

The Testimony



Richard Shekari

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By

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Acknowledgments.

Ayiwulu Alaku

Israel Dodo

Gordana Misciew

...Your words of encouragement and profound support
greatly influenced my desire to write this novella.

You're appreciated.

Dedication.

For Paul & Peter Ewuzie.

Chapter One: The Good Neighbour.

The doorbell rang. The time was 6:48pm.

“I’ll get it!” Tiffany said as she walked to the door, she had a pink top on. A teenager who just couldn’t wait for her next birthday. She peeked through the peephole and smiled. “It’s Greg!” She said as she opened the door.

“Hi, Tiffany!” He said. “You hold on to that,” he smiled as he handed her a bottle of wine. “This one’s heavy for your delicate-self!” Referring to the big red wrapped box he carried. Greg was in his early thirties, he was wearing a black long-sleeved shirt with a jacket on top.

“Wow!” She said excitedly, “Mom will devour this, trust me!” She smiled back, “Oh my, you seriously had to drive to our house?” On noticing his black SUV packed on their front yard not far from the mailbox.

“I can explain,” he replied, “see, the thing is...”

“The box is too heavy for you to carry?” She interjected.

“Well,” he remarked as he nodded, “You’re smarter than you look, young lady. Maybe you should run for president when you’re of age!”

“Apparently my parents aren’t spending their money to get me a good education for nothing.” She giggled, “Please come in!” She turned, “Mom! Dad! Greg is here!”

Greg followed her as he panted.

“I can see you’ve changed your glasses again!” She said.

“Naa!” He responded, “I changed the frame!”

“You know one thing I like about you, Greg?” She said.

“What’s that?” He asked.

“Aside from your dashing personality...” She added, “...You’re too generous for a neighbour! Is the box heavy? You can just...”

“No, it’s okay.” He interjected, “Doesn’t weigh much!”

“Okay,” She remarked, “So how was service today?”

“Just the usual chatter.” He replied. “It was good, not my favourite priest though.”

“Oh, is that why you left very early?” She asked. “We took some photos, it was fun. You missed!”

“Yeah,” he said, “Had some things to do.”

“Oh I see!” She responded. “Samantha kept bugging us with her usual, ‘where’s Uncle Grey.’”

“Uncle Grey!” Mumbled a little girl as she ran towards him.

“Oh, hey Samantha!” He said.

“Speak of the devil!” Tiffany said, she gave way for her kid sister to pass.

“Uncle Grey brought present for me?” Samantha asked as she hugged his legs.

“Yes, I did.” He replied, “And I am sure you’re going to love it.”

“Easy, Sam!” Tiffany said, “It’s Mr Greg, not Uncle Grey or just call him Greg! Okay? Get off of him, the box looks heavy. Go to mommy! Come on, shoo!”

“Take it easy on her,” he said, “She’s just a kid.” He dragged his leg cautiously to avoid pushing Samantha to the floor.

“Yeah, right.” Tiffany said, “This bug buzzes worse than a bunch of bees!” She walked to the dining area.

Her mother walked in from the kitchen holding a bowl of beef chilli.

“Yum! Yum!” Said Jacob as he walked behind holding some plates. He was a timid teenager.

“Mom, why do you allow this Rugrat into the kitchen?” Tiffany said.

“Because someone refused to lend me a helping hand?” Said her mother as she placed the bowl on the dining table.

“You have no idea what I saw him doing with a dead rat at school on Tuesday!” Tiffany added.

“Hey, Mrs Shortner!” Greg said. “You seems to be getting into shape lately!”

“Oh thank you, Greg!” She replied, “Been seriously working out.” She giggled, “Got to stay in shape in order to get rid of the competition, you know what I mean?” She winked as she laughed, “You arrived on time. Sorry, we’re starting a bit late, my husband came home a little late from the grocery store. See why women prefer to do the shopping themselves?”

“And I thought the late thingy is the other way around!” Greg said. “Where do I put this?”

“Are you kidding me,” said a male voice as a bald-headed man in his late-forties walked down the stairs, “Honey, if it was you that went to the market, we’d still be waiting for your return by now with spoons in between our teeth!”

“Yeah, right!” She responded.

“Hi Jerome!” Greg said, still holding on to the box.

“I can’t wait to chop these delicious delicacies with my crushers.” Jerome added as he walked to his wife, he kissed her. “You smell like heaven, honey!”

“You guys should get a room, please!” Tiffany said. “Ugh!”

“We own the house young lady,” Jerome responded, “Me and ma baby we own this C-R-I-B, shorty, you got that?” He bounced as he mimicked a rapper. He then turned to Greg with his hand stretched, “Dude, what’s that you’re holding?”

