

METAMORPHOSIS

A SHORT STORY COLLECTION



FESTUS OBEHI DESTINY

I want to Thank my Mom for the Edo names and languages that I used in this project, and my Dad for the history lessons that inspired Metamorphosis. Juliet, Jane and David, Thank you for the Interview about life in the University of Benin. To all those who support me in their own unique ways, Thank you.

Of course we knew all that but the world was changing and we must change along with it. One's feet must learn the dance of the world to survive. Change is needed. Change is necessary. Change is important. Isn't that the whole point of metamorphosis?.

Festus Obehi Destiny. Metamorphosis.

1897.

11th May 2020.

In the age when time was still buried in the womb of memory, when myth sprout grass that reality laid upon. The time when the earth was flat and the kings of the skies would sit and observe the earth float towards oblivion. It was a time before time itself and spirits roamed the galaxy in different forms and walked backwards. The world began when the Kings of the skies separated day from night and threw a rope into the well of damnation for the earth to save itself. History notes that the Kings of the skies were black beings. They wore no shades and their true majesty was in the divinity of their nakedness. The women had long hair that curled at their toe nails. The men were dandy and had long white beards that highlighted their black hair. They created seas and hills, animals and fowls, abstractions and concepts, rivers and deserts, sands and dust, air and death, light and darkness, sun and the moon. They spat out stars to keep the moon company at night and they let tears fall from their eyes to allow the earth receive rain. They sparked thunderbolts, flood and famine when they spoke in anger. And when their lust overcame them, allowing their lushed bodies cringed to their touch, the universe burned in reflection of their heightened intensity. Their brows would break as they climaxed. They would fly on their toes as their waist curved to release their spawns. Time saved these spawns from being destroyed and they grew up in different parts of the world. Wherever they landed, they grew and owned. They all had names that lived even after their death. Amadioha, sango, Moremi, Amina, oya, Ogiso, Oduduwa, and Bayajida were all children of the skies. In death, they were revered, in life, they were feared. Being children of the skies, they were all powerful. It was said that some walked on water and some traveled through different dimensions and moved easily through astral projections. They created men and beings as they chose and became the gods that men could see. This was the time that the Black men ruled existence. The children of men created altars for the children of the skies. The children of the skies ruled vast acres that eyes and thoughts couldn't cover. Men who walked to find the depth of their kingdoms lost their legs. The children of the skies commanded the tears of their creators to fall endlessly and they made the sun stand in one place. In their anger, the day ceased and the nights got pregnant and gave birth to more nights. They owned slaves and fame, lives and deaths, success and regret, love and hate, sand, blood and dust. Wars were rare in their time but when it happened, they returned wrapped in mountains of human heads. People who sought for their faces took days climbing these heads. When the children of the skies had lived to their full, they joined the Skies and became Rulers of the skies themselves. They were superior to death. Their kingdoms grew in strength and beauty. The children of the skies made love with the children of the world as their parents before them did. This act made them give birth to children. Hence, when they left, their children reigned in their stead. The people allowed this because there was nothing more sacred than the divine legitimacy bestowed than when gods ruled men. In the age when time was precious in the womb of memory, this was the legacy that black men lived and died to and although they were not written, the stories passed from mouth to ears and from one generation to the next.

