

**THE**  
**SPARK**  
**IN MY QUIET WORLD**

OLUWASEGUN **FEMI FRAGILE**

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## Dedication

To my father, Oluwasegun Ogungbemi. Your departure illuminated my mental capability. Even in death, you remain the best.

## Acknowledgment

I am thankful to God, my truest source of inspiration, without whom none of this would have been possible. I love you mum.

Thanks for the prayers and love. Thank you OBF – One Big Family, for always believing in me. You guys rock!

Niyi Adekanmbi, thank you for the unrelenting efforts. It was a major catalyst to the success of this eBook. This was made better by my two best critics, Fowe Adetoye and Patrick Jennifer. Thank you for never sparing the rod.

To my creative team of graphic designers, Capeworx, you guys are the best.

Tope Olofin, you are a timely inspiration. I am glad I know you.

To the readers of [www.femifragile.com](http://www.femifragile.com), this is your first reward of many to come. Thanks for the loyalty. Dear Nifemi Adeniyi, thank you for helping me realize the need to aim higher while staying focused. You are a blessing.

## The Team

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# Chapter One

I was seated in the back, between Kelvin and Chucks. Tayo shared the front row with George, and that made me an easy target. That's right, at some point during the journey, I became the topic of discussion and I almost hated myself. It was briefly after we made a detour to fill our tank...the car that is, and rehydrate ourselves; the sun was killing. I was so glad we were traveling within a convoy; I still can't imagine what my life would have felt like if we had opted for a ride on the Coaster bus as originally planned. Perhaps, my relationship life would have been X-rayed in several shades of unconstructive criticism.

My name is Victor and alcohol is my girlfriend. I know it doesn't sound like a responsible thing to say, but since I broke up with my ex five years ago I haven't been able to rearrange the puzzle of my life. Don't get me wrong, I like girls; I just wouldn't go out of my way to get their attention. It's not as if I haven't flirted with one or two after the demise of my previous relationship, it just didn't seem like the normal thing to do. I want the real thing but I am so scared to reach out and grab it. I'd rather buy myself a few bottles of beer and melt into moments of immeasurable fantasies; thoughts of a perfect relationship that would lead to a beautiful marriage.

"Vicko, na to find wife for you for this Akure wey we dey go so. It is abnormal for a man of our age to still be single" Kelvin mocked me. Kelvin and I have been friends for years now; we attended the same secondary school and higher institution. He is one of the two people who know every single detail about my relationship life. Him, along with Sauce (another close friend) have been there for me through thick and thin. Fortunately for me, the mockery was bearable because Sauce couldn't make the wedding; he was too busy at work.

However, he left me some instructions coupled with a stern warning.

He said "By the time you return to Ibadan, I want to hear tales of how many girls you conversed with at the wedding. You don't get a girlfriend by keeping to yourself. Meet girls, respect the good ones, smash the bad ones and before you know it there's a girl willing to spend the rest of her life with you. You dey feel me?"

"Yes sir" I replied. I knew agreeing to his demands was the quickest way to get him off my back. Trust my buddies to joke with anything.

As we pulled up to a young lady selling bread and akara, Tayo blurted out "You know say Victor no fit man up yarn and negotiate better deal with this Akara babe"

"Did you see the way that pretty girl was looking at him? Victor couldn't even look at her face. Make I die if this one get babe in five years' time."

I looked at him with disgust, and then Chucks said,

"Don't forget, you are going to see mama before the wedding, abeg give the poor woman someone to talk to. No one is saying you should get married tomorrow, we all understand the situation of things. But trust me, at this age every mother wants to know their son is dating someone. Except of course you are impotent or gay and you are hiding it from us."

That really got to me and I replied in a calm manner, "Chucks, that's enough. I will get a girlfriend." He raised his hands in a bid to surrender and get off my tail, after which he gave me the thumbs up sign. As if to urge me on.

Tayo immediately showed his displeasure by saying, "what is the thumbs up for? He doesn't deserve one until he has made an effort, abeg."

By this time, I had reached my maximum threshold of endurance and was about to yell when the groom came to my rescue.

"Leave Victor alone. He is a grown man and I am certain he has digested every word you've said.

I doubt flogging this issue is going to help his current situation. "

"Thanks, George" I said and inhaled deeply. These dudes almost knocked the wind out of me. I reached out to take a gulp of my glass of vodka, picked up my phone and started scrolling till their voices became a slight hum in the background.

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Kelvin's heavy tap sprung me back to reality, "Oh, we don't reach?" I mumbled as I drifted in from the dream world.

Tayo's immediate response was loaded with enough sarcasm to land him a slap "Uhn Uhn, we are still on the road. Ogbeni come down and let's book our rooms. Let's see if you'll be lucky enough to get laid this weekend."

I guess at this point, all my pent up emotions came rushing in. "Guy free me", I snapped.

Clearly astonished, he moved back and tried to tease me, "Na play now. But seriously, when last did you do it?"

Now, I had had it.

He saw the look on my face and stormed out of the car. He knew I was coming for him.

I pursued him around the hotel premises until we were both exhausted, but I wasn't giving up. As soon as I got close enough to him, I slapped him twice on the head and then burst into laughter.

