



HAROLDWRITES'

HOW I
MET
YOUR MURDER

and other stories

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and other stories

DEDICATED TO EVERY ASPIRING WRITER

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BLUNDER IN THE CATHEDRAL

The heat was getting to me. I had thought I could take it but it was becoming pretty obvious I couldn't. The air cooling units weren't working and the fans had defied the manuals that came with them – there was power, the regulators were turned on, but they refused to roll. All around me were different shades and shapes of hands swinging in the air - all holding firm to hand fans, notebooks, jotters and even Bibles in search of ventilation. But the more they fanned, the hotter the room became. A man right next to me, who should be in his mid-sixties, was deep asleep with his mouth slightly open, drooling away his life. I nudged him a little. He mumbled something and switched sitting positions, still deep in sleep.

The announcement came from the pulpit. It was testimony time.

“Children of the Most High, testimony time....!”

It was the tradition that whenever “testimony time” was introduced that way, the crowd would echo “Overcomers time!” in reply. But fa-fa-faho, that wasn't the case this time around. Everyone's mind was miles away, waiting for the service to come to a close. It had been a long and boring service. The guest Pastor had obviously forgotten it was a church pulpit he was mounting, and not a rally podium. His four-hour sermon (that's if it could be tagged as such), “The power to say NO! to Aristo and their agents” was as uninspiring as the title. Even the General-Overseer was disappointed; I noticed his writing pad which he had brought out before the sermon was returned blank as he could find nothing to put down all through the duration of the sermon.

“Brethren, we have one testifier in the house....”

The name was mentioned and the testifier indicated with a lift of hands from his seat. The usher handed him the mic. As the testifier stood up from his seat, I couldn't believe what I heard over the speakers.....

“Pass the Microphone ehe, Usher pass the microphone eh.....Pass the microphone ehe, Usher pass the microphone eh.....”

The testifier was either out of ignorance or mischief, reciting a version of the popular “Pass the microphone...” by music crooner Terry G. I watched in even more awe as the crowd burst up, dancing to the tune as the drummer created the necessary instrumental effects. The church was lively again. Even the G.O was shaking slowly to the tune. Of course, he didn't know the genealogy of the song. I spot a deacon scampering towards the G.O and whispered something into his ears. The G.O's face lit up. He handled the church bell and rang furiously.

“Change the song,” he instructed softly.

The testifier, who at this point was already on the pulpit to give his testimony, paused. He appeared to be thinking up another song. And then, I heard.....

“Everybody shout Hallelu.....Ha-lle-llu-yah,

Maga don pay-eh....Ha-llellu-yah....

Everybody shout Hallelu.....Ha-lle-llu-yah,

Mugu don pay-eh....Ha-llellu-yah....”

My word! It was another Terry G’s track. But to my greatest surprise, the church didn’t seem to get it. The drummer blasted the drums to the high heavens as the crowd waved their hands, shook their bodies and danced in adoration. The earlier sleeping dude was in the centre of everything on my row. He was dancing his life away this time.

I stood, amazed at everything that was happening. The G.O was also moving to the tune with his eyes closed in worship.

Then i noticed the Deacon whispering into the ears of the G.O again. The G.O’s face lit up for the second time. He rang the bell and instructed that the testifier went straight to his testimony. By this time everyone was sweating profusely as they took their seats.

The service finally came to a close and people started making their way out of church. I sat back, still astounded at the awkwardness of all that had happened.

As i made my way out of church, I walked past the G.O’s office. I overheard some heated argument and decided to eavesdrop.

“Deacon Simon, how did you know the songs are ungodly?” a voice which sounded like that of the General Overseer’s said.

Silence.

“Sir, the songs are played in clubs....” another voice replied.

“Oh, how do you know that?”

Silence again.

“Deacon, answer me. How do you know they are played in clubs? Deacon, do you go clubbing?..... I can’t have this in the House of the Lord – a deacon that clubs? You are hereby suspended....”

I heard the door screeching open and took to my heels.

THE NETHERWORLD (1): ARRIVAL OF THE LIVING DEADS

I was subconsciously woken up by the unpleasant cries of agonized voices and foul lingering smells of burnt flesh around me. My tractor-heavy head swayed and my blood-shot eyes tried to open. I felt a zillion pangs of pain shoot through my veins and arteries every millisecond. In my sub consciousness, I could sense the pool of liquid I lay in. The foul odour occupying the air around my nose indicated it could only be blood. I tried raising my body, but it felt like ten logs of iroko bound together. It was impossible. I tried feeling for my legs, but they were dead – immovable. At that point, my mind started racing through several thoughts. Was I dead? Was I paralyzed? Was I dreaming?

Just then I heard a distressed shout slice through thin air. "Help! Help!!"

Then my eyelids popped open. At first, all I could see were dark blurry images. I mildly shook my head and gave another try. One eye started visualising better pictures, but the other remained irresponsive. After a dozen attempts, I knew the eye was gone. I turned my head to the right, trying to make use of my better eye. I was shocked out of my skins at my first sight. Lying next to me was a hollow child's skull with fresh sticky blood and hot brains pumping out of it, the lacerated body lying unrecognisable by my feet. I tilted my head backwards, my heart racing furiously like the busy feet of an Olympic athlete. I saw another distorted body lying after that. This body which was soiled in thick blood had no head, one of its arms was chopped off, the other was turned inside-out; there was a concave around the chest and stomach region with blood gushing out of it like streaming water between two rocks.