“Oh, nothing much.” He said, “Just a gift for the family.”

Samantha poked him, “Gift for me?” She mumbled, “My box?”

“No, Samantha!” Greg said, “Yours is a special one!” He smiled.

“Mine special?” Samantha added, “You buy me doll?” She giggled.

“I’ve got something more beautiful for you,” he said as he managed to hold the box with one hand. He slipped his right hand into his jacket and pulled out a small box then handed it to her.

“What is it?” She said as she snatched the small box from his hand.

“Open it!” He replied.

Samantha tore the small box.

“Easy, young lady.” Jerome said. “Don’t behave like your mother the day I proposed to her!”

“Don’t you ever get tired of telling people that story?” Mrs Shortner said.

“Mammy!” Samantha said excitedly as she ran to her mother, “Mammy! Mammy! Look! Uncle Grey bought for me this.”

“Wow!” Mrs Shortner responded as she leaned and picked Samantha up. “Greg! Oh my...” She headed towards him, “A golden bracelet? Isn’t this too much?”

“Hmm!” Jerome responded, “That’s my problem with you bachelors; always wasting money on the wrong stuff.”

“Honey, really?” Said his wife as she stared at him.

“What?” He said, “It’s the fact! She’ll soon grow up and won’t be able to wear it!

“The good thing is we’d be able to sell it in the end!” Jacob said, “It’ll have more value by then, right?” He grinned.

Greg laughed reluctantly.

“I can’t believe you guys just said that!” Mrs Shortner added as she shook her head, “Thanks a lot, Greg.” She smiled then hugged him, “So, what do you say to Greg young lady?”

“Thank-you-Uncle-Grey!” Samantha mumbled and covered her eyes with her hands.

“Oh, you’re welcome, Sam.” He answered.

“How many times have I got to tell you, he is not our Uncle?” Tiffany said. “It’s Mr Greg! Pinhead.” She snorted, “Samantha doesn’t even like wearing bracelets. Just like mom; she hates wearing anything on her wrist. Too old school.”

“Don’t be hard on her!” Said her mother. “She’s just a little girl, my little angel. She may be two but she’s smarter than you when you were ten!”

“Whatever!” Tiffany remarked, “We need to teach her the right things in time, right?”

“It’s just dinner, man!” Jerome said to Greg, “Not like it’s our anniversary or something! Anyways, thanks a bunch! We really appreciate it. What’s in the box?”

“Well,” Greg remarked, “It’s just...”

“Don’t be rude, honey!” Mrs Shortner said, “Help the young man find a good place to keep the box, jeez.” She pinched Jerome. “Can’t you see he’s sweating already? You guys should keep it in the living room.”

“Oh, my bad!” He rushed to Greg and assisted him with the box.

“Thank you very much, Greg.” She said as she handed Samantha to Jacob, and continued setting the table. “You’re so kind and generous.”

Jacob laid his little sister on the table.

“Mom!” Tiffany said as she held up the bottle of wine Greg gave her.

“What?” Mrs Shortner responded.

“Greg brought this too!” She said.

Jacob walked behind her and seized the bottle.

“You midget!” Tiffany yelled as she chased him. They ran round the table as Jacob laughed. There were six chairs set around the table.

“Jacob J. Shortner, keep it on the table, now!” Mrs Shortner yelled, “Can’t you see we have a guest in the house?”

The kids ignored her and continued running.

“Jerome!” Mrs Shortner hollered.

“What’s going on here?” Jerome asked as he approached the dining area.

“Oh, nothing, dad!” Jacob answered as he gently placed the bottle on the table. He headed for the fridge and opened the freezer compartment, scraped off some frost and swallowed it. He then turned and began playing with his little sister.

His mother shook her head.

“Chloe,” Jerome said, “You see why I can’t afford to invite my boss for dinner?”

“They all behave like people from your side of the family!” She said, “I think it’s only my little angel that behaves like my mother.” She smiled, “Tiffany is like your sister, Venice. Jacob is like um...Oh I almost forgot, his namesake...your older brother, Jacob. Hence the name.”

“Blah-Blah-Blah!” Jerome chattered, “You ever wonder why I love you?” He walked to her and kissed her once more.

“Whatever!” She kissed him back and lightly pushed him off. “Okay everyone, dinner time. Greg! Please come over to the dining!”

“Alright,” Jerome said. “Everybody grab your chair!”

They all sat down, including Greg. Jerome and Greg sat facing each other. Chloe, Jerome’s wife sat by his left hand side while Tiffany on his right. Jacob sat next to Tiffany. Samantha ran to Greg and raised her hands, he lifted her up and onto his lap. She handed the bracelet to him, Greg then helped her wear it.

“Do you like it?” He asked.