When the White men came to the Black continent in birds and boats, they were amazed at the way the children of men had grown in the wisdom that the children of the skies had left behind. There was a particular empire that shared supreme greatness that the white men coveted most. A city whose nights were shielded by the burning lamplights that burned in the verandah and rooftops of the city. A city whose streets wore ivory and golden tusks. The beauty of the city sent lust to the desires of the white man and he wanted the city to satisfy his greed. A city whose history took a leap in time in 1987. When the British came to Benin, their lens kept shuttering and their lips broke its hinges and lost the ability to close. They had heard of a continent where the men slept naked and the women slept with monkeys. They did not see traces of blood and the skeletons of human heads on the streets. Instead, they saw red earth that glistened from the shadows of the skies. The fragrance of natural delicacies and sweat made their nose twitch. Their eyes were disappointed with the art the people possessed. They not only owned them, but wore them. The men had coral beads that rested on their succulent flesh and bracelets that sat on their protruded belly. The women wore beads around their locks, and rings that swallowed their ears. Their brown skin, colors of simple perfection. It was said that Benin had a night that glowed. The streets shone as if the earth was made from glowing diamonds. The silver that the chiefs wore woke up at night and made their hut look like a glowing cave. Each household owned a bamboo stick placed in front of their homes. A simple contraption that housed a lamp with fire that burned deep into the day. It was beautiful. With time, more foreigners came to see the black wonders of the world. These foreigners were poisoned with the delusion of superiority. They defined their upper hand because of the skin they wore and decided to rewrite our history so that the rest of their world would not stumble from the truth of the perfection of the black world. Where they saw beauty, they reported barbaric. Where diversity was accommodated, they called Paganism. When they saw the beautiful mothers that walked only with their glowing tribal tattoos, they called it indecency. They marveled when the people showed them the tricks that the children of the skies had taught them. The people of Benin walked on fire, healed broken bones and turned invisible. The white men called it devilish tricks. A practice from a demon that their own fathers had told them of. Benin grew in trade and beauty, the same way the children of the skies had ruled their empire. The white men practice grew from trade and then to humans. They fascinated Benin with their silver tongue and tried to teach the children their own ways. The western ways. But it was all about culture. It was the culture they feared. They knew that a people bounded by a culture they believed in could not be broken. It was like trying to cut water with a knife. Hence, they tried to introduce their philosophies and religion. They tried to poison the roots of our culture by preaching a code of morality that did not apply to them. They tried to combat truth with fear and lies. They saw the city that never fell to darkness and wanted to submit to their greed by owning the empire. They desecrated the altars of the children of the skies with their words and preached Exodus 20; 4 where their own Maker had preached against other gods. But Exodus 20; 17 didn't apply to the white men for they believed that it was their own divine right to own it all. Their ploy failed. The people of Benin told them blankly to leave the discussion open for trade talks only. 'Before you came, we had our own messiahs. They have

not forsaken us yet. Where was your god when Ogiso ruled the deserts and the seas? When he walked on water and commanded all beings to obey him? *Okpia ni wo?* Where was your god? We will not jump our boat when we know that the ways of the world cannot sink it.' They said. Years later, more men came, tried and failed again.

The white man's greed grew. He dreamt of guns and bringing war to the doorstep of the people of Benin. He wanted to sack the huts with neatly knotted palm fronds and use magic fire to burn the farms and villages. He wanted to spit on the sanctity and sacredness of the shrines. He wanted to rip the pages of the Benin history and desecrate our deities with his foreign tongue. With his gun pointed to Benin, he wanted to force his steps into the black history books. He dreamt of placing black men in mental and metal cuffs, sailing them through the Atlantic and compelling them to a life of servitude. He saw them tilling plantations and placing the fruit of their labor on the white man's table. He wanted to fill their tummies with leftovers and make sure they ate their own black children in harsh winters. He wanted to fulfill his dream in the same year he had it. 1897.

History recalls the event in 1897 as the dance of fire. The white man came in birds and boats with guns and gadgets whose only aim was death and destruction. They drafted plans on papers and sought the ways of their own fathers to take over the kingdom that the children of the sky had left behind. They sent two messengers to the Oba Ovonramwen of Benin, a son of the sky, asking him to surrender and submit to the order of the white force or face being deposed as the Oba of Benin. The messengers sang as they advanced to Benin, they walked haughtily to the palace, surveying the golden street that they would own and use as they wish. Before dusk, one of them returned to the camp holding a big box. Some soldiers had seen him dragging his feet and crying inaudibly. It wasn't until they got closer that they saw that his tongue had been cut off. With the aid of ink and paper, he told them that the Iyase, Prime minister of the Benin Empire had cut off his tongue after he had called Ovonramwen 'An effing Monkey'. A divine sacrilege. He was only spared so that he would live a fate worse than death. The colonel in charge promised to get a piece of Iyase if they met in the battle front. They buried the box without opening the severed body of the other messenger.