I turned to my left and my blood-coagulated eye was greeted by dozens of gouged bodies lying over each other on the grass turf. As consciousness slowly dawned on me, I perceived the big trees scattered around me – us – and suddenly realised we were in the bush – forest. The canopy of the big trees shielded sunlight from penetrating fully. I kept wriggling, trying to get up, but couldn't. Dollops of liquid started dropping from above onto my head. I moved my head, letting the liquid slide off it, and looked up again. Hanging askew on the branches of trees were bodies. Human bodies. Children bodies; lifeless, gruesomely slashed children bodies with fresh blood streaming out of them. I squeezed my fingers in tight fists and made to cry but all I felt in my eyes was hot air. No tear came out. The lifeless body of one kid hung on a close-by branch, held over by the shredded chains of his gorily distorted intestines. The head of another kid, sat on another branch like a bird's nest, its eyes dangling out of their sockets.

"Help!" I heard another voice call again.

"Mum...mmy....," another whimpered weakly by my side. I turned and saw a kid who couldn't be above nine, one side of his face burnt beyond recognition and still smoking, with a huge vehicle wheel on his legs. My body grew cold immediately in shock. What horror! I made to get up again. This time my waist gave way but my

legs wouldn't. And so I sat on my seat, my eyes beholding the horror around me. I could see a lot more bodies scattered afar, all drenched in thick blood and heard some wailings from all around. I also heard the humming sound of a vehicle but couldn't tell where it came from. My legs were soiled and I could see a deep cut on my right leg.

"Hey you! Give me a hand here!" I heard a tiny but serious voice scream at me. I turned and my eyes caught a small figure dressed in torn black singlet and short pants with patches. "Get up and come over here!" it yelled again.

As I gathered myself, I mumbled, "I ... I can't.... my legs..." The figure hopped over to my side and gave me a hand. I shook my head. "I can't move."

The figure – a little girl who couldn't be up to fifteen – made a sigh and screamed, "Yes, you will! We haven't got a lot of hands here!"

She bent over and gave me a big pull. I shrieked as my legs yielded to her firm pull, standing up. She spotted the cut on my right leg and muttered, "Oh." Then, "Give me a second." Her eyes roved around the area like a cat looking for a mice and I could tell what she was looking for. She picked a piece of tattered cloth and two flat pieces of wood from the ruins around and bent over to cast my damaged leg.

"Hope you can at least hop?" she asked with no emotion in her voice. Before I could utter a word, she continued, "Follow me!"

Like a humble lamb being led by the butcher to the slaughter house, I obeyed, limping behind her. We crossed over a few charred bodies with little life in them as they whimpered feebly. My heart was racing at a thousand beats per second now and I could actually feel it thumping against my chest like it would fall out.

"Where... Where are we going?" I asked weakly, not recognising my own voice, blood trickling down my forehead. She kept moving without a word. The pain in my leg was rising to my upper body and I was beginning to lose breathe. We walked past a little girl gasping for dear life, her waist chopped off revealing the jagged tips of her bloody spinal cord. I paused, turned around and saw her raising a bleeding hand to me, the looks in her innocent eyes begging me to help.

"Keep moving," the girl in singlet and short pants called. "She is dead already."

As we took a few more steps, I heard some crunchy sounds beneath our feet. I kept hopping, but when the sounds persisted, I halted and called at my partner. She turned around with an expression of disgust sitting heavily on her face.

"What agai..."

"Ssh..." I hushed her, paying attention to the sounds beneath. Squatting down to the grass, I cleared the swards with one hand. Lying around were crumbs of dry crushed bones with fragments of human skulls too. These bones were devoid of fresh dripping

blood. They looked old and decaying, like they had been there for a very long time. I glanced at my partner. For the first time since we met, she expressed real emotions – fear and confusion.

“Oh my God, where are we?” she gasped in terror.

SEX AND THE SIXTY

They say life begins at forty. But mine was officially over by then. My name is Osaro Oghenekevbe. I used to be the campus dude who knew what's up during my hay days – my nicky "Double O" could attest to that. I could tell the taste of a woman from the curl of her lips, or the colour of her lipstick. I knew how to turn every girl on – until I met my wife. If someone had actually told me I would get married in this life, I would have wished to swallow a bag of nails instead. But here I am, married to the woman of my nightmare – Ogene. Actually, I wouldn't really say I married her. My mom did – when I turned forty and she felt my life was heading for the doldrums. Not only was Ogene a minus facially, she was too local to be my wife. I mean a girl from the village? The gods forbid! And not only was she also short, she was actually a midget! I thought they said thunder never struck at the same place twice. But with Ogene, it struck more than thrice. She was just bad luck, and the cause of my present predicament. I married her because my mom threatened if I didn't, she would beat her flaccid breasts for me.

We have been married for about twenty-five years now – or thereabout. I can't really figure our anniversary date. You wouldn't if you were in my shoes. So you can guess my age. Yes, late sixties. Our first night together was a total disaster! One look at her nakedness and I lost my libido – FOREVER! Come on, don't laugh. I mean it. Can you imagine making love to a midget? Ah-ha! My man became like my aged mothers breast, forever. So, for like twenty-five years, I didn't know what it felt like to have s...

My doctors have recommended a whole lot of bullshit. Forgive my language. (It's only an expression of my agitation.) To get my grooves back on since I turned forty, I have done things real sane people wouldn't. I have been on therapy, gone to the church, mosque and recently, the herbalists. I have drunk concoctions in the name of natural herbs and I have starved myself to death-points in the name of dry fasts!

Today, all that is about to become history. A friend just recommended a rare treatment – a visit to a call-girl. I throttle into the brothel on three feet with a paper in hand. It was my ticket to youthfulness. Written on the paper is the name of my mistress – Ibukun. I ask everyone I see for her room and they direct me further. The hall smells of burnt tobacco and strong ale. Screams of ecstasy and mortal fulfilments ooze out of the dark, filthy rooms by my side. The sully hallway, with paraphernalia ranging from pails with dirty water to shoes of both hosts and clients, looks like a coven. Clients stand by doors waiting for their turns. The red-yellow bulb above my head blinks erratically.

