

VANILLA VILLAINS

Alas we are all villains; vile, corrupt, and
insensitive, living in a country where nothing
works!

From the Quill of a First time Novelist

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A short gothic story about a young teenager
and the darkness inside her

KAMSHINEN OBADIAH GOLU

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About the Author

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His hobbies are football, listening to music and writing of poetry.

Vanilla Villains is his first book.

Disclaimer

This artwork is purely fictional; any use of name, resemblance of a character living or dead, or any event is purely coincidental.

CHAPTER ONE

One last shrill cry of agony and pain, and alas it was dead, slaughtered by its owners. A tear came to Nenlap's eyes but it was a Pharisee tear though the hen has been part of the family for long and was almost considered and treated as a human being, it was still a hen. She had mixed emotions; she was happy and sad at the same time. She was sad because she grew fond of the bird, on the other hand she was happy because there was going to be meat and she was eager to devour the flesh, ribs and every part of its carcass. meat was seldom available, but this was the 24th of December, the eve of Christmas, the voices in her head were all screaming "Tomorrow we feast!".

After the execution, she picked her pot and was off to fetch

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water, on her way to the stream all she could think of was the Christmas celebration, Christmas was her favorite holiday, the fun, meat, food and drinks, it was a season of plenty and generous giving, everyone shared, the rich and poor alike, for love was in the air.

The water at the stream was crystal, you could see the pebbles underneath, it was the only source of water in Dungung village, Kanke local government area of Plateau State, and thank the heavens it was there because if it hadn't, all the people of the village will have to quench their thirst will be the thousand un-kept promises of boreholes by politicians, this promises never saw the light of day, they were all trick cards employed to get votes from the electorates during elections, it's pathetic, but this is the system!.

Balancing the earthen pot on her head she made to begin her journey home, when a voice called out,

"Haba Nen my friend, you left for water and didn't even call on me to go with you"

She knew the voice, it was overly familiar, a voice she has

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heard a thousand of times, she turned around and replied mockingly;

“I thought you only make friends with those from the city”

She was referring to Ritmwa’s cousin that arrived few days ago from Jos, Ritmwa chuckled, made to fill her pot and after filling it to the brim, they began their journey home. The road from the stream back to the village was narrow and stony, a lot of pots have met their disastrous end on this very path, thousands of Baobab trees lined up both sides of the road, these clusters of trees gave the name “*Tori*” to this particular part of the area in the village. The girls chatted and made plans on how they were going to enjoy every single minute of this Christmas, last year was fun but this year was going to be legendary. There is going to be a cultural show after the Christmas service Ritmwa informed Nenlap, it’s the talk of the town,

Who is organizing it? Nenlap ignorantly asked, “Who else but our very own *Ngolong*, Ritmwa replied.

They got to the end of the path leading from the stream, the road ahead was a snake’s tongue, it forked out two paths, one to the

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left and the other to the right, the girls bade their goodbyes and each took a path leading home.

Nenlap continued alone on her journey home, as she drew nearer, she could hear the goats bleating from her father's compound even before she stepped in. Her father was seated at the foot of his hut, smoking on his pipe and immersed in his thoughts, there was a pot over the fireplace, it was boiling hot and was threatening to take the lid off, it must be the chicken over there she thought to herself, and then proceeded to carefully put down her pot of water in one corner of the hut. Nde Silas Golkitda's compound was not a palace, two huts with thatched roof faced each other, there was a third that stood apart from the rest like the proud Golden goose, it was reserved for visitors, a pen for the goats and a *'Rumbu'* to the far left, it was not much but this was home for her, it was all she had known from birth.

That evening's meal was one of the best they had that year, part of the saucy water that boiled the meat was used in preparing the spinach soup, and little pieces of meat were thrown in as bonus by her mother. Nde watched as she swallowed her food with

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gusto, morsel after morsel of *Tuwo* , the way she ate hurriedly one will think she had not eaten for a week and was starving, almost at the verge of death.

“Are you okay?” He asked, she shook her head responding in the negative, “come and eat with me he offered”, he didn’t have to offer for the second time, the invite was much welcomed.

She rushed to his side and continued the party. He smiled and patted her head, you are not eating she said, go on child I don’t have an appetite. Nana as he fondly calls her which meant mother in the Ngas Dialect, like Isaac in the bible, she was the child of his old age, thirty years of marriage and no child, he had given up all hopes of a child and made peace with himself. Until 13 years ago in the middle of September, his wife Nawok broke the pleasant news to him; she had not seen her period for two consecutive months.

“Why didn’t you tell me sooner?” He asked full of joy he lifted her up and danced around with her in the air. Nawok explained that she was not sure it was pregnancy and did not want to raise

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his hopes only to later plunge him back into misery over a false alarm.

He loved this child and doted on her, he didn't have much but he ensured she had everything she needed. He enrolled her in the village's L.G.E.A primary school, a waste of money his peers called it, in their opinion a girl should stay in her father's compound and learn how to cook and take care of the home until she is ripe for marriage, educating a girl child was a waste of resources, resources he should have used to get himself a younger wife, probably the same age as his daughter. But Nde Silas was not a man moved by opinions, he knew the value of education, having been taught by the white man himself, in the spell of two short years he attended primary school. He was baptized Silas by the British and thus he had great reverence for the church and School.

The next morning was Christmas, the D-day. Nenlap barely slept the night before, she was up and doing, and was half way through her chores before the rooster alerted the neighborhood that dawn has broken. She was filled with excitement which

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flipped into a bask of euphoria when her mother told her to go and deliver a plate of the Christmas rice and some pieces of meat to her grandmother, and on her way back stop by old Soja's compound, the village's only tailor to collect her Christmas dress. The news brought great joy to her as she was unaware that such an arrangement has been made and was already planning to wear her old Christmas cloth from two years back.

