

Benin- city. A place, steeped in culture. Culture, which was the essence of all societies, modern or ancient. He loved its serene nature and the people whose allegiance was to their Oba first before any other authority. He was king and god, his subjects swore by his name and believed whoever he cursed was doomed and whoever he blessed was elevated in life. The British had dethroned Ovonranmen, an ancestor of the present Oba in 1897, but since then the town had remained peaceful even when other parts of the country had witnessed sporadic violence.

Chris Hart smiled at the pretty hostess as he disembarked from the aircraft at Benin airport and was rewarded with a wink and a piece of paper was thrust into his hand. Another one had fallen; Odion would rave about eternal damnation for sinners and the like but would shut up when Chris dropped a handsome amount of money for Sunday offering. Odion his naïve flat mate who thought his friend was an engineer in an oil firm. He read the barely legible writing scrawled on the scrap. She would be off at seven; he was to wait at the bar for her. Ladies always had a soft spot for him, they wanted to take care of him, do everything for him, and he had the look of a lost child who needed help. A child man actually, though none of the ladies he had shagged would believe he was twenty-five. Odion had once told him that he was misusing the gift of youth that God had blessed him with, innocent auctioneer whose bronze works were sought after by Nigerian and foreign tourists who came to the ancient city.

He reviewed the last assignment as he sipped his beer at the bar. Instead of pursuing the lead he had obtained from the dying man, he had received direct orders from the major to drop the case. Something was brewing in the United Kingdom and he might be sent over to see what one Dr. Timothy Egale was up to. He had been linked to the cabal, seems like they were grooming him to take over as governor of one of the oil rich states. He felt someone's eyes on him and turned to see a young girl who would be in her teens turn away, probably waiting for someone. He wondered what her reaction would be if he walked over to her table and told her that he was a trained killer who worked for a government that would deny his existence if word got out. He had had dreams of becoming an economist, dreams from another lifetime when he took for granted his mother's smile, his father's harsh words, Kelvin's bulk running after him. Major Atare had given him a reason to go on living. They had discovered him under Preye's inert body, which had been shattered by a block of falling masonry. He had been revived by the army's medics and handed over to Major Atare who had taken him to Kwara state and told him about the death of everyone in the village including his family. The world had screamed out in revulsion Nigeria had been suspended from the commonwealth and the G-7 countries had slammed sanctions on her.

This had not deterred General Tombut and his cronies but had fuelled their lust for more deaths and increased the zeal with which they depleted the nation's treasury.

"I would give a month's salary to know what's going on in that head"

He had seen her but preferred to remain in memory land. Picking up his valise, they walked out of the airport and boarded a taxi for his place at Ekenwan road. On the way

over there, the hostess who called her self Tracy couldn't keep her hands off him and the poor elderly driver couldn't keep his eyes off the rear-view mirror.

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“Welcome to Casa de Hart, make your self comfortable and I'll be back in a minute? He left her taking her clothes off, these airhostesses were really horny, maybe it was the high altitude that worked on their hormones. He checked to see if he had any mail, but as usual the post-box was empty, Odion always took care of the bills. It was seven thirty-three, Odion would be home any minute now best get on with the party in his room before he showed up and voiced his disapproval.

Tracy's birthday suit was totally glorious, chocolate brown skin and limbs like a gazelle. Her centre of gravity was covered by glistening velvet like bush. She stopped fiddling with the CD player and spread herself on the lead.

“You like?” she asked, stroking herself

“I want” he said peeling off his clothes and falling down on her.

“Hmm, good, for a moment I thought you were a voyeur”.

They wasted no time in connecting, disconnecting again. She clawed at him and begged him not to stop; this was a really loud one. After the third time, he crept to the kitchen to get them something to eat, Odion's door was closed and no, it couldn't be, either his ears were deceiving him or he was dreaming. He could actually hear moans coming from Odion's room, may be he was in the wrong house. After collecting a loaf of bread, milk, mayonnaise and two fresh cucumbers from the refrigerator he returned to his room not before giving Odion's door the thump up sign.

His nymph was supine on the rug and after filling their bellies they returned to their primeval dance with gusto.

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Tracy left early the next morning, after extracting his number and a promise to call her later. Poor girl she should never hear from him again and if she showed up at the house, he would lie to her and shag her.

After a light breakfast, he positioned himself directly opposite, Odion's door and pretended to watch the TV. Seven arm' seven-fifteen, seven-thirty, no sign of the door opening, his mobile began ringing, As he rushed to his room, Odion's door was thrown open and, no, good heavens, it couldn't be; their neighbour's daughter sneaked out and dashed outside. Chris returned to the kitchen and started at Odion's ursine frame covered by a towel.

