

THE INCREDIBLE TWO

A TERRIFIC ENTANGLEMENT OF TWO FRIENDS

By

KELICHA OCHONOGOR

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Dedication

To God Almighty I remain eternally submissive for the gift of Life and for setting the foundation on which this work is based.

Preface

The book is about two friends in the same class who portrayed the glamour of love and was able to stand for each other. One is from a rich home, while the other from a poor background. Joseph, from a poor background encountered many challenges academically and financially. His friend Stanley who is from a rich home never had financial issues but his parent was always busy due to their work schedules and never had quality time with him. At a point, Stanley's parent fell short of their fortunes to the extent that they started selling off their properties.

How will this tragedy affect Joseph and Stanley, what can they do to resolve this issue that is beyond human power?

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Cast

Stanly – Friend of Joseph whose Father was Rich

Joseph – Friend Stanley whose father was poor

Gladys – Staley's Mum

John – Staley's Father

Mrs. Umoh – Goseld School Headmistress

Esther –

Aisha –

Johnson -

Chapter 1

A new kid had arrived in the primary section of GOSELD Group of Schools International. Tall for his age, fair with pink lips and an almost blonde hair made this kid stand out as the finest boy who had ever enrolled into the school. He, however, seemed unconcerned with the attention his looks were getting.

This kid was awfully quiet (as was usual for newcomers), but the major issue which raised eyebrows in his case was the fact that he was admitted directly into primary four. GOSELD Group of Schools International has a very high reputation in the state as one of the best and strict schools. It was technically a high class school and their fees were quite affordable. They usually gave scholarships to three deserving students to further in their secondary section; so sometimes, some bright and promising students would be enrolled by their parents into the school into primary three if the headmistress found the pupil worthy. Such a pupil would work hard to get the scholarship into the secondary level. They never admitted a student into primary four. Any other student who is not enrolling with the common entrance examination as the major aim for registration usually had a written and

oral test to help sort them into the appropriate class based on their output.

Once, a rich semi- illiterate business man brought his favorite niece from the village to train her in a good school. The headmistress, after examining the child decided to place her in nursery one due to the fact that she could not string together a word talk less of reading. Even after the offering of a very generous bribe, the headmistress refused to put the girl of ten years in the primary two class.

When the bell for break rang, all the pupils went out to play except two - the new boy and the class captain. The only movement the new boy had made all day besides writing was to stand when being addressed. Most of the teachers were surprised at this impossible happening and some of them visited the primary four class, not for anything important but to see the fine boy who had gone through their headmistress' wall of pure iron. Some of them reasoned that it is because he looked so cute that he got admitted directly into primary four. Others argued that the only thing that moves the headmistress is a good brain. 'He must be very intelligent to have been admitted directly into primary four', they said.

The class captain walked over to the new boy with a big friendly smile plastered to his face. He sat on the desk in front of the new boy's locker in a manner that made them see face to face. The new boy avoided looking directly at him and concentrated instead on looking at the playground which was filled with so many children. Most of the smaller ones were playing with the swing while the older ones divided themselves about the sea-saw or got some ground for some games played mainly with the hands. Some others were busy eating mostly out of a lunch box or takeaway.

'Hi! I'm Joseph, what about you?' The class captain introduced himself. 'My name is Stanley', the new boy replied.

'Can I call you Stan? I like it that way. You can shorten my name if you want. My friends call me Joe but my parents call me Joe-boy and I don't really like it.'

'Nice meeting you, Joe', Stanley said and Joseph smiled so broadly that Stanley wondered if his smile could give him wrinkles.

'Same here Stan. Why not come along, let's go to the playground? We could talk more on the merry go round. I personally hate the see-saw but it's good for a conversation too. You'll make your pick out of what's out there and I'll play along today.'

'No, I can't', Stanley declined.

'Why?' Joseph asked while wondering if Stanley was in one way or the other offended by his company.

'I cannot afford to go home dirty on my first day.' This reply made Joseph decide to make Stanley his major friend.

"I understand. We are not playing any game outside today. My parents never liked the time I used to go home very dirty. I don't want to repeat that time again. Anyway, are you hungry? Would you like to eat anything? We have a very nice canteen with plenty of snacks to choose from."

"What type of snacks?"

"Biscuits, sweets, pie, buns – and much more" Joseph was pleased with himself since the new boy was actually talking to him.

Stanley strongly suspected that Joseph was trying his best to take him outside the classroom.

"I have a packaged lunch already. There is no need to buy anything else.

Care to join me?" Stanley asked and picked his lunch box from where it had been kept at the beginning of the school day.

Nah, Thank you, I'm okay. You better start eating before the bell for break over is rung."

"Alright" Stanley opened the box and brought out a sandwich. There were five sandwiches in all - coated with butter on the inside, fried sardines and a bit of fresh tomatoes.

The aroma of the sardine with the bread caused Joseph's stomach to rumble beneath his school uniform. He swallowed saliva and tried to put off the thoughts of what his rejecting the sandwich had cost him. The breakfast he had early in the morning was just pap and a little piece of bread. To forget about food, he engaged Stanley in a little discussion. "Let me guess, you and your parents just moved into town?" Joseph asked.

"Yes."

"Where were you staying before?" Abakiliki!

Joseph nodded. "I hear Abakiliki is somehow cold. Is it true?"

"Depends on the season"

"So, is this your first time in Akwa Ibom?"

"Yes, it's my first time. You've lived here for a long time?"

Yes, all my life.

They both laughed at this short remark.

"How long have you been here?" Joseph asked.

"I've been here for three weeks."

"That's enough time. What is the finest thing or place you've seen since you came?"

"Just the house we are staying in presently."

"You don't mean it!"

"For three good weeks, all you've seen is the inside of your house! You don't go sight-seeing?"

"I do. That is when my parents are not busy. But they are busy most of the time so it's always rare. "

"But, do they allow you go out on your own? If they do, I can take you sight-seeing on one of the weekends which we would not be choked with school work."

"I would very much like that. But I don't know how my parents would take that piece of news. I have never actually had a friend, neither have I introduced anyone to them as a friend. They always keep me indoors; I doubt they would agree." Stanley wondered why Joseph was making so much effort to get him as a friend to that extent.

"Well, however way it goes, there is no problem.

Do extend my regards to your parents when you are home."

"Okay. Do same for me, will you?"

"I will."

After a comfortable silence, Joseph asked, "So, what do your parents do?"

At that very moment, the bell rang and Joseph jumped down from the desk he was seated on. Pupils started rushing into their classes to avoid being punished for being caught outside after the bell signaling break

over had been rung.

"Until later", Joseph said nothing and went to his seat at the farther corner of the class and exchanged pleasantries with some classmates on his way.

Just before the bell signaling the end of the school day was rung, an attendant stepped into the class.

"Class greet!" Joseph called and all the pupils stood up and intoned: "Good afternoon, Miss."

The attendant simply nodded and whispered a few words to the class teacher who addressed the class:

"Stanley Johnson, you are called to the head mistress office. Follow the attendant, the rest of the pupils sits!"

Stanley followed the attendant out of the class. They passed many other classes and crossed the playground before reaching the headmistress office. The attendant knocked twice and opened the door. "Here he is", she said.

"Okay, you can go continue what you were doing. Johnson, walk in and close the door behind you."

The head mistress was a heavily built woman; fair and tall. She looked quite intimidating on her seat and Stanley felt his knees shake as he followed her instructions. It was not a new thing for him as he had gone to four different schools on an urgent transfer. He was always addressed by the head master or mistress on his first day. He could still remember the last one he had seen. The man was old and thin but quite funny. This was the best reception he had received in any school he had ever attended. Though he did not touch the refreshments offered, he had enjoyed what turned out to be a long gist until his driver was directed to the office to get him. That was just last term.

Sitting in front of the headmistress, Stanley crossed his fingers and waited. Gratefully, she wasted no time in getting straight to the point.

"You should have been told by now that this GOSELD School doesn't admit students into primary four. But from what your parents said and the report from your former school which have a very good reputation in this country, I decided to let you in. I trust you will not disappoint me." Mrs. Umoh paused and looked steadily at Stanley for an answer.

Stanley whose mind had wandered answered "Yes ma" without knowing exactly what had been asked.

"Now, if you do poorly in the tests, I will not allow you sit for exams. You are currently on probation so, do well. If you do well, you might be a recipient of the school's scholarship awards. And the secondary school has boarding facilities; you won't need to change schools anyhow again. It's not healthy for you educationally."

'That is if I stay long enough for all of that to happen', Stanley thought. "Okay ma, thank you", he replied and drew his feet together, ready to move should she give the go ahead.

"Be serious and study hard", she added.

Stanley nodded and stood up to go.

"Also, while you are here, I don't want to hear anything about you making trouble. You can go", she concluded.

Stanley left quickly as he did not find her office comfortable.

Outside, school had dismissed. Stanley went straight to the classroom and sat still watching other pupils as they exchanged passing pleasantries before leaving. Dad was supposed to pick him up as Mum had dropped him off earlier. However, he was the last person to leave school that day as John had arrived quite late.

Chapter 2

Joseph kept talking to Stanley even when Stanley avoided answering him sometimes. After two days of John's late coming to pick Stanley, Joseph noticed it and made a decision.