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CHAPTER TWO

She delivered the food in a flash and rushed to old Soja's compound, there he was, giving directives in his compound like a general on a battle field, he was a retired soldier who served as a tailor during the Biafra war, he never was at the battle ground but

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the way he told his story with pride and honour will have you thinking he had achieve a feat equal to the legacy and triumphs of Alexander the Great.

“The enemies were everywhere he continued”, placing his hand on her shoulder and taking her round the compound, “mines scattered across the field, one wrong step and you are dead, this mines explodes a man, tearing him limb to limb, the men were scared, but you see I urged them on, I told them to be strong for the were fighting a good cause, holding my rifle”, he illustrated using his walking stick, from a long range distance I shot their enemy’s commander, bulls eye straight in the head! It earned me the nickname “Sniper” for security reasons you must not mention this name to anyone. And I will tell you why, just last week he began again,” the government came looking for me, they were short of courageous men on the battlefield, men of valour and brutality, I even received a letter from the president himself, begging to re-enlist me so I can lead the troop against the Boko Haram insurgents, but you see I told him these old bones are tired and not what the used to be”.

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Nenlap looked at him in awe, she fully knew what his tales were conjured stories, but this man was born a story teller! The way he illustrated and told the story with vigour and energy made her listened keenly. After five more minutes of his tales he handed her a polythene bag containing her dress, “the design I made for you he said has only been worn by one person, her royal majesty Queen Elizabeth of England, he exclaimed! Now off you go, wear it with pride.”

Set free from the bondage of old Soja’s stories she ran all the way home, slowing down only to catch her breath and then zoom again she goes like she was training for a marathon race. She was panting when she got home,

Which mad man is chasing after you?” Her mother inquired jokingly, “the mad man in old Soja’s body she replied, amidst laughter. “He kept me for over thirty minutes with his stories” she added. Go and take your bath its almost time for church, Nawok instructed.

Within ten minutes she was done bathing, she rushed to wear her new dress, the yard was tie and dye probably made in Kano, a

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piece of golden embroidery fitted round the neck of the dress and the edge of the sleeves too, it was a oversized but she was not worried, she was happy having a new dress to wear and nothing was going to dampen her spirit today, moreover complaining will do no good as her mother like most mothers in the village; will only point out that she'll grow to fit in the dress.

The Christmas service was fully packed, there were no more seats in the church, the congregation outside were more in number than those inside the church, the sermon was brief it was like the Reverend was also in a haste to start the jollification. The scenery outside the church was beautiful; kids with Multi colored sun glasses, toy water guns and balloons all purchased from the stand set up by a trader from Pankshin. He was there every single Christmas as far as she could remember, the fortune he makes by the end of the day was enough motivation to keep him coming year in, and year out.

The highlight of the day was the cultural show, it was graced by the Sombi dancers a cultural troupe famous in this part of the country. The songs and Jeje dance they performed was well

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known, the crowd even joined in. The juju men came with their Voo-Doo, they were slashed with sharp knives but no visible cuts or blood were seen, some laid on the ground and were pounded with pestles, they only smiled like they were been tickled with feathers instead of pestles. It was a piece of paper pestles pounding their bare chest; the people marveled and shouted in amazement.

Nenlap, Ritmwa and two other girls of the same age, went from house to house, neighbors to relatives, they had enough to eat and drink.

Walking lazily home, you could mistaken their bulgy stomachs for pregnant teenagers, they also had monetary gifts too, mostly ten or twenty naira, alas the day was gone, but it was fun while it lasted. When she got home she pulled off and proceeded to count her money, two hundred and fifty naira she shouted in joy, she never had this much money in her life, tonight for all she cared, she and Alhaji Dangote belonged in the same class.

The next morning she woke up late, clearly the events of yesterday had taken toll on her, she felt sore, all the joints in her

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body were weak and tired, she was surprised her mother did not wake her up to perform her morning chores, maybe she thought she needed the rest and decided her to give her a day off, whatever her mother's reason was, she was glad to get the additional rest. She found her father and her second cousin Nengak in the compound, they had just finished a meal, she greeted both of them and made to leave them to their chatter, but she was stopped by her father, sit down Nana he said, she sat on a stump of mahogany tree that serves as seat, a minute later her mother joined them.

“As you know”, Nde Golkitda started, looking directly at her, “your cousin has just returned from the city. I sent him to deliver a message to Nentawe, my sister and your aunt, today he has brought back a reply, she has agreed for you to stay with her in Jos, there you will be able to continue your secondary education” he concluded.’

She stared at her father's lip the whole time he was speaking, the moved up and down like he was in a puppet show, his moustache twitched and did a little funny dance anytime he spoke, her

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younger self of five or six years always found the dance hilarious.

She was dumbfounded, she knew of the errand her father sent, but never thought her aunt will agree to it, she seldom meets her aunt; in fact she had only seen her once or twice. Nengak took his hat, and his leave, he had messages to deliver to other families that had sent him to their friends and relatives living in the city as well, mostly the messages he delivered in the city were messages asking for money, village people had a naïve way of thinking; they believe that once you resided in the city you automatically have money, or at least you are more comfortable than they were. This was not mostly true.

CHAPTER THREE

The vials in her heart were full, her joy knew no bounds, she was going to be a city girl and when she gets back she is going to show her peer who the queen was. The news of her travel has circulated the village already, she even added a gait in her walking steps earning her a nickname among the village boys, they called her “Nen baby, the city girl”. She had a lot to do in preparation for her journey; she washed all her clothes, dried and neatly packed them in her new *Gongoro* box bought for her by her loving mother, specifically for this journey.

That evening, her father’s compound was half filled with relatives, friends and foes alike trooped in, people she had never seen or rarely talked to were all in attendance, it is indeed true that once you gain a bit of success everyone will want to be identified with you, but this same people wouldn’t help you in dire times of need. Another reason they all came was the free rounds of *Burkutu* and jollification going on in Nde Golkitda’s Compound, it was like a mini send off party for his beloved child. The party

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went on from 6pm to around 8pm until it had to be cut off short by Nde Golkitda himself when people started getting intoxicated, frenzy and starting unnecessary fights. Everyone retired for the night except her mother; she sat with her in her room, dimly lit by a kerosene lamp hanging from the wall, emitting deadly poisonous smokes. Her mother continued advising her,

“You must not go and behave like a child without home training, you must work harder than you do here, respect your aunty and her husbands at all times and most importantly avoid those city boys, they are bad news for you”. Yes *Nana* she replied, I will not disgrace you, I'll do my best.

