

QUARANTINE EPISODES

— FESTUS OBEHI —
DESTINY



It was really difficult finishing this project with limited resources. But I'm glad dedication prevailed. This short collection is a fragment of my memory of life during the pandemic. The theories and rumours I accommodated through characters are my attempts to build a bridge between all perspectives that were alive during this period. I want to appreciate everyone who forced me to write something and removed the veil of laziness from my eyes. Anastasia, Zainab and Timothy, I thank you. And once again, I owe Matthias for lending me his laptop for another round of editing and writing.

And for everyone, I hope when you read this, you remember what it felt like. Even if it's just a little bit tingle.

Obhidestiny9991@gmail.com.

Ig @Hugsandeyes.

The Doctors of Rumours.

28th of March 2020

Two weeks ago, the only dilemma I had was what to wear during the two weeks warning strike that Asuu had just declared. The break in school then, was the only dark cloud that hovered over my happiness. A week later, I was lying flat on my bed trying my best to keep my thoughts from exploding as my body itched from small pox. I placed my thoughts in pockets that my eyes couldn't see through so that I could escape from the torture of my present pain. Then, that was the only pain that caused lines to stretch across my forehead. Pain has made that time seem like ages ago. A time when we had simple issues that required complex solutions. When we lived life in the bliss that ignorance provided and didn't look for hidden answers in the cracked walls of our beliefs. Things are different now. Yesterday, I slept with the news of seventy confirmed corona cases in Nigeria. This morning I woke up to eighty one cases. I felt a chill tear out my spine, colder than pox and longer than a two week break.

Our generation didn't experience the war, a revolution, and a turning point in religion or the first coming of a messiah. We were born in the shadows of the history that had already been written and mapped out for us. We were born into a pyramid of experience, built from the lips of the ones before us. We read about the exploits, the fears, the miracles, and the uncertainties that happened before us and we struggled to place our consciousness in a memory that never existed. To us, it was just a brush of genius. Nothing more. Till now. There is no memory as real now as the pandemic that the world now faces. Now, we are faced with a reality that will forever alter our virgin memory.

As of the date of this journal entry, there are currently a confirmed case of 600,859 cases, 133,383 recoveries and 27,417 deaths. The virus has kept countries on their knees. On January 30th 2020, The World health organisation declared the corona virus a global pandemic. Before the virus crossed the Nigerian border, its presence was regarded as a distant truth that was stored in the walls of ignorance. We talked, painted and sat on this wall and doubt there would be repercussions. The rumours that heralded the virus kept people in a very blank and confident states. There were rumours that it was only a virus for the rich, black people were immune, and the virus couldn't survive in places with hot weather conditions. This was much easier to believe than trying to acknowledge an episode where the country would be in a state of lockdown because of the virus. On the 28th of February 2020, the minister of Health announced a confirmed state of the Corona virus pandemic in Lagos state, Nigeria. The case, which was confirmed on the 27th of February, was the first case to be reported in Nigeria since the beginning of the outbreak in China. Days later, rumour escaped from its cave and hovered across the country, excreting droplets of truth, lies, fear and doubt. Market

women said the reported case was a lie and the government only sought to increase the price of foodstuff and make more money. There were stories of a rich man with pot belly who lived in Banana Island and refused to subject himself to testing. They said he was ashamed. Opposition political parties said it was a ploy by the government to install panic and control forced loyalty that stemmed from fear. Chinese in Lagos, in the days to come suffered abuse and stigmatization. There were reports of people avoiding places and companies that belonged to the Chinese. It was my first time witnessing a level of racism in black Nigerian society. Once, my mom came home with the rumours circulating around her work place. She said "They said the Chinese owned the virus and were spreading it to the other nations as a bio weapon tool to enslave the world.