The next day, the day of the dance of fire, the white men advanced towards Benin. They met the warriors of Igodomigodo on the bush path. They rubbed coal on their faces and their feet were painted with mud. They sang and danced as the white men advanced. Somewhere distant, a drum was beating but the people could hear it as if it was close. It was a drum of war. When the white men had almost reached the warriors, they were surprised when a batch of invisible men appeared behind them. The white men took aim. Guns cocked but bullets were too scared to leave their cartridge. They heard footsteps and saw foottraces running but saw no one. Bodies that ran but were not seen. They heard voices and searched frantically for the beings that sang so ghastly. The forest breathed life and roared. Sands turned to glass and the sun stood in one direction. The white men were surrounded by voices but they felt alone in this war. They called

on their gods but their answers were not louder than the songs that the people of Benin sang. After what seemed like a long time, A priest walked up to the soldiers of the white men and pointed at an empty path behind them. '*Akian a ye ware*. Leave and never return'. Whether they were surprised with the orchestration that had displayed before them or fear had scared vigor out of their legs, they stood. Fear in their eyes and their faces buried in tears, they stood. It was the dry season but the chill of fear they felt left their fingers trembling and their lips chattering. The priest, known as Igueben, was one of the great grandchildren of the children of the skies and he had immense power. He let out a laugh that was echoed by the warriors of Igodomigodo that stood behind him. Then he spat and pointed at two white men. Immediately, they let out a deep piercing scream and turned into dust. He did this to three other white men as they all fled in different directions. As they ran, they heard the drums more clearly and their lips erupted into an uncontrollable flame of fire. Igueben had thrown a grenade of fear and curiosity in their mind and it had exploded and left behind shrapnel of trauma and regret. The kings of the skies watched as the white man ran and the people of Benin danced and ran with invisible bodies. The Kings of the skies celebrated and drank palm wine. When the wine left behind foam in the side of their mouth, they wiped it off and it caused a drizzle in the land. The people of Benin saw this as a sign of the gods celebrating with them and extended the celebration of the dance of fire for a month. As they celebrated on earth, the king and children of the skies celebrated, made love and shared nostalgia about a lonely age when time was still buried in the womb of memory and they alone, ruled the universe.

A slice of Happiness.

13th May 2020.

The women that I met in my line of work all had similar stories. They were either victims of rape at a very young unimaginable age, or their step fathers sexually molested them. The most common finger that pushed them into the ring of prostitution was poverty. Whenever I saw someone vomiting the bitter pill of their past that they had swallowed a long time ago, I had no choice but to stick my finger of shame deep into my throat and vomit my own lies of my own past. Many times I created different histories that never existed that it became difficult keeping up with the truth that never existed in the first place. Reliving memories I hadn't lived and shedding tears about a past I haven't visited yet. I did not have a temperamental dad who tore at my skirt when I turned thirteen and a mother who plugged pretense deep into her earlobes and chose ignorance over concern. I didn't grow up around cousins who took me to the bathroom to show me invisible lizard eggs and ask me to touch the extended finger between their legs. I grew up around dining tables with foods piled from the center to the edges, under painted ceilings, in a two storey building in the town of Ewohinmi, Edo state. At a young age, I knew desire. It drove me, sustained my imagination, and kept me company as I dreamt my way through the thrust of ecstasy. I started touching myself in places I didn't know exist when I turned fifteen. Our house had short walls and tall palm trees. During the rainy season, strong winds made the leaves beat themselves into a frenzy till it created a non-rhythmic sound. My mom always said the plants were living beings and they were simply paying homage to the rain. I often wondered if they heard me as I danced to their voices while my fingers kept digging in and out of me as I spiraled in and out of consciousness, keeping my breath galloping ahead of my imagination towards climax. Whenever my parents were in a business meeting, I would switch on the black and white TV set and watch the American music videos. The ones with half dressed women swinging delicate waists, bopping their heads and dancing seductively around other women. I preferred this to when they danced with men. The former to me felt so natural and in my naïve mind, I didn't imagine that society frowned at my fancies. I became an addict in my fantasies and soon the sound of running waters and the sight of Vaseline lotion made me uneasy. It was like a vampire's lust and disdain for blood.