By 10AM the next morning they were set to leave, few family members came around, words of advice were spoken, prayers were offered. Her father spoke last, she knelt down on the mat and he began,

‘Everything I wish to say has been uttered already; you know where you are coming from, read your books and never depart from the ways you were brought up. He then began the intercessory prayers; the family formed a circle around her,

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'You shall not lack food or water to drink"

'Anyet' they chorused.

'You shall excel in your education and over all troubles of life"

'Amen' the response came again.

"God's grace will continually be sufficient for you"

'Anyet'!

"As long as there is hair on your head, let our words have meaning and remain valuable to you, the circle nodded in agreement, and may the almighty God in heaven and our ancestors protect you on your journey now and for the rest of your days,

The circle shouted one last time in unison, "ANYET"!

Her best friend Ritmwa and her mother were sobbing uncontrollably, it was like she was dying or going away forever and they would never see her again. Even her father had teary eyes at the sight of his only child leaving, but he was a man and must never be seen to cry, so he fought off the tears and held

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them back. The bike men that will transport them to Pankshin arrived, they will travel to Pankshin where they will board a commercial vehicle travelling to Jos. Nawok hugged her child amidst sobs, the bond between mother and child was so strong, that they had to be forcefully separated. They waved their goodbyes, and the motorcycles roared to life. Turning back she could still see her mother holding on to Ritmwa and crying. They got to Pankshin within thirty minutes; Pankshin was developed than her local government and poor village. They duo dropped at Monday Market Junction and fortunately for them a Sharan pulled over,

Jos ne? The driver asked in Hausa, Nengak replied yes and asked how much?

After a minute of bargaining the driver asked them to pay eight hundred naira per person reducing it from the initial one thousand naira they were to pay. He explained that fuel was costly, and now the pump price at filling stations had hiked to ₦180 naira per litre owing to the Christmas celebrations. They boarded the vehicle as the discussion continued,

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“Can you imagine that as an oil producing country we buy fuel at higher pump prices than non oil producing countries?”

A fair bald man with Igbo accent lamented from the back seat,

“And why do fuel prices and the prices of every other commodity in the country multiply by two once it is Christmas but never at other holidays?” A mother breastfeeding her baby interjected. The question was rhetoric; nobody could provide an answer even if they had wanted to.

Nine passengers were aboard the vehicle, an old man with a boy about her age were seated in the front, she, Nengak, the breastfeeding mother and one other lady who slept through the whole conversation were in the middle seats, while the backseats were occupied by the bald Igbo man who had asked the first questions and two other gentlemen with identical bowler hats and matching Collared T-shirts. She could not read the words engraved on their hats from her seat but it though seems like they were heading to Jos for an event.

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The radio was tuned to Peace 90.5 FM and was blaring Omah Lay's "LoLo". She knew few lines of the lyrics and followed the song, her feet shaking to the rhythm and her lips in low tones synced to the lyrics. She did not wink throughout the whole journey, Nengak allowed her to seat by the window; from there she watched the trees in a never ending race with their vehicle. The check points were fully packed with hawkers trying to sell Oranges, Bananas, roasted Groundnuts, bottled drinks and hosts of other eatables to passengers through the window. She also noticed that the driver crumpled twenty naira notes and stylishly handed it over to the police and military men stationed at each checkpoint, it was either that or thirty to forty minutes of harassment, delay and unnecessary searching of the vehicle and passenger's belongings. This was the system.

Upon arriving Jos, they dropped at Terminus; she was bewildered by the crowd, tall buildings and fast traffic. She had never seen a market this big; the biggest she saw was Monday market in Pankshin but even that was nowhere near the size of this commercial centre.

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They had to walk a long distance to the outskirts of the market before they could find *keke* to take them to their destination, *kekés* were not allowed in this section of the market during the daytime. She had never been in a tricycle before, she was quick to notice that the tricycles all looked alike, they were painted in green and yellow with numbers written at the back with white paint, they boarded one that had the number PT 2157 written at the back. Ten minutes later they alighted at a roundabout, "This is Farin Gada roundabout", Nengak informed her.

They got to aunt Nentawe's house seven minutes later, it was a three bedroom safe contain flat, well furnished, a "45 inch" Plasma TV was placed on the wall, a dining table with four chairs in the dining section, a fridge in the living room and a woofer sound system all decorated the room. The furniture was a sofa pair of three seater, two seater and two other single sofas. The house was painted in orange and white, with tiled floor. Aunty Nentawe, received them warmly and treated them both to relishing plates of fried rice, chicken meat and a bottle of Pepsi. Nenlap felt like she was at Aso Rock, the presidential villa. "This is the life" she thought to herself.

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Nengak left immediately he was done eating, but not until aunt Nentawe squeezed a little token of appreciation into his palm. "Take your bags and follow me" her aunt instructed, she led her to one of the rooms, "this will be your room" unpack and then come and help me in the kitchen. She unpacked quickly for she did not possess much, there was a ten spring mattress lying on the floor, a wall paper of Jesus and a reading table against the wall. She knelt down and prayed, thanking God for journey mercy and for his grace in this new environment and life.

CHAPTER FOUR

The next morning, after having tea, and bread for breakfast, aunty Nentawe took her to Farin gada Tomato market, she showed her where to locate and buy different items, she also introduced her to her numerous customers.

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“Is this your daughter? Without waiting for reply “she is pretty” mama Nkechi added. “No she is not my daughter, she is my niece”, aunty Nentawe replied. Mama Nkechi was an igbo trader that sells crayfish, stockfish, *ogbono* and *dogwu* leaves at the market.