“Yes, very much!” She said, “Thank you very much!”

A black cat walked down from the stairs and jumped on the empty chair next to Greg.

“Oh, Jesus!” Jerome said, “I thought we’ve agreed to never let Miss Kitty stamp her paws on the dining table?”

“Uh oh!” Samantha interjected.

“I can’t leave her alone in the room, dad!” Jacob said.

“Unbelievable!” His father responded.

“Tiffany dear,” said Chloe, “Please, pray for us!”

“Mom?” Tiffany answered, “Daddy prayed in the morning, must we pray again?”

“Yes!” Said her parent in unison.

“Greg is here,” she said. “Why don’t you ask him to pray?”

“Shut it, lady!” Her mother said.

“Pray! Pray! Pray already!” Jacob teased, “I am starving, Jesus!”

“Fine!” She protested as she closed her eyes, “Thank you heavenly Father for the meal. Don’t remember us if we don’t remember the poor and the homeless! Amen!” Tiffany opened her eyes and grabbed a fork, when she realised all eyes were set on her, she grinned, “What? God doesn’t like lousy people, so I made it short!” She sank the fork into the plate of rice that was laid before her.

Chloe shook her head and entertained Jacob’s plate with broccoli.

“Mom?” He lamented.

“And you...” Jerome said, “Allow Uncle Grey to eat, okay? Go disturb mammy!” He mimicked Samantha’s voice.

“Seriously?” Chloe said. “I’ve been working all day trying to make dinner.”

“Well, she kicked your stomach for months before you finally dropped her!” He added, “You’re the only one who’ve mastered the art of Samanthism!” He giggled.

Greg and Chloe burst into laughter.

“You’re a joke,” she said, “Do you know that?”

“I guess it’s one of the reasons you dumped the rest of the crew and married the captain?” He said as he kissed her, “I love you!”

“I love you too!” She kissed him back.

“Ugh!” Tiffany responded. “You two make me so NOT want to be an adult anymore!”

“So, Samantha was a boxer, eh?” Greg said.

“Yes,” Jerome remarked as he sipped his wine, “I’d sit down and watch her little foot come and go like this...” he kept the glass cup on the table and punched the air with his fist back and forth. “It was like watching a kick boxer trying to kick his way out of a punch bag.” He laughed.

“Yeah, and what did I get for bringing your seed into this world?” She said, “He was away on an assignment the day I gave birth to her. Now all she wants is daddy, daddy! Daddy!”

“Jealous!” Jerome responded and threw a tongue out.

“Mammy!” Samantha said as she threw a tongue out.

“Don’t mind daddy, my adorable sweet muffin.” Chloe said, “Mommy will teach you how to be a good lady, okay?” She smiled.

“Owokay!” Samantha whispered, “Mammy teach me how-to-be good lady?”

“She really resemble you, Chloe!” Greg said. “She’s got your dimple...and your smile!”

“Well, she doesn’t have any choice!” Chloe added as she passed a bowl of salad to Jerome, “She didn’t want to end up having a face like her sister, so she chose wisely which side of the family to roll with!”

“Whatever!” Tiffany protested as she filled her cup with juice.

They all laughed.

“And now she’ll get away with that?” Said Jerome, “And There you were yesterday accusing me of...”

“Angel, come to mammy so Uncle Grey would eat, okay?” Chloe interposed.

“No!” Samantha said. “I stay with Uncle Grey. You’re not my friend anymore. Uncle Grey is my friend!”

Greg laughed.

“Are you sure you’re comfortable with her like that?” Jerome asked.

“It’s alright,” Greg said, “We can eat from the same plate. Right friend?” He tickled Samantha. She giggled as he took a sip of water from the glass cup before him.

“So what’s in the box?” Jacob said, “When are we going to open it?”

“Jacob! Manners!” His mother said.

“It’s for the family, you can open it anytime.” Greg said, “Right after dinner would be best, I guess.”

“I want a bicycle but dad said until I get good grades in school,” Jacob added as he chewed his broccoli, “Did you buy me a...”

“Hush it, young man!” Chloe said. “Where’s your table manners?”

“What this?” Samantha asked as she curiously lifted Greg’s jacket. “Bang? Bang?” She giggled, “Jacob has gun too. Daddy bought water gun for Jacob! Uncle Grey, is this water gun too?”

Jerome and Chloe raised their heads up, they looked at each other, then gazed at Greg.

“Yes, Samantha.” Greg said, “It’s a gun...but not a toy gun.” He sighed as his lively face slowly froze to a more baleful look. He slipped his right hand into his jacket and pulled out a firearm from his shoulder holster. Greg lowered his head as he placed his right hand on the table; the gun was pointed at Jerome.