Most students would patiently wait for the closing bell. After a few minutes when the bell had been rung, everyone else had either left or had been taken home. This particular day, Stanley and Joseph were the last pupils left in the class. Joseph sat where he had liked sitting to talk with Stanley.

"You're waiting for your parent too?" Stanley asked.

"No. I usually go home myself."

"Then, why are you not on your way already?" Stanley asked, puzzled. "I want to keep you company till your parent picks you. Who are you waiting for? Mum or Dad?"

"Dad" Stanley replied and kept quiet for a while. The fact that Joseph

was willing to wait with him touched him. I could keep him as a friend, he thought.

"What if my Dad comes late, your parents would not mind you coming back late, would they?" Stanley asked out of concern.

"Oh, they would. But it's not a problem. My Dad is at his shop working and my mum is in the market. I'm supposed to join her there by 4pm after taking my lunch at home and doing my assignments. Your Dad would arrive before then."

"Okay. What does your mother sell?" Stanley asked.

"She sells fresh tomatoes and fresh pepper in the market. My dad is a tailor."

"Cool", Stanley managed to say.

"What about you? What do your parents do?"

Stanley wished he could have avoided this question. But since he had been given an honest answer, he decided to give his also.

"My mother is a business lady and my father works in a construction company."

"As what?" Joseph was curious.

"He's a senior executive."

Joseph thought for a while and smiled, "Is that why you're been to many states?"

"Yes. The nature of his job makes it so."

"Cool! I've never been anywhere else. How are the other states like?"
"I can't really say. I never really stated long enough and I don't go sight-seeing. I mostly stay at home."

"Your parents must be really busy. But they make a lot of money right?"
"Yes."

"I wish my parents make a lot of money too. My mother makes enough to feed us while my Dad's money goes into rent and school fees. They work so hard every day. I pray I grow up fast so that I can take care of them too because they have really tried for my sister and I."

Stanley became lost in thought. He had never really thought of his parents like that. They seemed so independent and not in need. He tried to change the topic.

"You will be going to the secondary school, right? This school's secondary section..."

"I hope to. I'm working very hard to get a scholarship into the secondary section. If I don't get the scholarship, I will go to a government owned secondary school. I don't want to stress my parents too much."

"I hope you make it", Stanley noted.

"I hope you stay. The school has a boarding section; your parents can put you there."

"Maybe", Stanley replied and wondered if how relieved his parents would be if he boarded.

Just then, a grey Jeep pulled up at the school's parking lot.
"That's my Dad", Stanley noted.

"Okay. Let's walk down to the car so that we can go home."
They both walked to the car and when they had reached the vehicle, Joseph greeted, "Good afternoon sir!"

John grunted a reply and zoomed off as soon as Stanley entered the car. "How was school today?" he asked.

"Fine", Stanley muttered and pressed his face to the window, observing the passers-by and the scenery.

"Read well and be a good boy at school. Make us proud."

John's words seemed to have poured on Stanley's back instead of into his brain. He simply nodded, though his father couldn't see and continued his gaze on the car window. He just did not know why but he loved his mother much more than his father. He always told himself that the reason for this was because his father hardly showed him care and concern most of the time. But any time he had doubts about his father, he would simply think of his mother and feel better. That was what he did at that point.

Chapter 3

The new week in school saw Joseph with a long face in class. Though he chatted with his classmates as usual, it was clear to Stanley that something was wrong. When the bell for break had been rung, Joseph declined moving out of his seat for any reason. He did not accompany some of his classmates to the playground to return later. Neither did he go to sit with Stanley and keep him company. He just bent his head on his desk and pretended to sleep.

Everyone else left him and went to the playground. Stanley, who had never played at the playground since he arrived, wondered what was wrong with Joseph. He placed a hand on Joseph's shoulder but Joseph refused to carry his head up.

"Are you okay?" Stanley asked.

After a short while, Joseph replied in a strained voice, "I'm fine. I just need to rest a little."

Stanley kept quiet for a while and thought of what to do. Here was

someone who made efforts to be his friend and keep him company. He had never really had a friend before so he was at a loss of what to do. Stanley went back to his seat and returned with his lunch box.

"Would you like a bite?" he asked.

Joseph wondered how he would say no to Stanley. But when he remembered that Stanley always took sandwiches to school and that the sandwich in question was something he had been dreaming about for days; the yes escaped his mouth.

Stanley opened the lunch box and offered it to Joseph.

"What about you? Are you not eating?" Joseph asked.

"No. I don't usually eat it because I'm hungry but because I cannot take it back home."

Joseph ate quickly and a bit noisily. He drank the juice and gave a big burp when he had finished everything.

"Are you sure you're okay?" he asked Stanley.

"I'm fine", Stanley replied.

A new light seemed to have entered Joseph's eyes. Feeling somehow ashamed with the way he had just eaten, Joseph confided: "I haven't eaten since Friday."

Stanley was surprised. "Why?" he asked.

"Mom's stand in the market got demolished on Friday morning. During the demolition, many of her goods were destroyed. As it is, she does not have a place to sell anything again for now. Dad currently has nothing in his pocket as most of his customers owe him."

"You mean to tell me that since Friday, this is the only thing you have eaten?" Stanley asked, surprised.

"Yes", he reply.

“What about your sister?”

"She is in a boarding school. My uncle is sponsoring her.”

"Wow! You've not eaten for three days!" Stanley remarked, still surprised. "What about your relatives? Why not ask help?”

"No, they have enough on their plate already.”

"What are you people going to do?”

"I will look for what to do to get money.”

Stanley looked puzzled. "Like what?" he asked.

"I will look for something to do. Maybe work in a food joint if they will take me or something else. I don't know yet but God will make a way.”

"You believe so?”

"I know so. I remember in my primary two, Mum lost her job as a teacher. Things were hard but after everything she got introduced to the business she was doing. Now government have done demolition, mtchew...”

Stanley was surprised at Joseph's resolution. He had never had to worry about what he would eat or about anything at all because his parents provided everything he needed.

"I never knew things could be like that" Stanley said out loud.
"It's just how life is. You should be grateful to your parents you know - for everything they give you. I never fail to say thank you to my parents whenever I'm given something, even after meal times."

Joseph went quiet for a while. "I wish my parents had good jobs and more money."

"I wish mine had more time for me. They are always travelling and having this business and that business to attend to, they travel a lot."

"You should be grateful for what they have. I would not mind if my parents travelled far and wide as far as they brought back good things."
"I would like what you have. My parents hardly have time for me."

As if on cue, the bell for break over rang and pupils started pouring into the class. Stanley carried his lunch box and made to leave.

"Till much later", Joseph whispered and Stanley nodded his answer on his way.

For two weeks straight, Joseph came to school with soaked garry in his stomach as breakfast. Stanley had become attached to Joseph that he made it a point of duty to ask Joseph everyday if his mother had gotten something to do or if his father had been paid.

"You don't like forgetting something". Joseph remarked on Wednesday.
"I will be fine."

"I'm not asking if you will be fine or not. I just asked if Mum has gotten another work."

This was what Joseph liked in his friend Stanley - his authoritative behaviour at times.

"Not yet", Joseph replied.

When Stanley pushed the lunch box to him, he did not complain or resist as he normally did because he had found it to be a waste of time. He thanked him and ate with guilt as he wondered how his parents were faring with just the soaked garry they all shared most mornings since the demolition.

He wished silently in his heart that his parents get better work to do and good pay. He wondered why so many things were not balanced in life. Here he was wishing to have the kind of parents his friend has while his friend was wishing to have the kind of parents he had who always had time for him. He felt lucky in a way and not so lucky.

'I'm grateful for what I have', he thought. 'At least, my parents try. There are some worse cases out there.'

No matter what happens, I will not do what others do to get money. I will do what my parents do which is to work for money and not do 419.' Joseph made sure he thanked Stanley properly though Stanley did not really understand how hungry he was.

Chapter 4

Sunday was quite uneventful for Stanley. He was easily bored with most things these days as he was mostly alone. The service itself was quiet in itself and Stanley liked it that way. In exactly three hours, the service was over and the John's family went home direct as they hardly knew anyone in the church to exchange pleasantries; neither were they intent on listening to anyone else.

At home, Stanley was glad to see his parents join him in the sitting room with casual clothes on their body. This showed that they were going to be home all day. To be double sure, Stanley checked his mother's face for any faint trace of make-up. To his delight, her face was without a hint of make-up.

Stanley watched the cartoon showing on the television with less interest though his gaze was fixed on the screen. After a complete hour of waiting for any of his parent to make small talk with him, he got restless and looked at them. Behold, they were both absorbed with their phones. A few minutes later, John left the sitting room and reappeared with his laptop. Stanley understood that whenever his father is with his

laptop, he is not to be disturbed; neither will he stir until what he is doing is done or at meal times.

Looking at his mother again, she looked really absorbed with her phone so Stanley gave up hope on having any discussion with them and concentrated on the cartoon showing on the television screen.