I finally get to my room. Luckily for me, there is no client waiting. My aged hand shakes uncontrollably as I knock on the door. An angelic voice invites me in. I brush my hair (if only I still have a strand on) with my rough palm, dust my shirt and move into the dark room.

"Undress and close your eyes," the sweet voice commands in the dark.

Excitedly, I obey. My imagination grows wild. I expect my miracle.

"But wait," I say. "I like to do it with the lights on."

"No problem, papa," Ibukun says as she saunters to the switchboard.

*Click**Click** The lights go on as I open my eyes to see my saviour. And what?!! Standing before me is who? Ogene?!!! My Ogene?!! What? How? What prank is this? My midget wife on G-string? In a brothel?

Another look at her thick, muscular nakedness, my heart takes a long pause...and restarts. And I know I am going to have a cardiac arrest!!!

SENT TO GOLGOTHA...

I struggled to scribble as much of the events my eyes could behold. My hand shook like the waist of a cultural troop dancer. The old village stadium was overcrowded. The village chief, his elders and their robo robo wives occupied the front row; all dressed in royal regalia like it was some feast we were celebrating. Well, yes, it was the New Yam Festival, but no one was here to see any tuber ...or masquerade. Everyone here came to send the wicked on a journey of no return. They were here to witness the public execution of a varsity miscreant who allegedly raped and gruesomely murdered a daughter of the soil. And yes. On a venerated festive day.

"May the Lord accept your soul. Amen," the pot-bellied Priest said and banged his dusty Bible, the expression on his face saying the direct opposite of his prayers. It was obvious he wished his listener baked in hell. A hood was placed over the boy's head, and the thick noose, fastened to his neck. I saw pity in his eyes, i saw a plea of innocence, i saw God, and i was moved to tears.

Did he really do what he was convicted for? Was His Lordship unduly pressurised by the village to pass a death penalty on him? Did his Attorney do thorough investigation?

When the case was assigned to me by my Editor, i reluctantly accepted it. My last Crime Report on the country's first use of electric chair left a sour taste in my mouth that i vowed never to cover death sentences again. It was a horrifying experience: The first jolt of 1900 volts passed through the condemned prisoner's body. Sparks and flames erupted from the electrode tied to his legs. A large puff of greyish smoke and sparks poured out from under the hood that covered his face. An overpowering stench of burnt flesh and clothing pervaded the room. Later, two doctors examined his body but declared he was not dead. He was administered another doze of electricity. His hood burst in flames, revealing a blackened face. Again the doctors examined him, but declared his heart was still racing. A third charge of electricity was passed through his body. The blackened skin exploded, revealing a bone of skull streaming with blood. The doctor checked the third time and pronounced him dead...

"Aww!!!" the cry of the crowd brought me back to the present. The boy had just been hanged, executed, but something was wrong. His head had popped out of his neck. I could see his eyes had also popped out of their sockets, his tongue hung out.

Then a car sped into the arena, causing a sudden fuss in the crowd. A man ran out of the car, holding a piece of paper in hand. Ten minutes later, the word spread in the crowd. The court had just ordered a stay of execution! New evidence showed they had the wrong person. The actual criminal, the boy's twin, had been caught.

KOKO JESUS: IF JESUS WERE TO BE BORN TODAY...

As reported by Double Oh Seven

Senior Correspondent (Koko Newspaper)

Recently, a video flick was posted by a thirteen-year old Israeli boy on YouTube. The flick is claimed to be the video of the much anticipated birth of The Messiah in a manger as prophesied by the Jewish Prophets of about six thousand years ago. If this video is anything to go by, then faithful of the Jewish sect – The Brethren (which presently is almost in every country of the world) are in for happy times as this, they believe will shut their doubters. However, when confronted with the said birth of the messiah, the Secretary to the President of the United States on Foreign Affairs, Ms. Hilary Lipton retorted, "Listen to yourself. How can the Messiah be born in a manger of all places? For crying out loud, this (America) is God's own country! Where else would God choose to drop his son than here?" When asked by pressmen if the United States Government was not concerned the Israelis may recruit the boy into their military as the prophets of old prophesied he would be capable of many things (like making a nuclear weapon?), the Secretary replied, "If the story of the boy's birth is true.... then the U.S definitely won't sit back. Yes, we are concerned. Umm, all I can say now is that we've got the best scientists in the world, so we will really consider cloning our own messiah. What can't our scientists do?"

Meanwhile, members of the religious Jewish Sect in the West African country of Nigeria are in a mood of frenzy about the news. The President, Goodluck Nathaniel is a senior member of the sect. Just last week, he appeared on the American T.V Station, Cable News Network (CNN) declaring that the self-acclaimed 'Giant of Africa' is considering making the baby a crib for a present. Hear him, "It is not going to be just any crib. It is going to be the world's biggest crib. The Ministry of Interior Decoration have contacted some of the world's finest construction firms and we are going to make a crib as big as the World Trade Centre of blessed Memory." This news is coming on the heels of the country's failed attempt to make the world's biggest cake at its fiftieth Anniversary, but the President is not perturbed. "We know we made a mistake, but this time, we shall get it right!" he enthused.