In the early days of March 2020, rumours and fear kept people in line more than the actual virus did. Rumours reigned over the headlines of our discussions. There were pictures on social media displaying an alarming number of people infected with the disease. They called it a ploy by the government to hide the truth. Across hundreds of group chats on WhatsApp, they were voice notes with warnings and sinister voices preaching of conspiracies and the biological effects of the virus. I remember one of them. His voice was pleading but his crooked voice fuelled my doubts and caused a thin smile to spread across my lips. He said "The information I am peddling is dangerous. I am putting my life at risk as I am speaking currently. We have over five thousand people already infected with the disease. The government is hiding the real number to control panic and fear..." if rumours peddling was a commercial venture, people would have made millions by then. Or perhaps they did. I often wondered why people would climb the ladders of success to pull down fear and spread it in graphic form on people's faces. Some people believed. Some didn't. The religious extremists said that this was God's judgement on the world for our trillions of sins. Imams said this was Allah's way of bringing the earth to her knees. People's voice ignited whenever they spoke about the end time and people who hadn't found God listened with broken confidence and swollen eyes. My neighbour's mom held more morning devotions and her voice tore through the walls and threatened to cause an earthquake. A week later, I saw her slithering to her house with gallons of anointing oil. The weight laid heavy hands on her waist and made her drag her legs. I was so lost in the trail of oil she left as she dragged herself that I forgot to offer assistance. Freethinkers and atheist on twitter, made fun of the ignorant religious people. It was the war of philosophies. While everyone threw points and swallowed insults on Twitter, I slept on the fence. Social media was a mad house and people sought distraction even in the questions they already knew the answers to. It appeared there was also a battle between the optimistic and the pessimistic. It affected everything, our religion, our faith, and most importantly, us. In the days to come, Twitter would become our solace for the uncertainty the future held. There, we found jokes, sarcasm, truth, mirror of lies and most important of all, distraction. Twitter was a war

front and everyone wrestled with their philosophies. It was a street where everyone bore their own address of knowledge. Each man's knowledge was his own universal truth and it was only when he uttered his truth that his real character is exposed. That is only when we can identify the tribalist, ritualist, ignorant, the extremist, the feminist, the atheist, the rapist, the patriarchal and the psychopathic. If I close my eyes tightly shut for a long time, I can still perceive the pessimism that we decorated our WhatsApp status with. We all planted seeds of negativity on each other's mind and we couldn't handle the harvest of nightmare that swallowed us whole. If I stretch out my tongue, I can still taste the depression that lounged on our faces. It was our new fashion. The uncertainty that the future held kept the depression in place and kept it from falling. I can still hear the thoughts on mind. Answers that held the same marks that the questions had. It was a present of a blank page and an empty ink and no one could paint the future in this condition.

On the 8th of March 2020, the second case of Corona virus was confirmed in Nigeria. The 3rd case was announced on the 17th of March. Five new cases were announced on the 18th of March, bringing the total to 8. A total of 12 was announced on the 19th of March. Schools were shut and the academic staff union of Nigerian universities threw the keys into the sinking hole of uncertainty by going on strike. Pastors sent their flocks home and markets were shut. It felt like the war. The future was unpredictable and they was a struggle between the forces of hope and hopelessness. On the 27th of March, Nigeria recorded the first death of Corona Virus. A 67 year old man with underlying medical conditions. Among the herds of philosophers that sprang during the year of the mask, none other were more successful than the rumour peddlers. The doctors of rumours. For they alone were able to steal their shadows into our consciousness and bury they lies into our integrity. They moonwalked on our fears and caused rain to burn our thoughts. In the days to come, they ruled our lives and thoughts until we hoped that their truth would become our reality

Rose.