Dinner was Stanley's favourite - white rice and peppered chicken stew. This was a big change from what he had been having since they relocated to Akwa Ibom state. Due to Gladys busy schedule, she normally bought take away meals from fast food joints and had Stanley take sandwiches to school every day. This Sunday, however, she had taken time to get a live chicken the day before and prepared it all herself. The chicken was very big so she fried half of it which they ate with salad that Saturday night while the other half was what she used to make the stew.

Stanley always enjoyed his mother's cooking. His only problem was that it wasn't often. She usually employed a cook to prepare and serve meals to allow her have more time for work and rest from work. He ate with gusto and asked for extra.

When they were done eating, Gladys served them some fruit juice in tall glasses with flowery imprints on them.

"How had school been Stan?" she asked.

It took this long! Stanley thought. "School has been fine, Mum", he replied.

"No trouble and you're coping fine?" she asked again.

"No trouble. Everything is fine."

Gladys nodded at his reply and they stayed silent for a little while. Gladys nudged her husband to say something to his son.

"You have new friends?" he asked.

"Just one", Stanley replied.

"You must miss all your friends from your old school", Gladys remarked.

"I did not have any", Stanley replied.

"Seriously? Gladys asked with concern.

"Yes!" he reply.

"It's good. A man is not supposed to have so many friends you know." Gladys frowned at this statement her husband had just made.

"But you're friendly with everyone", she countered.

"I talk to them. That doesn't make them my friends." Gladys shrugged and continued her conversation with Stanley.

"So, this friend, he's in your class right?" she asked.

"Yes, he's the class captain."

"Well, class captains are always friendly. I hope you understand most of what you are taught if not all. You know you will be writing your common entrance examinations in primary five, you have to be prepared well so that you will not lag behind in secondary school."

"I understand most of what they teach", Stanley replied.

"Okay. Despite that, we have gotten you a private tutor who will start teaching you from tomorrow evening. Also, since we will not really be around for some months, we have made arrangements for a nanny for you. I know we've not really been there for you but don't worry, we'll make it up to you soon."

Stanley nodded. He loved his mother's reassuring words.

"If you need anything - anything at all, just let us know, okay?" John added to his wife's speech.

"Okay", Stanley replied and relaxed better than before to enjoy what he was watching.

Monday saw a new addition to Stanley's lunch box. A piece of the fried chicken which remained was added to his usual sandwich. He would have loved to take rice and chicken stew in his lunch box but the stew got finished that morning.

At school, Joseph insisted on sharing the fried chicken with Stanley instead of eating it alone as he suggested.

Later in the evening, Gladys returned from work with a woman. This woman was short and dark with very white teeth. Her teeth made her face look lovely and warm when she smiled.

"Where is your father?" Gladys asked after he had greeted her.

"He went out," was the reply.

"Okay. Stanley, this is Mrs. Isaac. She will be your nanny. You see, I and your father will be very busy this period so we might not always be around. That is why we thought it wise to get a nanny for you."

"Okay Mum", Stanley replied.

"Also, we're getting you a private tutor. To avoid you getting picked up late, we've gotten you a driver. They will all start tomorrow morning."

"Mum, you did not mention the driver yesterday", Stanley noted.

"Oh! I told you about the nanny and tutor already?" Gladys asked, puzzled.

"Yes Mum!" Stanley replied.

"I must have forgotten", she noted and dismissed the woman with a

hand. She held onto Stanley's shoulder as she led him to his room. "How has school been?" she asked when they were inside.

"Fine!" Stanley replied and sat on his bed.

Gladys looked about the room, checking for any issues.

"I have to apologies. You understand that your father and I have been very busy of late. We're mostly busy anyway. But I want you to never forget that we love you so much. Anything we do is for your own good. We want to make sure you never lack anything."

"I understand Mum", Stanley replied. This was what he loved about his Mum. She was more sensitive than Johnson.

Gladys sighed and hoped that Stanley meant what he said. She hopped on the bed beside Stanley and said, "You know what?"

"What?" Stanley asked with surprise. Any time his mother asked such a question, it meant that he was going to have something she knew he wanted.

"You will not travel again. You will finish in this school you're in now. If you want to, you'll go to the secondary school as well. Though you'll board, I'll be visiting every term and I will make provisions for me to be free during your terms holidays. That's why we're getting permanent staff here."

Stanley smiled. It was good news compared to how he had expected his future to be like.

"What about Dad?" he asked.

"Honestly, I don't know. In his side, a promotion means greater responsibility. I cannot guarantee his presence but I know he will try."

After a while she added, "But you've been spending quality time with him while getting back from school."

Stanley frowned and said, "He's always late and he doesn't say anything."

"He's stressed, you have to understand with him", Gladys defended. "Do you have any assignment you need help with?" she asked.

"No", he replied.

"Okay. How about you read a little before you sleep?"

"I will do that", Stanley replied and watched his mother leave the room. "Dad could use some change", he told himself. "The same way he changed before, he could change again. I know we used to play."

Stanley sighed and stood up to stretch. He checked the time and grumbled aloud.

Chapter 5

Joseph went to school happier than usual the next day. Stanley noticed it quick and wasted no time in asking him about it during break.

"You're smiling plenty today. Something tells me you have good news!" Stanley exclaimed.

The smile on Joseph's face widened, making his face look brighter. "Mum has gotten a job", he said.

"Wow! I'm so happy for you!" Stanley exclaimed with genuine joy. "And the pay is very good. She's working for one big woman like that. That family must have too much money but I'm so cool with it. I brought my breakfast so that you will share it with me. You have tried for me Stan, always giving me your lunch."

"You've also tried for me too, always waiting behind with me until my father comes to pick me."

"You're a good friend", Joseph said and patted Stanley's shoulder. He removed a black cellophane bag from his school bag and removed the food flask it was used to cover. When he opened it, the aroma of jollof rice filled the air and Stanley just looked at the properly red rice with a piece of fish on top of it.

"I hope you did not remove the spoon in your lunch box. You will use it today." Joseph removed a plastic spoon from the cellophane and waited for Stanley to bring out the spoon in his lunch box.

"I'm okay", Stanley replied instead, "I am not really hungry. I will eat my sandwich."

Joseph narrowed his eyes to look at Stanley. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"How?" Stanley asked, confused.

"I did not ask you if you're okay or not. I simply asked you to share in my breakfast."

"But, would it be enough for you if I join you to eat it?" Stanley asked. "I don't care if it is enough or not. I just want you to join me."

"No", Stanley replied, "I don't want you to eat a half breakfast."

"Okay. How about we eat this rice and also eat the sandwiches together? That way, you can call it equal. You just cannot say no to my mother's jollof rice."

Seeing that Joseph will not rest nor eat unless he joined him, he decided to join him but take only a little.

Halfway into the meal, Stanley swallowed a spoonful of rice and

exclaimed "This is really good!"

"I know! Else, I won't have brought it to school", Joseph replied.

"It's really nice", Stanley repeated and kept eating.

When they had finished both meals, they drank water and reclined on the desk in a resting position.

"What's your favorite meal?" Joseph asked.

"Rice and chicken stew. I love the way my Mum prepares it. What about you? What's your favorite meal?"

"I have so many", Joseph replied. "But I think my favorite is okra soup cooked by my Dad. He cooks the best okra I know. Mum just doesn't like okra so she doesn't put effort if she's the one preparing it."

Stanley kept quiet for a while and asked, "Your Dad cooks?"

"Yes, he does", he reply. "If Mum is very busy, he takes over the kitchen. If Mum calls to tell him that she's returning late, he cooks dinner."

"That's beautiful", Stanley noted.

"What about your Dad?" Joseph asked.

"He doesn't cook", Stanley muttered his reply and the bell rang signaling break over.

When school hours were over, Joseph was surprised to see the grey car parked early at the school park.

"I am very sure it is not my Dad", Stanley noted.

"You just may be surprised Stan", Joseph encouraged.

“No. The only thing he's never late to is work.”

Sure enough, when they reached the car, it wasn't John at the wheel. It was a young man at the wheel while Gladys sat behind.

Joseph bid his friend goodbye and opened the door to join his mother inside.

"Is that your friend you talked about?" she asked.

"Yes", Stanley replied.

“Call him for me, let me see him well", she requested.

Stanley called Joseph back and Gladys asked him to join them in the car.

"Where are you going to, boy?" she asked.

"Ekpok layout ma", Joseph replied.

"The driver will drop you there", she said.

"Thank you very much ma", Joseph greeted.

"It's alright. Driver, turn up the AC.”

"Yes ma", the driver replied.

“What is your name", Gladys asked Joseph.

"My name is Joseph, ma", he replied.

“What do your parents do?” she asked.

"My father is a tailor while my mother just got a new job yesterday. She was a trader before her store was demolished."

"Okay. You talk well, I like that."

"Thank you ma", Joseph replied.

When they reached Ekpok street, Joseph alighted and greeted them goodbye. Stanley watched as his friend disappeared being a narrow track between two houses. He wondered where Joseph's house was as all what he could see was a cluster of houses without any décor on the outside. Most of them had peeling paint and dirty television aerials sticking out of the roof tops.

At home, right after lunch, the nanny who Gladys had shown him already came around to do her job. She first of all asked Stanley to show her all his school assignments for the day. She tried helping him through most of it though but ended up just watching him answer them himself.