I think we finally realized how silly we must have looked. Two grown men chasing one another like primary school children. Once that moment passed, we decided to join the rest of the gang at the hotel reception, since they went ahead to book our rooms. The plan was to freshen up and have a drink later at the hotel's bar.

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I was about to make my first order when I remembered that I hadn't called my mum. I dialed her number and smiled when I heard the hello on the other end.

"Mummy, mummy"

Of which she replied "Son, how are you?"

"Good o. I am in Akure. I came for a big brother's wedding."

From my end of the phone I could tell that she was elated. She began to make musical sounds with her mouth, and I imagined her dancing to her own beat.

"Gbeke Gbeke, welcome my husband," Gbeke, the pet name she would always call me is short form for Igbekeoluwa. I have always had a soft spot for my mother and she knew if she wanted to tame the beast in me, all she needed to do is call me Igbekeoluwa – the hope of God. Her next question of course was "When are you coming to see me?"

"I will visit you tomorrow ma"

And before the words came out, I knew she has intent on picking up where my friends stopped, "okay, did you come alone or are you here with your girlfriend?"

I think she heard my frustrated sigh at the other end of the line, so her conclusion was,

"We will discuss that when you come around tomorrow"

We said our goodbyes with our usual name calling ceremony and I ended the call.

I looked at our table and noticed the rest of the gang had almost exhausted their first order. I didn't need to be told, I called out,

"Barman, give me a glass and a bottle of chilled stout."

I was very particular about my looks before our journey to Akure, particularly because my mother doesn't like the "beard gang" movement. I was careful not to remove it but made sure it was neatly trimmed and shiny.

As expected that was the first thing she pointed out when I stepped into her office. You'll be amazed to know that she came to welcome me at the gate. That way, if my beard wasn't looking good enough she would escort me to the nearest barbing salon. She hugged me, chanted my lineage's appraisal, and together we marched to her staff room.

They had just concluded the assembly and so I was the cynosure of all eyes; both the students and her co-teachers. I cannot recount the number of people she introduced me to, but I will never forget the manner in which she conducted the introduction. She would adjust her wrapper and her glasses, then go ahead,

"Mummy/daddy, this is your son. My king, my first son." For every time she said it, I was filled with pride and gratitude. I knew I was doing a great job of taking care of her and my siblings. Yoruba parents and tradition, every child has multiple parents. That day I had a score and more.

We finally settled down in their staff room, we sat down behind her table and got talking. She insisted on the girlfriend issue. I did my best to explain.

"Mummy, it's not as if I don't want to have a girlfriend. It's just that you trained me to be responsible and responsive. Right now, I'm only managing to take care of you and my siblings. Bringing a girl into the picture now will bring about a divided attention, and that's because I don't have what it takes to satisfy both parties yet."

She mumbled, but I went on

"I think the proper question to ask will be what progress am I making as regards getting a job. With a job at hand, so many things will be better placed. All these girls, not one of them wants to stay with a hustler like me. And I seriously don't blame them; I wouldn't allow my sisters to walk into a similar situation."

She smiled and said to me, "Victor, you've done right by me and your siblings and I must commend you. The right job will come in God's time as long as you keep looking and you are not lazy. By the way how is your business?"

I took a long drag of breath, shook my head in a restrained manner and answered her, "Business is there. Cooking and writing as usual; there are good days and there are days that aren't good enough. It's quite unfortunate that the past few months haven't been good enough."

"Don't lose hope, I believe in your dreams. All will be well." She encouraged and then asked like every concerned mother would, "So, how have you been coping?"

"I have been spending from my savings. God has been faithful, and I don't know what I'll do without Kelvin and Sauce. Those two guys have been supportive."

"How are they?" she asked,

"They are fine. Kelvin is around; we will check on you together before we head back to Ibadan. Sauce couldn't make it down."

Mentioning their names left a mischievous smile on my face, but I couldn't tell mum that it was because they have been taunting me with talks about getting a girlfriend. She went ahead to ask about my health and she was relieved to know that I was in great shape. She revisited the girlfriend issue while seeing me off and gave me a sermon about how a girl who truly loves me would defy all odds to stick with me.

My unspoken reply was "Yeah, right! Not in this materialistic day and age"

Her final words on the issue were,

"You will never truly know a girl that loves you when you are rich. It will take a strong discerning spirit to separate the seed from the shafts. I understand your standpoint; all I am saying is,

please give it a try.”

I hugged her and walked away deep in thoughts, comparing the characters of our mothers to the modern girls. Miles apart! For the modern girls, the paper bill is the only language most of them understand. I don't think that's bad, the world is evolving, was my final consolation.

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This time, the discussion was about girls...again! Don't get it twisted, guys talk too but we don't gossip. We had a fuller house, every one of us was finally present. We laughed hard as we made fun of ourselves, then the girls.

Some girls can be saucy, or pretend to be.

They will do anything for the attention.

When you finally get to meet them, you will realize how soft and caring they are.

These are but a few of the hypothesis the discussion hovered around.

I listened to my friends as they analyzed the good, the bad, and the ugly among the bride's friends. They were about to drift towards me and suggest which one would complement me when I excused myself,

“I taya. Make I go sleep small before this bach eve start, abeg.”

It wasn't a planned bachelor's eve, it was just an avenue to get drunk and dance. It was getting dark already but I still sighted the bride looking beautiful, her face dolled up and her body all glammed in white. I called out to her playfully.