Mama Richie walked quickly to the market. If legs were wings, then she flapped them hurriedly. Her last child, Onome, was held behind her by two wrappers tied in an intricate manner to keep her child from falling. She crossed the road hurriedly without looking and waved inadvertently to the *okada* man that was throwing invectives at her for almost hitting his dead engine motorcycle. She walked quickly, her gaze focused ahead of her as she gathered cloud and dust behind her. It seemed the earth was aware of her mission for no nail or stone stood in front of her. Today was Wednesday. And ever since the shutdown, the federal government only allowed markets to open on Wednesday and Saturday between 10 and 2 pm. The time was almost eleven and this propelled Mama Richie to run, stop, walk and then run again. This was her only chance to make money to sustain her family again till the next market day. Her husband hadn't gone to work in three weeks and the likelihood of him getting paid was looking for a pebble in the sky. So, she forged ahead her path to the market with her sadness and prayer lines etched across her face and causing a million invisible lines dragging their weight across her forehead. Mama Richie's pace grew as she gladdened at the thought of her many customers that would buy her wares. Some had called her a few days after the government had issued a market lockdown. They called to express sympathies but she wished they called to give money instead. This was a time of want and not words. Mama Richie shared an open stall with three dozen other women. Many of them were widows and this was their only source of livelihood. They all sold different wares ranging from stock fish, panla, beans, rice, moimoi, fufu and sorts. Each one sold more depending on how loud the voice cries or how alluring the wares look. Another thing Mama Richie looked forward to was the gossip that always kept the women company. Stories so intense it kept their seat and lives from falling apart. The first week of the lockdown, all of them had independent stories and theories regarding the state of the nation. Some exaggerated to gain attention, some lied so that they would not be excluded from general discussion and some listened with open minds. At the end of the day, each took what the other said with a little pinch of disbelief. That was then, when all of their thoughts filled the well of their discussion. But now, a certain woman stood out among them. Her name was Rose. No one noticed her before the pandemic. In fact, the women rarely noticed each other before stories arose to show how complicated and similar their lives could turn out to be. Mama Richie now looked forward to the tales that swam out of Rose's lips. In fact all of them did. Rose's stories about the virus were different. Most of them had no television in their homes hence Rose became the bearer

of their doom and miracle. While all of them worried about the increasing prices of goods and the reduction in demand that would drawl out from the pandemic, Rose spoke of the idea that the virus could just be theoretical not real. A ploy that the government had constructed to increase prices and fill their pocket with more funds. The words she used drag all eyes to her wares and they noticed for the first time, this middle aged woman who seemed to have no family or lines on her face but knew more than their ignorant minds could afford. She used big words and that was the trophy that won their attention. In the days to come, Rose's stories about the virus kept their life and mind afloat. In her stories, the found comfort. In her tales, enlightenment defeated ignorance. In her presence, hope sat on a stool higher than the flickering legs of despair.

Rose said "I have a television in my home. Never once have they showed pictures of people infected with the virus. All fake news. All they show is empty beds and numbers. I'm sure that this is a well-orchestrated ploy. I am sure of this." She hit her hand aggressively on her flat chest as a sign of authenticity, staring around, daring anyone to doubt her knowledge. No one did. In fact, they all stopped adding their own contributions after that day and left the entire floor to Rose. Seeing the market as her stage, Rose played the actor, the actress and rarely the audience. Rose kept the women late for they were indeed mesmerized. For where illiteracy is the soil, ignorance would always sprout, bearing seeds of fear, doubt and uncertainty. This was a time where words mended belief.

The market rose to life as sands made way for the burdens of steps that threatened to kick the earth. It was a war of steps and sweat. Mama Richie got to the market around eleven thirty. If bikes were allowed, she would have gotten there earlier. But the lockdown had also restricted business for people that anchored public transportation. Tired, she walked to the section in the market. Her heart started beating fast when she saw the cloud of dust that had already gathered. Rose had started enlightening the women of the condition of the nation. This made her sad than her lateness. She quickened her pace and opened her ears as she started arranging her goods and tried to catch splinters of Rose's tale. They came out like a message on a broken transmitter. She moved her seat closer and leaned in to listen to the conversation.

Rose started "I was watching the news yesterday when I noticed something" She paused and added "You know I always watch the news". Everyone commended her amiable effort and complemented her. Rose paused, drank some water and took time before spitting it out. A part of it touched a woman behind her. But she dared not complain for the sacrifice was worth the knowledge that Rose was going to empower them with. Rose continued "I noticed eh, that in china, they have all recovered. They once had 80, 000 cases and now they have none." A woman tried to interrupt but she was hushed immediately. Mama Richie eyed the woman sternly.

Rose continued "I believe that China have a cure. But they do not wish to share it. They want the world to beg them and let china rule them before they agree. I saw it with my two naked eyes on the news." The women hissed and some stumped their feet so hard on the floor that their legs hurt before they remembered that they had no idea where china was or who their president is.