I had defiled my mind and defined my lust a long time before a boy touched my body. The older I grew, the more conscious I became aware of my choices. In my thoughts, I was scared of being different, being a lesbian. When I was still in secondary school, the headmistress had caught two girls in the school bathroom. After giving them forty strokes on their buttocks in the assembly hall for doing 'Ungodly act' to each other, she expelled them. A week later, some hoodlums caught a gathering of men in Benin City who were masquerading a church for a secret hide out for homosexuals. They were caught, tied and burnt alive. The church was razed down under fire and spit. No one investigated the matter. Being gay is a crime in Nigeria and death is often the

judgment. And so I grew up with fear and a deep longing for my own sex. One day, the Pastor in our local church who always gave sermons in Ishan language decided to preach on homosexuality. I could tell that my parents were very uncomfortable. They kept glancing at their watches. Soon, they engaged in a whisper of chitchat about family affairs. I listened to the pastor with a running heart and sweaty eyes. I listened to his fears, his judgment and his hate.

“All of them will go to hell. The Bible forbids it. Jesus forbids it. It is a sin. How can a man love another man?” He laughed in disgust. The whole church echoed his disgust.

“Women can also love women too” I whispered inaudibly so that my mother would not hear me and hand me over to the pastor to throw me into the lake of fire.

‘*Osenobua e gua ne be dia rio.* God forbids it.’ The pastor added after the uproar had subsided. He broke into a song, which the choir picked up and the congregation echoed.

‘*Ekpokpo suwa onwha ghi ime re. uwa no si Ose. Oyi mhen ni re. Uwa no si Ose*’.

With the image of my body drowning in the lake of eternal fire, I thrust my body into the arms of my first boyfriend in SS3. I didn’t love him but he worshipped me and that was enough. To me, it was an experiment of self. And so I removed modesty from the attires I wore to his house and he wrapped his lust below my waist. It was futile. I had poured water on a basket. While he moaned and vibrated, I stood staring at the ceilings and counted the cobwebs at the edges of the room. I felt more when I was alone in the bathroom. After three more trials, I broke away and let myself free.

I became a prostitute at twenty. When I started, I realized that I was the oldest on the block. Everyone else had found their sexual potentials at sixteen and less. Perhaps I wouldn’t have ran from Ewohinmi to a dingy apartment with Adesua and five ladies in Upper Sakponba road if my mom hadn’t found me and a lady kissing ferociously in my room. Her name was peace. I had met her a few times in Agbado market in Egwa. I knew she was different like me when she smiled at me and held me longer whenever we exchanged hugs. A few times after hugging peace, I visited her shop one evening. When she tried to pull away after a short hug, I held her longer and planted my lips on hers. She drew back and cocked her head. I feared that I had misread platonic for intimacy. I stuttered and thought of a lie to cover my tracks till she smiled and said.

‘You are bold o. what if someone had seen you?’

‘Oh. I wasn’t thinking.’

‘It is all right. How did you know?’

‘I don’t know. I just like it when you hug me and I felt...’ words failed me,’

‘We should meet at my house this weekend. My mother will not be around’

‘Okay’

‘Okay’

She wrote her address on a piece of paper. When I stretched out my hand to take it from her, she pulled me deep into her dark stall and kissed me. That was how my first relationship began. Peace and I rocked each other’s world. The comfort and temporary peace we enjoyed when we were together was the only time we were invisible to society’s judgment. We created a world of secrecy and ecstasy around each other. A world that burnt out of existence when my mother caught us in my room. Judgment was put on hold till my father came back from work. My mom told him the full picture. She added colors and exaggeration while I knelt down between them. My dad flogged me with the metallic head of his hard leather belt till my two eyes bloated out and I felt a rib in my thighs.