“Mmm Mmm, Tobi Tobi, our wife to be. You are looking gorgeous. Ore mi toh beautiful.” She smiled sheepishly; we hit a high five, and then she explained that she was having her bridal shower.

“Ehn en? I heard rumors that your friends are mermaids” I teased further.

She gave me the look and replied, “Yeske, I don't have ugly friends.”

The discussion went a bit further before I excused myself and headed to my room. I had just walked past the reception when I saw her.

No, I saw four of them taking selfies but to be honest, I only noticed her. She was nothing like any woman I had ever seen before. You'd say the same if you saw her eyes, her nude lips, and her alluring body. They were all mermaids, but she was their queen.

## Chapter Two

The next few moments of my life went by in slow motion. All I can say is that I must have been in a trance because before I knew what was happening, I took three steps forward and I found myself in front of my room but closer to where they were standing. Dazed by her beauty I paused at my doorstep and stared at her without shame. I doubt she noticed me but I didn't care. I was mesmerized by her beauty. As she tried different poses for her selfie, her voluptuousness inevitably became more evident. Her eyeballs, ably assisted by contact lenses were crystal white. Oh my days! Please tell me you remember the sight of Jolie's nude sexy lips in "The Original Sin", hers were even sexier.

She wore a sleeveless, flowered, short gown with matching heels; she also had a clutch purse with her. Another look at her and I saw so much perfection in imperfection. As they walked away, I noticed her sway. My head started to spin. I had to meet her. I just had to. As she faded from my sight, I could feel my heart skip a beat, a quick rush of adrenaline and then it started to pick up a fast tempo. I had made up my mind; nothing will stop me from getting to know her, not even her.

It was thirty minutes after my encounter and I couldn't think of anything else, if I didn't know better I could have argued that I fell asleep and dreamt about her. I just couldn't cast her picture out of my memory. I picked up my phone, opened my Blackberry Messenger application, scrolled down to a chat between myself and Sauce and engaged him in quick conversation.

"Guy, how far? I just see one fine babe. E be like say God wan butter my life but I never follow am talk"

I could feel my buddy's exasperated sigh even before he typed the words

"Idiot, you no collect name. Why you come dey ping me? You fit disturb me after you get name NOT before"

A wounded laugh escaped from my lip but for some funny reason unknown to me, it strengthened my resolve. It has been said "to achieve your goals is easier when you have it written on paper" and that propelled me to scribble the words, "Get her name and more."

As the night progressed and activities came and went, the moment for gyration and dance moves was upon us. Once again, I had freshened up, stepped out of room into the mixture of loud music, collision of empty bottles and chants demanding the intending groom to step on the dance floor. I spotted my circle of loyal friends and crossed over the dance floor to join them.

I looked towards the ceiling, mentally noting that somewhere in the hotel the bridal shower was being held. I whispered a quick prayer. "Please, let them join our party when theirs is over. So I can at least bump into that girl again. I NEED A NAME...arghhhhh". I opened a chilled bottle of my regular to calm my nerves and then marched to the dance floor to try and shake up my ruffled nerves.

I was so engrossed in dancing to the beat of Mafikizolo's Khona but that didn't stop me from noticing the moment the bride-to-be and her entourage stepped into our space and for a moment, I skipped another heartbeat. I became conscious of my movements, silently praying that she notices me. In a bid to impress her, or so I thought, I did a spin and realized she was no longer standing where she was.

"Maybe she went to ease herself" I thought, but after several minutes of eyeing the previous spot where she was I figured she must have gone to bed. The night continued and I danced with other ladies but my thoughts were never far from her. I wished the other ladies were her. I imagined holding her hands and telling her how beautiful she looked. I NEED A NAME...Arghhhhhh!

My dance partner soon helped me snap out of my beautiful distraction, she grinded me to the point of having an erection. By the time the night was over, I was high and tired. I staggered to bed and didn't open my eyes until 8am the next day.

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As friends of the groom, Kelvin and I were in charge of drinks, and that required not only purchasing it but ensuring that it was chilled and readily available when any guest needed a drink. So while others dressed up for the church service we set sail to accomplish our task. We were only half way done by 10:00 AM. We were preparing to go and ice them at the venue of the reception when Kelvin requested that we make a quick stop at the hotel, he needed to pick up his cell phone. He had to make an urgent call. Once we got to the hotel premises, he rushed into his room, got what he needed, hopped into the car again and all I could remember after that was that I saw her. I wasted no time in persuading Kelvin to stop right beside her. He moved into action and was right beside her before I could compose my thoughts. Instinctively, I composed a tacky pick up line and introduced myself to her,

"Hi. My name is Victor and something tells me you are my future wife. What is your name?"

She smiled reluctantly and replied, "Lizzy."

I felt my confidence level rise, so I pushed further, "that smile seemed fake, but it still doesn't change the fact that we're fated to end our lives together."

That must have got to her cause I saw her body erupt with laughter. That had to mean I was on the right track, so with a smile I asked, "I'll see you around?" Kelvin took the cue and gave the car accelerator a tap. As we moved away, I noticed from the rear view mirror that she just stood there and watched as we drove off.

"There's no better introduction than that. You nailed it, motherfucker! I told ya, you still gat da shii in you nigga."

