on this matter. If you had been responsible, you would have built an edifice in the village that will accommodate your high society friends. Do you know why the youths are doing this?"

"You can tell me. Not that it would make any sense," said Ovie.

Mamus shook his head, "I will tell you. Many industrious sons and daughters of Godere tend to build mansions in the city and not lay a house foundation in Godere. The youths passionately carry out this custom to compel people to build houses in their villages and build business industries that will enable the village develop into a town. Your father wished for a burial ground in his father's house, and as he wanted, we shall fulfill his wish. It was his desire. I guess comfort is not your only reason for these dreadful shows you are putting on. You talk like a king and act like an ordinary palace guard otherwise you can postpone your father's burial until you build a grand hotel or motel!" Ovie looked at his uncle with contempt and stormed out of the town hall.

\* \* \* \* \*

On the day of the burial, the youths of Godere hired a lorry to Apele. Ovie had brought police to safeguard the corpse in the mortuary. The irate youths charmed the police officers and collected their guns. The force men were fixated while the youths entered the mortuary and carried the casket.

They put the coffin in a car and released the police officers from the spell. They gave the police officers heavy slaps on the cheeks and kicks on the buttocks.

“This is a fair warning never to intrude on the activities of Godere youths. We will spare your lives. It is the solemn day of our brother’s funeral rite. Count one another lucky because our battle is not with you but with that misguided child of the deceased,” said the youth leader. He made a threatening move and the police officers scampered out of his way.

The youths gave the police officers menacing look before they got into the vehicle. The police officers ran into different hideouts until they zoomed off.

The Police Inspector of the squad was new to the locale. His junior officers had resisted the task to guard the corpse but he had threatened them with their jobs.

“Oga, now you see what we had told you. Nobody messes with Godere youths,” a Sergeant said. He saluted the Police Inspector. The Inspector wiped dotted sweat off his forehead.

In many disputes, that Godere community was involved peacekeepers did not interfere. Any Security Commander posted to the area always mounted pressure to get transfer. When situations went awry, it was not easy to restore peace in the community. The peacekeepers always stayed in the outskirts of the community. They feared the clash between communities could crush them overnight if they rested in their temporal quarters.

The youths drove to their relative’s mansion in Apele. They disseminated tents, toppled chairs, and tables. Some of them carted away with the foods and drinks. The burial took place in Godere.

Ovie was furious at the turn of event. He slammed his palm on the wall, “Damn! I cannot believe they easily carted away with my father’s corpse.”

His friend clasped him on the shoulder, “their potency was mightier, Ovie, let it be. Let your father’s soul find rest. You have troubled his body enough. I think we should go to the village and apologise.”

Ovie brushed his hand aside, “Dave, you bother over little things. My father has not been buried, they dare not.”

“Were you deaf when uncle Mamus said he witnessed the burial? Were you blind when he showed us pictures of the ceremony? Ovie get this straight, they have put your father in the ground and covered him with dust. It is over.”

“No, it is not over. We shall exhume his body and bury him where he belongs.”

“I think you’ve gone mad. It is so hot in here,” Dave went to the bar and fixed himself a glass of juice with ice cubes.

“I am not. However, I will be. I will be mad if we do not do right by my father.”

“Forget it Ovie, your father is resting in Godere, peacefully. We will go and apologise.”

“We will get his body. Come on, Dave, we have to do this. You promised you got my back on this.”

“Well, I have reached my final limits to that selfless oath I took. Count me out on this one,” Dave sipped his drink.

“You can take the first flight back to the city,” Ovie said. “I shall do it myself.” Dave cocked an eyebrow.

Ovie’s mother walked in, “you will do no such thing. Son, what is wrong with you. Was this how your father and I raised you? For goodness sake, what has come over you? Stop this madness please.”

Ovie pointed at his mother, “You are a traitor for going over to Godere for his burial. Stay out of this, mother. You will not meddle in my affairs.”

“This is my late husband you are raving about. I will not be silent and watch you disregard your father. Let him rest in peace. What is so special about burying him here? You will honour your father’s request. His last wish was to rest in Godere despite your insistence.”

“Everybody should stay clear of my decisions. I will not hesitate to crush anyone that comes in the way.”

His mother stood close to him, their faces inches apart, “where were you when Godere youths were at their best, coward.”

“Mother, you will not taunt me in that manner. Do not dare me.”

Mamus walked in, “Ovie, do not talk to your mother that way,” he said.

Her tone softened. “Calm down, my son. Your father was a traditionalist, and his clan has given him the burial rites that accorded his faith. You should apologise to your relatives. They shall grant you the honour of completing the final rites.”