"Children of nowadays!" she exclaimed while cross checking his answers. "I have a boy just like you in age", she said. "He also hardly needs my help with his assignments. Its only when he has a problem that he would ask me to help but normally asks me to not interfere with his assignment."

Stanley didn't know what to reply so he just kept quiet.

The cook arrived at about the same time the tutor arrived. Stanley and the tutor went to the garage where John had kept a white board and some markers for the extra classes Stanley was to be getting.

"My name is Udoh. You can simply call me Sir Udoh. I will take you on everything you need to know for your common entrance examination." At that very moment, the cook barged in. "Where is madam?" she asked.

Udoh was taken aback by her rudeness and decided not to reply. Ignoring Udoh, she asked Stanley, "I think you are Madam Gladys son?"

"Yes", he replied.

"Where is your mother?" she asked.

"She's in the garden behind", he replied.

"Come and show me", she demanded.

"Did you not see a class in progress?" Udoh snapped. "Go and ask the gateman to show you to her and leave my pupil alone!"

"Meaning what?" she shouted. "Boy, come and show me mummy!"

"Stanley, just go. I am tired of looking at her stretched face." Udoh sat down with a look of disgust on his face.

"Don't come again sef", the cook hissed. She left them alone to go look for the gate man at the gate post.

"Now, where were we?" Udoh asked and the lesson began in earnest. It was a little revision class on what should have been taught in previous classes. He taught with a pompous air and spent more time boasting about his former pupils and himself. Stanley felt like he would dislike him much more than the cook who he had already begun to grow a dislike for.

The only thing that made Stanley enjoy that day was the fact that his Mum was around all day. She did so to ensure that she could leave Stanley in their hands without feeling worse than she would.

Dinner was uneventful and though the meal was nice, no one bothered to compliment it as both Stanley and his father missed the cooking of the mother in the house.

Chapter 6

After a week of endless meetings which made John arrive home late the whole week, John announced, "I will be travelling this weekend. I have business outside the state to address." This was while they were having dinner.

Gladys dropped her fork and knife. Looking at his wife's face, John could see that she was visibly upset. "Honey, what is the matter?" he asked.

"You're travelling this weekend!" she exclaimed.

"Is there anything wrong with that? This is not the first time, or did you have a bad dream last night?"

Gladys laughed at the last statement despite herself. "I was going to say that I'm travelling too."

"Wow. Stanley would be left alone in this house!" John stopped eating at this point and dropped his fork and knife too.

"I wish you told me earlier. I would have rescheduled this journey but I have already paid for my flight ticket." Gladys pouted and gazed intently at John.

"Ticket is not expensive. You can cancel and travel next weekend." John resumed eating his meal.

Meanwhile, Stanley attacked his yam pepper soup with a ferocity that tried to suggest that he is not following the conversation being made about him over his head.

"Not possible", Gladys finally announced.

John looked up and asked, "How?"

"There's no money for that", she replied. It was now John's turn to look visibly upset.

"What do you mean by that statement, dear?" he asked.

Gladys shifted on her chair before explaining. "Maybe I should not have paid the workers three months advance. I'm not really left with anything tangible presently because I'm expecting something big from this trip. I've invested heavily and I'm going to do some checks and balances to make sure I return with the right amount. It is my friend's mall in Ghana which I'm going to. You remember I invested in three big lines of goods."

"I remember quite well. It's due for returns. I thought you were going to reinvest."

"No, not for now at least", Gladys resumed eating.

"Wow! This means Stan would have to be a big boy for a week", John exclaimed.

“A whole week? When are you going and when are you returning?” Gladys asked and stopped eating again.

“Tomorrow. I'll be back Friday evening.”

“And I'll be back Friday morning!” Gladys was really upset now. “I wish I could take Stan with me! Or maybe I should!”

“There is no need. You've employed people for that. Let them do their jobs.” John seemed unconcerned.

“They just started working today! Today, John!”

John lost appetite at the mention of his name. He just did not understand why his wife had to lose her temper with him over such a petty issue. He wondered why she would employ people who she can easily suspect but he did not dare voice his opinions aloud.

“Carry him along with you then. Make sure you teach him everything he's going to miss at school too in Ghana.” John did not know when he lost his temper too.

“Insult me for worrying over our son's welfare”, Gladys complained and pushed her meal aside.

After a comfortable silence, John decided to try and cool tempers.

“Honey, it's not like I'm not also worried. I'm sorry if I made it look like you are overreacting. But, we wouldn't want Stanley to miss out on classes. Besides, we promised ourselves that we won't make him miss so much again at school because of the nature of our jobs. What we would simply do is this: I will drop this smaller phone for Stan. If he has any complain at all, he will call me since I will still be within the country. If it's serious, I'll book the next flight back whether or not I'm done with what I was supposed to do. Is that okay?”

"Sounds much better", Gladys replied and poured out some fruit juice for herself.

"Now, give me one of those your bright smiles sweetie", John cooed. Gladys ignored him and pouted instead. John laughed and turned his attention to Stanley.

"Stanley my boy!" he hailed. Stanley only smiled in response. "Stanley, my only boy! My son! My oyibo! My own! My pride!" John continued hailing. Stanley only kept smiling and did nothing else. He pushed his food aside too since he was tired of eating.

"You heard all what your mother and I have said, right?" John asked. Stanley only nodded in reply.

"I want you to understand something, It's not like we like leaving you alone but we just can't help it. Do you understand that?"

"I understand, dad", Stanley replied to put his father off the long sermon he was about to venture into.

"Okay. Thank God you do. Now, I will give you that my smaller phone. If anything happens that you don't like, dial my number at once and let me know, okay?"

"Okay", Stanley replied.

"When I say anything, I mean anything! If the food you're served is horrible, do what?"

"Dial your number."

"If the driver does not come to pick you or he picks you very late, do what?"

"Dial your number."

"If your nanny brings people since we are not around or she disturbs you unnecessarily or even upsets you for anything, do what?"

"Dial your number."

"Good! It is settled." With that, John resumed eating. Gladys just smiled and poured out some juice for Stanley.

Chapter 7

Gladys and Stanley saw John off to the airport quite early in the morning before Stanley was dropped off at school while Gladys went back home.

At school, Joseph was as cheerful as ever and the two were inseparable. They had made it a habit to not always go outside during break time. Instead, they spent their break in the classroom.

"Look what I brought!" Joseph announced with glee and started removing a parcel from his school bag. It turned out to be an old worn out scrabble board.

"This is a scrabble board, right?" Stanley asked after Joseph had placed it well on his desk.

"Yes it is. You have one of it at home?"

"No. I wanted it but I had no one to play with so there was no point getting it."

"Mum got it from my uncle a long time ago. She used it to pass time with my sister before she got admitted into the university. She now uses it to check my vocabulary. She says it's one of the best ways to learn correct spelling and its use."

"Now, I get to learn from you!" Stanley remarked.

"Nope. We'll just play. You're already good in English"

Joseph brought out a little pouch containing the little boxes with the alphabets imprinted on them. He reached into his bag again and brought out two racks, one for himself and the other for Stanley.

He spent that break time showing Stanley how the game is played and the bell interrupted them while in the process.

They agreed to continue after school hours pending the time Stanley's driver would come to pick him. Unfortunately for them, the driver was there five minutes to the closing time waiting for Stanley in the car.

After Stanley had left rather early, some of their pupils surrounded Joseph.

"It's not fair!" one of them exclaimed.

"What is not fair?" Joseph asked, confused.

"Ever since that boy came into this school, you have not been having time for us!" another person replied.

"Yes. It is like we don't exist anymore!" They all nodded in unison at the last statement made by the shortest boy in the class.

"You people always complain", Joseph replied. "Before Stan came,

you people complained that I don't join you to play some kinds of play as if I am too clean. If I come to the playground and not play, you would complain. I play, you complain that I am playing with just one or two people. What do you expect me to do?"

They all kept quiet since they had nothing to reply.

"If you want to be joining me and Stanley in the class, just say you want to. If you want to make friends with him, you are very free!"

"I am very sure you are the reason he hasn't joined us outside for break since he came", the most stubborn of them remarked.

"I am not. I tried several times to get him outside but he does not want to. If you think I'm lying, you can try him yourself tomorrow or any other day."

"But you've abandoned us!" another said.

"I did not!" Joseph replied.

"We heard he travels a lot. When he travels again, we'll see who you will go to. Or you will follow him like hand bag."

They all burst out laughing at this statement made by the tallest person in their midst.

"I'm going", Joseph said sharply and made to take his leave.

The oldest boy there held him lightly to the shoulder and said, "What you are doing is not good o."

Joseph looked him in the face and replied, "I have done nothing wrong."

Joseph left the class and went straight home while the boys stayed behind a bit to talk about Joseph's strange attachment with the new boy.

Chapter 8

Stanley found the nanny to be a very nice person. She showed concern and was always willing to help him in whatever way she could. What made him like her most was her opening question which she never failed to ask as soon as he got home from school:

"How was school today?"

As the days passed, he progressed from just replying "Fine", or "It was okay" to giving detailed reports of his day at school.

"Your day at school seemed to not be complete without you mentioning Joe", she observed after he had told her of how Joe brought a scrabble board to school that day. Stanley only smiled.