"I must warn you my fellow women" Rose continued "The people in government are going about testing people. Don't allow them test you. They want to give you the virus. Why else do you think they closed the churches? Because they know that God will show these to the pastors and their evil plans would be revealed to the world. That is why. Or can you think of any? They said the office of the accountant general caught on fire. The same people that said monkeys and snakes swallow funds meant for the poor? Of course they have eaten the money. Or can snakes swallow money now?"

Mama Richie was ashamed at this. She was one of those people who had believed that snake indeed had swallowed the money. She had grown up in a home where spiritual and diabolical traits weren't ignored. She believed that a man had turned into a snake, swallowed the money and disappeared. Now, she saw her ignorance as naked as her foolishness. She wished she had met Rose earlier. No. She wished she was Rose. All the women sold wares simultaneously and listened to Rose. Rose's ware was empty. She had come earlier and sold all her wares to the early buyers. Most of the women had near empty goods now. Only Mama Richie's store was full. She worried less about that and pinned her ears to the ground as Rose's words fell on them.

"Do you people remember the Chinese doctors in the country? I heard that 7 of them have the virus. Their plans were to infect us with the virus. Virus that came from those idiots that eat bats. We will all be fine"

Time grew jealous and ran quietly and quickly. Tales and wares were sold until each vessel turned empty. Mama Richie had one last ware to sell. She tied the last stock fish in a black nylon and retied it. She packed all her profits and tied them similarly in a black nylon too. All the women had sold all their wares but Rose's tales put their legs on lock and they all slipped into it willingly. There was nothing exciting waiting for them at home anyways apart from empty bellies and loud cries and husbands who couldn't wait to hear their children's snore before plunging deep into their wives.

Rose spoke with a weary voice. Some of the women had offered her food in the course of her tales to keep her from getting tired or leaving early. Her hands were still oily from the Okpa and akara that she had eaten and an empty bottle of lacasera slept under her. She spoke loudly, pretending to appear oblivious of the crowd that was gathering beneath and above her, aware of the attention that her hook caught and feeling powerful. Each gaze that sought her made her powerful.

"My people, Many pastors have begged the government to allow them visit the isolation centres to heal this sick people. But they have refused. Because the government knows that there are no sick people and they are using this avenue to collect more money from the president. Now they have partners with the foreigners to install 5G program in our country. I heard that this program will cause cancer and many disease to phone users. Only people without phones will be safe. Goodbye" With this, Rose stood up, dusted her wrappers and left a trail of dust and longing behind her. The women pondered on what had been said before leaving one by one. Mama Richie sold her last wares and gave the women the black nylon where that she had tired. She kept the other one in her bra. She looked at Onome, who she had ignored throughout, placed him carefully on her back and started walking home.

When she got home, she walked passed her neighbours and dropped herself in the only stool in their one room apartment. Her husband walked in behind her and greeted her. She looked at him and noticed things that she hadn't in the past weeks. His hairline was getting thinner, his skin was darker and he was growing thin.

"How was the market" He asked

"Fine. I sold all my wares" she brought out the nylon from her brazier and opened it to calculate her profit. Her screams made her husband stumble before falling. Onome started crying.

"What is it?" her husband asked.

Mama Richie spread her legs in front of a black nylon that had crayfish inside. She had given her last customer her money and took home her last crayfish. She had lost herself in Rose's lips and picked hunger over her family. She recollected what had happened in the market. In her trance, she had exchanged her money with her last bag of crayfish. But it wasn't her fault. She had misplaced her attention. How could she have known? When her attention had been comfortable in Rose's lips and she had trailed Rose's footsteps when she left and inhaled the dust that her footsteps built behind her.



Shadows on Empty Street.

30th of March 2020.

I hope when you read this, you remember what it felt like. Even if it's just a little bit tingle.

I was born in 1999. Hence, I didn't experience the Nigerian Biafra civil war. My knowledge of it is based on the pictures on the pages that I have seen and the mouth of one handed soldiers who have been compassionate enough to accommodate my own footsteps in their private memory lane. But I guess this is what it feels like. I remember the last day of 2019. I had gone to the crossover service organized by the church as a way of praying our way into the New Year. It is always the most glorious of service. People who have scars from the year, those who saw death and escaped its long claws always dance their way through the Thanksgiving service. Everyone thought 2020 was going to be a spectacular year. The digit itself was spectacular. Everyone had a New Year theme and resolution. I to. Who would have thought that the earth would stop breathing three month into 2020?

