IDENTITY THEFT

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The day seemed to go by in a blur; it now hung in that dim zone that was neither night nor day. The ceremonies of the first day were almost over, but the smell of the burnt skin of the cows that had been killed the night before still lingered. The *akwunechenyi* music produced by rhythmic drums, beat by well-dressed drummers dancing to the sound of their own music, and the piping sound of the *oja*, the small wooden flute that praised the deserving and those who had come of age, got fainter as the musicians moved farther away from the ceremonies. Most of the guests – and there had been many – had gone home too. But a few people were still sitting out front, under the brightly coloured canopies, talking and smiling, asking to be served with food and drinks, as if this was a party. Some asked for the more expensive bottles of small stout and Guinness malt in place of the cheaper Coca Cola. Mrs Anoliefo could not see any of this from where she was sat on a small stool in front of what used to be the kitchen. But she could hear the noises and having attended, and even helped organise events like this, she saw the scene in her mind's eye: young men lounging around, drinks in hand, showing off their youth as if they would never die, young women asking for food for their children who had eaten more than once, old women saying their soup lacked meat, all having a good time. As if they had come to a party.

Ogonna, her younger sister who had been chatting with her, went into the house to get something to eat. This seemed to signal that the performance was over. She stretched and yawned and wondered silently at her tiredness. She had been sitting down all day, in the bungalow beside the main house, the house she and Innocent had lived in before his business started doing well and they built the big one-story. That was where she received the guests who came to give their sympathies. They told her *ndo*, sorry, for her loss, and put money in the tray on the table by the side. But now the ceremony was over, at least for today. She tied her scarf more securely on her bald head. She ignored the young, thin woman seated on a mat by the side of the house, almost hidden. She ignored Okeoma, her second daughter who had been hovering around, looking as if her mother had suddenly become helpless, and walked into the main house though a back door. She could not abide her daughter's mothering attitude, practiced too often with her brothers, not today.

She took charge – that was her character: she refused others permission to act or decide for her. She had been in Enugu when Innocent suffered the stroke. When Afam, her eldest son, called her, she had wasted no time wondering what she should do. She had quickly gone to the hospital in Awka where he was. She had taken charge, dismissing the hapless girl who had no idea what to do or who to talk to. She had had him transferred to the Teaching Hospital in Enugu, where the best doctors in the East practiced, doctors who were friends to her and Innocent. She was the one whom the doctors reassured, telling her that people survived strokes so much better these days. But they promptly put him into the 144 bed-end

ward, where they put the seriously ill, and where people died everyday like flies.

She had been there when he died; she had made the arrangements for the mortuary. She had contacted the Bishop and begged him to preside over the funeral. She had told Afam, her eldest son, which printer to use for the funeral programme. She had told him which caterer to contact for the food. She had told her children to make sure there were souvenirs for the guests who would attend the funeral. That was the fashion these days – souvenirs at birthday parties, souvenirs at weddings, souvenirs at funerals. Her friend Mrs Uzondu had had umbrellas distributed to important guests when her husband died the previous year, the people in the village got plastic buckets and washing bowls. She was the one who shouted at the catering women when they arranged their big cooking pots and pans and began to make a fire too close to her orange tree. That orange tree was special; she had planted it in her first year with Innocent. Although she did not ask to see him where he lay in state in the main sitting room downstairs, she knew what he looked like; she had selected his clothes, the clothes he would meet his Maker in.

Just the day before she had been making sure that everything went smoothly, from instructing her son to contact the rainmaker to ensure that the day was bright and clear, to demanding that Ada supervise the caterers and the men who came to kill the cows. It was fitting that a cow be killed for Innocent. For all his faults, he was certainly deserving of that honour, she thought, an honour given mostly by those who could afford it to themselves. Innocent had taken the *ozo* title years ago; another chieftaincy title had been conferred on both she and Innocent seven years before. So she had ordered that two cows be bought for the ceremony, the funeral of a titled man. Two cows had been killed, along with several goats and chickens. And she told her children to make sure none of the meat went into the bags of the women in the village who came to help out; it seemed part of the tradition that village women would steal meat and *mgbaduga*, the round cassava flour wrapped in cellophane.