‘We should take her for Deliverance service. Pastor Erhomose is very powerful. He will exorcise the demon’ Mom said

‘I would rather have a prostitute for a daughter than a lesbian. This is your fault’ he turned to my mom.

They left me in my bruises and headed to the sitting room to explode in a full blown tussle of blames and choices. That night, I packed clothes into a travelling bag, stole money from my dad’s room and ran away.

I share a studio apartment with six women. Women who are young in age but old in bondage and lust. We stayed in Egbe Street in Upper Sakponba. Upper Sakponba road is the city of vices. Some would say it is the most populated area in Benin. It is a home for confra men and prostitutes. It is a normal sight to see buildings with churches and beer parlors in them. After a hot morning of listening to God’s word, people chilled their heads in the gallons of palmwine sold in the beer parlour. It was a sight to see young girls and protruding stomach. Most of our customers were yahoo boys and married men. Girls who couldn’t get into secondary school either learnt trade or spread their legs to climb the ladders that society had constructed for them. The city came alive at night. Prostitutes who stood at the edge of the road to attract the center of men’s attraction caused traffic congestion and the beer parlour allowed us to use their shops for finding customers. They made money from this. The nights were short and dull and the day was loud. We always shared our stories or sometimes if the room wasn’t too hot, we talked about our history. I was closest with Adeusa. She was the one who had found me, brought me to the apartment and let me heal for a month before she made me start trading pleasures for money. Adesua was the only one that knew I was a lesbian. I had told her everything when she found me.

One day, Ofure, one of the girls was narrating her experience about one of her customer Dr. Osaro. We all knew him. He was a quack who sold pregnancy pills and also performed clean abortions. He had tried to rape Ofure after giving her three bottles of Gulder. Ofure dramatically recounted how she insulted him and beat him up. Among us all, life had been toughest on her. Ofure had grown up with seven sisters and a prostitute mother in a one room apartment. Whenever any of her mother's lover came around, they all went outside and sat on the verandah. Some days when their mother forgot herself and moaned loudly, they sang so their voices would drown their shame. When Ofure turned fourteen, four of her sisters got pregnant at the same time. One of them said her pregnancy was of the holyspirit. She claimed that she was still a virgin. The girl's name was Magdalene.

After Ofure had finished her escapade, Ebosata began hers. Her voice was so tiny and she sang like a squeaking pipe.

'Babes, One *Ozwo* yesterday give me ten grand and he no do anything'

'Talk true' Omonigho, the youngest among us leaned in. I could see the vein stretching out her eye lid as she struggled to get the description of the man from Ebosata.

'And God go dy bring useless doctors come my side' Ofure hissed.

'Where you meet am?' The seventeen year old Omonigho asked again. She had been bombarding Ebosata with questions since she began leaving no space for her to answer.

'Na yesterday o. you know sey I package wella and I wear confirm make up as per we dy Easter. We gat to celebrate Jesus Christ. Na so this pure nigger reach my whisper sey he can be friend. Na so I charge five k for friendship so that he go run comot. Guy man bring out ten k. I chuck money inside bobby follow am'

'Imagine sey person use you do blood nko. You know sabi sey na so they dy use people do blood money?' I couldn't tell if Adesua's concern was sarcastic or genuine. She didn't like Ebosata.

'Or perhaps he was gay' I said.

'Na talk be that?' Ofure hissed. Slowly, the conversations dried up and the girls went back to their single space for reflections.

Later Adesua reprimanded me for bringing up any mention of gay in our discussions.

'It makes people suspicious' she said.

'How?'

'Just be careful.'

'I am.'

Be happy and content with here.'

'I really wish I could. I want to live in a world where I will be accepted as a lesbian and not a prostitute'

'You cannot'

'Why?'

'Because of the same reason you left home''.

Before Adesua could apologize, I had already run into the bathroom to cry my eyes out. I thought about Peace, my mom and the metallic head of my dad's belt and cried louder. Adesua kept knocking on the door. 'I am sorry Osas. I am sorry.' I opened the door and let her wrap her arms around my wet face. I slept in her bosom. When night came, we didn't transform into the women we were, instead we held eachother's arms and slept again.