Schools are closed and now students count corona victims instead of the alphabet. Pastors preach from the safety of their bedrooms and priests count their rosaries behind locked temples. Shadows walk on Empty Street and the memory of the past is slowly merging into the future to present our grim situation. Markets are closed and now we count the days till our last grain will stare deep into our souls and acknowledge our terrible tears. Till they lose their potency to defeat the raging hunger that threaten to tear out through our bellies. Students have been visited by boredom and it has dragged their attention into the sinking holes of social media. The Government makes promises with inaudible voices. Just moving lips with no twitching ears. An echo that enters a room and leaves without being noticed. The other day, soldiers flogged old women who had refused the government's order to close the market. The rules shouldn't have applied since it was a food market. It didn't stop the soldier's whip. It only grew their ruthlessness.

The last few days came and left with interesting features. One of many was the controversy between the Nigerian president and the Imam of peace on Twitter. The imam of peace ridiculed the Nigerian government and its incompetency in handling terrorism and his unavailability to address the Nation on the order of things. The squabble forced the loyal government to address the president in a recorded video that was acclaimed a "Live" one.

I guess fear has always ruled my life. I am reminded of a time when I was younger and suffered from continuous nightmares. Some nights, I would lay in bed with open eyes. I

was always so scared to look in the opposite direction even though I knew that demon that haunted me was my shadow and sounds of hungry rat. Once again, I have been crippled by fear and the government. The government has ordered a nationwide shutdown, putting a pause on my academic and social dreams. Fear that the situation will get extreme before it weakens. Days are now quiet because gathering have been blinded by the fear of the virus. Rumours fly around during the day and nightmares keep us awake at night. The days have now grown taller than me and walk too quickly that I have to run to keep up the pace. Days run into each other and it has made it difficult for me to keep track of time. As of the day that this entry is written, Nigeria has a case of 111 virus. Everyone's concentration is on lockdown.

Shadows on Empty Street. It feels like the war. I know my emotions is heightened by exaggeration. It feels like I'm trapped in a semi war narrative where rumours thrive in the day and the pregnancy of these stories keep us awake at night.

There have been significant hike in the prices of foodstuffs, and there is an alarming increase in the rate of fear that dwell in people's mind.

I dropped a pin yesterday and I heard the echo of my nostalgia. I assembled my confidence and watch them get massacred by my trembling fingers. I dreamt about school yesterday and I found ashes on the empty seats around me. The empty walls threatened to explode with memories of people, laughter and regret. I went to the market hungry. Empty stalls and living sands bade me no attention. I left, dragging my lifeless body behind me. Now silence scare me more than death itself. I heard God left his home and started to reside in people's heart. I miss the days when we forgot to lock the gate and sleep off without praying. Memories of a time when we hugged in high spirit.

I dropped a pen yesterday and I heard the echoes of my nostalgia. I sleep on the sheet of memories when things were normal. But fear keeps pulling me out of bed. Sometimes, hunger does. All I do is pray and count the seconds with open eyes. Sometimes, I dream with eyes open. Dreaming of a time before and after this time, when all my fears and doubts will be a chapter in a dusty old book. Before we breathed life in rumours and worshipped fear more than our humanity. Before they were shadows on Empty Street.

Quarantine episodes

On days when Godwin was feeling copacetic, he allowed his serving boy Jude sit in the living room along with him and his guests. On bad days, Jude's face was buried behind dirty dishes and transparent glass cups that always managed to allow sticking alcohol lines in them. Somedays, he weeded the garden behind the house. The grass were nasty creatures and always sprang forth longer necks hours after Jude finished cutting them. Initially, Jude thought he was an inexperienced slayer of grass. Later, he assumed a diabolical diagnosis and concluded that the grass were filled with life and refuse to be subjected to the prowess of man. With time, he believed they would one day fall and go their own way.