“What are you staring at?”

“Welcome to the club”.

They remained silent for some seconds before bursting out in laughter. Later while he was having breakfast, Odion told Chris how he had drifted in the ‘would”.

“It started on Sunday, the congregation was busy singing when we heard shouts from outside the hall; the next we heard was a loud gunshot. This brought the faithful to their feet and scrambling for safety. The police had somehow arrived on time and were restraining the shooter who turned out to be the reverends friend and a leading lawyer. It turned out that our revered man of God had been humping a number of young maidens, four to be precise. The learned gentleman’s daughter took in and refused an abortion, instead she spilled the beans when the holy man refused to divorce his wife and marry her.

“Where’s our prophet now?”

“Thin air!” He vanished during the ensuing confusion, his wife fainted when three mothers came forward and confessed to having helped their daughter abort their pregnancies. Well that was the end of the Divine End-Time Mission Assembly.

“So that’s why you broke your vow of abstinence”.

“The bastard was enjoying choice arse while preaching about the evils of fornication.

Now in intend to have at least one new girl everyday, you know, making up for lost time”.

“Who was the first?”

“Edna my secretary, you know; she always had the hots for me, that was Monday night, you saw last night’s piece and today’s Wednesday, I’ll come up with someone else.

Yours was pretty cool, where do you get them anyway?”

Chris smiled and rose from the table he had left a monk two weeks ago and had returned to a sex maniac.

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Just two hours after they arrived at Odion’s workshop cum gallery, his target for the day had already been chosen. A dark beauty who said she was a Biology Major at the University of Benin. She had been enthralled by Odion’s smooth talk, he had whispered to Chris that if he knew it was that easy, to pick girls, he wouldn’t have wasted his years at the university.

Chris had met him when he was an undergraduate at the University of Ilorin. Odion had been a green fine art student who was always bullied by cult members. On one particular occasion, Chris had run into two goons beating up the budding sculptor. After chasing off the surprised bullies (who couldn't fathom how a young boy could do that) he had taken it upon himself to be Odion's guardian. The different cults had done their best to recruit him but he had fended them off because he thought them revolting. They all claimed to fight against injustice and oppression of the black race but what they actually did was kill one another like wild turkey. So far no white man had been taken on.

Those had been hard years, combining his education with the hard physical training he received at the Major's farm. They were others, no one asked questions, all knew they were being trained by the government but which government they didn't know, they was never any official recognition, their instructors came and went just like them. At first he had refused to have anything to do with the killers of his family but the Major who had replaced his family, taught him French, paid for his education and provided shelter explained everything to him.

They had gone out hunting and while cleaning the waterbuck, the Major had suddenly brought up the topic.

“When I joined the army, I swore that I would do my best and retire as a general officer. I passed all my exams and settled on the amphibious corp, which I thought would be the toughest corp in the army. At the academy, we were thought about honour and commitment to duty, taught how to above all else be patriots, the safety of the nation should come first before all else. That's what has kept this country together, when others had gone down the ugly path of war.”

They placed their catch over the roaring blaze and sat down. It was one of those memorable moments, camping out in the African wild at night. The tantalizing smells of roast game tickling their nostrils.

“ I was second in command of the 106th when we were ordered to your village. The night before we deployed, our Co came down with a fever and brigade ordered me to take command. He glanced at Chris, who had that look of hate he usually put on whenever he remembered the tragedy. The bottle of whisky was in his backpack, taking it out; he took a long slug before passing it to Chris.

“We had orders to search for the militant youths and apprehend them. Intelligence had had it that they were over two hundred and were armed to the last man. Just before dawn the chief of operation at defence HQ who was more of a politician than an officer called me and changed my orders. We were to destroy your village, no one said anything about the villagers but I was supposed to read between the lines; I tried arguing but was bluntly told to do my duty. Before I could issue orders artillery had finished the job.

“Did you intend to carry out your order?” this had asked.

“Of course not, all we had to made was arrest anybody who looked like a militant and destroy some houses, but no one would have been killed. They took that option out of my hands, so all I could do was salvage the situation and here you are.”

“No one questioned your resignation?”

“No”.

“ I don’t see what this has to do with the training you want for me.”

Major Atare continued talking as he turned the glistening antelope.” My friends say you are too young to be told these things but you’ve got a better intellect than that of your peers. What do you know about Herbert McCauley?”

“Born 14th November 1864, died 47 in Kano widely acclaimed as father of Nigerian Nationalism, Grandson of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther. Until his death he fought for the right of Nigerians under British rule and was pretty conservative.”