"He seems to be your best friend", she noted.

"He's my only friend", Stanley replied.

"Why not make other friends too?"

"I don't know. I'm just used to him. He's a really nice person, and very intelligent."

"That is good. I hope you will not travel soon and leave your friend behind."

"I won't and hopefully, we will enter the same secondary school."

"Alright, Lunch is ready. You will wash up first and return to eat lunch then we'll look at your assignment together. It's a mathematics assignment today right?"

"Yes."

"I'm not too good at it but I will see what I can do, okay? Go wash up now!"

Stanley practically raced to the bathroom. Since he started relating with his nanny, he had become livelier at home as he no longer felt as lonely as he did before she was employed. The only employee he avoided as much as he could was the cook. She seemed intent on only doing her job and nothing else; not even responding to someone's greeting. Everyone generally disliked her in the compound and also tried to avoid her except Udoh.

Anytime he came to take Stanley on his classes, he would first of all barge into the kitchen to see what she was preparing for dinner.

"Are you sure you can cook at all?" he would ask.

"Oga teitiar", she would explode, "goes away let me do my job!" She usually pronounced 'j' as 'y'. If the gateman was within earshot, he would burst into a very noisy laughter.

"I can't believe you failed this particular question. It was the simplest of

all the assignments I gave you on this subject!" That was the tutor's signature statement whenever he got anything in his assignment wrong.

Whenever he got an answer wrong in his class work, Mr. Udoh would remark: "I took pains to teach this a few moments ago and look at the nonsense you can reproduce for me!"

He would then begin to boast about his former pupils:

"I have taught so many pupils and secondary school students. They always made top grades and schools compete to get them accept their admission. I have taught governor's children. I teach the children of many big politicians. I even teach some children who are considered as hopeless cases. Their parents always have testimonies to tell afterwards. If you will learn to forget, I will expand your skull myself." This last statement always made Stanley want to laugh instead of looking more serious but he would try his best to contain the laughter and keep it to himself. There was no doubt that Mr. Udoh was a good teacher but his pomposity and constant bragging made everyone, especially the cook to dislike him more.

The gate man on his own was the most jovial and carefree employee in the house. The driver was usually very quiet and reserved.

Stanley did not really mind them much but treasured the nanny above all others and each day strengthened their bond and they became very good friends.

Chapter 9

Surprisingly, Gladys and John returned home the same day. Stanley was overjoyed when he returned home from school that Friday and met both of them at home waiting for him at the door. He ran all the way from the car and first into his mother's arms.

"Stan! You're growing so fast. One of these days, you will make me fall!" she exclaimed.

He then turned to John and got lifted up high in the air.

"Sweetheart, what you said is true. I can't even throw him as I used to. Imagine, only one week and you're already fat!"

They all laughed and walked into the house.

"Mummy, how was your trip", Stanley asked, having picked the habit from Mrs. Esther who was fond of asking how his day went at school.

"It was very good, and smooth. The only issue was with bank transfer. I

had to pack all that millions into my bag. I will go to the bank first thing tomorrow morning to deposit it and rectify the issue.”

"Okay Mum.”

John felt jealous and asked, "Little man, are you not going to ask me too how mine went?”

Stanley grinned and asked, "Dad, how was your journey?”

"It was smooth! Never had an easier job!”

"Okay Dad", Stanley said.

"What about you? How have you been? I hope you've been taken good care of!" Gladys started fusing over Stanley's looks; checking to see if there was anything out of place.

"I've been taken good care of", Stanley reported, “but it's good to have you back Mum! and Dad!”

"How has school been?" Gladys asked still not satisfied.

"School has been okay", Stan replied.

“Alright dear. Go take your bathe and come down let's have lunch, okay?" Gladys ordered.

"Okay Mum!" Stanley replied.

Stanley went up the stairs happy at his parents' return. A few minutes later, he was down for dinner.

That evening, John joined Stanley and Udoh in the garage to read his paper while they had their class.

Stanley noticed that he refrained from his usual pomposity and boastings. Instead of beating about the bush as he normally did, he went straight to the lesson and taught it in a better way than that which Stanley was used to. He produced a perfect example of what a parent would want to see in a lesson teacher.

Stanley hated this and tried to show his displeasure through his dull answers and obvious show of disinterest in the proceedings of the class. Although Udoh noticed it, he refused to comment on it because he knew what he had done and was doing.

The pay is good," he thought, "why loose this job because of my normal character?"

John on his part did not notice how the class went as his interest was buried in the paper he had in his hands.

That night, Stanley woke up in cold sweat. When he checked the display on the clock in his room, it was reading 1:25am. He sat on his bed trying to remember exactly what he had seen. He lay down to see if he could catch some sleep again before the day brightened but he woke up again an hour later with the same horrible dream. This time, he remembered clearly what he had seen and refused to sleep again in case it got twisted to something worse than that.

While breakfast was going on, Stanley fumbled so much with it to the point where he spilled his tea all over his fried eggs and on the table.

Stan honey, did you not sleep well last night?" Gladys asked with worry written all over her face.

"No, Mum", he replied, grateful for the opportunity that had just risen by itself.

“What happened? You had a dream?” Gladys asked while looking him over as if she could see his problem by just looking at him.

“Maybe he has problem at school and does not want to go and face the music”, John suggested and took a sip of his tea.

“What do you mean by that?” Gladys countered. “Our son is not a trouble maker and he stays out of trouble!”

“I'm just suggesting that he can change, that's all”, John defended himself and concentrated more on taking his breakfast.

“My son, what is the problem?” Gladys asked, ignoring her husband. “It was a dream”, Stanley replied.

“Interesting!” John exclaimed and set down his cup of tea.

“I saw Mum in the dream. You were walking down a straight road with a big bag and you were looking happy. Suddenly, three men started following you. Whenever you turned, they would behave as if they are not following you. This happened three times. After the third time, you were not comfortable. As you looked back the fourth time, you saw them with guns and cutlass and knives. They were not pretending again and it was very clear that they were coming for you. So, you started running. You ran away from them but they followed you and they were faster. Before I could say anything, they caught you and tied you with ropes and took you away. They collected the big bag you were holding and kept you in one place where I could not see. I don't understand the dream, I hope it's not too bad”, Stanley concluded with fear in his eyes. “This is serious”, Gladys noted.

“It's bullshit! I think it's a figment of his imagination!” John thundered. “What do you mean?” Gladys asked, irritated.

“This is a simple thing Gladys. This child has not seen us for long and now you've returned with a very fat purse. He must have been very afraid for us while we were away so worry has poured itself into a dream now that we are back.”

“Honey, what if this is something serious?” Gladys asked, confused. “Mummy please, don't go anywhere today”, Stanley pleaded.

“What if those people are armed robbers? They could still come to the house to rob you of whatever it is that is in that bag. Honey, if we were to always take all these things seriously, we will never have anything done.”

Gladys seemed confused than ever - should she follow her son or her husband's advice?

“Just finish eating and let the driver drop you off before you will be late for school, okay?” Gladys managed to say.

“Mum, you're not going anywhere today, are you?” Stanley asked with watery eyes. The dream was still very vivid in his memory and he feared greatly, though his young brain did not fully process what he had seen.

“I will be fine, okay? Don't worry about me”, Gladys tried to reassure him.

Stanley left for school very sad. Though he did not really understand, something told him deep down that something horrible was going to happen. He wondered if he would see his mother again as the dream had his mother removed completely from the picture.

Chapter 10

Stanley's sad mood followed him throughout the school day. Even when Joseph tried to get him to talk what his problem was, he could not find words to describe it. When Joseph gave up trying to know what the problem was and tried to make him smile, nothing he did or said lifted Stanley's spirits. In fact, the only words Stanley said was a very low 'good morning' to his class teacher as was customary for all pupils.

When Stanley got home, his bad mood followed him throughout lunch and the lesson. Esther wondered what had gotten into the boy when he replied 'Fine' to her usual question about school and his day. She tried to get him to tell what his problem was but after getting no success, she let him be. 'He will tell me when he is ready to talk' she thought.

John returned home late around 7p.m. Stanley studied him carefully for signs of anything. John just went upstairs and refreshed himself. He came down and ate his dinner with a very big appetite. When he was done eating, he called Stanley.

“My boy, I hope you are feeling better now?” he asked.

Stanley gave no answer but mopped hoping to hear good news or see his mother walk through the door.

“Have you seen your mother since you returned?” he asked when he realized that Stanley was not going to answer his previous question.

“No”, came the reply.

“Okay”, John replied, “call me your nanny.”

Esther followed Stanley to the dining wondering what her employer's husband wanted to say as he had never spoken to her since she started working in the house.

“Have you seen your madam today?” John asked.

“Yes sir. I saw her in the morning.”

“After Stanley went to school, have you seen her?”

“No sir”, Esther was becoming concerned.

“Okay, call me the gateman”, he said.

Esther walked down to the gate to call the gate man from his duty post. Oga, see me here”, the gate man said.

“Since madam left this morning with me, have you seen her return?”

“No sir. Since she left, I have not seen her”, the gate man replied and shook his head.

“That's strange”, John noted.

He carried his phone from the top of the dining table and dialled Gladys'

number. It rang but she did not pick the call.