On days when Jude sat in the living room, he was privy to the discussion between Godwin and his friends. In the years to come, when time was merciful enough to open the gates of memory to Jude, he would confess that these were the best moments of his life. In this happiness, he swore that time stooped and concentrated on them. These were the beautiful memories of 2020. He relished the moment when Godwin spoke. A man with a fat voice that accommodated many books of the white men and politics. He often wondered why Godwin had not tried to take a chief tancy title. He was by far smarter in the ways of the world than the old chiefs in the village who had no standard three knowledge. Godwin was a learned man. He was the only person in Jude's family who spoke English differently. Jude will later come to learn that this was a variety of accent that the English language was capable of. When his mother introduced him to his Uncle Godwin, who wanted to take him to Lagos to resume school again. He wore a wrapper of scowl on his face that was buttoned by indifference and aggression. But after Godwin spoke a few words in English, Jude's taut legs relaxed and his lips began to drag themselves close to his ears in an attempt to smile. After cash notes was given and pocketed, Jude left with Godwin to the city of Lagos. That was many years ago. Now he knew the stretch marks of civilisation and read books in Jude library even though they were wider and deeper than his standard three knowledge.

Jude did not leave his room whenever Ruth, Goodwin's girlfriend was around. He didn't hate her and he didn't like her either. She was like a tree in the middle of a path that he knew existed but refused to acknowledge. In the past, Ruth had attempted to make a bridge between both their worlds but when she noticed that his palm kernel refused to break amidst her fervent knocks, she let things be. Ruth was religious and this prompted many arguments between her and Jude that resulted in broken tumblers and dislodged hinges on doors. Jude wished they would fight it out like men and establish a truce in the heat of the long breath taken after a fight. But instead, it was loud voices and louder sobs. This words crept into Jude's dreams and he dreamt about a tree in the middle of the forest that kept on dancing towards him.

Jude did not feel that he was old enough to be bothered about religion. He was fifteen and had a long life ahead of him. And so when Ruth suspected that Goodwin's indifference was rubbing off on Jude, she tricked Jude into accompanying her to church. Ruth was catholic and attended a St.Peter's Catholic Church in Ikeja. The church had a very large compound for people who rode cars and wanted to park them. Ruth and Jude had taken the BRT Transport and had walked only a few miles. When they got inside, Jude forgot to close his mouth as he stood amazed at the painting on the ceiling of the walls. Brush strokes of different colours of a man in red surrounded by twelve people who were all looking at him. Jude knew they respected this man just the way he respected Godwin. They were food on their plates but no one was bothered about the bread. Jude pondered about it and decided that no one was worth an empty stomach.

"They could have eaten and listened. Who knew if it was going to be their last supper?" He said.

He allowed his eyes to search other parts of the roof, the altars and the exorbitant clothing that the priest wore, the pews and even the floors. He saw something written on the pews and was murmuring to himself when Ruth read it aloud. That was the moment that he realized that she had been watching him, taking in his excitement and bemused at his amazement. The priest spoke in Latin and most of his words were inaudible. Jude found a hard time following Ruth as she stood up, knelt down, stood up again and went on her knees, rolled the rosary and recited a reply to everything the priest said. After the service, Ruth asked "So, How was it?"

"Uh"

"The service. How was it?"

"Nice. I enjoyed it" Jude lied. That was the last time he accompanied her to the church. Years later, he confessed to himself that indeed Godwin played a huge role on why he didn't accept the holy communion of religion and swallow it whole. As awkward as that was, those were days when everyone lived without fear and sought confidence. And

though it felt like Nigeria was crumbling down with terrorism, hunger and corruption, in the chambers of the discussion between Godwin and his friends, Jude felt invincible. The troubles of the world like were a flying eagle. Too high to hurt him. Far away. Far away or so it seemed.

Stars started breaking from the skies and falling in the sitting room in the months to come. No one accounted for this catastrophe and the repercussions exploded in every part of the home leaving behind shrapnel of regret and sadness. Jude was younger then but he knew that it was because of a sickness. At first, Jude was unconcerned because he knew that there was no sickness that Dibia Ogbuefi Nduka in his little village couldn't send back with herbs and soil. And so one day, while Ruth and Jude were preparing dinner, Ruth attempted to rebuild a bridge again by telling Jude of how scared the virus made her and her worries about her family in the abroad.