“What do you mean by conservative”

“He didn’t actually fight for self-government, what he wanted was the well being of the people.”

Atare stared at Chris for some time before continuing, “ You’re correct on that score. After the civil war, a group of leading Nigerians from different spheres of life got together and formed a body they simply called Heelas-”

“One of Macaulay’s names.”

“Yes, they expounded on what they thought were maculay’s principles. They wanted no part in the government of the federation but they would do all they could to prevent its break up”.

Who were they?”

“Two were senior civilians in the security services the other three were from business; from the north, south, east and west. The council was non-partisan, had on ethic allegiances, and interest in joining any government.”

“Kind of like Ludlum’s invar brass?”

“Correct-“

“And we’re the foot soldiers of the council of Heelas; but why Heelas?”

“Macaulay would have been appalled by what his beloved country had become, that’s why they had chosen his name. You can’t take revenge for your family’s death; providence sent the sluts to Tombut, what you can do is help prevent future massacres.

There exist a clique-a cabal-in this country with aims that are totally opposite of those of the council of Heelas. Complete economic subjugation of the nation. Destroy it and another rises to take its place. There will always be greedy men as long as there are men.”

“How did you sign up?”

“You don’t have to know the details but suffice it to say that the present council is made up of men of honour.”

“The present council?”

“Yes, three of the original members are dead, replaced by people with credible credentials.’

“When do I meet them?”

“Hard luck, you might be summoned if you re deemed fit, but for now you’ve not even been accepted.”

“The had their venison and retired for the night.

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“Chris is more like a brother to me”, Odion was at his best, it had taken some doing to convince the biologist click to go home with them. She had spent the whole day with them at the workshop marvelling at the various stages of producing bronze works.

“But he’s on the quiet side”, she said looking at him”” I hope he approves of me?”

“ Oh, you’re great, I’m not just in the talking mood.” He turned up the volume of the car stereo to down their voices. He would call Tracy since he had had no luck today and besides last night’s marathon performance was still fresh on his mind.

He had this knack for sensing trouble before it befell him. The Mercedes was speeding towards them as if it was on a formula one track. He knew what the occupants were up to. Their operation, what ever it was had undoubtedly gone haywire, they were looking for another getaway car, maybe the Mercedes had been spotted. The weather was conclusive for snatching a vehicle, it had rained all the way from Ugbowo where the gallery was and they had just turned into Ekenwan road. The bandits would no doubt settle for their Honda. Chris had told Odion that the money for the car had come from a loan he had secured from the workers co-operative of his company with luck, there would be no need for guns, all he had to do was a little creative driving. The lovebirds were totally

oblivious to the approaching danger; he increased his speed as the other car came at them. They also increased and tried to overtake them, Odion and the would be biologist had now realized what was happening and were screaming Jesus, Jesus (you always remember him when there's trouble). Their speeds were now neck breaking as the Mercedes drew abreast. He could see three men and a fourth who was bleeding in the arms of another in the back seat. Before they could draw fully abreast and may be open fire, he stepped on the brake, and swung the car onto an exit. The other driver hadn't expected the move at all and sped on. The map of the area was imprinted on his brain so he lost no time in finding his own street. The minute the car stopped the love birds were out tearing away to the house; so much for travelling companions. He would have called the police to alert them to the fact that there were desperate men around but that was against council's policy, no authorized contacts with the known security services. Locking all four doors, he muttered good night to the outlaws and walked inside; there would be no Tracy tonight.

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Tina jumped when the bell rang-who on earth would be calling at this hour of the night. She always stayed up late on Thursday to watch her favourite TV show. Already in her nightgown she walked to the front door and peeped through the eyehole; Evans her neighbour, he was always borrowing something or another she removed the chain and unlocked the door.

“What in heavens-“, the door slammed against her and Evans was thrown on her.

“Tie her and search the damned place”. No, she couldn't believe it, that voice, she had heard it earlier that day. Kunle Adebisi was staring at her with hate filled eyes. Another guy, a white guy was tying her to one of her chairs and gagging her, Evans was crouched beside Kunle with his sleeves folded. There were marks on his arm, God he was a junkie.

“Yeah, you never guessed he was a junkie, did you? Now why don't you be a good girl and tell me where the discs are?”

“Kunle, what's the meaning of this His feet lashed out and struck her face, she tasted blood in her mouth. Whoever was with him had come back into the room and informed Kunle that the search had been futile. Kunle brought out a long knife from his jacket and smiled at her; holding it against her bruised cheek he whispered to her.