Trust Kelvin to pull up his imported American accent anytime he gets excited. In his excitement, he offered me a hot bottle of stout to celebrate my premature feat and cheer me on to the next round...getting her number!

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I didn't spot Lizzy until the reception was over and when I did, I was ready to take another go at it. I walked over to where she sat with her friends and initiated a conversation.

"Hello again. Mind if I join you?"

As I chattered away, I noticed a ring on her middle finger. I inquired and she explained that she was engaged. Dang! Why are the good ones taken? And for a third time, my heart skipped a beat. I tried not to act surprised. I did my best to congratulate her and asked her to send me an invitation when she's ready to get married. The ceremony ended and we all hung out together that night. I couldn't keep my eyes off her. I made sure I was seated next to her friend. Her name is Candy and she exhibited serenity. The night ended and I didn't get her number. Instead, I got her friends' numbers; Candy and Toni. A worthy compensation for the devastating revelation.

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The next morning, I bumped into them again. We exchanged pleasantries and I saw them off as they made their way for the park. Lizzy and I didn't say much to each other, but I was able to hide the awkwardness by engaging Candy and Toni in a cheerful banter.

They returned to Lagos and we returned to Ibadan few hours after their departure. First thing I did was to unpack, and then I called Toni to confirm that they arrived safely before requesting for Lizzy's number. I called her and she answered, I introduced myself and she pleaded with me to call her back. She sounded like I woke her up from her sleep. When she was finally wide awake, she proposed that we migrated to BBM. She sent her PIN.

## Chapter Three

Our friendship started off at a slow pace. I would check on her every morning and almost every other night and we would chat for long unending hours. There were days when we wouldn't even talk and though I was apprehensive, I had to learn to be patient. I guess it was the awareness that she was already engaged that helped me to draw a line. For some reasons, I knew meeting her wasn't by chance; I liked to think that it was predestined. On one of our brief chats I garnered up some courage and asked her about her fiancé. She simply typed "You finally brought it up. I am in a serious relationship but I am not engaged o!"

It was a rush of emotions for me, but in the end, the main emotion I could place my fingers on was relief. The revelation afforded more freedom of expression. I could talk to her without a swollen conscience about being a cog in her relationship. Yes, she was in a relationship, but when you like someone so much and with all sincerity, you just have to let them know. I am not really into the 'toasting routine', I just like to get all close and personal until an opportunity presents itself for me to express myself.

We became good friends. Chatted and talked more, and in no time I began to sense a certain connection. I could talk to her all day and not feel bored, tell her a secret and trust her to keep it. There were times I felt it wasn't ripe to strip my soul of all its walls, but, I couldn't help it. She was cool and exhibited so much maturity which was good enough for me. I was determined to remain her friend until I got my chance and if I never did, I was ready to embrace our friendship with all I had.

Days went by slowly until one day she sent me a message on one of our various online chat applications. She said, "Mr. Victor, you there? I wanna talk. I feel burnt. I am hurt."

My emotional catalyst kicked into action and it didn't take me seconds before enquiring why she felt that way. At first she was unwilling to spill it. I offered to call and I could hear from the way she spoke that she was broken.

I did my best in coaxing her to spill the beans

"Hey dear, what's wrong?" I asked for the umpteenth time.

She laughed hysterically and explained, "I went on Instagram today and found pictures of him proposing to another girl. I have been the side chick all along."

"Jesus Christ" I exclaimed, "Have you confronted him? What was his excuse?" I probed further.

I heard her breathe in and let it out before saying something about the fact that he wanted to get married soon and she didn't seem ready.

"Did you tell him you weren't ready?" I asked diplomatically. Was trying to be careful not to further bruise her emotional injury.

"He wanted our families to meet later this year, and all I asked for was that we wait till early next year" she answered.

"And that was it?" I asked

"Yes" she snapped.

My sixth sense kicked in and I changed the topic. As much as talking about an issue helps, dwelling on it doesn't. I have been there, I know. I initiated a conversation about how beautiful she is physically and at heart, and reassured her that she deserved better and wouldn't get anything less.

That night I kept the conversation going until I was certain she was smiling on the other end. I figured that she needed all the care and attention she could get and I made up my mind to give it to her. That single act of nicety made us closer. We teased and abused each other. It felt like

heaven was being handed to me on a platter of gold. I wanted all of her attention. I kept nothing from her, told her about my family, my past, my present, my strength and weaknesses. She did the same. I had shared minute details with her before, but after that night, I held nothing back. Weeks sped by and we got closer, no day ended without a conversation. We were constantly in touch with each other. I admire Lizzy's strength; she didn't let the hurt she experienced drive her to hate.

Before I could define what was happening, she had substituted my name for B, which could mean anything; Boo, Baby, Bae, Boy or even Bastard. I took my time before reciprocating the act. Green lights could be deceptive at times; you never know what the other party is thinking. During this period we would have raunchy conversations and not blink. She became more endearing by the day. At this point, I felt the friendship had gone beyond just friends but I was also aware that we were not lovers. She would listen to a beautiful love song and send it to me and I would do the same. There were days we discussed the lyrics of such songs in relation to our lives. Like magic, we became mysteries and we couldn't even unravel us. We just followed the tide. One day, I decided to ask her how she feels about me over BBM. She sent a smiley emoticon and replied, "You are mature, caring, understanding and loveable. You are the perfect boyfriend."