The Shortner’s stopped eating on noticing the gun. The sight of the pistol sent shivers down their spine. Tension steamed up as fear gripped the kids. The place became silent.

“Jacob, see gun like yours!” Samantha mumbled. “Uncle Grey has gun too!”

Jerome took a small white garment and cleaned his mouth. “Is everything okay, man?” He asked.

Greg nodded. “Yeah!”

“Greg, are you okay?” Chloe asked as fear gripped her. She turned to Jerome.

“Time to play?” Samantha asked.

“Yes, Samantha.” Greg said, “It’s play time!”

“Come on, man!” Jerome added, “We’ve got kids here. You shouldn’t be...”

“Shut up, Jerome!” He interjected. “Tiffany, empty the salad from the bowl, please.”

Tiffany looked at her father. Jerome signalled her to do as told. She was terrified. “Where do you want me to pour it?” She asked.

“Anywhere on the table, please!” Greg said.

She then poured the salad in the middle of the table as she trembled.

“It’s alright, sweetheart.” Jerome said to her as he coerced a smile.

“Keep it on the table, and Sit down!” Greg added.

Tiffany gently laid the bowl on the table and sat down. She was frightened, “dad?” She called.

“It’ll be alright, sweetheart.” Jerome reassured her once more.

“Jacob! Empty the wine from the bottle into the bowl...” Greg instructed, “...Including all the liquid contents in the cups!”

Jacob turned to his father, who gave him a sign to do as told.

“It’s okay, son...go ahead!” He said.

Jacob then stood up, took his cup and emptied the content in the bowl. Then went round the table and did same with the rest of the cups and the bottle. The bowl was half-full.

“Thank you, Jacob!” Greg said, “Please sit down.” He pulled out his phone and gave it to Samantha. “Hey, girl. Go and drop the phone into the bowl!”

“Bowl?” She asked with a smile as the cat climbed up the table.

“Yes, bowl.” He said, “Phone into bowl.”

“But water in bowl!” She said.

“Yeah, I know.” He responded, “Just do it, okay?”

“Okay!” She said.

Greg placed Samantha on top of the table, she walked between the plates and threw his phone into the bowl. She then turned and clapped, “Yeah!”

“Good girl.” Greg said, “Now, come to Uncle Grey!”

“Sweet muffin,” Chloe said, “Come to mommy.”

“No, mammy!” Samantha said, she giggled and ran back to Greg. He held her with his left arm then stood to his feet, with his right hand still holding on to the firearm.

“Now, all of you should throw your cell phones into the bowl.” He ordered.

Chloe turned to Jerome, “No! No!” She cried, “What is happening, Greg?”

“Just do what I say and no one will be hurt, okay?” Greg added politely. “Please!”

“Is this some kind of a joke?” Jerome said.

Greg took his finger off the trigger and pulled back the hammer to full cock.

“Oh my God!” Chloe screamed as she quickly held her mouth tight with her hands.

“Do what Uncle Grey says, mammy!” Samantha said, ignorantly, “You have another gun?”

“No, Sam!” He said, “Just this one!”

“Do what he says kids.” Jerome instructed his children. “Honey?” He turned to his wife. Jerome gently took out his phone from his pocket and threw it into the bowl, and so did Tiffany and Jacob. As Chloe made an attempt to pick her phone which was lying next to her plate, it began to ring. Greg turned the gun towards her, she gently took it from the table and flung it into the bowl. The sound faded as bubbles rose and popped.

“Now, that wasn’t so hard.” Greg said, “Was it?”

“Not hard!” Samantha said as she threw her hands up, “Easy!”

“Yeah, girl!” Greg said, “Easy...Easy!” He then stared at Jerome.

The cat walked on the table towards Greg and began lifting its paws to touch the gun.

“Uncle Grey?” Samantha said, “Kitty wants to be carried too!” She used her leg to push it away, the cat then jumped off the table and went upstairs. “Kitty scared!” She giggled, “Little kitty scared!”

“Yeah, Samantha.” Greg said, “Little kitties are always scared when faced with real danger.”

“Baby,” Chloe said, “Come to mommy!” She sobbed. “Please, don’t take my baby!”

“Look, man!” Jerome pleaded, “She’s just a little girl. She won’t survive out there without her mother. Give her back, please!”

“Oh my God!” Tiffany said as she wept, “Is he taking Sam away? Mommy! Daddy! No!”

“Please, Greg!” Chloe appealed as she wiped her tears.

“No one is taking your daughter anywhere!” He said, “So calm down, okay?”

“No one taking daughter anywhere!” Samantha mumbled,
“Mammy, why you crying?”

“Now, let’s go open our gift box,” Greg said. “Shall we?”

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