She had not argued with their clansmen, the *umunna*, not this time. She had quarrelled with them during Adanna's traditional marriage ceremony when they demanded that a leg of the cow that was killed for the ceremony be given to them. For years, she had stood her ground against them, greedy men trying to rob their clansman who had done well in life. And she had been mostly successful. They considered her mean for protecting her husband and she knew that they were complicit in Innocent's last deception. This time she let them have a goat, a big Hausa goat. She gave it to them before they asked. It would not buy them over – they had being on opposite sides of the fence too long. But, perhaps, even though she anticipated no roadblocks, it would soften their opposition to her plans. And she wanted them to know that she was still in charge.

She kept all the other traditions: She allowed the *umuada*, the daughters of the clan, to shave her head bald. Indeed, even with the new gospel being spread by the new churches that the Bible did not require it, or the position of the women's rights groups to which her friend Dr. Mrs. Onyeso belonged that it was denigrating to women because men did not have to do it, Mrs. Anoliefo did not see anything wrong with shaving one's head at a husband's death. She did not insist on seeing her husband's dead body; she knew well what he looked like after all. She thought it was a stupid tradition to disallow women from seeing their husbands' corpses before it entered the ground, but it was a tradition that was taken very seriously – hundreds of people had died in Etti, the next village, when a woman who had been deceived by her church into thinking that it was her right to see her husband's corpse after it came back from the mortuary. With the plan that she had in mind, every little bit that would soften the *umunna* helped.

So, while Mrs Anoliefo dutifully kept the low profile of a mourning widow, she was fully in charge of the funeral ceremony. That is, until the brown, shiny, wooden coffin went into the grave. Standing with the other members of the family, dressed in their blue abada uniform which she had chosen herself, the Bishop blessed the freshly dug grave. Young men from the village began to lower the coffin into the grave. That was when the first signal came: she almost asked out loud what they were doing, why they were putting Innocent in the big hole in

the ground. “Dust to dust, ashes to ashes,” the Bishop intoned, reading from the funeral programme. “… he signaled to Afam, and he bent down and took some of the fresh red earth and threw it into the coffin. It landed with a resounding thud. That was when the pain and anger struck and all the careful, cultivated self-control vanished as if it had never been there. She let out a shriek, and bawled like a mad woman, her head scarf flapping slightly in the wind. She swayed from side to side from the pain that death had inflicted, intensified by Innocent’s last betrayal. Her eldest son, Afam, tears streaming from his eyes, caught hold of her.

At the corner, a thin girl who looked out of place, wearing a black shapeless dress, was crying too. Why was she crying, Mrs Anoliefo wondered angrily? It was not her husband, not her Innocent, who had died.

* * *

She was forced to mourn with the girl. Custom required that she stay in the village for three months after the funeral; so she did. Her children remained with her, before they went back to their respective jobs and families in Lagos, Port Harcourt and London. It still surprised her how her children had turned out differently. The girls instinctively knew what their mother needed. They made themselves useful, cleaning up and receiving guests. Okeoma, her second daughter, slept with her in the bedroom downstairs; it would have been uncomfortable sleeping in their large bedroom upstairs. Okeoma had always been the soft one, the one who wanted to take care of everyone, the one who disliked quarrel. She remembered Okeoma when she was ten or eleven years old offering to give her packets of cornflakes and cabin biscuits, the supplements that boarding students took back with them, to her whiny brother, Afam, who had more than she did. Ada, her first daughter, was the most difficult. She found that she harboured some anger against Ada, who had been the apple of her father’s eyes. Even at thirty-five with a husband and children of her own, Ada could still not see how her mother had been the one who had ensured that they were taken care of, that she was the one who bought provisions for them at boarding school, visited them on visiting days, and did those little things that mothers did. True, Innocent made most of the money. But she did most of the hard work and the planning; Innocent did not know much about handling servants, or arranging birthday parties and she had made sure he never worried about things like that. Yet it was Ada who was most like her – strong-willed, decisive. It was Ada who said that the girl had to go.

