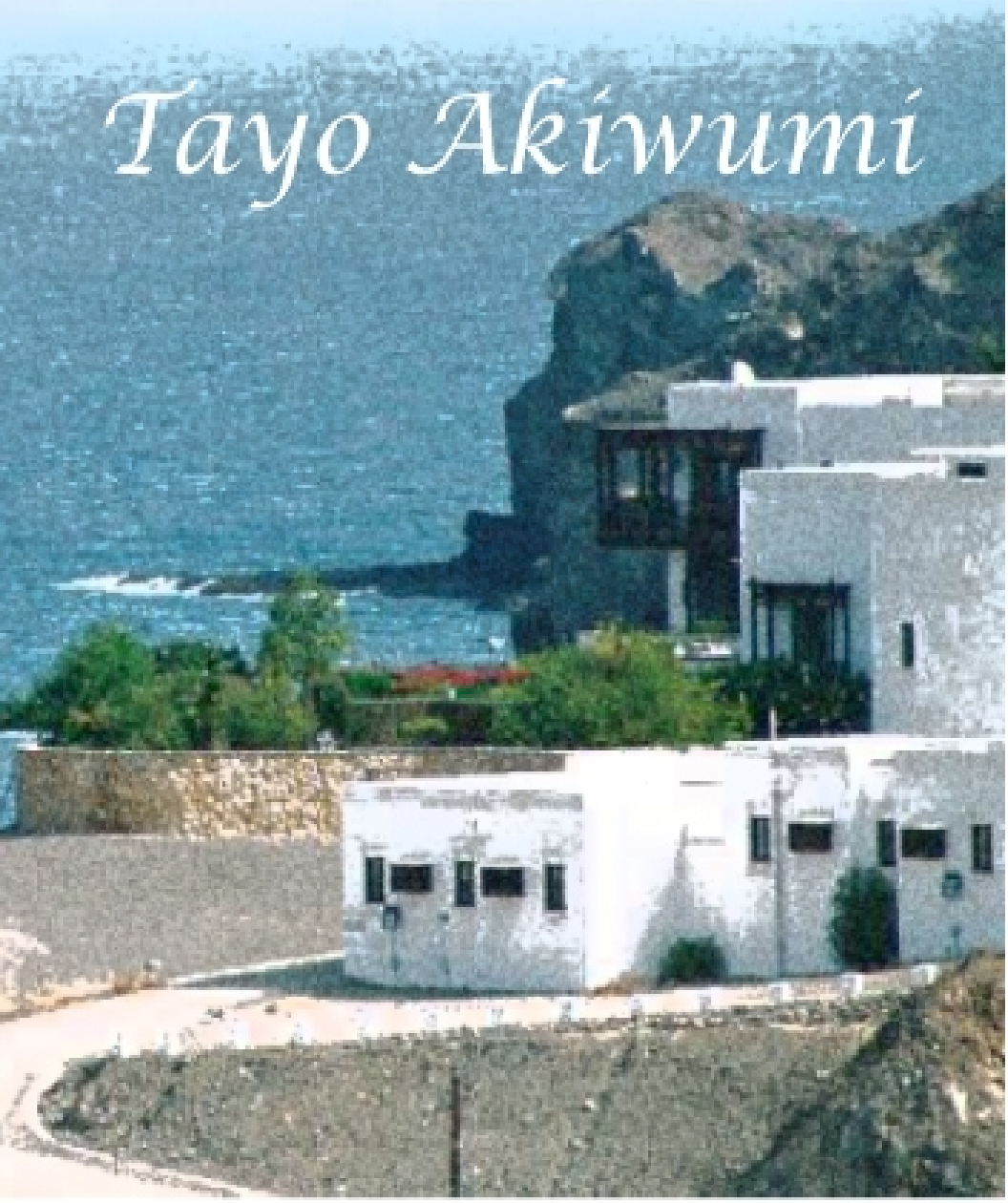


Carlene

A Love Story

Tayo Akiwumi



About the author

An international marketer by profession, Tayo Akiwumi has a particular love for Far-East Asia and has spent many years traveling in that region. Raised in London, England he has since traveled to over 40 countries across the globe and has lived in Africa, Europe, Middle-East and Asia including Dubai and Bangkok.

'Carlene - A Love Story' is Tayo Akiwumi's first novel.

Carlene Homepage
<http://carlene.akiwumi.net/>

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For my father (R.I.P.), and mother, Bolaji and Yemisi Akiwumi, for their sacrifices, love and firm guidance.