I found a slice of happiness the day a car pulled up at me. It was almost midnight and I was standing at my favorite junction in Ogba Street when a woman in her twenties called me from the other end in the street.

'You are very pretty'. She said as I reached the car. There was a man sitting beside her with earplugs in his ears.

'Thank you'. I wanted to tell her how her golden locks made her look like a goddess. But prostitutes didn't give complements until after payment.

'What is your name?'

'Osas''

'Oh. Are you part of them' she pointed at the group of girls behind us.

'Yes'

'Good. How much for a night?'

She drove an expensive car. So, I gave an expensive price. Adesua would be proud when I tell her of this escapade. I imagined Omonigho tearing my attention to get the full details as Ebosata leer in jealousy.

'Thirty thousand'

'That's good. I will pay'.

She looked behind me again and stared ahead

‘Is he always this shy?’ I pointed to the man on the wheels.

She laughed out and spoke slowly without fear. ‘Darling, the service is for me. You see, I enjoy a different world of pleasure. So are you in?’

It felt like a trap. I looked behind if a police van was waiting for me the trap to hook me before coming. I looked behind and checked if a group of mean faced men were running towards us with fire and tires. I looked ahead if my mom and her pastor were coming with a chain to tie me and throw me into the lake of fire. I could smell the metallic head of my father’s belt. I bit my tongue to make sure it wasn’t a dream. The pain made me regret the action. The woman mistook my joy for doubt and added.

‘I will pay you double if you want’

‘No. it is fine.’

I threw myself into the back seat. The car drove a few minute before she told the driver to stop. She joined me in the back seat.

Her hands were stroking my laps and I felt a sensation that I had thought was lost a long time ago. A time when the rainy season made the palm fronds behind my window beat against themselves and made me imagine an ecstasy that only my fingers provided.

‘I think I am going to like you pretty’ she said.

I buried my lips in hers and added. ‘Me too’.

Hall Two.

(For Juliet, whose anecdote designed these empty pages with her words).

May 15th, 2020.

Saturdays were for reflection. The six bunk room became more spacious when some of the roommates left for the weekend, especially the squatters. They bore their discomfort until the weekend. In the third series in Queen Idia hostel was a six man room where ten girls resided. The room had three springy bunks. The last one was broken and the two bonafide had to put their foams on the floor. They ended up sleeping with their heads close to where meals were prepared and woke up with bed sheets that had been blackened from dirt and coal from kerosene stove. Of course, there was a kitchen but no one risked cooking in the dirty lands of Queen Idia's cuisine. One had to stay with the food at all times to avoid theft or sometimes the full disappearance of the whole stove and pots itself. The mattress used had slim foams and the loose springs made the bunks jumpy. It never seemed to fall no matter the weight it bore. Today, the room was half empty. Odegua, a bonafide in the room with three squatters had gone home to help her mummy in her restaurant at the busy ring road market. Fidelia had gone to visit her boyfriend Orukpe in Upper uwa. Her cousin Akhere was the only squatter around. Today, Akhere was taking a risk by cooking in the kitchen. She had tried it twice this week and she was successful in her quest. The first time she had attempted it, a roommate had objected to her cooking at night because of the heat it would generate and the stains on the bed sheets that were beginning to leave permanent marks. Frustrated, she had plunged herself into the kitchen, defying fear and odds. She came out successful. After a week of buying handouts, listening to boring lectures and copying assignments from hidden websites, the girls took their Saturdays for enjoyment. If there was no weekend party, home emergencies or night class preparations, they had Saturdays like this, free for discussion. They called it the weekends of gists.