The President isn't the only one planning to welcome the Messiah. All around the Western African country, posters, fliers and billboards have been circulated and erected with the inscription, "Bomboi Jesu...9ja loves you!" The President's wife is reported to be organising a high delegation of women groups to visit the child, all dressed in customised Ankara with the inscription, "Messiah, 9ja's first Lady loves you. Na U b d Koko!" In the Neighbouring country of Ghana, President Jacob Zuma-Rock has hinted what should be expected of them. "We are sending the boy and his mother five hundred million cedis (C500,000,000). I mean FIVE HUNDRED MILLION CEDIS." Some few years back, that amount would be five hundred naira (N500), Nigerian currency.

Citizens of Britain are not taking reports of the birth of The Messiah in Israel likely. Some don't even believe it's true. "How can it be?" a Londoner replied when faced with the issue. "The prophets of old claimed The Messiah will be from the house of David, right? But the only David who is making the waves right now is David

Beckham but Becks says there has been no new born in his lineage. Or could the prophets have meant David Luiz of Chelsea instead?"

In Russia, the story is spreading like wild fire. Usmarov, the world's richest man was featured in this month's issue of Forbes Magazine. The multi-billion dollar rich oil mogul revealed he is aware of the birth. "I have heard of it," he said in an Exclusive interview. "And I think its great news for the world. I mean, we have waited for it for like how long? – Six thousand years? Geez, that's like forever! I am just happy it is happening during my time. I could invest in that area, who knows?" The wealthy billionaire however, didn't reveal how he intends to invest in the boy's birth. "It is top business secret," he said.

The Entertainment world is not unaware of the hype. Top Hollywood celebrities, Brat Pit and Angel Jolie are conspiring to adopt the baby. "The world knows how much we love babies," Jolie said in a press briefing before boarding a plane for Israel. "But this is not just about adopting another baby. This baby was born in the most unpleasant of places and circumstances. A manger? How is the mother fairing? So you see, We are not just going to adopt another baby. We are going to save a life, to help a family in need and above all, to save the world."

Hollywood award-winning director, James Cameronia revealed he is really considering doing a movie on the birth of the boy. "Only this time, he will not be born in a manger," he said on channel E! "No one will buy such movie. You know, people want action. In my movie, he will be born in a casino...We are considering casting Matt Daemon as his father and Halle Berry as his mom.....Umm, don't let me tell you the movie even before it goes on set. Just hold your breath. You will love it."

Back in the West African country of Nigeria, some Nollywood producers are having the same idea. One of them, Fred Atama tells us a little bit of what to expect. "I think we will either use Aki or Pawpaw to play the part of the baby Messiah. Those boys are a bundle of talent and either of them will play the role just fine."

HOW MUCH IS YOUR LOVE?

It was a cold afternoon during winter in Ajegunle sometime last year. Femi Olabode, a blonde lanky dude strolled into the Pawnshop along Wall Street road looking pale. The shop attendant, a fat chubby-cheeked man smiled at him, his teeth looking like the contents of a call girl's handbag – rough and scattered.

“What can I do you for,Sire?” the attendant said.

Femi sighed,pulled out a cuban cigar from his breast pocket,lit same and took a heavy puff. After a while, he pulled out a picture from his pant pocket. “Know her? he said.

The shop attendant took a long look.

“Ummm, looks like Halima Usman, the daughter of the village goldsmith. What about her?”

“How much is her love?”

There was a short silence.

“But Sire,” said the attendant. “I thought you were engaged to Miss Funmi-Rice?”

Femi took a long and hard stare at the man, his eyes bloodshot red.

“Her love was fake. It expired yesterday. And I had just bought it!” He slammed at the counter.

The attendant shivered and fumbled with a bottle with red content. “Err err, am sorry sire. Here is Halimat's love,” he said handing over the bottle to Femi.

Femi snatched the bottle from him and looked at it, scrutinising it. “How am I sure this is the original?”

“Its the last of her love left. We bought it from the last person she had given her love to – Mr Roland Azikiwe. Here is the receipt of purchase.”

Femi scrutinised the receipt. “Looks original,” he said.

“It is,” the attendant concurred. “Miss Halimat has sold all her love over the years and they have all been lost or crushed by her past lovers. We were lucky to get this one – the last of her love.”

“How much?”

“Umm, Sire you see, since its a very special love, being that it's the last of its kind.....”

Femi interrupted with a roar. “I said how much is her love?!!”

“Oh oh, it will only cost you L5 (Five Love)...”

“Five Love? Whose and whose love?”

“We don't want you to pay with the love of people you already know. These five loves are loves you will have in the future. Since you are yet to have them, we will just acquire the future loving rights from you.”

Femi took another puff at his cigarette.

“That's too expensive. I can only offer L2 (Two Love)..”

“Four.”

“Three”

“Deal.”

The attendant produced a document from underneath his desk.

“Here is the Deed of Love, transferring all your reversionary three loves in the future to us.... You can sign here.....”

In no time, the contract was signed and Femi made his way out of the shop. He felt accomplished having just bought Halimat's love. He didn't care whose future love he had just traded for Halimat's love. He wants to love Halimat so much. He had been wooing her in the last six months, begging for her to disclose how much her love would cost and where he could get it. She had remained non-compliant and difficult. Last week, he was 'jonzing' on the web when he came across the advert on www.love.com that her love was on sale at City People's Love PawnShop in Ajegunle. He made his way from Ohafia in Abia State to Lagos, just for her love. He couldn't wait to have her to himself. He couldn't wait to have her love before it expired.

DO ME A FAVOUR: KILL ME!

I hate my life because everyone else hates it. And when I say everyone, I mean EVERYONE. My Momma hates me – I can tell from how she looks at me everyday; my dad abhors me – I know because he hardly remembers my name; my sisters loathe me – they think I was a mistake; my friends detest me, that's if I still have anyone to call a friend; my pastor forbids my existence – he thinks am a discarded clay from God's pottery wheel. If I were to write a book about my life, it will be filled with stories of hate, sadness, travails, loneliness and suicidal thoughts.