“That will be over my dead body. I shall bury my father the way I want.”

“Ovie, you talk like an insane man,” she thundered.

“Oh, just shut up, mother.”

“Ovie, watch your utterances.” His uncle gave him a slap, “she is my sister, your mother and your father’s widow.”

The force of the slap moved Ovie’s face sideways. It took a while before Ovie turned his neck and faced his uncle. He flexed his shoulder. “Uncle, you slapped me?” he asked unbelievably.

“Yes, and believe me, I will slap you countless times if you say another disrespectful word to your mother. I have endured your nonsense for this long because you are my nephew, but no more. I thought your behaviour was born out of the frustration of losing your father. I looked upon you as a child with some tantrums, oh, Ovie; I forgot you are no more a child. I must look like a fool for supporting you all these while. I tried to convince you it is the way of your father’s people to bury him according to custom.” Ovie shook his head. He bowed to his mother and left the house.

Dave could not look at Ovie’s mother. He went into the room and returned with his bag, “I am sorry, please forgive me ma. I will leave for the city at once.” He left the house to take a commercial bus.

In the midnight, Ovie took some men to evacuate his father’s coffin and buried it in Apele. Day and night, there was sorrowful cry of an adult man. This made the neighbours lost sleep. They requested Ovie and his family to come to their house and find out the mystery.

“I have played the oracle; it says your father’s spirit is restless at where he was buried,” said Mamus.

“I said it. I said my father should not be buried in the village.” Ovie fervently said.

“Shut up. Your father’s spirit is not restless in Godere. Someone removed his body from his grave. Ovie, your father’s spirit desire to be back in his root, someone removed your father’s body and put that of a dead stranger. His soul cries in Godere. He said whoever exhumed his body should bring it back to its rightful place.”

Ovie’s mother turned on him with suspicion, “Ovie, where have you kept his body?”

“I do not know, you should ask his relatives. Ask them if they took the body from the morgue and buried it in Godere or if they did something else with your husband’s body.”

His mother slapped him. “Ovie, tell us what you have done with your father’s body?”

“I said I do not know. Do you people want to force a lie out of my mouth?” Ovie shouted.

A thunderous slap landed on Ovie’s cheek. It was his mother that slapped him, “Tell me where my husband is you foolish child! If you don’t tell me in a second, I will get naked and curse you here and now!”

Ovie quickly ran towards the hallway. His family followed him. Ovie had buried his father in one of the guest bedrooms.

“This is an abomination. Ovie, what have you done to your father?” Mamus calmly asked.

His mother covered her mouth in shock, “I was right. You are mad,” she said.

“I just wanted to bury my father the way I want. This is his house, is it not? It is a tradition to also bury people in their houses?” Ovie slid to the floor and cried, “I have a right to bury my father the way I want.”

Ovie’s mother invited some youths to take the corpse back to Godere. Ovie paid some money as a levy for his act. The villagers pardoned Ovie and allowed him perform the final rites of the burial.

## Four

### The Danger of Self Medication

Iya tried to feed her son some herbal mixture. The child's flaying legs toppled the cup and the brown liquid content spilled on some coloured panties stacked on a low bench. Iya hissed at the mess. She imprisoned his tiny legs with her arm, and used the other to pin down his hands. She smiled at the workable tactics.

She poured another warm brew from the flask into the cup. Iya held her son's nose. Due to blockade of his nose, the baby breathed through his mouth. She poured the herbal brew into his tiny mouth and the medicine gurgled down his throat. His mother let go of him. He let out a cry and began kicking his leg in protest of the bitter taste.

Sissy came by the store, "it is wrong to give such a little baby agbo-herbal mixture to drink," she took the baby from his mother. She gently rubbed his back and fanned his face with her mouth. The baby stopped crying and hiccupped.

"It works well for sugar belly," Iya said. She stood up and separated the good pants from the stained pants, "how will I recover this loss?" She looked worn-out.

"That is your business, Iya, so figure a way out. I am angry with you. I just went to the slaughterhouse to get meat and you fed him agbo."

"I only wanted to cure his belly off sugar."

"Iya, you only gave him a wrap of chocolate to eat. Children actually need sugar for growth, it helps them become bright."

"That chocolate was too sweet. All the worms in his tummy will be dancing by now."

"That is why you should deworm your child in every three months," Sissy raised three fingers to Iya's face.

"Sissy, three months is too far. The agbo that I have given him will make my husband and I sleep well at night."