Gists. The girls loved gists and their subjects danced sporadically from school stress, to sex, abortions, parties, examinations, boys, experience and family issues. There was always a shared experience or a contrasting opinion between them that sweetened the argument and made them oblivious to the passage of time. On some occasions, bonds had developed between some of them based on the intensity of the discussion shared. To them, these gists were life. It was the spice that turned boredom to delicious memories. In the discussion that brewed between them, they build bridges between their thoughts. Whenever one spoke, she made sure she provided a transparent window so that the others could peer and see the honesty in her words. On Saturdays like this, when they had riveting conversation that kept their tongues out of their lips hours after silence reigned, they threw themselves into a dark tunnel without light except rocks of gists that they could lean on.

Today, Akhere, Osas, Grace and Oseme were the only ones in the room. Lastweek, Akhere had almost been raped by some boys in Ekosodin, a space of houses and hostels in streets that were

situated at the backgate of Uniben. Ekosodin had been a home of confra-guys and the likes in the past and represented a dangerous territory. Before Akhere almost got raped, she was always the author of Ekosodin gists. Being the ninth and last child of her parents, here eight elder siblings had all gone to Uniben. They deposited in her memory mountains of Ekosodin stories and myths and she came to Uniben with that knowledge. Akhere had the current affairs of cult tussle that had rocked Uniben soil. She knew the exact details of the ghost stories, the execution of the final year medical student that had tried to escape from initiation, the juju incidents at the university guest house, the date of the birthday party that turned into a blood bath, the cult fights and the war of 2012, the deaths of Capones and the innocents. The fragile hearts among them found it difficult to urinate after Akhere's stories and many times, they had nightmares based on the pictures she painted for them.

The sun was throwing fire and fury and the east series of the hostel suffered the wrath the most. Osas, whose bed was closest to the window rolled away to the bed under her which had been untouched and cool since the owner had left earlier in the day. A girl was walking the corridor with nothing on except panties. Her firm breast rested on her chest as she sought for water to quench her heat. The veil of patience that the girls had put on in preparation for the gist was beginning to lose its color. Osas was the first to break the silence.

'How many food Akhere dy cook for kitchen sef? Based on one or two, I suppose go mail letter to my mama for toilet but I no wan enter room when una dy do closing prayer for the matter'

'Calm down. You sabi sey na weekend. She fit wan cook for today, tomorrow and warming for Monday' Grace said without turning away from the book she was pretending to read.

'E fit be that her owu kerosene stove wey she no wan change o' Osas snickered. The bed she had moved to was cool and comfortable. She removed her brassier so that the breeze that was sneaking into the room could touch more parts of her body. There, she lay naked and stared at the ceilings imagining the twist of Akhere's gists and counting the fading strokes on the ceilings.

'Abeg you get small change make we arrange Nadia bread so that we go use am marry Akhere's beans?' Grace asked. Osas hissed and turned her head to the fading cream and peeling brown walls of the hostel. She also wanted to bury her teeth in the delicious aroma of Nadia bakery bread and massaged herself with the beans Akhere was preparing. But like Grace, she was on a budget.

Just then, Oseme walked in with a small paint rubber that she used in defecating. The hostel toilet was rarely neat and most of the girls, scared of infections defecated in plastic bowl. Some used polythene nylons and threw them out the window. This was called shotput. People who passed by hall two at night were very careful so as to avoid shotput nylons thrown at them.

In the past, Osas and Oseme had had arguments on where she kept her plastic bowl. She was the only one that kept hers inside the room even after the roommated had complained that the sight

disgusted them. And today, Oseme had inadvertently put the bowl beside Osas's bag. Their beds were close to each other. A deep furrow appeared on the forehead of Osas's head in lines of anger as she dashed invectives at Oseme.

'Dirty fool. Sebi I don tell you make you no dy stain my bag with your rubbish'

'Abeg rest' Oseme waved at her nonchalantly and this infuriated Osas the more. She was about to burst into a long round of curses when Akhere walked in.

'Did you guys begin without me?' she sat and used a dirty cloth on her bed to wipe her hands. She smelled of crayfish and Maggi spice. Oseme hissed and walked out.

'Should we wait for her?' Grace asked

'Abeg abeg continue. She go watch highlight. She no wan hear gist before sef' Osas said

'Oya. Mastercraft do your thing'.