“Have you ever watched Hausa men prepare Suyameat? They cut thin slices off a large hunk. How would it feel, slicing off pieces of flesh from soft human flesh? He could see the terror in her eyes; he had her full attention now.

“Where are the discs?” she felt the knife dig into her left thigh.

“With a friend”.

“I don’t believe you Tina, maybe I should be more convincing”, he flicked the knife and she felt a piece of flesh separated from her thigh. He stopped and scream which was about to come out of her mouth with his left hand.

“I swear, I gave it to her for safe keeping, but she doesn’t know what they contain”.

“Who is she?”

“She’s with the Sun – “; a bright light flashed through her head. The pain that seared through her was worse then death. He had driven the knife into the bone.

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“You’re got to clear out now, take all you can, I’ll be on my way after I clear up this end”.

Kunle was screaming on the phone. Timothy was at a party organized by the publisher of the sun. He could even see him through the French windows right now. By tomorrow, the police’d want him and the very same people who have courted him only minutes ago would vilify him with glee.

“Kunle make sure you leave nothing that can lead back to its, I’m on my way out of the country now, call Abuja and intimate them. This cancels every thing, you hear, everything.

“Of course I’ve called them, what I’m afraid of is if they decide to cancel us”.

“Get a grip on yourself man, and clear out the minute I ring off, what about the subject?”

This was strange, he sounded like a master spy who has done this all his life.

“Taken care of”

Egale rang off and proceeded to apologise to a slightly amused host for his sudden departure. The man would know by morning the real reason. He glanced at his watch, it was 11:42pm, called his travel agent and was told that the earliest flight to any where in Africa was at 5:00am Friday morning, and that was to Egypt, Virgin Atlantic left for Abuja at 5:35 am. His hand were shaking as he drove home, if only Kunle hid the bitches body well to give them time.

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Kunle stared at the wall as if the answered he sought would materialize. Why had this happed? Abuja had just disowned him, stay in England and they would crucify him, rum to Nigeria and the cabal would make mince meat of aim. The stakes favoured his return to Nigeria, he could literally get lost anywhere until the dust settles, stay in Britain and one of those racist whites would no doubt do him in prison. He also had his secret trump



cards, digging them out of his safe; he turned them in his hand. Four different passports, he would use one and send the other three by post to Nigeria, no sense in taking them along. Customs could stumble on them on his way out of the country if he carried them; the bloody Arabs had made everyone cautious. Kunle Adebisi, which wasn't his real name, anyway would simply disappear. Welcome to life Phillip Danjuma.

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Inspector Trevor Battersea (Land Batty to his friends and subordinates) was a stickler for detailed. That was why the superintendent had woken him up at 5:30am to handle the Mortimer street case (the pigeons from fleet street had already christened it). Two deaths, a black Nigerian lady with British citizenship and a white junkie. The old lady who had called in had reported, seeing two white men go into the flat of first the junkie and then the black lady (identified as Tina Okonkwo lately of the Green Delta Foundation). She had grown suspicious when they came out alone and left in a hurry, no, she couldn't describe them except that they were of average height and build. She hoped they caught them because Tina was such a nice girl; he promised to do his best but didn't bother to tell her that 95% of all statistics were averages. The men she had seen could be anyone and everywhere.

“Make sure you get everything to the lab and I want the results pronto” he said to Smith the leader of the forensic team.

“As his lordship wishes; its defiantly a drug thing, the Yard's going to be monitor this”, Smith replied as he dropped a small drug vial into an evidence bag. Whoever had done this was certainly sick, the poor girl had been sodomized and her face was no longer recognizable. The junkie ho had been tagged as Evans Frost like he needed defrosting, the killers has strangled him and dumped him in the deep freezer. He had spilled his guts on the carpet giving the room a rotten starch.

“And have somebody clean this place up” Battersea shouted over his shoulder as he left for the station house.

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Dr. Egale's not around right now, but I can take a message”, the secretary's crisp voice came over the line to Insp. Battersea.

“Just tell him to call me at this number and you had best advice him to check the morning papers before he calls, thank you.” He imagined the bewildered expression that would be on the lady's face. Picking up the phone again he dialled Scotland yard and asked to be connected to Superintendent Joyce who was with narcotics and asked him for anything on Frost. Joyce promised to call back. He didn't understand the case, why would a girl like miss Okonkwo have anything to do with a slimy character like Frost. Neighbours had told him that Frost was in the habit of begging from them. Maybe he couldn't pay-up for

his drugs and had somehow gotten the girl involved. He has a hunch that things would unfold before the day ran out.