“From now on she’ll be the one coming to the market; put plenty *gyara* for her anytime she comes o” aunty Nentawe continued.

When they got home, she helped her aunt in preparing stew. Aunty Nentawe showed her the basics on how to use the kitchen equipments; “you must make sure you turn off the gas cylinder anytime it is not in use” and then she demonstrated how to turn it on and off several times. Nenlap had never seen a gas cooker before, she marveled at how the flames miraculously appeared from nowhere at the twist of a knob. Back in the village she had to go and gather firewood from the bush to cook with. The smoke that emits from the burning wood was not something she fancied. The white man is truly amazing she thought to herself. By New Year she could name a few places, and run errands unaccompanied. Her aunt bought her a new dress, a silver gown

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and black high heels to match with. The way she walked in them from the car to the church for New Year service was disastrously funny; she was not used to heels. She walked like a trained dog walking on its hind legs; if not for the timely intervention of a fine gentleman who supported her from the back she would have Jack and Jilled down the staircase. He smiled at her and held by the hands till she entered the church auditorium, "thank you" he nodded, smile and left.

4th January came, the day for school resumption; she was nervous, new school, new environment, new challenges and no friends. Her aunt has secured admission for her at Zion International Academy, it was close to home and her long time classmate Mrs. Sylvia was the Principal so it was pretty easy getting admission. The school was painted in Abuja Brown and milk colors; a Nigerian flag was flying lazily in the middle of the school compound. They proceeded to the principal's office; her aunt was engaged in a chat with the principal. Nen stood behind her, dressed in clad white buttoned shirt over blue skirt, she wore white socks and black shoes. She was thinking, how was she going to adapt in this new school? How was she going to

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compete? The other students in her class certainly had better educational background. "if you ever need anything let me know" Mrs. Sylvia said, breaking her thoughts. "Yes ma'am". She replied.

The Principal took her to JSS 1A and handed her over to the class teacher Miss Lillian Davou a Berom lady from Jos North. The next period was social studies and it was taken by the class teacher herself. The class was occupied by twenty five students including her, there were three rows of seats, two pupils sat per desk. Luckily she encountered no problems on her first day. When she got home she was greeted by fried rice and plantain for lunch.

The years ran by quickly, she was now 15 and in JSS 3. She visited home once a year. One fateful evening she was informed her that her husband was coming back home. He has been away for 2 years in Canada, studying. He has now completed his master's programme and was set to return home. A week later he arrived, he was welcomed by a little crowd of old friends, colleagues, neighbors and his best buddy Solomon. They had a small welcome home party for him at the residence.

Nenlap had not seen him before, he was tall and muscular, he

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belonged to the beard gang, his beard was long, curly, and finely trimmed. The next morning she was setting up breakfast at the dining when he walked in, "Nenlap is it? He asked. "Yes, good morning sir." She greeted him. "We didn't get a chance to talk yesterday, how are you doing?" "I'm fine thank you" she replied, "And welcome back sir".

He nodded, and asked for the breakfast to be brought to him in the living room that way he could eat and watch the business news on CNN at the same time.

Dawn broke the next day, it was a fine Sunday morning, you could hear the church bells toll, alerting the masses that it was time for church service. "I thought you said you stopped drinking? You lying bastard!" aunty Nentawe's voice echoed, relegating the sounds of the church bell to the background, "where were you all night? Drinking and chasing after your strumpets right? You could not even pretend for two days, only God knows what atrocities you have been committing over there for the last two years!!"

"Let me explain" but he she shut him down immediately! "Explain what?" the fight was getting intense her aunt was

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infuriated she was a dragon spitting flames, the house turned instantly into a living hell, instead of church service that morning, the devil was having his own morning service here. Uncle Bernard realizing she would not calm down, took his shirt, picked his phone and slammed the door angrily on his way out, “yes go on! Leave! You always do! You will come back and meet me in this house! Aunty Nentawe continued ranting, she then slumped into the sofa, sobbing. Nenlap couldn’t really place all the pieces together, for the two years she lived with her aunt she never saw her aunt raise her voice or even this sad. Just within two days of her husband’s arrival and all hell had broken loose and the demons are out to play. Trouble was looming in the corner she thought to herself; she joined her aunt on the sofa and tried to console her.

First period on Monday was Miss Lillian’s Class, she had a policy of choosing pupils at random to go in front of the class and answer questions, today the lot fell on Nen, “go to the board” and write out twenty ethnic groups that you know in Nigeria” As she stood up she heard whispers and murmuring, what is going on she turned around and looked, she had answered a thousand of

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Mrs. Lillian's dreaded questions already what is the fuse all about today? The class teacher noticed the noise was becoming unbearable and asked what the problem was, Victor Ogbonnaya the class bully, a boy with a rather un-proportional head, too big for his thin neck to carry, didn't waste time in answering, "she peed herself" he pointed and erupted into an episode of wicked laughter, the whole class joined in except her best friend Freda. Nen looked at the back of her skirt and it was all soiled, what is happening she was confused, she had never peed herself, and to do that unknowingly in broad daylight like this? She dropped the marker on the floor and ran out of the class, straight to the female restroom and fastened the bolts. She sat on one of the toilet seats and sobbed uncontrollably, this type of disgrace was too much to bear, Freda ran after her and was pleading with her to open the door, but she wouldn't yield. Few minutes later Miss Jemimah arrived the rest room, she was seating under the mango tree in the school compound when she noticed Nen running into the restroom and Freda following a moment later, she sensed there was a problem and decided to see what it was. "What is wrong?" she asked Freda, Freda shrugged her shoulders

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she herself doesn't know, what is your friend's name? "Nenlap" she replied "or Nen if u like" she added. "Nen can you hear me? Miss Jemimah asked, "My name is Jemimah, I'm the new youth corper that was introduced on Friday last week at the assembly ground, please open the door so we can help you, we are here for you" she continued for about 5minutes and was about to give up when the door slowly opened, and a head popped out. Nenlap explained the whole situation to her, at once she knew what the ordeal was she sent Freda to the Staff room to get her bag, "you are menstruating" she kindly explained to her Nen."Do you know what that is? She asked, Nen shook her head, "okay, simply put, menstruation is the discharge of blood and cells from the lining of the uterus; this means you are now a woman and at a child bearing age", "do you mean I'm pregnant? Nen naively asked "No, it means you are now matured and can give birth to a baby".