By now, you must be wondering why. Well, I am a victim of circumstance. And 'my circumstance' is that I was born thin, but grew up to be fat, then overweight; and now I am obese. I mean, really obese – Yokozuna kind of obese. And everyone thinks I don't deserve to live, like it was some goddamn fault of mine. I mean, I have tried my very best to remain slim and trim – chewing stick-figure – like those HIV-looking models on Fashion T.V but nothing has worked. All those drugs, herbs, therapy, exercises, fasts and prayers etc have done nothing but turned my bank account into a code-red. Now, I only console myself with these lines:

I am fearfully made, I am wonderfully made

I know I am fearfully made, and I mean in the terrifying kind of way. My size is nothing short of a curse. Of all my momma's girls, I am the Shrek of the family. I once confronted my mom with the question if anyone had put a spell on her while she was pregnant with me. She only replied my question with more curses.

No normal human would grow this big. I don't use public transport anymore; no vehicle would even stop at my flag. Travelling by air is not an option because I am always made to purchase tickets meant for heavy duty luggage – that is if the booking attendant as much as courteously ask if I missed my way to the airport.

At a point in my life, I decided to stop accepting all the world was throwing at me (insults, wicked looks etc) and start giving them back tit-for-tat. If you dare call me fat (obese, overweight...whatever), I would make you realise how broom-sticked, big-eyed, small-assed, baggy-lipped etc you were. The point is that I would always find a 'defect' in you and make you see it as a curse that you'd hate life generally. I have made teachers in my numerous secondary schools (back in the days) resign; I have never had a stable job because my mouth always gets into trouble with my bosses, colleagues, clients etc

Currently, I am job-hunting. No one wants to hire me. Not after seeing my size during interview. I have sent dozens of job applications in the preceding weeks. All unreturned. Save for one.

I got a call earlier in the day from one Sasha Pelumi-Aboderin of whatever-the-name-of-her-company-is-again (sorry I have lost count of places I drop application letters). She said I could resume work the next day. Just like that. No interview

required. That was like the best news I have heard in years and I am not going to blow this. I need the job badly.

So I decide to celebrate the big news. I walk into a Sweet Sensation outlet in Victoria Island to have some burger and hot dogs (?). I notice the waiter taking short, quick glances at me as he takes my orders. He must be saying to himself "what an amoeba." As if I cared. But he dare not convert his thoughts into words...

As I take my first bite, I hear a knock on my table.

"Excuse me," a tiny voice says. "Am sorry, this table is already taken."

I take a quick look at the speaker; a tiny, frail-looking woman in her mid-thirties. I continue at my burger.

"Umm, am-am sorry," she pleads. "Did you hear me? I said..."

"I heard you the first time," I bark back in a deep voice. "Get another table."

The lady starts pacing around, looking worried.

"Please, please I was here earlier and am expecting some friends. I just went to get..."

When she notices I am not paying any attention, she moves away, cursing under her breathe.

"What did you say to me?" I ask standing to my feet. She has just fallen on my wrong side, and I am going to make sure I set her as an example to everyone who must have been staring at me as I walked into the eatery or as I ate my snack. Yeah, I am going to make her feel like my high school teachers or my former employers, colleagues etc who disrespected my size. "Hello Miss skinny ass!" I bark at her as she walks away so everyone can hear and see me. "I am talking to you, you tiny mal-nourished, skeletal bitch! Is it my fault you can't be as healthy as myself? Walking corpse! A spoonful of Peak Powder Milk everyday would be of help, Miss String!"

I notice everyone looking at me in surprise as Miss String scurry out of the eatery. Yeah, I got to her...

FAST-FORWARD. NEXT DAY.

I am dressed-up in my most fabulous outfit as I walk into the office block where I am expected to resume work. I tell the receptionist the cause of my visit and she directs me to another office – the MD's – to get my appointment letter. I am tense as I arrive at the door. I can't believe I finally have a job. With the opulence exhibited in the preceding offices, I know it is going to be a well-paying one.

I knock and wait for a few minutes, rehearsing my salutation.

"Come in," a voice say.

I swing open the door with a big smile. But the smile is cut short when I catch a glimpse of the tiny woman sitting behind the MD's desk. She is the lady from the eatery. Miss String! I stand in complete shock with my flabby body trembling like an erupting earthquake, waiting for the ground to open and swallow me up. But it has never been firmer.

BAPTISM OF FIRE

It was almost three a.m and the vigil was getting thicker. The guest prophet, a smallish man on cheap suit had been on for about four hours now. His suit was drenched in sweat capable of quenching a storey building on fire, if squeezed. He had been performing signs and wonders all the while, telling people their problems and which way the heavens wanted them to go about solving them. I have been a spectator for a larger part of the service. It's not that I was not moved by all he had done. Who wouldn't be? The man was pulling some pretty stunts out there. Earlier in the service, he had brought out three brothers (the oldest couldn't be more than eleven years old) and revealed they all were little wizards who tormented the businesses of their parents. Their parents, quite surprisingly, looked on with satisfaction. Maybe they had also suspected their kids of foul play. The boys later confessed and agreed that they were, but not after the prophet made them drink twelve bottles of GOYA olive oil (really? It looked more of groundnut oil from where I sat) each, and threatened he would make them drink much more if they continued denying the 'truth'. The crowd applauded. Later, the prophet brought out a woman and revealed that the reason she couldn't conceive in her marriage was because somebody – maybe a woman in her compound, didn't like her face.

"I know the woman, Prophet," the woman had eagerly concurred before the prophet could move on to his next words.