I wished she had ended it with, 'for me', but that was satisfying. I could infer from everything she told me about herself that she had never experienced lack. She had supportive parents who always gave her whatever she needed before she asked. As for me, nothing I had was handed to me on a platter of gold. Now, that was the tricky part. I didn't have a job and business was slow. That scared me; it made me question my odds. I didn't think I had all I required to keep that trend, not at that time. It made me more focused though, no, she made me more focused. From the way she talked about her ex, it was obvious the dude was very capable of taking care of her. If I wanted to be deadly sincere with myself, that was going to be a huge shoe to fill, but I knew I desired her. There came a time when she told me she had needs, and she needed a real boo. It got me thinking, was she saying that to scare me or toughen me up? Whichever it was, it awakened the man in me.

We kept up our daily routine of chatting and calling. She read my blog posts, and she always talked about how she looked forward to eating a meal prepared by me. On other days, she would tell me how she prays to God to give her a husband that can cook, and with that I would imagine myself as her future husband. I hadn't even told her I wanted to date her; I didn't think it was appropriate to rush. She finally gave me the chance to when she asked me to write her a love letter, "You are a writer now. Ogbeni, show us some skills, let's see if you can melt a woman's heart." Within me I knew I wouldn't just melt her heart, I would remold and adorn it with royalty. She didn't know, but to me, she was a queen. I got to work. I wrote her a love letter; an expression of how I felt about her. It read:

Lizzy,

Using the word "blessings" to describe the day our paths crossed will be undermining the joy that walked into my life the first time we exchanged our hellos. I will always bless it as a memory I intend to take to my grave irrespective of how this love story ends.

I have seen beautiful women, but none like you. There is something different about you. It wasn't just your endearing smile, no. It wasn't only your sparkling eyeballs, neither was it your modestly shaped beautiful body. It was the goodness I sensed beneath your beauty; the aura of serenity hovering over you. Right there, I knew my greatest act of cowardice will be to walk by without saying hello.

Sweetness, where have you been all my life? From the moment I met you, it has been nothing but joy. My guess is that the Supreme Being was saving the best for the last. Yes, a glimpse of hope

just when it seems like my world was going to fall apart; a jackpot of fruitfulness; a plant in the Sahara. You are an imperfect perfection; intelligence and transparency precedes you, yet your stubbornness is charming and I am glad I met you.

I imagine the combination of the brightest star and the rainbow, a colourful ray of shiny lights, that's what your presence radiates to me. You are as attractive as the full moon is to the night, and as fierce as the sun is to the day. Like a Lily that springs forth in a pond of mud, your beauty is manifested in a unique dimension; with a beautiful voice like Serinus and an appealing aroma like a Fragrant Cloud (Rose).

Do I love you? Yes, but the fact that am in love with you melts my heart to gold. You give my life a new meaning, a purpose; a future with you is what I'd rather build. A place where all our dreams will come through, being each other's indispensable supporter. Just last night I thought of what it would feel like to warm your bath when you are cold and pick your hair when it's grey. I aspire to be your man, I long to claim your heart. To have, hold and never let go. To hug, kiss and always pamper you. We'll pray, fight and win battles together. I'll choose your dress while you pick my tie. You can make dinner; breakfast in bed will be my role to play.

No doubt, we will have our itches, but you can be sure the world would never have to guess why our bond is unbreakable. I will always remain your number one supporter and a good father to our unborn children. We will nurture them with so much love; I can already imagine the look in my eyes when I behold them; the replica of love unspeakable that I have for you, my soul mate. When you become moody, I'll devise means to see you happy because there is no home without a happy wife and mother. There will be no me without you, and there will be no other after you. Our world will be built on words of worth; God, fidelity, loyalty, sacrifice, trust and wealth. If I can't bring the world to your feet, it is my duty to take you around it. I will kiss you in the open, and if the need arises, I'll scold you in our closet. With you I will walk tall, and when I win accolades for the best writer in the future we will embrace the spotlight together. I dedicate every award to you in advance, "to the woman that owns my heart; for her push and love."

We will never struggle to survive. You will be treated the way you deserve and more. The sex will always be memorable; we will have beautiful moments of being lost in each other while we make love. I will place a kiss on your forehead, kiss your ears, neck and massage your toes. I will love you helplessly. And if a minute with you is what I get of us in this lifetime, Baby, I will cherish it and treasure the pleasant memories with thoughts of how we came to be friends. Believe it or not you have been a spark in my quiet world.

You are special.

Victor.

If I didn't know better, I could have sworn that my feelings for her heightened afterwards and I would argue that she felt better about me too. Her reaction to the letter was enchanting.

She typed to me on BBM; "talking about your letter and the future. Are you a book person? I was hoping we could go to Estonia together to further our studies. It's tuition free."

I simply replied "yes"

And she probed, "Yes? Yes you are a bookie or yes, let's go to Estonia?"

"Yes to both, I'll go anywhere and do anything just to be with you" was my ecstatic reply to her question.