Akhere laughed at the name that Grace had designed for her because of her story telling gists.

'I am sorry I came late. I was having trouble fixing the owu in the kerosene stove. I will need to get an electric stove before the semester ends'.

Grace and Osas exchanged looks and Akhere understood that they had made fun of her kerosene stove in her absence.

Osas moved back to her bed since the sun had retracted its burning hands. She wanted to get a full view of Akhere's mouth. Grace kept the book she had been pretending to read. She concluded that she would pay for exam malpractice later. 'Book wey no enter head go enter exam hall'.

'So, last week sha. I went to a friend's birthday bash in BDPA. It was very loud. Popular guys and babes in campus were present. You should have seen different drinks and foods. I think they put something in the drink and cake because I noticed I was getting tipsy. Everyone in the party was behaving weird. I was supposed to leave by seven sha but I completely lost track of time. You know I was having fun sha. When it was nine, the guy I went with suggested we leave. So, I checked the time sha and I realized that it was very late. I wanted to come straight to the hostel but he begged me to accompany him to his home in Ekosodin, Newton Street'

Akhere stopped briefly so the girls could digest the little piece of the puzzle she had given them. The girls knew how dangerous Newton Street was. At night, boys would pretend to be vigilante and hold electric torch and rob people of their phones. Osas's friend, Jane had lost her phone in this manner. The boys had asked her to pay a sum of two thousand naira before they would release her phones. When she came back an hour later with two thousand naira and a face whose eyes were covered with sweat, the boys had left. Boys who were found empty handed were

beaten to a pulp. Girls suffered rape sometimes or mild sexual harassment. It depended mostly on the generosity of the night guard they met. No one noticed that Oseme was at the door, fondling with the broken door knobs.

‘So, when we got to Newton street sha. He was behaving really weird. He asked me where my faculty was, I told him that I was a student of English and literature in the faculty of art. He said that it was a shock that we hadn’t met. When I asked him what he was studying, he said he was a student of management science. He said his faculty was close to art sef. Na there my ears pick up sey this guy na fraud. The guy was trying to knock me for road sef. I just dy scope am sey I dy on my period. It was almost eleven when we almost reached his home. I saw two guys forcing one girl like this in front of the house. One was holding her and one was pushing her into an apartment. That was when I ran away. I ran and ran. Even when my phone and begs fell down, I didn’t stop to pick it, I kept on running. Na so I run comot for Ekosodin enter campus o. Na God deliver me’.

‘I pity the girl they were raping. Did you see her face? You for try help am?’ Grace said

‘Miss Samaritan. What if she had tried to be a superhero and got raped herself?’ Osas chipped.

Akhere was preparing to go into the kitchen to check up on her food when Grace threw her one last question.

‘The girl. Did you see her face?’

‘No. I was too busy saving my life to notice anything’.

Akhere walked quickly and she didn’t notice Oseme beside the door. Oseme waited for some minutes before going downstairs to wash her hands and face at the only tap that was working. For the first time that week, she smiled going downstairs and laughed as she washed her face. She was happy that her secret was safe. Akhere hadn’t seen her but she had seen Akhere. Not today, but a week ago when the boys had dragged her defiant body into the room and taken turns raping her. She didn’t struggle. One of them had pointed a pistol at Akhere’s head. The same way they had done to Oseme. They had just finished having fun with Oseme when they pounced on Akhere. The girls were blindfolded and they were ordered not to make a sound. The room was covered in darkness save for one of the boys who held an android phone whose torch he had switched on. After they had had their fill, one of the boys spat at Akhere and laughed with the remaining two. They took her phone and her bag and left her there, crying, she didn’t notice when Oseme stealthily loosened her blindfolds and walked out the door. Oseme had listened to Akhere recreate her past, fearful that she had noticed her amidst her silence. Perhaps if she had cried, her presence would have been discovered. Oseme walked back into the room. Grace had picked up the book again and Osas was looking for a bed that the sun had not touched. Someone was playing Johnny drille’s Count on you with a loud Bluetooth speaker in the next room and

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