"Rejoice, oh daughter of Zion, for Heaven has smiled on you this day," the delighted prophet said.

He prophesied the Hosts of Heaven would release her womb to her. "But you will have to register your name first on heaven's roll. I can see on Heaven's Miracle List a lot of names. Your name is nowhere to be found..."

The woman looked sad.

"But," the prophet quickly added. "You can provoke heaven to attend to your case by making a sacrifice like never before."

The woman promised to triple her tithe...

Moving on, the prophet picked out two people from the choir stand – a man, who should be in his mid-thirties and a girl who should be in her mid-twenties. He revealed they were solving 'bedimathics'...

So, you see, the vigil had been interesting all along. But my mind was set on something far away from where I was. I should be happy, but I wasn't. My birthday was the next day, and I was expecting a very full house of friends, but I had no money! All my friends knew my birthday and had called me earlier to say they were coming over to 'share in my joy' and what was I to do? Tell them to stay clear because I had no money? No way! So I decided to meet Bamiloye, a colleague, to borrow some cash. But by the time I got to Bami's house, he was already dressed up

for this vigil. Before I could make my request, he asked me to join him to the prayer house. And what was I to say again?

"Err...sorry Bee, I can't come. I just wanted to borrow som-some money from you..."

That wouldn't sound courteous enough for a person who needed help. I had to thread softly. And that's what I was still doing. Once the vigil was over, I would make my request.

As I thought of how best to make my request, I heard a loud voice directed at me.

"Oh Son of Zion, come out!" The scrawny index finger of the prophet pointed at me.

Oh noo nooo, this can't be happening. Daddy Jesus, please not today, I thought.

Before I knew what had hit me, two ushers pulled me out of my seat and took me to the front of the church where the prophet awaited me. The crowd applauded.

"Why do you have a heavy heart my son when you are in your father's house?" the prophet said, looking at me in the eyes.

I didn't know if that was rhetorical or if it demanded an answer. I looked on, confused and fidgeting.

"But rejoice, for the host of heaven have located you this day! That which you seek, you shall get it!"

Really? I didn't know if I should smile, laugh or hug the man of God. Really? God is going to give me money? How? Most importantly, when?

"Today, you shall receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit," the prophet said.

Wait...Baptism of what?

"Spread out your hands!" he barked.

I reluctantly obeyed.

"Thank you Holy Spirit," he said and blew some air in my face. "Receive it!"

Gosh! The smell alone could melt mountains. I wiped my face, standing still. The prophet blew another doze of hot air, spittle coming along with it. I still stood fixed to the ground. He did it again and again. Nothing happened.

"Ohhh," he said to the hearing of the crowd. "This brother is possessed with a familiar spirit."

Wait, prophet. Me? Possessed with what?

And that was it, I knew I couldn't take it anymore.

As he blew another doze, I erupted. My hands flew in different directions, my body swaying dangerously.

"Yes, the spirit is moving," I heard him say.

If only he knew...

I spun and spun and kept on spinning. Nothing could hold me back. I left the stage and spun into the crowd. Everyone stood up from their seats and made way. I deliberately crashed onto the chairs, stood up, held my head like something had got into it, and kept on twisting like a tornado. I jumped, landed on the floor (ouch!) and rolled all over it. I kicked bags, water bottles, jotters and anything that came in my way, including humans. I spotted the prophet with one eye. He looked lost and confused. I continued the ferocious baptism for another fifteen minutes. The ushers couldn't keep me still, not after I poked one in the eyes. I continued the nuisance for another ten minutes, and then lay still. I spotted the prophet wiping his face which streamed with oceans of sweat.

And that was how the service came to a close. The General Overseer of the church wouldn't allow for any more miracles. Who knows? The next person may be more vicious – or worse.

HOW I MET YOUR MURDER 1

The Man In Black twisted his foot and squeezed at a sheet. He was getting frustrated. No task had ever taken this long to accomplish. He was not going to have any more of it. She must be put away today. He took a look at the sheet of paper in his hand. The rough sketch of a girl was on it, with a red circle around her chest region. Today she must meet with her destiny – the one he had planned for her.

It was a wet Friday evening. Usually, life at the Ibom Tropicana where the Silverbird Cinema was, was always busy on Fridays: the popular theme “thank God it is Friday” always played out. Both those who had been productive during the course of the week and those who were more of a liability to the society bought into the theme. But today was different. The numbers at the Tropicana were less. One could actually count the number of people that were around if one chose to.

The Man In Black noticed this, but he could not have been happier at the way things were. Less people meant less eyes, and less eyes meant higher probability of carrying out the job unnoticed. It was not like he was scared of carrying out a job in public – he had done that on several occasions, but just like every other person in a similar line of business as his, a clearer coast meant a perfect job. And he – The Man In Black, had a thing for perfection.

He stole a glance at his watch. It was almost 5.30 pm, time for the movie he had paid for. He wished he could make the time run faster. He looked at his ticket. The movie, Ice Age 4 was boldly imprinted on it. He couldn't believe he actually paid for the movie – that movie. Ice Age 4? Seriously? Ice Age 4?

“Gag me,” he muttered. “Moron,” he cursed at the girl on the sheet. She actually informed his decision. He paid for the ticket because that was the movie she was going to see. He went over his plan again. It appeared simple: buy whatever movie ticket she was buying, follow her to the room, sit behind her, and do it without anyone noticing. Simple. The Man in Black tapped his box of tools beside him. All he needed to make the job smooth rested in there.

“Perfect.”

At that moment, he noticed the girl walking into Room 5.

“Poor thing.”