Freda returned with Miss Jemimah's hand bag, they helped cleaned Nen, fortunately Miss Jemimah's bag was a cave of treasures, she took out a sanitary pad and showed the girls how to use it. Then she took Nen to the principal's office, she explained the whole thing to the principal. The principal sent for

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the class teacher and admonished her accordingly, her negligence and uncaring attitude was provocative, “you are supposed to be a teacher in all spheres of this pupil’s life and not just in the educational aspect, I’m ashamed of you! As the adult you were supposed to go after her and find out what the problem is, really I’m disappointed in you” Mrs Sylvia ended. She gave Nen a day off and agreed to open a girl’s club at the school via the request of Miss Mima as she was later fondly called by the students. “All preparations will start immediately, and I’ll love you to spearhead the club, if you are willing” she said, Miss Mima accepted to, she was used to this type of situations already and quite experienced too, she had passion to help the girl child, so for her it was just another day at the office.

On their way home from school with Freda she was still taunted by Victor, the class bully, and his gang of three other boys, John, Mathew and Frank, “Pissy Pissy” they continued mocking, “Forget them let us just go” Freda begged Nen who was already pumped up with anger, she dropped her bag on the ground and turned to face victor, “what did you call me again?” Before he uttered another word she splashed a handful of sand in his face and

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pushed him to the ground, he was momentarily blind; she sat on top of him and fed him a mouthful of sand. "Do not ever call me that again", "yes, I won't please get off" he pleaded, trying to spit out the sand. His gang seeing their leader eating sand decided to run for their safety. Victor was physically big but he was no match for this village girl, Nen had gained experience and tact from quite a number of times she engaged in wrestling with boys at the village square. "yes run away" Freda yelled at the fleeing boys, and do not ever mess with us ever again" the scared Freda was now full of courage now that she had seen the prowess of her friend , she jumped up and down in happiness. The story of how the class bully was dealt by a girl circulated the school the next day and no one ever dared to call her "Pissy Pissy" again, at least not to her face.

CHAPTER FIVE

The bar was dimly lit, bulbs of different colours surround the sparsely located huts, West of Mines Avenue had always been a bubbling area in night, A sign post read “Madam Cash Kitchen and Bar”, Chief Osabede’s popular high life jam “*Osondi Owendi*” was playing in the background, the aroma of freshly prepared *Esi wu* simmered through the air, “four bottles of starlite and two plates of *Esi wu* dey hard you people to bring since 30 minutes ago?” A man in his forties seating at a corner of the hut asked, he

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was clearly vexed.

“Leave dem na so dem de do for this place, dem no just get respect for regulars”, his friend a dark man with protruded belly proclaimed, he looked like a pregnant woman waiting her turn for pre-natal at the hospital. Five minutes later the drinks were placed on his table alongside it two plates of assorted and relishing looking *Esi wu* were served, “Even if na *SARS* officers you meet for road you suppose don bring this tin tey tey na” he further complained. “Sorry o oga customers plenty today and na only three of us dey shop today no vex”.

“What is the problem?” Madam cash inquired “na dis your gal o she no de know regulars, I don almost spend eternity for here no drink, no meat, shebi make I stop de come here abi?” Madam Cash pleaded with him and then explained the matter to him “ na only me, Uju and Gloria de shop today no vex my customer”, she turned around to go and then stopped abruptly like she have seen a ghost. Who gave this fool a drink? Staring at a malnourished looking fella with scars on his left cheeks, Davou! Didn’t I tell you to stop coming to my bar? Have u paid your debts? You think say

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"I de run charity organization here abi?" She started ranting and threatened to undress him. Madam cash how much is his bill? The man with the protruded belly asked, "two thousand five hundred naira plus today's own", I'll settle you he said. "In fact give everybody one one bottle for here, bills on me".

The shouts of ODUGWU filled the air, Davou was on his knees "you be Odugwu, you be senior man! Anybody wey plan you bad tin no gree reach house today, trailer go jam am for road!" Davou continued showering prayers and accolades on the man. Davou was a drunk; rumor has it that what he owes in bars across Jos city was more than the debts Nigeria owed foreign nations.

Uncle Bernard watched the whole drama from a corner, Solomon his best friend was settling the bills and wooing Uju, "juju baby you are a fine girl, see eh all my money in this life I will give to you, just follow me go my village, just come and see my mama." Uncle Bernard had to drag him away from Uju, on their way he was still saying "Ben you don't know that this small small girls between 15 and 18 years na dem sweet pass o, everything is fresh and succulent, sweet sweet girls". King Solo Solo! Uncle

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Ben hailed him. “Na me o” he replied, “even King Solo for Bible de learn work for where I dey”. He bragged.

The door creaked wide open “Where is your aunty?” Uncle Bernard inquired, “She has gone to work, this week she is on night duty” Nen replied. “Ok serve me dinner “He said as he switched on the television. The 9 o’clock news was airing, Temitope Taiwo was presenting the news, the #EndSars protest is the highlight of the news these days, and it was getting hotter with each passing day.

The protest was against the Special Anti Robbery Squad (SARS) of the police Department, geared by the Nigerian youths, there was mass protest all over the country, the youths had awoken, they named themselves “Generation Z” the last letter of the alphabet representing the end. They are out to protest and put an end to everything bad, enough is enough, they have lost brothers, fathers, sisters and friends to the corrupt officers of this notorious Anti robbery squad. Just last week a young man in Jos lost his life, he was gunned down by a SARS officer, these officers had no regards for due process or rule of law, they were

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reckless and felt godlike, they take lives unnecessarily with no remorse, they rob late night travelers, collect bribes, harass, assault and arrested anybody with a tattoo or a flamboyant hairstyle.