"Iya, this mixture is dangerous. The pharmaceuticals are not fools for making drugs that weaken and eliminate worms. Unknowing, you might be feeding him poison."

"Agbo worked for me, it will work for my child."

"It did work for you, yes. How well does it work for you? When last did you go to the hospital for check-up? Perhaps, in our days, the natural foods we fed on revitalized these strong herbs. You attended antenatal at the hospital, do not desist from their medical prescriptions for your baby. Agbo is not an approved medicine by NAFDAC or WHO. Most of these herbalists just brew all sorts of leaves and tree stems without accurate measurement and sell to people."

"My sister, agbo works at any time and on anybody. The midwives sanction agbo for ila-measles treatment. You know, and I know that it works well. Agbo is a component of powerful herbs."

"Yes, I know, but the substance you constantly give to your child, I have my doubts. Please stop giving my fine baby this stuff to drink. His system may not agree with it."

"But his system agrees with eating sweets? Hmmm, he will drink agbo to wash out the sweetness." The baby urinated on Sissy. "Oh, dear, I am sorry; he has ruined your dress."

"It is okay. Why did you not wear him diapers? Would you prefer to tie leaves around his waist?" Sissy rocked the baby and pecked his cheeks.

Iya laughed, "I will wear him pampers. If he eats another sweet, I will give him agbo to drink. A person that does not like bitter leaf should not be fond of eating sweets."

"Iya, I have warned you." Sissy sighed and handed the baby to his mother.

“So Sissy baby, which of the pants will you buy?” Iya spread many pants on the table, “your man will love this red colour very well. It matches your nail polish.”

“I have not worn the pants I bought the last time jare. I have been too busy to go to my boyfriend’s house for a weekend. I will only take two black bras. I need them for the white polo shirts I will wear for a two-day awareness walk. It is a campaign for people to stop self-medication. I will like you to attend. It is for people like you that like to administer drugs themselves, worse of all, traditional medicines.”

“Who will look after my business while I roam the streets with placards and banners? Please, I am too hungry to get involved in your campaign, I cannot afford the walk, and I do not have the strength. I am looking for money. Sissy, maybe I will attend some other time.”

“Iya, life is not all about making money. Iya, you should also learn how to use it. You can save up the Fifty Naira for agbo to buy worm medicine in the next three months. Please, you should pay attention to important programmes, especially those with health benefits. If you lock the shop for a day, there will not be loss in your business or profit margin. The kinds of goods you sell allow most of your customers to wait for you or come back again if you are not around. They can call you on phone when they are in urgent need of an item.”

“Okay, I have heard you. I will join the campaign. Is it not just to walk about to share flyers and raise posters above my head?”

“It is not just that, you will take home lessons that are applicable to your health and practice it.”

“Okay, thank you Sissy, I will see you tomorrow.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The next day, Iya was shelving her goods when Sissy came by. “Aha, Iya, you are displaying your goods. I told you the programme is by eleven o’clock, and this is past ten o’clock.”

Iya adjusted her headgear. It loosened. She removed it and tied the scarf around her petite waist, “eh Sissy, the thing is. I cannot make it today. You see, today was market sanitation and it took an extra thirty minutes before the meeting ended. We opened the market just five minutes ago, so I want to make up for lost sales, I hope you understand.”

“Iya...you should just lock the shop until we are back. I will help you arrange your wares and sell for the day.”

“Sissy, please not today, I cannot make it. Please do not be annoyed. You know I am the only one fending for the family. My husband is yet to get another job. I am trying to raise capital for him to start a small business.”

“Yes Iya, I understand. I wish I could help,” Sissy’s eyebrows furrowed.

“Sissy, your patronage is an assurance that we make profit and be able to keep body and soul together. Please tell more of your friends to patronize underclothes from me. I will sell at good prices,” she started fixing the finest, sexy pants into hangers.

“Sure I will, Iya. I will be on my way. I will share useful information when I return. How is your son? You did not bring my fine boy to the shop?” Sissy peered into the shop.

“He stayed home with his father today. Let him babysit for today.”

“That is good. Iya, I will see you later. Send my love to my fine boy,” Sissy left and Iya fully opened her shop.

After she made some sales, Iya added up the money to previous sales and counted. She looked sad at the total sum spread in her palms. She rummaged through her wooden coffer and came up disappointed. Invoices, kola nut, old pen and some torn naira notes were all that filled the box.

“God, I am far from gathering substantial amount for my husband to start his phone repair business. God, please boost sales so I can raise enough money.” Iya got up and propped up her goods to attract customers. She sang as she mopped her veranda.