John kept dialling. It was after the twelfth call that he became worried. Stanley refused to leave his side with high hopes that his mother's safety would be assured by a call or her entrance.

They waited for a very long time for either a return call or her entrance. John constantly checked his social media chats wondering if Gladys would unexpectedly leave an explanation for her lateness.

When the clock stroked midnight, John carried a sleeping Stanley to his room and tucked him in. He went back downstairs to continue the vigil of waiting for his wife.

While waiting, a thousand thoughts flashed through his mind. He wondered if this was a manifestation of Stanley' dream.

'What if that dream was actually a warning?' he thought.

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'If so, I'm dead. My wife! And she did not want to go.

Why did I convince her to go?

What if she has been kidnapped?

What if she's dead? What if they used her for rituals?

What if she has been taken to one remote place and abandoned with nothing?

Why did I doubt so much?

Why did I not believe the dream of that little boy? Why did I behave like that?

Just why?!

If anything happens to her, I will never forgive myself!

What kind of a husband am I? Gladys warned me plenty about my insensitivity but I never paid attention to it. Now, it seems I will pay dearly for this.

What will I do?

Will Stanley ever forgive me if something actually happens to his mother?

Oh, God! Please, let this just be a dream!'

In this manner, the early hours of the morning passed for John. He spent every moment worrying about the whole issue at hand. Those kinds of thoughts replayed in his mind over and over again, becoming uglier with every minute.

Chapter **11**

Stanley woke up late and ran downstairs hoping to see his mother smiling at him as usual. Immediately he saw his father's face, he understood that something was very wrong.

“Good morning Dad”, he greeted carefully, checking his face for any sign of anything.

“Stanley”, John managed to say. “You will be late for school!”

Stanley noticed the round dark circles about his father's eyes and the way his eyelids seemed very heavy. His voice was also cracked like that of someone who had been crying.

“Mum is not back?” Stanley asked with anxiety.

John ignored his question and replied instead, “Go and have your bath. Breakfast is ready. You will have to hurry up so that you will meet up with school today.”

“I don't want to go to school if I don't see Mum”, Stanley demanded surprising his father and himself too.

John was too tired to argue so he let him be.

That day, father and son just sat down in the sitting room waiting for a miracle. John phoned his boss in the office and reported himself as sick and asked for exemption from work for treatment.

Early in the afternoon, Esther arrived to prepare and wait for Stanley to return from school. She was shocked to see him in the house already. “Good afternoon sir!” she greeted John and beckoned on Stanley to follow her.

“What are you doing in the house? Why are you not in school?” she asked with concern.

Stanley could not answer. He just burst into tears instead.

“What is it?” she asked. Seeing that she would get no answer at this point, she just held Stanley in a tight embrace till he calmed enough to stop crying.

“Can you talk now?” she asked.

“My Mum. She has not returned since yesterday”, he complained.

“But your Mum travels like that sometimes”, Esther noted trying to remove the worry from Stanley's face.

“This last time she returned, she never told us she is travelling again. She went to pay some money into the bank.”

“But she has been paying money into the bank. Yesterday could not be any different day.”

“I had a dream before yesterday. I told my parents but my dad thought it was just play!” Tears started welling up in Stanley's eyes again.

“Okay? Want to tell me about it?” Esther egged.

“I saw Mum being chased by three men. And she was holding a big bag. Those men were holding weapons. She was chased and caught. They tied her and took her away. I did not see her again in the dream when they took her away.”

Stanley was crying again after his narration.

“It's okay. It will be fine.”

“If only Dad listened to me”, Stanley said between sobs. “If he had listened to me, this would not have happened!”

“It's okay, don't blame your father”, Esther said and held him again in a bigger embrace.

“I blame him! I told them but he made Mum to still go out yesterday... He does not care... I hate him!”

At this last statement, Esther broke the embrace and bent down to look at Stanley eyeball to eyeball.

“Never hate your Dad, Stanley. He's your father! And he cares.”

“No, he does not!” Stanley replied stubbornly. “If he did, he won't have allowed this to happen.”

“He does! Just that he is a man and has so many things on his head.”

“He cannot have so much in his head than Mum. Mum still finds time

for me sometime but he hardly talks to me. Even when we are in the same car, he does not even care how my day goes or how school is. I will stop greeting him, I will not be...”

“Stop this!” Esther interrupted. She sighed and wondered what she would say that would make Stanley feel better towards his father.

Esther made them to sit down together on a seat. She chose her words carefully:

“Stanley, there is nothing I can tell you that will justify what you father did. But you need to understand with him. Besides, you cannot be against your father now. Did you look at your father very well? It is clear that your mother's disappearance has caused him sleepless night. He needs you now. Yes he has made a mistake to not listen to you, that does not mean he is bad or he wanted this to happen. I'm sure if he had seen ahead, he won't have allowed her to go out yesterday. But what has been done has been done.”

“But he is not a good Dad. All he cares about is money and more money and his job.”

“That's not true. He cares about you too.”

“No, he does not. It was only mum that cared for all of us. “Stanley, address people the way you like to be addressed. What you are planning on doing, would you like it if your child does the same to you?”

“No. But I will not be like him!”

“It is not in your place to be sure of that. You don't know what the future holds. Instead of changing, why not still do right and wait for everything to right itself? You are behaving as if your mother will not return.”

The last statement calmed Stanley down a little.

“I did not see her again in the dream”, Stanley complained.

“If you believe you will see her again, you will. Just believe and do the right thing, okay? Besides, if your mother should return and meet you with another character, do you think she would be pleased and happy?”

“No”, Stanley replied. After a few moments of silence, he said, “I will not hate Dad. Thank you auntie.”

Mrs. Esther held and embraced Stanley for a moment to make him feel calm.

After a long time of being with him, she led Stanley to the dining table where the breakfast which had run very cold had been replaced with hot steaming bowls of egusi soup and semovita.

Chapter 12

The third day after Gladys' disappearance, Stanley returned home and met his father drinking alcohol.

“Good afternoon Dad”, he greeted.

As John lifted his eyes, Stanley noticed how red his eyes were.

“Your mother has been kidnapped”, he announced dryly. After a few minutes of father and son staring at each other, John burst into tears and cried like a baby.

Stanley who had been trying his best to not blame the Dad now felt for him as he saw him do what he had never seen him do - cry.

Stanley felt bad at this point. All through his life, he had always seen his father as a big and strong person. He never really saw him as someone who could cry because he always seemed in control of everything and everyone.

John calmed down a little and gave a full report of his day:

"I went to work today. But when I entered my office, I saw an envelope on my desk. When I opened this envelope, I was shocked to see that I've been suspended till further notice. When I went to ask why, I was told that I'm being investigated for fraud. I am innocent but they don't want to believe me. They were asking me instead, to produce my members in the fraud deal. I know nothing about anything! If there's anything I don't do, is stealing.

I came back home unhappy only for an unknown number to call me and ask me if I'm Gladys John's husband. After I said yes, they simply told me that they are holding your mother hostage and demand the sum of twelve million naira before they will let her go. Before I could say anything, I heard them shouting at Gladys to talk. I don't know if they are starving her, she sounded dull and very unhappy.

I would happily close my bank accounts and sell everything I have to make sure your mother is released, but right now, I have nothing! All my accounts are frozen. If I had agreed to stay in the company's building, we would have been out in the streets by now.

I wish I listened to you Stan. If I did, we would have still had your mother here now. I don't know why I did not believe; see what my unbelief has caused!"

John took a long drink from the bottle in his hand and when he saw that the bottle was empty, he threw the bottle away. It broke on the wall and its pieces were sent flying everywhere around that corner.

Stanley was at a loss of what to do. He knew next to nothing about comforting someone, much less an older person. He would have cried after hearing the news of his mother's kidnap and the demanded ransom but the sight of his father in such a vulnerable way made him forget about himself and feel pity for his father.

Stanley just moved forward and wrapped his little arms around his father's neck hoping it would help calm him just as the hug Esther gave him the day before helped calm him.

Esther walked in and saw father and son in this embrace. She let them alone and tried to make as little noise as possible to avoid interrupting the father and child moment.

Later in the evening, the nanny met Stanley sitting outside alone lost in thoughts, she went close to Stanley and he greeted, Good evening Mrs Esther.

Esther held Stanley's hands and said, I want us to do something. What is that? Stanley asked in curiosity. When we face troubles and challenges Stanley, the best thing for us to do is ask God for help. What trouble do you have Stanley? My Mum is kidnapped and I want her back. Stanley replied urgently. Then let us ask God to bring her back.

Mrs Esther led Stanley to pray for a while asking God to save his Mum and bring her back. After the prayers, Stanley felt a little peace in his heart and thanked Mrs Esther for helping him pray.

Chapter 13

At school, Joseph still insisted of finding out what had made Stanley moody these days. He started wondering if someone died which Stanley did not want to talk about.

When the bell for break rang, Joseph went to Stanley's seat determined to find out what was wrong with him.

"I know you don't want to tell me. But it's making me worry too. Is it that bad? Is someone dead?" Joseph probed.

Stanley looked at Joseph for a while wondering if he should tell him his problem or not.