He pulled out another sheet from his gabardine coat. There was a list of people on it. They all had their names crossed, except the last name – that of the girl. The Man In Black could not believe how much he had achieved in the last month. He had thirteen names on the sheet. He had done twelve in just three weeks, but had been following the thirteenth – the girl – for a week now. She always had a way of escaping his plot. He had followed her almost everywhere – the eateries: Oliver Tweest, Food Affairs, Crunches ... He had also followed her to her school, the University of Uyo and even her church, the Redeemed Christian Church of God at

Edet Akpan Avenue. But the problem was that everywhere he followed her, she was always with company; always, even when she went to the ladies.

The time was now 5.45 pm. The Man In Black took the last quarter of an hour waiting to see who else would be watching Ice Age 4 but in all that time, no other person joined the girl, much to the surprise of The Man In Black. He spotted a janitor dusting the carpet at the doorway after the girl walked in. The janitor, with his broom and parker later followed the girl in, but was out in no time.

"Perfect," The Man In Black droned. "I guess it's just going to be you and me, baby."

He picked up his tool kit, touched the brim of his hat and sauntered into Room 5. The room was dark and ice-chill. The flickering ray from the projector guided the path of The Man In Black. He picked a spot at the last row. His eyes roved in search of the girl but he could not spot her just yet. In no time, he opened his tool kit and started caressing each tool, one after the other.

In the tool box, he had every edition of Play Boy magazine of the last year, Vaseline, fifteen packs of Gold Circle condom, one sex toy, a Karma Sutra DVD collection, some other X-rated movies, Barbie versions of Nicky Minaj, Kim Kardashian and Mercy Johnson, a knife which he never used, a hammer, twine, and sketches of several girls. He picked up the sketch of the girl he had followed in. He was a good artist, and he had perfectly captured the excessively heavy bust and waistline of the girl. Ever since he crossed paths with her at Central Supermarket, she had remained in his thoughts – just like every other girl he had fantasized about.

He remembered his eighteenth birthday. He had unknowingly walked into his naked mother in her room. What he saw aroused the man in him. He had rushed back into his room, put down a sketch of his naked mom, and used the drawing to satisfy his libido whenever he had an urge to masturbate. With time, he got fed up with his mother's sketch and craved for somebody else. He picked on some girls in his class, put down their sketches and used them to satisfy his libido. Over time, he got fed up with fantasizing over these girls in his room. He had new ideas. He would put down the sketch of a girl that caught his fancy, follow her to wherever and arouse himself to satisfaction, with both the sketch and the girl still in view. It did not matter whether he had full view of the girl so long she was around, no matter the distance. Her presence alone made him feel he was actually making love to her. He would slide his hand into his trouser and get going. And depending on how wild his fantasy took him that day, he would dress accordingly. In the past, he had dressed as a policeman, doctor, engineer, reporter and even, pastor. Today, he was a mobster. He had followed girls to the supermarket, park, class room, club and even, the church. Today would be the first time he would be doing it in a cinema room and he was more than pleased his plot was playing out, hitch-free after a week of wrecked plans.

The ray of the projector fell on his shoulders and leg. He reached for the sketch and positioned it neatly against the dim ray on his leg. He could not still spot the girl. It did not matter. He would get going, arouse himself with her sketch and just before he climaxed, he knew he would see her. Perfect!

Just as he slid his hands into his trouser, the knife fell from the tool box.

"Shit," he cursed.

He reached under the seat for the knife but got his hand into something sticky. His fingers moved over the floor and he felt more wetness. He reached for his Blackberry and turned on the torchlight. He was taken aback at what he saw. He saw the knife quite alright, but in a pool of red. He picked up the knife, dollops of red trickling off it, and traced the pool of red which stretched to the centre of the row. There, he saw the body of the girl, resting in a queer position. Her body sank deep into the seat with her head bent awkwardly to the side. His heart started racing and his forehead broke a sweat. He did not want to think what he was thinking.

He dragged his shaky feet over to her seat. A tiny hole with jagged edges rested on her chest, fresh red liquid trickling down. The Man In Black felt sick instantly and vomited. His puke spread over the still body of the girl. Without thinking, and frightened to the bones, he made for the puke trying to wipe it off the girl, his hands shaking uncontrollably. Then he spotted a note on her leg. He picked it up and lifted it against the ray. A roughly scribbled message read: +234 87 41229415.

The Man In Black dropped the note, wiped off sweat from his forehead and dashed to his seat. He threw his blood-covered knife and the girl's sketch into his tool kit, slammed it shut and made for the exit door. Just as he opened the door, a girl walked past him into the room. The Man In Black was sure the girl noticed the uneasiness on his face. He moved on, hastening his steps as he spotted the exit door of the cinema complex. It was still some hundred steps away. He had not taken ten steps when he heard a loud scream coming from Room 5. He started hopping, but before he could make eighty steps, he heard a shout he was sure was directed at him.

"Murder! Murder! Stop that man!" It was a masculine voice.

All eyes in the lounge turned to him. He started running.

Five more steps and I'll be there. Oh God, oh God...

As he reached for the door handle, he felt a heavy strike at the back of his neck and that was the last thing he remembered.

HOW I MET YOUR MURDER 2

This is a continuation of the series. If you missed the first part, you can view it [here](#).

The Man In Black tried opening his eyes, but they felt heavy and sore. All he could see was thick darkness. He could make out some distant noise, but couldn't tell what the pandemonium was all about. He tried moving his body, but it felt as heavy as a rock, with pangs of pain shooting through every vein and bone.

What's going on? Why am I feeling this way?

He made another effort to move his hands and legs, but they did not move an inch. He wriggled and wriggled, but nothing happened. Then he heard a faint voice say, "E be like say him don wake up!" Before The Man In Black could make out the meaning of that, he felt a heavy bang on his head.