"I think I should go to America. There are talks of the Government closing down airports and roads. Better safe than sorry"

Jude listened even though he understand only half of what she was saying. He whispered a silent prayer, cleared his throat vehemently and began "Aunt Ruth. There is a certain man in my village. Ogbuefi Nduka. He is a Dibia. You can meet him for production." When he saw the still gaze of Ruth, he interpreted it as interest and continued in colourful enthusiasm. "There was a time that a crippled man was passing through our turn. Ogbuefi Nduka pitied him and gave him some herbs to chew. Two market days later, he returned to our town with two legs. He danced too" Jude, lost in nostalgia, forgot himself and did three steps before he stumbled to attention and kept on picking the uziza leaves. Ruth heaved a sign of pity and negation. She thought of throwing in a sermon of God, the devil and demonic powers. Instead she said "It is well. Thank you Jude".

The virus was spreading fast and still Jude couldn't pronounce it till the day he heard Godwin say it to someone on the phone. Corona Virus. Ruth later travelled to America. They said her mother had the virus. In those days, Godwin spent more time in his study. He only spoke whenever Jude brought in tea. Even then. His English lacked flavour. Dull and bitter. The tension in the room rubbed itself against the dry curtains and sweaty conversations whenever Godwin's friends came around.

"I am sure this is politics. I do not disregard the fact that there are cases of corona virus in Nigeria. But I can bet my life that this stupid government people are politicising numbers. The cases are absurd" Melvin spoke with a thin but angry voice. He was always the clown of the conversation but today, he was no joker. He had just been laid off at work with a meagre salary of thirty thousand which he had spent mostly on Vodka.

Friday, the police officer spoke next. He was the only one in the group who spoke

English slowly and quickly tuned to Igbo when his nuances were too deep for English to catch. "Why? Why do you think they will lie about the numbers when it will affect lives and security?"

"Why else? Because of Money. Money of course! More corona virus victims means more funds for your state. They have shared the palliative money amongst their greedy selves. The so called poor of the poor are still struggling. This is why I said that the Government is to blame for the robberies and not the people." He drank his drink quickly and eyed Godwin. His eyes were daring Godwin to talk but his heart hoped Godwin would maintain the brood state that he had been all day. Weeks ago, when they were multiple robberies in Lagos and ogun state. Godwin and Melvin had gotten into a heated argument on who was to blame. Godwin said that people who had evil intentions were just looking for opportunities to utilize their barbaric and inhumane skills. This was no Robin Hood grievance. Melvin held his ground and affirmed that the government's corruption resulted into corruption and unemployment which in turn caused people to take arms and rob. The other people in the room took no sides. They enjoying their sips and the different point of view. But today, only Melvin spoke. He was infected with something greater than the virus, fear of the future and hunger. More dangerous than any virus.

Minutes later, Godwin broke the spell of silence "Let us ask the doctor in our midst to remember the question mark from our answers"

Doctor Onyebuchi fiddled with his glasses and drank the rest of his vodka in one swoop. He had been quiet during the whole conversation. He leaned in forward and peered through the glass to look at everyone in the room.

"What I must say now must not leave this room" He eyes everyone and buried his gaze on Jude. Godwin noticed and spoke hurriedly "I trust Jude. He is my boy"

"Okay" Doc said and drank a shot again "It is true what Melvin has said. There are lies in the numbers. A hundred is fifty and a thousand is five hundred."

Melvin's glass dropped and Jude hurried over to pack up the pieces. No one paid him any attention. Everyone's attention was in Doc's deep pocket of Government conspiracy theory.

"On Monday, they brought 35 people to my hospital. Some had corona. Some were mere cases of malaria. We were asked to treat them accordingly and promised huge allowances for secrecy. At night, I saw 81 cases instead of Perhaps 20 or 22."

"Someone has to do something "Melvin whispered and regretted his foolishness immediately. "How much were you paid Doc?"

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