The boys hovered a bit, trying to prove their manliness. Trying to take over decisions she normally made. As if something told them that having lost her husband, she had lost her senses as well. Like telling the girl that she could stay in one of the small bedrooms in the main house. She had quickly countermanded that of course. Imagine having the stupid, husband-snatcher sleeping in the same house as she, she fumed? How senseless could they be? Did they not see any danger because the girl had only a baby girl? Had she given them the go-crazy potion she gave their father? The next day before the after-funeral ceremonies, the *akwa*, began, with Afam, Chukwuemeka and Elozona her three sons at her side, each standing tall with the imposing height they had got from their father, she banished the girl to the small bungalow beside the big house. It would not do to send her home before the time was ripe.

After three months, Mrs. Anoliefo went back to Enugu, there to continue her angry mourning. She was angry that she could not go back to work at the supermarket immediately because she was worried about what people think. She wallowed shamelessly in self-pity in her heart. She refused to be kind to the people who came to comfort her, not helping them with the difficulties of expressing condolences, not filling in the silences with small talk, smiling coldly and acting unmoved by events past. She did not tell them that their commiserations made her humiliation more palpable, that she knew that all they talked about in their cars as they drove

home with pity in their voices was how Innocent got himself entangled with that young woman.

Not for the first time she asked herself what she had done wrong. Had she not been a good wife? How could God let this happen to her? Her life had been typical. Grow up, marry a man acceptable to your parents, a man that could feed her. Have children with him. Make good meals. Sleep with him as often as you can comfortably. Go to church together. Make good friends with the same social status. Build a house and a home together. Send the children to school. Then send them out to the world to be useful to themselves and the society, and reflect well on you. Grow old together. It had all seemed so simple. But now it seemed silly, stupid even to think that a man who did not know his own needs could provide all of yours. Truly foolish, that.

Sitting in her favorite sofa directly opposite the television in the sitting room which she had not changed at all since Innocent left her, she stared at the wall. They had made a good life for themselves after the Biafran war, she thought now, looking at the framed pictures on the sitting room wall. Life looked simple in those black and white pictures they took in the early years – she in a long gown which Ada said looked like a maternity gown, Innocent with his abundant hair cut into a funny square shape and a suit that now looked jumped-up, the trousers barely covering his socks-clad ankles. That was taken soon after they married in 1964, when Innocent was working in the Ministry of Finance. They looked young and she wondered where that full, smooth skin on her face had gone. She remembered her delighted pride when Innocent came to ask for her hand from her parents. She had everything to be proud of – he was tall and handsome, he had graduated from the University of London and was working in the civil service in Enugu. She was the envy of her friends.

In another picture, she and Innocent were sitting down, and the five children – Ozioma had not come along then – were standing ramrod straight like soldiers behind them. It was taken on the large veranda in front of the rented flat in Chiene Street before they moved to their own house in Independence Layout. So that must have been taken in 1977. Innocent had begun to lose his hair and his lean tall frame of the years before the Biafran war had begun to fill out with flesh, with a particular emphasis on the middle. The belly did not show very much in the traditional clothes he had begun to wear in the eighties, the ones he called ‘chieftain.’ He was wearing one of those in the other picture that they had taken together with Ada at her matriculation in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1982. How proud they had been when she got admitted to study medicine. She was serious; he was smiling into the camera, his right hand around their daughter.

He was always smiling; their children said that she was the serious one. But someone had had to take charge, wield the cane and enforce discipline, she told herself in an argument now as old as her now wrinkling face. She looked serious in all the pictures, even at a time of great happiness in her life – in the picture she had taken in front of the Pitman College in London where she studied in 1975 before coming home to teach in the primary school. Her friends had all been envious that her husband would pay for her to go abroad and become a ‘been-to.’ She had been pregnant with Elozona her fifth child, but there was no stopping her. She had hid the pregnancy from Innocent, only telling him when she got to London because she was afraid that he would try to persuade her to have the baby first and then going to London would possibly never happen. As it happened, it had all worked out better than she planned – having Elozona in London had given her son what was these days a vital United Kingdom citizenship, and he now lived and worked there, she thought proudly. It seemed to her that having climbed the *oji* tree, she had got firewood too. Then there was the picture of them at Afam’s wedding, only five years before. Had it really been that recent? Those framed pictures told a story of a good family life. The family that Innocent had thrown away.