\* \* \* \* \*

Iya closed the shop very late. She reached home and flung her bag on the nearest chair. Her son was in a feverish condition, “Kenny, why did you not call me?” She bundled her son into her arms.

“I did not want to disturb you. He has had warm temperature since 4 pm, it worsened this night, like an hour ago,” Kenny brought agbo to feed the boy.

Iya pushed the cup of agbo away. “No, he is not getting better. Do not give him the herb. Let us take him to the hospital,” she said.

Kenny was frantic. He hurried into the bedroom and changed from his boxers to a trouser. They left for the hospital in anxiety.

The hospital admitted the child. “Madam, what have you been treating your child with? He is in a severe condition,” the doctor said.

“Doctor, he has been well, he was not sick,” Iya said in a weepy tone.

“He has been sick for a long time, the symptoms were not clear to you. He is very sick,” the doctor scribbled on the baby’s medical report card.

“Oh, my God, what sickness is that?” Kenny asked. He looked pale all of a sudden.

“What did you give him before coming here, what drugs have you given him?” The doctor asked.

“Agbo sir, it is usual to give him herbal medicine to cure his sugar belly because some nice patrons at my shop do give him sweet things to eat and drink.” The doctor shook his head. Iya held the doctor’s arms and went on her knees, “Doctor, please save my son. I cannot bear any other child. Please, his birth was complicated. My Doctor removed my womb to stop the infection from spreading. My son is my life.”

“Madam, we are doing our best. We will run a test on him. Nurse, please get his blood sample.”

“Please save our son,” Kenny said.

“We will do our best. Nurse, get the blood test done with immediacy.” The doctor patted Kenny’s shoulder and left the room.

Some minutes later, the doctor said to the nurse, “nothing can be done for the child. He has few hours to live. The herbal components have cut his liver and opened holes in his kidney, whatever that was mixed in the substance was acidic. It was too toxic for a boy who has not clocked a year old.”

The nurse looked at Iya and her husband, “oh, it is a pity. I wish a miracle could happen. This horrible news will shatter the couple,” she said.

“Doctor,” Iya screamed. The doctor and nurse ran into the room. He put the thermometer on the boy’s chest. He sighed. He gestured for the nurse to cover the corpse.

Iya stopped the nurse. She turned to the doctor, “Doctor, what is she doing?”

“I am sorry madam, we lost him,” the doctor said.

Iya screamed and whipped her body on the floor. She grabbed the doctor’s robe. “Do not take away my child from me. Look, I have money,” she threw the sales money at the doctor, “take all the money and treat my child. Doctor, please bring my child back to life.” She turned to the nurse, “I am sure you are a mother; you know I will not be able to live without my child. I cannot live through this pain.”

Kenny dragged her into the hallway. She was kicking and crying, “Someone should bring back my child.”

Kenny shook her roughly, “stop this Iya. Our precious son is no more. He is dead.” Iya went quiet. Kenny laughed insanely. He dropped to the floor and cried.

## Five

### Mudlark

My brother and I sat in front of a local pharmacy. My feet hurt from walking about. My mother came out of the drugstore. “Mama, I am tired. I feel so weak. Can we not stay home today?” I said to my mother.

Mama swallowed some pills and drank water. She sat on a crate and massaged her hands and legs, “we must work hard, or else there will not be food for us to eat. Come on, we have to hurry to make some money. The pain will disappear once you walk around,” Mama said as she tagged us along to the big market.

As much as I could remember, it had always been hard work all day if we must survive. Things only got worse after our eviction from Ileoda. The turbulent sea had threatened to submerge our community. The government marked down the waterfront and issued an eviction letter to residents of Ileoda.

The Minister of Housing and Environment had said it was for the good of its dwellers. The government said the reason was to build better houses for us. We tried to fight against it because these decent structures would not have a place for *low lives* like us. The restructuring roadmap of Ileoda did not include avenues for the poor. The government only wanted to get us out of the waterfront with no plans for settlement and they succeeded.

We were miserable and powerless to fight the government. Later, we were happy to get a court injunction, but the battle won, was short lived. The demolishers ignored the court injunction. They brought bulldozers to our homes and destroyed everything.

The demolition of houses and properties caused displacement of over fifty thousand residents of Ileoda. Many had nowhere to go. Some people expressed their displeasure by committing suicide. My family and I slept under different bridges for weeks until we were able to rent a room.

We reached the big market. My brother and I carried goods on our heads while Mama stacked customers' items on a plank sitting on her head and walked toward the motor park. As Mama was crossing the road, a speedy ambulance vehicle hit her. She died on the spot. We became orphans.

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