She was practically asking me to plan a future with her. Hence, everything made absolute sense. She was heaven sent. In her, I found every quality that I lacked but needed. She is an epitome of a good woman, the pillar behind every successful man. She doesn't chicken out of situations like I would. She would say,

"You don't give up when it doesn't work. You keep at it until it works." Her presence redefined my

existence; it gave me a nearer foresight, a clearer insight, and archived hindsight. Without any form of insecurity, I let her into my life wholly, shared my plans with her, and complemented for all her inadequacies. I admired her strength, but I cared for her weaknesses.

Lizzy could be snappy and easily wander into a mood swing. However, I knew the right antidote to strike the balance. She ignited my life with fun. Even when she was at a distance, she knew how to make me smile. She would tag me on funny Instagram pictures and videos and share funny pictures of her making faces to me. My favourite amongst all remains the one that she captioned "selfie for Victor." We were so into each other. We discussed everything; sex, movies, and the efficacy of prayer. I couldn't have desired a better woman.

Finally, we became impatient. Months rolled by and we figured it was time to arrange a meeting, have some fun and define us. The last time we saw was at the wedding. A lot of things had changed. She shared with me her plans of attending a wedding in a neighbouring town a fortnight from then, and suggested that I could tag along if I was free. We would lodge, hang out, talk all night while staring into each other's eyes, and of course, attend the wedding. It was a perfect plan. By then I was no longer used to calling her by her name. She was either my sweetness or my queen. We had our differences but we never slept on our anger. It made sense when it made no sense. I would text her in the midnight just to tell her how much I adore her. She would reply by morning with a motivational message. All that was left was for me to ask her out, make it official. My heart yearned to be with her.

Every journey experiences its delay, by default or accident. The Titanic story was that beautiful because of the storm, without which Jack and Rose will only be a name to you and I.

Lizzy and I were chatting one day and as I addressed her as I always did, "Sweetness," she snapped "Victor, please stop using all these sweet words for me. I am not your girlfriend. I am not even sure I am what you want. I can't be who you want me to be."

I was calm enough to reply her with, "Calm down. Did I do anything wrong?"

"No. But you are choking me. I can practically feel the emotions. I think you should ease off. Please."

Wow!

I know you are also wondering where that came out from. I asked myself the same question countless times before calling her. She picked. I have always been the guy that would ask how, why and what. I will never conclude for you, it is a winning mentality.

"I am sorry I snapped" was the first thing she said before I got the chance to ask any questions. I wanted a better explanation but she wasn't willing to give any. That night she read every message I sent to her over BBM but didn't reply any.

I was restless as thoughts of her burdened my heart. We slept without saying goodnight to each other. The next day she repeated the same thing and even made it worse by ignoring my calls. Then days became slower and boring. I thought it was wise to give her some space, hopefully she will come around.

After one week of grave silence my heart became ill, ruffled like a drug addict that was denied a fix.

## Chapter Four

We didn't get to see as the result of the silence. She attended the wedding and I attended another. I thought of calling her friends for help but it would be inappropriate, even disrespectful to call Candy because I haven't reached out to her since Lizzy and I got close. However, Toni and I chatted often, and so calling her was easier. I dialed her number and she didn't pick. I was about redialing when she called back. I was sincere with my explanation, and she was a good listener. When I was done she simply said to me,

"Be calm dear. Give her time, she will come around. If she doesn't want you to choke her, you should really consider approaching this with diplomacy." I expressed my gratitude for her advice and returned to my drawing board. Where did I go wrong? What didn't I do right? I read through our previous chats and I realized that I might have been deaf to her yearnings. I remembered how she had told me about her many needs, and that I did nothing. It wasn't like I chose not to; I just didn't have what it required. I was silly to think she understood, even my younger sister wouldn't. All girls deserve to be pampered. Truth is, that passing moment was stormy. I thought I did well by hiding it from her.

I took Toni's advice and stayed away until one morning. I pinged her and she replied by dropping three job links. She didn't say hi or good morning. I said thanks but she didn't reply. I wasn't sure of what to make of her action, and so I ignored it and went ahead to apply. I opened every link and found out that the applications closed two days before. It made me feel bad. If she hadn't waited for me to ping her, perhaps I could have been lucky enough to apply. I couldn't bear to hold back anymore. I decided to express myself to her; at least to see the reason for her actions. I mailed her a letter and sent her a text to inform her about it around 6am that morning.

Lizzy,

Not good enough? Perhaps for other girls; I simply aspired to be the best, for you. But even then, Rome wasn't built in a day. How could you give up on me like our friendship was just a blab? In over 60 days we hit the climax of a true union; attention, loyalty and support. How can we toss that to the dust in just 60 seconds, like all of it meant nothing? How can we possibly walk away from our midnight chats, lengthy phone conversations, teases, abuses and shared secrets? Who pushed the wrong button? Was it me or you? Maybe it's us. Whatever the answer is, I'd absorb the blame.

The spark in our friendship is too real to be a lie. If not, who was the actor? I refuse to believe it was a waste of our time. I was ready to yield to your warning, I understood your fears, but you mistook my sincere intention for infatuation. You never cared to ask how, what, or why. I was simply maximizing every moment I got to share with you. I wasn't blind to your emotions; I have my fears too, but you chose not to see them for what they really are. I understand now that I was being too sweet. How could I have forgotten that even sugar has its side effects? I understand now that we can't have a perfect relationship. I just didn't guess we'd stay this long without talking to each other. What's friendship without imperfection anyways?