The protesters Placards read “Fine boy no be Criminal! #ENDSARS”, “Possessing Laptops and Iphone doesn’t make me a Yahoo boy #ENDSARS”, “STOP KILLING OUR BROTHERS #ENDSARS” and a lot of other captions. A woman in Lagos was been interviewed at the protest ground, she was narrated how SARS officers shot dead her younger brother and snatched his vehicle on his way home from Abuja.

“Here is your food sir, Nen placed a steaming hot plate of Egusi soup and pounded yam. She turned to go get a bottle of water from the fridge and found Uncle Bernard Staring at her, “do u need anything else? She asked, “ehmm no” he managed to mutter, it was as if he swallowed a frog and it got stucked in his throat. “Okay, goodnight sir” she said, she could still feel his eyes prying at her as she went to her room. These girls have really come of age uncle Bernard said to himself, he admired the girl

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who puberty had growing faster than her age, she had slightly visible and perky breast, her hips were already showing, giving shape to a well rounded buttocks, he licked his lips and proceeded to dine. He was done with his meal but he had no satisfaction, food is not what he needed at the moment something was missing.

The pendulum rang 10PM, it was archaic but an exquisite piece of art, probably it was one of the few working pendulum clocks that remained in the country, Nen thought to herself. She shoved the English textbook she was reading aside, JSSCE was around the corner and she was determined to pass at all cost. But this night she was tired and decided to sleep. Around midnight she felt a cold hand touch her, she was not one of those kids that believed in ghost stories, but today it looks like her disbelief has caught up with her. But this was no ghost, this was flesh and blood, she kicked hard and uncle Bernard grunted, what do u want she screamed, but he immediately closed her mouth with his hands,

She struggled but it was in vain, she was no match for him. she

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was in pain, he easily overpowered her, he had one hand on her mouth, and used the other to rip off her night gown, uncle please she was muttering and pleading under her breath, but he didn't listen, he pushed, heaved, back and forth he went, penetrating deep inside, pleasuring himself in an orgy of senseless rapine.

Satisfied he got up and holding his trouser loosely he walked out of the room smiling like a proud king returning from a conquest, it was pathetic how conquering a little girl made him feel like a man. King solo was right he chuckled to himself; these teenagers were better and more satisfying than adults. Tears gushed out from both sides of her eyes. She just laid there unable to move, she couldn't say a word, her throat was parched dry, she also had an uneasy feeling in her stomach, how can someone that calls himself her uncle be this wicked? How was she going to tell her aunt? Who will believe her? Clearly it was her word against his! How she managed to dose off amidst the thousand unanswered questions racing on her mind was still a mystery.

The next day she told her aunt what has happened,

“So you want destroy my marriage huh? After all I did for you?”

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Her aunty asked, “ you ungrateful wretch, I picked you from the cave in the village, cleaned you up, catered for you and sent you to one of the best school in town, this is how you want to repay me right ?” “Aunty this is not a marriage” Nen replied, “he drinks, comes home late and beats you”. “What do you know about marriage? He aunty retorted, “Do you know how hard it is to get a husband? I got this man when I was 35 years old, if you destroy this marriage who will marry me? Who will take care of your education? Definitely not me. If you do not keep quiet I’ll send you back to the village, clearly you prefer hunger pangs, stream water and typhoid ailments.

“Please I’m begging you” aunty Nentawe pleaded, dropping her threats, “what do you want people to say?” Nen was in tears “people’s opinion matters to you more than my wellbeing?” she asked amidst sobs, “ is it because I’m not your daughter?” but before she could ask another question she received a thundering slap that made her swallow the rest of her words, “how dare you insult me and mock me of my childlessness? From today you eat only what I give you, you go only where I send you, I’m I understood?” Nen nodded, clenching the side of her face, her

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aunt was left handed and had manly hands, it was as if she had just been slapped by a giant. From that day her world fell apart.

School did not help, the bright and cheerful student everyone knew was replaced by a shadow of her former self, she became moody, quiet and reserved; she paid little or no attention in class. She was getting pale and looked sick. She has lost interested in everything, including the girls club; it was no fun without Miss Mima, who was away in Kebbi, she lost her twin sister and went home for the burial rites, so there was virtually no use of going to the club.

CHAPTER SIX

A month has gone by since the incident occurred, but with each passing day aunt Nentawe became more hostile. Nen considered going back to the village, but where was she going to get money for transport? What about her education? Her father has also been sick for a while now and aunt Nentawe has been the one footing the medical bills. Her mother was a petty trader and could only contribute little to the finances. No way, she can't go back; the news of her predicaments might kill the old man faster than the ailment he was suffering from. So she said nothing and did nothing.

"After you are done day dreaming wash these clothes" the voice

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of her aunt broke her thoughts, she heaped a load of clothes on her, it was a big bale, tied up in a wrapper, in the same fashion and manner those traders at Katako market tie up the bale of clothes they sell. “And when you are done, ensure you also wash the dirty plates on the kitchen sink”.

“Aunty I have not had anything to eat today” Nen said. “What have you done today? You lazy fool, until you finish all your chores you are not getting a spoon of my food, and iron those clothes neatly when they dry off” aunty Nentawe hissed and left.

Nen was devastated, how did she get here? Why is fate this cruel to her? Painfully she finished up her chores and found half a plate of yam porridge left over in the kitchen, she quickly gobbled it up before her aunt finds it and gives it to the dogs, for the past few weeks the canines fed much better than she did. Around 7pm her aunt left for work, she was filling in for a sick colleague for the rest of the week. The next morning was a Saturday she woke up to the sound of someone pounding the door; she stole a quick glance at the wall clock it was a quarter to Seven, who could be at the door this early? She wondered. When she opened the door,

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she found Uncle Bernard, he beamed immediately at the sight of her, "Nen baby, how are you?" but she did not reply him. Bring in my luggage he directed, he has been away for a week for a workshop in Kaduna, "where is your aunt and why are you acting up?" "She is yet to come home from work" Nen replied him.