For the rest of my family: for their constant love.

Deep thanks to friends and colleagues like Sonoyo, Jiang Yan and Kayleigh Chung who spent many hours helping to comb through 'Carlene' and giving feedback that helped shape a better novel.

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It was Sunday and time for me to return to Chelmsford where I was doing my apprenticeship and part-time study. I usually came home to London every other weekend, when I could afford it. I was 19 and had won a technical apprenticeship position with Marconi Communications Systems, with my father and mother's encouragement. I left school and went to live away from home for the first time. I was fairly self-supporting from that point but of course, mum and dad were always there for when my bank account nudged red.

Marconi owned Chelmsford. It was said that when the workers went home; the town of Chelmsford shut down.

The bus ride to Liverpool Street railway station was uneventful and as per normal. The buzz and busyness surrounded me as I entered the station, starkly contrasting the dull bus trip.

I stopped at a kiosk to get snacks for the fifty minutes train journey. On the way to my train's platform, two Far-East Asian girls standing to one side of the platform gate drew my attention.

They were perhaps 2-3 years older than me, at a guess. The slim, prettier one crossed eyes with me momentarily as I walked past, close by.

I boarded the train and walked along its side corridors, looking for an empty cabin. The train did not seem so full in fact and I was spoilt for choice. I selected one in the carriage before the canteen

carriage. I made sure I would be in a carriage which did not get left behind when the train shed some carriages several stations prior to arriving at Chelmsford.

I entered, closed the sliding door dumped my sports bag and guitar on the seat opposite and settled myself into my 'private' cabin.

It was a beautiful spring day and I was relaxed and content with life, not a care in the world and looking forward to the journey back.

I usually preferred to take the train leaving just after 1:30 in the afternoon as it gave me time to settle back into semi-rural life in Chelmsford. I was happy to be returning yet I also looked forward to going home to London whenever the time came.

I had many friends back at the dormitory in Chelmsford, the first 'animal house' I lived in. In fact the whole mansion had been rented by Marconi to house its apprentices and other staff. We always have a lot of fun mixed with rivalry of course. It was a new home offering new experiences and friendships along with challenges academically and socially.

Back home in London, I had my friends from school days whom I saw often when I did go home for weekends. We would play tennis, one of my favourite sports, watch a film, or just lark around town.

There were of course, my two brothers and sister. Two years after I arrived in England, my brother Tunji and sister Demi were also sent for by our parents and journeyed together to England. Demi was 8 years old, even younger than I when I first traveled on a plane. There was approximately 2 years difference between our ages so we were pretty close. Shortly after Tunji and Demi joined me and Deji, our cousin Dotun, who grew up with us at granny's house also left Nigeria, to be with his mother who lived in Scotland at the time.

Normal, sibling rivalry aside, we got on very well and spent a lot of time together and with our friends.

The noise of people walking past the cabin door and along the corridor outside stemmed my daydreaming. Dragging bulky luggage, they bumped into the door which rattled back in protest. I watched them march past my private haven, hoping I will be left alone to continue my reflection during the trip.

I glanced at my watch, wondering if the train was going to leave late as it tends to. Less than five minutes to the scheduled departure time. I stared out of the window across the platforms watching other trains come and go and tried to track the mesmerizing flow of legs striding on the platforms.

I turned as the slide door was disturbed again, this time it was opened. I instantly recognized the pretty girl at the platform gate. She stood behind her slightly plump companion who was not carrying luggage.

“Would you mind if my cousin sits with you, she’s still new to the country? She’s on her way to White Notley, are you going that far?” The plump girl spoke in a typical but educated London accent. The other girl smiled as her cousin, gave her a reproachful side glance laced with embarrassment.

“Yes, yes of course”, I replied, stunned at lady Luck’s gift to me. “I’m getting off at Chelmsford, three stops before White Notley”

“Fantastic!” she beamed. “Alright then, call me when you get there won’t you?” she said, turning to her delicious cousin and stepping aside to let her into the cabin. I hurriedly pulled my luggage to the seat next to me, making room for her to sit opposite me. She kissed her cousin on the cheek and they hugged. Her cousin smiled an appreciative smile and I returned the smile, even more appreciatively. “Thank you, thank you!” I telepathized with her.

I watched her arrange her luggage and sit down in the opposite seat. Somehow, I sensed this train journey was taking both of us to a destination neither had planned.

We smiled at each other as the train obeyed the departure

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