I am never too proud to put the past where it belongs and forge ahead, but you wouldn't meet me halfway. Now we seem like strange friends; one with the boat, another with the paddle; neither of us willing to sacrifice our pride for the sake of smooth continuity. Kings in our different worlds, but slaves by the rules of restriction we created. You do not want me to love you; that's understandable, but not good enough; it isn't a good excuse for you to shut me out.

"I can't be who you want me to be" you said.

I am just curious as to how you know precisely what I want you to be. You claim you've exhausted all the love God created you with, I think that's a lie. You are just scared of the possible outcome of falling in love again. How can you know the end of a journey you're not willing to embark on? It is only proper that someone with your various distinctive qualities of profusion and goodness shouldn't disguise as a lone ranger. You sheath your true emotions with vague words; baked beauty concealed with ambiguous icing. You create impressions that negates the intentions you want to express. To what end? I am not judging you; maybe I should ask the right questions. What do you want? What exactly are you scared of? Tell it to yourself, it should help you figure out whether or not you are on the right course.

Nothing can be forced; everyone gravitates in the direction of care. This letter isn't meant to woo you back, it is just important to let you know that I have no regrets with you. Every moment was meaningful and I am glad I was completely open. You taught me to demand more from life, which was a defining experience for me; thank you. However, I wouldn't shut the door behind me; I will also play the prodigal as long as it means returning home.

Let's play a game, stare at your mirror and declare that moments we spent being in touch with each other meant nothing. Not speaking with you has its advantages though, that way I got to think of you every minute. Do I miss you? Hmmm. Why am I saying all this? I want you to know that you are being unfair, not to me but to yourself. How can you shut out someone whose desire is to see that you are happy at all times? I might not have done that the way you desire, but you should know that I haven't given my best to anyone in a while the way I was willing to give to you. You earned it without an expiry date. Given the capability, I will do better.

I haven't had anyone tell me "ya mad" lately, have you had anyone threaten to slap you in a sarcastic manner? I don't think I was just a distraction, but you were my centre of attention; one game, different moves. This long silence is chaotic. Where do we go from here? To drift further apart or pull down the fence; whatever happens wouldn't yield any disappointment. Nothing changes, especially not the way I feel about you.

Victor.

She replied my letter with a text: 'I never cared? What do you want me to be for you? A lone ranger? I sighed with relief at the sight of it and waited till she was ready to talk about it. That was after I had replied her text with clarifications of what I wanted her to be for me, "whatever you are comfortable with and my friend." In the evening she finally requested for a chat whenever I was free. I was with a client. I reached out several minutes later. She asked to discuss my letter and I disclosed that it was written amidst uncertainties. I didn't know why we weren't talking and I needed the right answers.

Lizzy poured out her mind to me. She re-established the fact that she hadn't experienced such intense emotions in a long time; the only guy that showed her something relative did so a long time ago. She expressed that

"I felt like screaming. Felt like I was choked with your emotions, they were too heavy." She admitted that she freaked out, "last time I checked, developing cold feet isn't a crime." I held my phone as her messages rushed in, I was determined not to type a word till she was done. She axed my heart when she told me she couldn't give me the love I wanted.

She continued "I like the Victor on BBM and phone. I am not sure I like the physical one, and that's why I don't want to get deep. Because I know as much as I am crazy about you, I might not be physically attracted to you. How can I date someone I am not physically attracted to?"

"Okay. I agree that we saw briefly in Akure. The essence of planning to meet was to figure out all this, wasn't it?" I asked myself rhetorically. The notification tone on my phone wouldn't stop sounding, she kept typing.

"Victor, I don't want to be with you and be unfaithful. I am sorry I hurt you; I know I am still hurting you. I am sorry. You wanted the truth and there you have it. I don't even want to pray about you like I'd have done because I am scared I'd get a positive answer from God. You can't tell God he's a good man but you are not physically attracted to him. It isn't even a sensible criterion. You are everything I want; sweet, loyal, romantic, sincere and a passionate lover. You love me with all you have."

I typed "Okay..." to signal that I was paying vivid attention.

"It was never about you. You are good enough. I believe in your dreams and I know you will make it. Okay, I'm done anyway."

I appreciated her sincerity and made her understand that there's no point loving someone if they aren't happy,

"As long as you are happy as my friend I am contented." She countered, "I want you to be happy too. I won't see you with a girl and shine my teeth. But I can't eat my cake and have it."

"So, what exactly do you want from me?" I asked confusingly. "Be free, be yourself. Be who you are" she rejoined,

"That means we get to gist, laugh, abuse and bare our minds to each other" I added,

"You don't do all that and expect me not to get involved" she reacted.

"I can't afford to lose our friendship. So I have to ask, what exactly do you want from me?" I enquired on a final note. I never got an answer to that question. She was smart enough to avoid it and I didn't push it. We went back to being friends afterwards.

## Chapter Five

We finally got our chance at seeing. Few weeks to Christmas she informed me of her intending trip to the institution where she had her Master's Degree program. She was going to collect her transcript and seek for some of her lecturers' recommendation letter. She had plans of furthering her studies. Fatedly, the institution was so close to Ibadan. I proposed it and she agreed that we saw when she was done. She made the trip. Seeing her filled me with so much joy. We decided to see a movie together. We saw a Nollywood movie that premiered two weeks before. The cinema was scanty. It made it easier for us to whisper and laugh together. At some point I said to her, "I can't shy away from the fact that I am crazy about you. But I need to know, should I let this feeling grow or should I kill it?"