"I thought we were gone pass all this issues?" he continued and made to move closer to her, but she retreated backwards towards the door. "I'm not going to bite you, look" he said bringing out a phone box from his bag, "I bought this for you, so that you can belong with all the kids in your school, take it and we can forget anything ever happened between us".

"No thank you" the reply came " I don't want anything from you !" she knew better than to dine with the devil. "Come on just look at it he said bringing out the phone from the pack, it was an android device, Tecno spark 3 Model, "I don't want it!" please just leave me alone" Nen insisted. "Foolish girl, and here I was thinking that I will intercede on your behalf so my wife can forgive you and start treating you better, now I have changed my mind, we shall see what will become of you in this house" picking up his

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luggage and the phone he disappeared angrily to his bedroom. Nen remained outside till he came out; he had showered and was well dressed, "tell your aunt I won't be coming back till tomorrow, I have business in town". Nen did not reply he frowned at her and went his way.

Aunt Nentawe got back home an hour later, she was tired so she went straight to bed ignoring Nen who had just informed her that her husband was back from his trip, but he was out again and will not come back home till the next day. Around 6PM her aunt left for work again, Nen enjoyed having the whole house to herself. That day she ate to satisfaction and went to bed early around 7:30PM. 30 minutes later she heard a sound of movement in the living room, this rodents again she thought to herself, their sleep have been terrorized by rats for days now, her aunt has obviously forgotten to buy the mouse trap again. But then the noise became persistent, she lazily got out of bed to check the situation, on her way to the living room she bumped into a figure, it was uncle Bernard! How did he get in? How he got in without the dogs barking at the sight of him surprised her. She was very sure she locked all the doors; little did she know he had

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a spare key to the back door.

She made to run back to her room but he grabbed and forced her to the ground, the tiled floor was cold against her back.

There in the passage he took his pound of flesh, lustfully driving his spear in and out, and in again, then he drove hard, then harder and harder he went, causing her more pain, this is payback for the rudeness and attitude you exhibited in the morning, he smiled thoughtfully to himself, clearly he was enjoying this.

She struggled with the beast until she got one hand free, then she tapped the floor groping around in the dark, her hand touched something, she grabbed it and with all her strength she rammed him in the head, once, twice, thrice, in quick successions, he winced in pain shrieking like a bitten dog, he got off her immediately.

“You rascal” he said supporting himself against the wall, he managed to switch on the lights, his face was partly covered in blood, there was stains on the wall too from the splatter, his head was trickling blood. There she stood in the middle of the passage with a bloody metallic figurine of the Virgin Mary in her hand,

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literally and figuratively she was saved by mother Mary. Normally the figurine was fixed to the wall, how it got to the floor she didn't know, but she was glad it was there when she needed it. "You will pay for this" he screamed and he then made for her, but she ducked under his arms and fled.

She got out of the house and ran barefooted to the streets, a man asked what the problem was but she ignored him and kept running, she cannot live this life any longer, it will be better if she ended it all, with that thought in her head she ran headlong straight into the road, a 406 Peugeot nearly knocked her down, missing her by just few inches, the driver was experienced as she suddenly appeared on the road he swerved to the side of the road, almost colliding into a parked Keke by the side of the road. The middle aged man that was the driver, dressed in blue T-shirt and black shorts, jumped out of the vehicle even before the wheels stopped spinning,

"Are you mad? You no de see road? Tell my village people say you no see me incase na dem send you, he continued ranting in pidgin English. Nen stood still, rooted to the spot, she was

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shivering. A small crowd gathered. “No be me go kill you o, are u blind?” the crowd begged him, a familiar feminine voice was the most prudent and persistent in calming him down, he calmed down and drove away five minutes later. The familiar voice came again”

“Nen lets go” a car headlight flashed the figure, it was Miss Mima the corper from her school, she led her by hand till they disappeared down the road, they then took a route leading to Miss Mima’s place, it was a small apartment. Miss Mima sat her down, got her a glass of a fruit juice. After she gulped it down, Miss Mima asked what the problem was. Didn’t you check the road before crossing? Where were you going to by this time of the night? Miss Mima had gotten into town two hours ago after resting a bit, she decided to stretch her legs which were sore from the journey, she decided to stretch that was when she saw the crowd by the road side, she decided to check out what was happening, she saw a disheveled figure in the middle of the crowd, a young girl barefooted with scattered hair, at a first glance she mistook her for a mentally derailed woman. On a closer look she discovered it was one of her pupils from the Girls

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club at Zion International Academy.

Miss Mima had this unique Aura that made it easy for people to trust her. So when Nen started narrating her story, She didn't utter a word, she listened attentively to every bit of the story, Nen told her the story from day one to that evening. Miss Mima was filled with Pity, "I'm sorry you went through all this". Why didn't you talk to anybody?"

Miss Mima consoled her and took her to the hospital that very night, the doctor examined her for Genital injuries, treated her bodily cuts and bruises, she then advised them to come for another check up in a week's time. She emphasized the need for additional examination; the check up was to ascertain whether she had contacted any Sexual transmitted Disease (STD's), HIV infections, *Bacterial Vaginosis* or other diseases. Also she was to have a pregnancy test. She advised them to report the case to the police immediately.

They heeded to her counsel and stopped at the Police station nearest to the hospital. After listening to them, the sergeant on duty, was reluctant to file a report,

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“Madam e too late to file any report now, you know this kind of case na serious one, infact all the file I get here don full, but if you fit rub my palm, me sef go rub your back, as dah one go done make you be my person well well, i fit see small motivation make I take squeeze your matter enter inside”.

Miss Mima knew what he wanted, Nigerian police officers wanted to be given incentives before they did their work, always looking like they don't receive salaries.