"Flog am well well!" another voice screamed.

Another knock landed on his head. The Man In Black could feel blood gushing out of his head. He tried opening his eyes, but his eyelids still wouldn't make way.

"Oya pour am sharp sharp!" the faint voice which was now getting clearer said. The Man In Black felt a stream of liquid covering his head. The liquid trickled down his cheeks into his mouth. He could taste it. It tasted like gasoline.

"Bring another one!" another voice yelled. The Man In Black felt some hands forcing something around his neck. At this point, one of his eyelids popped open and out of his blood-blurred vision, he could make out some hands fixing a tire around his head. He tried screaming but all that came out of his mouth was air. He had lost his voice.

At this juncture he knew what was going on. Bound all over with ropes and used car tires, and covered in a pool of his blood and an ocean of petrol, The Man In Black knew his end was imminent.

"Bring matches! Bring matches!!" an angry voice barked. The Man In Black spotted a figure coming from the crowd around him with a match box in hand. The figure pulled out a match stick and struck it against the match box. A gust of breeze put out the fire just as soon as it was lit.

"Were, you no fit light matches again?!" an angry voice from the crowd bellowed.

The man with the matches tried lighting another stick, but the stick fell off his hand to the ground. The on-looking crowd seemed to be getting impatient with him. They chanted in anger and requested that somebody else took over.

A burly, bullish man snatched the matches from the first man and struck frantically. With each strike he made, the sticks kept breaking. He slowed down and struck yet another match stick. This time around, the yellow-blue glow stood on the match stick. The crowd screamed in excitement.

"Oya, burn the maga," a voice commanded.

Just as the burly, bullish man got set to throw the lit match stick at the PMS-soiled Man In Black, he heard two loud cracks.

BANG! BANG!!

Gun shots rang in the air. The burly, bullish man just like everyone else in the crowd scurried away as fast as his legs could take him. The Police had arrived just in time.

Sarah Udemudia stood by the giant-size digital bill board at Edet Akpan junction with the scorching sun threatening to boil her blood if she stayed a second longer. This wasn't funny anymore. She had walked the whole length of the dusty six kilometre long road in search of the firm of Bakersfield & Rutledge. Every local she asked appeared not to have heard of a firm by such name. Her once shinny white pair of shoes now looked old and dirty and her earlier neatly pressed NYSC khaki outfit was as rumped as a squeezed twenty naira note.

She stared at her watch. The time was 3:00pm. She had had enough. She was going back home. This would be the third day since she left Camp in search of the firm, but there still was no sign that it existed.

If Bakersfield & Rutledge really want me, let them come get me.

As she made to halt a keke, she spotted a small wooden sign post on the opposite side of the road. It had the inscription: B&R on it.

B&R? she muttered.

She crossed over and followed a tiny path through some groceries shanties. Behind the shanties was a block with an office door with the B&R inscription. She walked in, to the reception desk. No one was on seat. The reception was small and smelled of stench. Old books and journals piled up everywhere, an SMH fan with two blades clung to the ceiling, a waste basket filled to the brim sat at one corner in the room, an old typewriter was on the reception desk with a few other paraphernalia scattered around.

"Hello?" she called. "Is anyone here?"

A short fat man walked in through another room Sarah had not noticed.

"Yes?" he replied curtly.

"Is this Bakersfield & Rutledge?" Sarah asked, in a scared tone.

The short fat man winced. "Yes. What do you want?"

"Excuse me, this is Bakersfield & Rutledge? The law firm?" Sarah asked again in disbelief. She dreaded the response she was anticipating. This *couldn't* possibly be the Bakersfield & Rutledge she had in mind.

By no stretch of imagination can this den be Bakersfield & Rutledge.

"Does this look like a brothel to you?" the short man replied. "Look young lady, am under pressure here. If you don't mind, I will like to return to work."

The short man made to go.

"I was posted here," Sarah stopped him with those words.

The short man turned around in surprise.

"You were what?"

"I am a corper...."

"I can see that. And you were posted here?"

"Yes."

To Sarah's utmost surprise, the short man burst out laughing. She did not know why.

The short man too did not offer any reason. He too was surprised that a corper was sent to the firm.

"Am I at the wrong place?" Sarah interrupted his thought.

"No no no," the short man replied. "You are exactly where you should be. Come with me."

The short man led Sarah to another small office. He got to a seat behind a desk and offered Sarah another seat in front of him. Hardly had Sarah got down to her seat before the short man pulled out a file from his desk and handed same to her.

"Here," he said, smiling cynically. "Your first case. A murderer was arrested by the police yesterday. He is currently at Zone 2. Somebody from the Chief Justice' office brought this file this morning. He said we have been assigned to handle the matter." The short man took a deep breath and sighed. "I don't know what these people want from me. It's a good thing they sent you here to come serve your fatherland. Now, I want you to take this file, go to the station, get that murderer bail.... Or whatever. Just go do your thing."

Everything was going too fast for Sarah Udemudia. She had not recovered from the fact that her earlier assessment of what Bakersfield & Rutledge should look like was a huge fallacy, now she is being hurriedly assigned to a matter she had no idea of. And by the way, who was this short man?

“Sorry Sir, I need to get some facts right.”

The short man stood up from his seat and forced the file into Sarah's hands. “I have told you all you need to know for now. Just get up and go do something,” the man almost barked.

Sarah rushed off her seat, totally perplexed.

“Good,” the short man said. “Alright then, go. Go.” The man pointed to the door, shooing her away. “Run along, run along.”

Sarah made for the door. As she stumbled out of the room, she heard the short man scream, “I am Bakersfield Rutledge! Nice meeting you!”

*** To be continued***

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