She fed me with popcorn and answered unconvincingly, "I cherish every moment you. Just be yourself and we will be fine." Reminded me of one of our favourites songs, 'Who you are by Jessie J'.

The movie ended. I pulled her back as we approached the cinema exit and hugged her. It was a never-let-go type of hug. We didn't know how, but we eased into a deep kiss. It felt like heaven. I was speechless and she was all smiles as we headed to the park. Was it genuine? Did we just get carried away? I didn't care, it didn't matter. We never brought it up afterwards. She got back to Lagos safely.

On one of my many visits to Akure, I decided to see my mother. I figured it was best to see her before the festive season activities took the whole of me. It was during my stay in Akure that I noticed the changes in Lizzy.

Mum, she will never just stop asking if I was in any serious relationship and I guess my persistent 'no' didn't help matters either. We discussed other important issues including how much she enjoys reading my blog and can't wait for me to publish my first novel.

"Wole Soyinka's mother would have been very proud of him. I am confident you will make me feel the same way. Write a book. Let me know what it will cost to publish it, I will foot the bills."

That's my mother for you. She would do anything for her children, even if it meant borrowing.

"Who is this beautiful lady?" She asked, looking at my display picture. Mother won't look away from the phone she held in her hand. I know when she is trying to hide the excitement in her voice. "Ehn en. She is light skinned like me. I think we look alike."

Mum enjoys being theatrical sometimes. I let in a bit of sarcasm, "you people look alike gan ni. In fact she is your daughter, the missing one", before I stylishly took my phone from her.

"You this boy. Are you making jest of me?"

"No o. Make jest of you ke? Never."

She looked at me and smiled again. I knew she was up to something. She didn't disappoint, "she can be my daughter if you marry her. I am just saying."

"Okay."

"Okay what? I'd like to speak to her when you call her,"

"Can you imagine?" I snapped and continued. "Why?"

"I just want to hear her voice. Who knows, maybe she has my voice too."

I figured she was beginning to get serious so I excused myself after agreeing to her demands. I called Lizzy that evening. I made sure mother wasn't around when I did,

"Baby" she called out and with a smile on my face I asked how she was doing and did a little catch up on what I have missed. We talked about random stuffs and then I informed her of mother's intention to speak to her.

"Hmmm. Call when she is around. I hope she won't ask me questions I can't answer" she chipped in.

"I will make sure she doesn't" I promised.

It wasn't a conscious effort and I don't really remember what happened, but mother never got to speak with her. It was about that time that I realized that she was withdrawing.

Prior to that time she shared some good news with me and it all began to make more sense after her sudden withdrawal.

She gained admission to a University in the UK for her doctorate program. Yes, she is a book-worm. Career oriented; she had bagged two Masters Degrees already. Although she wasn't going to resume until October the next year, it already felt like a part of me was leaving. So I began to make plans towards supporting her dreams, getting a scholarship of my own or any other traveling means to visit her while she was there. I never told her, but I did have some breakthrough. I would like to assume she was also asking herself similar questions like what will happen to us when she travels and so on. Only if she will realize that we had just ten months to work it out but she had already begun to drift away.

Another thing that could have prompted her closure might have been the consistent way in which I displayed different ladies' pictures on my BBM. I know she is naturally jealous, but my intention wasn't to spite her. I have beautiful friends and family that I love to celebrate at intervals. One of those incidents was when Candy asked her about the lady on my DP. And she decided to hold it against me, temporarily. How can she forget Tomi's face? For God's sake, she was at the wedding. I summed all these together and I still couldn't figure out why she kept her distance. On the day I was due to return to Ibadan, I sent her a text explaining that I noticed her withdrawal. She confirmed it but that it was happening subconsciously.

I returned to Ibadan amid the uncertainties that trailed our friendship. I tried to reach out to her, but she refused to meet me halfway. It began to look like I was forcing the friendship, again. I remembered our first rift and I just let her be.

I am not going to be the guy that chokes a lady up. Whatever will be will be. Christmas wasn't much fun without her, but I was able to hide it from my friends. I wished her merry Christmas and that was all. Two days later I put up a picture of an herbal drink on a social media platform and was pleasantly surprised when she sent me a message saying "I just saw you on SnapChat. Are you drinking again? Or was that to get my attention? You are taking those toxic local herbs."

I was happy at first. The thought that she still cared about me plagued my mind for a bit. But I became utterly devastated and confused when I typed tons of messages to explain why I posted the picture and I got no reply.

Who does she think she is?

What exactly does she want?

I let sleeping dogs lie until she sent me another job link without any form of pleasantries before or after.

It bruised my ego, because it insinuated that I was lazy, jobless and unwilling to make something of my life. I smiled, but not the happy smile, it was more of bottled up anger. The one that helps a warrior keep his sword sheathed a little longer. I restricted myself from reacting at that moment; I don't like regrets as a result of impatience or resentment.

As usual, I sought for dialogue but she declined. She explained that she was ill and didn't have the strength for any emotional conversation. She promised to call but never did. Few days later I placed a call to her,

"We've been silent for so long and that has to come to an end one way or the other.

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