"Okay, since you don't want to tell me. Just know that you're loved." Joseph stood up to go outside.

"My Mum has been kidnapped", Stanley said and Joseph sat back, shocked.

"Kidnapped you say?" he asked to be sure he heard well.

"Yes." Stanley cast his eyes down as he felt tears well up in his eyes.
"What are the kidnapers saying about her release?" Joseph asked.

"They want twelve million."

Joseph shouted, "Twelve million! What kind of wicked people are they? Do they think people pluck money from trees, twelve million?!"

Stanley just looked more downcast.

"What are you going to do? What is your father saying about it?"

Stanley sighed. "He was suspended from work. All his bank accounts are frozen. There is no money at all. If not for this suspension, he would have been able to get the money."

"Wow! This is bad. I really don't know what to say now."

They both kept quiet for a while before Joseph said, "So, this is the reason for your bad grades in the last three tests and you've been coming late to school. And I guess the day she did not return was the day you did not come to school."

They both kept quiet again for a long time. Jo, thinking how best to console his friend, he simply said, "I will start sitting behind with you."
"But you won't see anything if you sit behind", Stanley remarked.

"I know. You will write and I will copy. When we are having a test, I will cross check your answers. I will correct you when you make a mistake."

"Is that not cheating?" Stanley asked.

"It is. But we cannot have you failing all your tests. You will get expelled if you carry on like this. I don't want you expelled."

"The way things are going, I may not return after this term."

"You will Stan, you will!"

Stanley smiled, happy to have someone by his side.

"I don't think I will go with your plan. I remember my nanny telling me that I should do to others what I would like others to do to me. If I cheat, our teacher will not like it the same way I would not like it if my pupil cheats. Besides, if we get caught, I will put you into trouble. I don't want that."

"If we get caught, we will tell them why. They won't punish us when they hear our reason."

"No. If my grades don't improve, I will tell them why. But I will try. In case Mum returns soon, I don't want her to come and see a bad result."

"Not if, she will return!" Joseph tried to reassure him.

"Thank you for being my friend Joseph. You are the only real friend I've had in my short life."

Joseph laughed and smiled. "I'm happy you came here Stan. I will never forget you in all my long life."

They sat in silence till the bell for break over rang.

Chapter 14

That same day which Stanley and Joseph's friendship was firmly established, Esther went early to work. She met John on the floor with bottles all about him.

She passed him and went to the kitchen and met the cook looking sour. "Good afternoon", she greeted.

"Ohh-oh", the cook replied.

"Has oga eaten anything?"

"My sister, mmh. For three days now, even water, is hard for him to swallows. I pities him and I pities ourself. If this thing go like that, we will not have this sweet work again."

Esther thanked her and went back to the sitting room. She stood for a long while looking at John as he kept on drinking even when it was clear that he was tired and could not bear to take another sip. At long last, she spoke up.

“Is this how you plan to waste your life instead of looking for another alternative?”

John came back to reality and turned his head slowly to see who had made the statement.

Esther did not allow him stress himself so much, she moved forward and faced him directly.

"Why not comfort your son? Why bring yourself this low? Why not sit down and think of how to secure your wife's freedom? You're behaving like someone who has long given up."

John laughed a dry laugh. "Where do you want me to get the money from? Should I steal as I'm accused? I gave up already, it is not today."

Esther waited and said, I may not know how you feel but drinking will not bring your wife back. You need to set your mind on what you expect from the situation you are in.

You cannot replace a negative situation with a negative attitude. I believe you are better than this sir, Esther said with empathy as she sat down to say more. But before she could say anything, Johnson interrupted.

So what do you suggest I do? I am a man that used to know what to do at any given time but now, I am clueless as to what I should do. I think I would sell some of my property to raise the money.

Please join me and the others tomorrow so that I can take out some items to sell. Johnson stood up and left the sitting room.

Chapter 15

The next day, all the items which were to be sold were all packed and kept outside. The evening before was a very busy one. John packed everything in the storeroom out while Esther and Stanley repackaged them for selling. The cook joined them when she was done cooking. The gate man and the driver followed suit. The cook was the first to leave, followed by the driver. Esther stayed till late in the night before she decided to call it a day and go home. Thankfully, the next day was a Saturday so they spent the whole morning and noon finishing what they started. The cook fed them at right times. When Udoh arrived for his lesson, he left seeing that his pupil was not available for learning. He openly declared that he does not want to do anything outside his job description.

When they were almost done Esther made sure she packed away some valuable food items and some other essential things which would hold Stanley and his father for a couple of months.

They then waited for the three supermarket owners who John had reached out to. He waited with high hopes that they would not force him

to sell at a very big loss.

The first buyer came three o'clock on the dot. He looked pleaded with the items on display but declared that they are all old goods and needed repackaging. He started claiming that it would cost him to make them more presentable.

The other two buyers came and looked at the goods too. One noted that she is ready to pay in full for the parts she was interested in. The gate man and the driver sorted out her demands and started loading them into the car she brought with her.

A loud continuous banging was heard at the gate.

"Who is that that is knocking like a mad person?" the cook asked and everyone turned to look at her. That was by far the only statement she had made without error and serious accent issues.

"Go and check who that is so that our ears will have peace", John told the gate man and off he went.

A few minutes later, a very loud shout was heard from the gate.

"It seems today was meant to be a noisy day in your compound", the first buyer remarked.

"I wonder what is going on there. You", he pointed at the driver, "Go and check what is going on."

Half a minute later, they heard the driver's voice for the first time as he shouted too. Both he and the gate man then shouted together, "Madam ooh!!"

This other way, no one knew what was going on and they could not

really hear exactly what the gate man and the driver were shouting. "Maybe I should go and check", John muttered.

"No, let me check. Complete this transaction." With those words, Esther left to see what was going on at the gate. As soon as she reached there, she reversed and went back to where John and the buyers were and whispered into his ear, "Madam is back!"

"The money has been sent", the third buyer said and put her phone in her pocket but John heard nothing.

He screamed, "My wife is back?" He left everything and ran towards the gate. Stanley followed behind. The first people they saw were two police men. Then just behind them was Gladys sitting in the car right outside the gate.

John jumped and screamed like a little boy whose mother had just returned from a very long journey with lots of goodies for him. He ignored the police men and ran to the car with Stanley following. They hugged Gladys and looked her over. At a point, they all cried tears of joy.

Esther said a silent prayer of thanks in her heart.

The cook just used that moment to bring out glasses for juice and a little celebration.

Chapter 16

Gladys sat in the living room looking shaken but happy to be home. She narrated her experience:

"I noticed a particular car following me. They stopped my car on the road telling me that there was something wrong with my car. When I came down to check they tried to hold me. I ran back and locked myself in the car. I drove off quickly but before I knew it, another car blocked my path. They brought out guns and threatened to shoot if I moved the car.

They took me out of my car and tied me up and put me in their car. They were three men. One of them drove my car.

They covered my face with a black cloth so that I would not see where they were taking me too.

I was not the only person there. They already had two kidnapped people there. One got released that day. All the money I brought back from that trip to Ghana is all gone.

I stayed the longest. They were planning on using me for rituals should the ransom not be paid before Tuesday.”

Gladys sighed and drank the glass of water before her.

"So, how did you get released?" Esther asked.

"It was yesterday, very early in the morning. We heard gunshots. I think, somehow, the police had gotten information about their hideout. Two of them were killed in the cross fire while the others were arrested. We were all giving statements in the police station. I never knew we were so far away until the police took us away from that bush.”

"Thank God oh!" Esther said and raised her hands upwards in a show of praise.

"I was thinking you would get a loan and get me out of there sooner. Thank God you didn't. We would have been twelve million poorer!" John shed tears at this point. "Leave us", he demanded and all the employees left.

"Honey, I got suspended at work for fraud. I'm sure they are just trying to work out my sack.”

Gladys was shocked. "But you are innocent, I know you are! If there is anything you can't do, its stealing!"

John shook his head sadly and turned his palm upward. "They froze my accounts. I practically have nothing except this house we are in right now.”

Gladys shook her head at their misfortune. "And that money I was with was not recovered in the raid.”

John laughed bitterly. "We are broke", he said, "but I am very happy you're back safe and sound. We will get our lives back together as a family."

"Yes dear, we will", Gladys concurred.

"The only thing that vexes me is that I did not pay attention to Stanley's dream. If I did, we would not be in this situation now." John shook his head sadly.

Gladys drew Stanley to herself and wrapped him a warm embrace. "We are sorry we did not listen to you sweetheart."

"It's okay mum", Stanley replied under her bosom.

At that point, John checked his phone for the alert he was supposed to have received. He just remembered that the third buyer had made a transfer and left with the goods she had picked out.

"Three hundred thousand naira", he said absent-mindedly.

"You have another account?" Gladys asked.

"Yes, I opened one of these free accounts which you can open without a down payment."

"I saw our things outside. Were you selling them?"

"Yes, we were trying to see if we could raise the money for your release. At least, we can use the money for housekeeping now."

Gladys smiled and said, "At least I won't have to worry about transport. I will go to the north and check that shop I left there under the care of that my friend Aisha. You remember Aisha right? She has been asking

me to come get my part of the profits; she's tired of holding it.”