It was not as if they had a perfect marriage. But who did? He said she nagged too much. But that was what women were for. They told men what to do because men frequently did not know what to do. And so it had been since the day of Adam and Eve. It was Eve who set things in motion; Adam was – wisely in Mrs. Anoliefo’s opinion – only too happy to go along

with whatever worked. Nagging worked. That was how they had built their homes – a big house in Enugu, a block of flats in Awka and a big house in the village. That was how they had scraped the money together to send Elozona to the London School of Economics, even though it almost killed them. Perception was not her strongest points and it did not cross her mind that her in-charge attitude gave him nothing to do but be a figure in her dreams, one that she could parade as her husband. And why would it? Not when she had done much of the hard work. Not when she had given him the best years of her life, been the best wife she knew how to be, and carried six of his children – three boys and three girls – in her womb. She had stood by him when he decided to take an early retirement from the civil service and go into business. She had assured him that her headmistress salary would sustain the family while he established the biscuit factory that eventually became a booming biscuit business. She counted her efforts to compel the primary school pupils in her school buy the biscuits as the most important factor in the success of that business venture. She was the one who stood between him and his relatives, his *umunna*, when they would have milked him dry with their endless requests for money. And all she had gained from that was their undying hatred. But none of that had mattered; his comfort was sufficient reward.

She had known from early on that he was unfaithful, which man wasn't? All her friends – Mrs. Okeke, whose husband always came back with the tell-tale lipstick on his shirt even after he had been caught several times, Mrs. Okorafor, whose professor husband spent all his salary on the university girls he taught, Mrs. Akosa whose husband had apparently kept a mistress and a young son in Onitsha – knew that men could not be trusted. The restlessness between their legs, that no one woman could hope to satisfy, took them from one woman to the next. But none of them ever married their girlfriends. None of them ever left home to live with another woman in full view of the public, openly and without regard for their families. Except Innocent.

Her knowledge of his last infidelity was forever attached to the loss of her womb. She remembered that morning well. She had been feeling the pains for a while. The extra amounts of blood that came for longer and longer periods preceded the pains. She had mentioned the pains to him and he had asked her to go and see their friend and her gynaecologist, Dr Uzochukwu. Dr Uzochukwu said it was a fibroid and recommended a hysterectomy. Innocent had encouraged her to have the operation. After having six grown children, what did she really need a womb at fifty-six for, he asked?

She was due to enter the hospital in two days when her sister told her. "You will have to deal with this when you come out," Ogonna had said, "All these young women who steal other women's husbands," she hissed. What would she know about it, Mrs Anoliefo had thought irritably, her husband would not look at another woman if she were the Queen of Sheba. Ogonna's husband was too miserly to spend his money on anybody else, not even himself. He still wore shirts that he had worn in the university in the seventies, with their old, brown, fraying collars. She did not rebuke herself for having such hurtful, if honest, thoughts of her sister and her family; she had not spoken them out loud after all. She wondered at the appropriateness of the timing of this information, but perhaps Ogonna wanted to make sure she would put everything into not dying on an operating table, knowing that she had a fight awaiting her. That was indeed good incentive, she thought angrily. But her annoyance was better reserved for her husband of thirty-two years who was being unfaithful to her She resolved to deal with it when she got out of hospital – she needed all her strength for the operation and she would not confront him immediately. She would warn him, shout and scream as she had done in earlier years, threaten the woman and get her fired from her job, like she had done with that thin girl who had been Innocent's first secretary in the business. She had learnt her lesson after that – she would not hear of women working directly under Innocent.

She did not confront him; instead he came to her three weeks after the operation. He said simply that he was leaving. Lying in their large bed, she had stared up at him, lost for speech for perhaps the first time in her life. Their children were grown, he said. They did not have

much in common at all, not in a long time. He wanted to be happy, he continued. He was moving to their block of flats in Awka to live with the girl. He did not say she was already pregnant for him, but she found this out later. His eyes went all around their wide room, anywhere but at her. He had moved some of his things to Awka already, he told her. While she lay in a hospital bed, giving away her womb at his suggestion, she thought bitterly. He had not even waited for her to recover fully after the operation. Men were wicked, she thought. But she knew that he was only capitalizing on her momentary weakness; he would not have been able to do what he did if she were herself, she told herself reassuringly. She shouted insults at him, but they came out without the customary bite. She was still weak after the operation and she could not hold on to him even though she got up from the bed and clutched at him.