“You are all corrupt” Miss Mima said, “ well done o saint, Abi Mother Mary, you just carry your bad luck come spoil person sweet night with all your rubbish, abeg comot for here before I vex for you this night”. Miss Mima was infuriated, she took note of his name from his tag, Okoro Nwafor it read, she promise to report him to higher authorities but tonight was not the night, she will deal him with him another time. They left and lodged their complain at the Gada Biu Police Division, the police officers there were sympathetic and immediately filed a first information Report (FIR). Mr Bernard was arrested the next day. He was charged to court, but it took three months for the case to get a

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hearing date, and for Mr. Ben to be arraigned before a judge, this was how bad and slow the judiciary system in the country was. The day finally came and he pleaded guilty to all three count of charges brought against him, sexual assault, battery, and rape. The presiding judge, His lordship Samuel Aboki in his erudite wisdom had this to say;

“It is heartbreaking to find any human in this situation, especially children, rape doesn’t only affect the victims physically, it also distorts their psychological and emotional balance. This is the zenith of wickedness, man to man is just unfair.

So this is my ruling;

The accused has pleaded guilty to all three count charge of sexual assault, battery and rape, and has been found guilty; he is thereby convicted by this guilt and is sentenced to 14 years in prison with hard labour and no option of fine. But considering the remorseful nature of the accused and the fact that he pleaded guilty to all charges thereby saving the court, time, energy, and resources. The sentence is mitigated to 12 years in prison with hard labour and no option of fine. Though no amount of money

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can heal the trauma of the victim, nor cleanse the stigma associated to it, therefore the accused is to pay a sum of five hundred thousand Naira (₦500, 000) immediately to the complainant. This is the verdict of the court.”

The court in one voice answered “As the court pleases”. All rise.

Nen was glad, tears of joy flooded her eyes, she finally got Justice and thanked God for sending Miss Mima her way, she had no doubt this lady was her Guardian angel. Her dad had recuperated and was in attendance in court alongside her mother who was weeping profusely. He extended his thanks to Miss Mima and proclaimed blessings over her life.

Following weeks of therapy and counseling Nenlap gradually fell in love with life once again, her will to live was stronger than ever. There was colour on her face and the graceful smile that endeared her to many also returned. Her cheeks bubbled she was no longer pale, instead she looked like a fatten calf that was about to be sacrificed at the altar, her educational prowess was back again, life was blooming, apparently Miss Mima was doing a good Job with Nen who now lived with her.

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Nen in the company of her new guardian attended an awareness symposium against rape and the fight against maltreatment of the girl child, the event was organized by the “Save the Girl Child Foundation” it was a non-governmental organization that seeks to help educate and render help to the plight of the girl child across the country. The event held at Crest hotel. The foundation having heard her story through Miss Mima who was an active member of the organization, awarded Nen an educational scholarship of One Million Naira. The spoke person of the event Mrs Favour Noel emphasized a lot on the issue of vigilance;

“Parents you must be wary of all forms of physical relationship your wards have with the opposite gender; do not allow a girl child sit on the laps of any male friend or family member, or the boy child on the laps of the female relation or friend. You must educate them on these issues, try to give time to your kids and listen to their problems, because a lot of these teenagers are concealing these abuses, too afraid to say them out. Do not forget also that the boy child can be sexually abused too, nobody ever talks about that. Thirdly teachers are saddled with the responsibility of sensitizing their pupils on this type of issues;

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that must not slack in any way as the future of pupils can be thwarted by incidence of this nature. Lastly I want to use myself as an example to all victims of sexual assault, I was raped at age 12 continuously by my stepfather, but here I am today, a Professor, a proud mother of three with a happy marriage, do not allow the incident define you, there is a life of abundance waiting for you.”

Ten years later, Nen later secured admission and is currently a student undergoing a master’s Program in Guidance and Counseling at the University of Oxford, United Kingdom. She is also a proud and active member of the former “Save the girl Child foundation” which has been now renamed and redefined into “Save the Nigerian Child Foundation” the former encompasses only the needs of the girl child, who was going to save the boy child? Instead of “Happily ever after” as most stories end, this story begs to differ and ends with “LET’S save the Nigerian Child, TOGETHER WE CAN!

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EPILOGUE

We are all like children in hot pursuit of the ice cream van, we all want the Vanilla flavor and we do all we can to get it, regardless

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of the means. There are no saints amongst us, No, not one!

I asked my neighbors the other day “who is a villain? who is corrupt?” They all pointed to the politician passing In a Prado jeep with tinted glasses. I then asked what about you?

Mr. Femi steals from his boss at the filling station, Hajiya from her husband, and Amina from her Mother. What about Pastors dipping their hands in the church treasury?

Should I mention Mama Nkechi that dilutes her palm oil with water just to make more profit? How is that not corruption?

When you go to the ATM instead of one card you cunningly collect cards belonging to your friends who are just coming, leaving those who had been standing in the queue for hours stranded when the machine stops paying.

But they swore to me that there was a difference in the corruption level, all the acts of corruption by a poor man was aimed at survival, it was the rich that were truly corrupt. These folks liked differentiating between small and big sins. Sin is sin in the sight of God and so is corruption.

We cheat, we lie, we seize, we plunder! We take bribes, we employ only those from our locality and tribes, we rape daughters and murder sons,

Alas we are all villains: vile, corrupt and insensitive, living in a country where nothing works!

GLOSSARY

<i>Anyet</i>	Amen
<i>Burkutu</i>	Locally brewed alcohol.
<i>Esi wu</i>	Assorted meat prepared from goat head.
<i>Gongoro Box</i>	A metal luggage box.
<i>Keke</i>	Pidgin for a Tricycle.
<i>Ngolong</i>	A King or Traditional ruler.
<i>Nde</i>	Ngas word for an elder.
<i>Nana</i>	“Mother” in the Ngas Dialect.
<i>Rumbu</i>	Hausa term for a storage room, with thatched roof.
<i>Tori</i>	The Ngas word for a Baobab tree or its fruit.