"Seriously! I forgot about that particular shop. Thank God you did not take the profits from there too to invest in the Ghana business. We would have been somehow finished.”

"My dear, it's good to put your eggs in different baskets in case one breaks", Gladys noted.

"But dear, I'm afraid for you. Can't you just ask Aisha to just transfer the money instead of you travelling?”

"Okay, I will ask her to send me the records through mail before she sends the money.”

"I feel much better now", John replied.

"Me too", Stanley added and they all burst out laughing.

Chapter 17

"Stan, you're looking super happy", Joseph noted.

Stanley replied with a very wide grin which made his face look so bright like a star of sorts. "Mum is back!"

Joseph jumped from his seat and did a little dance of joy.

"How did she get freed? How did it happen?"

"Police! They got her out of there. I'm so happy." Stanley could barely conceal his excitement.

"I'm much happier. At least you're back to normal. You don't know how I've missed you." Joseph finally sat down again and they both smiled looking at each other.

"Stan, do you know that some of our class mates are jealous?" Joseph asked.

"Jealous of?" Stanley was puzzled.

"Both of us!"

Stanley laughed first before asking, "How?"

"You see, you are the finest boy in the whole school", Joseph began. Stanley blushed and laughed.

"It's true o. Anyway, they were accusing me of leaving them to come in class for that fine boy. They were busy complaining."

"Because of me? I'm sorry Joe, maybe I should have been going outside as you wanted."

"Don't blame yourself Stan. They are jealous. I heard a teacher telling another of how our friendship is the best she has seen since she started teaching. They have been using us as examples in other classes. They are just jealous of our good name."

"Well, I don't care what they think. I'm happy to have you as a friend."
"Me too."

The bell for break over rang and all the pupils poured in as usual. Just before the first class after break, the attendant to the head mistress came into the class. This was the second time she was coming in that term.

"Class greet!" Joseph called.

"Good afternoon, Miss!" they all chorused.

"Afternoon", the attendant replied and addressed the class teacher, "I have been sent to call Stanley John to the headmistress office."

“Okay. Stanley, you can follow her.” She shook her head as Stanley moved out of his desk and followed the attendant.

On the way to the headmistress office, Stanley was afraid.

'Is it because of my grades?' he thought. 'I failed only three tests. I hope they don't send me home for this. Mum will not be glad.'

He continued wondering in this manner and said a silent prayer in his heart that he would not be expelled.

Once in the familiar office, he sat quietly and crossed his fingers again. "You failed three tests with a big zero", Mrs. Umoh finally remarked.

Stanley hung his head and replied very quietly, "Yes ma."

"But you did so well in your other tests. In fact, the lowest score you had before these bad results came in is eight. Now, I believe that someone who had good grades such as yours would not have such bad grades without a reason. Do you have anything to tell me?"

"Ma, my Mum got kidnapped. The day after her kidnapping, I did not come to school. Since that time, I have had bad results but she got released on Saturday. Now that she is back, I believe I'm back to normal."

Mrs. Umoh was quiet for a while.

"I am happy that your mother is back. I understand why your performance got bad. I will ignore those tests and allow you continue your classes as normal. But you know, if you do not do well, I will revisit your case without favour."

"Thank you very much ma."

Stanley left the headmistress office relieved.

Chapter 18

Stanley walked into the house with joy in his heart. No sooner had he passed the door that he got lifted up in the air on high and he heard his father shout, "You came at the right time! I just returned."

He set him down and said, "Let's go look for your mother."

They both went straight to the little garden behind, knowing how Gladys loved to sit there. Sure enough, she was there reading a book.

"Guess what?!" John exclaimed. He could hardly hide his happiness.

"What dear?" Gladys asked, surprised.

"My boy, sit down first and listen!" John led Stanley to a seat and removed his school bag from his shoulders. He placed it on the third seat there.

"Now, we were both in this house, weren't we honey?"

"We were?" Gladys replied and wondered what could make her husband so happy.

John started telling them what happened with motion and plenty of smiles.

"I was in the sitting room, you were too. We were watching TV. Then a call came through.

I heard someone say, is this John Maxwell? I said, yes this is he. Then I heard the person ask me to come to the office immediately. So, I left the house.

When I reached there, nobody answered me at first. After thirty minutes, I saw police officers walk in. I was so afraid! I thought they wanted to arrest me. But I knew I was very innocent of the charges levelled against me.

Next thing I knew, the two people who travelled with me on that last trip I went on before the suspension came in and were cuffed immediately. I was shocked.

They framed me for fraud while they were the ones who stole millions of naira. The only reason I was not arrested immediately was because they could not see where I packed all those millions to. The amount stolen was more than five hundred million but when they checked my accounts, it was nowhere near that amount. I had not gotten any new property after that theft; neither could they see anything suspicious about me.

When you were kidnapped, they heard about it but I did not know. After they waited to see if I would finally cough out the money and use it for your release but I did not, they knew then that I was completely innocent.

Do you know that one of these buyers was sent by the company to check me? I thank God they were there when you returned and that they heard the police report from the police men. I am free!

They have unfrozen my accounts and they have paid me some money for the false accusation. My suspension has been lifted. My name has been cleared!" John danced about a little at the end of this narration.

"Dear, I'm so happy for you, for us!" That was all Gladys could say. She was speechless.

Mom! Stanley cuts in, Mrs. Esther taught me how to pray, when you were kidnapped we prayed and I believe our prayers was heard that was why you were released. I have been praying and this news has proven to us that God answers prayers.

I think we should start praying often in the house.

That is a good idea, thank God for bringing Mrs Esther to us. Johnson said as he smiled and looked at his son. We are going to be praying in this house from henceforth.

"I am taking all of us out tomorrow evening. Then Stan, my boy! We are going on a guy's outing on Saturday, just the both of us. I think this episode made me understand that nothing is better than family and I really have not been paying attention, especially to you my son. I am happy and grateful that you did not hate me for the way I was before. Instead, you were always there for me. I don't think I deserve a son like you Stan.

Even after I doubted your dream so much that I made it come to pass, you still treated me like your father."

John drew Stanley into his arms and embraced him.

“I love you son. I'm proud of you, always!”

The Cook chose that moment to bring those fruit juice and they all laughed at her perfect timing.

CONCLUSION

Stanley is a handsome kid who has everything going well for him and his family. His parents relocated due to a transfer and as such, he had to change school, again.

He makes a new friend for the first time and gets closer to his nanny. His parents both coincidental have to travel on business at the same time. He is left in the hands of his nanny and the other staff who take care of him as supposed. They returned, but his mother gets kidnapped a day after he had a bad dream about her.

Angry at his parent's ignoring his dream and the subsequent manifestation that followed, Stanley wishes to disregard his Dad who got suspended from work for dubious works. But his nanny talks to him and assures him that all hope was not lost yet. She encourages him to pray.

Stanley takes the advice of his nanny and gets closer to his father. He also is closer to his friend but refuses unlawful help. Subsequently, his mother is released and his father's name is cleared.

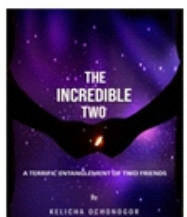
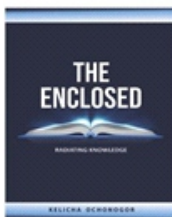
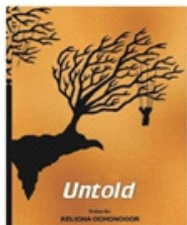
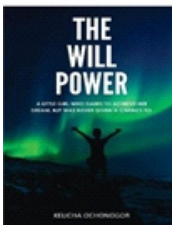
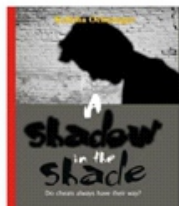
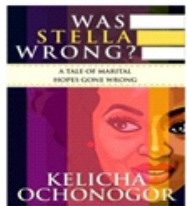
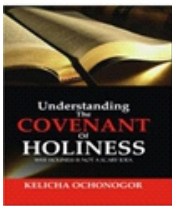
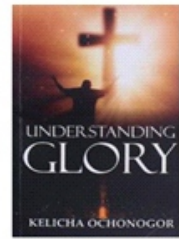
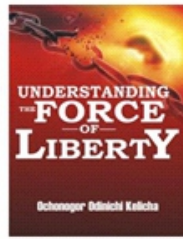
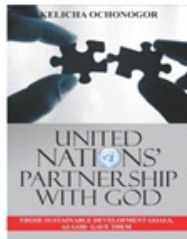
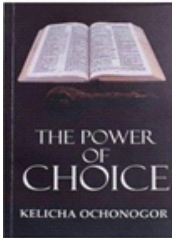
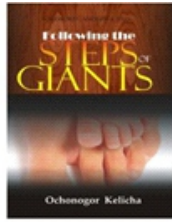
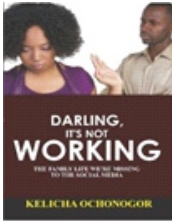
Moral lessons:

1. Move with the right people.
2. No matter what happens, never show disrespect to your elders.
3. Never quickly dismiss any piece of information as unnecessary.
4. Pray always.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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OTHER BOOKS BY MRS. KELICHA OCHONOGOR



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