She could not believe what appeared to be happening. They had been married forever, it seemed. This was not England or America where men left their wives after more than thirty years of marriage. Other men had affairs and got whatever it was out of their system, why did he not do the same? This was not England or America where women left their husbands because they were unfaithful to their wives. This was Nigeria, where people were realistic and knew, from the day he was born, that a man would stray

She remembered her dubiousness when she was told about this latest affair, and that it seemed very serious. She had not had the slightest suspicion; it was really late in the marriage to worry too much about that, or so she had thought. She should have known that men could not be trusted, not while one of their members remained active. Did the great Zik not remarry at age seventy? At least, Zik had waited for his first wife to die. Still, it was incredulous that Innocent, at over sixty nearly an old man with one foot in the grave, would be thinking of taking another wife. Not when they had reached the point in their lives when most of the troubles that plagued marriages in the early years were no longer issues, except for the obligatory nagging and complaining. The age when people knew on which side of the bed they preferred to sleep and had slept in that spot for years. That age when people understood, if not loved, their spouses. Not with a grandchild on the way – Ada was then pregnant with her first child. What would now happen to their membership of the Rotary Club? She had thought they might vie for the District Governor position that year. How would he explain her absence to the Old Boys of DMGS? How could she continue to chair the Christian Women's Meeting in church? How could she attend church without his tall frame beside her, receiving greetings from everyone – including the priests who knew how much money they gave in support to the church – and counseling young couples who aspired to their enviable stability and success? She would have to cancel performing the solo rendition of "Bless This House' that she had promised the Okechukwus, the young couple at church, who had asked her to sing at their house opening in a few months. She would not be able to hold her head up anymore, she thought, how could he humiliate her so publicly?

In her heart she called herself Nkiruka, the name her parents had given her, but 'Mrs. Anoliefo' was her identity, the person she presented to the world. That was what her customers at the supermarket called her. Before she retired from teaching that was what the children in Ekulu primary school had called her. She remembered going to antenatal classes when she was pregnant with Afam, her first child. When it was her turn to see the doctor, the nurse would respectfully call out, "Mrs. Anoliefo" That was when it began to dawn on her that she really was somebody. He would take that from her, her identity, and give it to another woman, she thought angrily. Just like he had taken her womb and handed her a bombshell. That was forever the way the event etched itself in her mind – the theft of a womb. It did not matter that she had had children, did not want more and was unlikely to have more. It did not matter that the doctor had taken out a fibroid as large as a Christmas chicken attached to her womb. Nor did it matter that she had reached the age of menopause. All that seemed irrelevant to her husband's grave duplicity – encouraging her to have a hysterectomy, when he was sleeping, and making a baby, with another woman. She tortured herself unflinchingly with thoughts of what the two of them would have done in a bedroom – they had after all produced a child – he

with his sagging skin and flabby beer belly and she with her young, thin body.

He had not even allowed her dignity in her mourning, she thought now, staring at a picture of him in the garb of a Knight of St. Christopher of the Anglican Diocese of Enugu. Her hope had been that he would come back to his senses in due course. Instead, he had died, leaving her to mourn without peace. To mourn him with another woman. Suddenly she wanted to pull him out of that picture, to bring him back from the absolute ending of death. And kill him again. To take a knife to his torso and see if he could feel the pain that he had caused her. This pain that brought back the utterly foreign sensation of helplessness she had felt when he packed his bags and moved to Awka to live with a girl younger than his first two daughters. This pain that caused her to wake up every night seething with an anger that almost overwhelmed her.

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It was a Friday morning when she arrived at the block of flats in Awka. Morning was a good time because many occupants would have gone to work. No matter, she had come with reinforcements – she had hired two policemen from Enugu. The gateman, who knew her well but had not seen her for the past three years, greeted her with respect and a barely suppressed excitement: he expected some drama today. She responded coldly; she was unaccountably angry with all who had remained in Innocent's employment when he went to live with the girl. She had already fired his driver. The gateman was next, as soon as she found a replacement.

She walked upstairs to the third floor. Why did Innocent want to climb all these stairs, she wondered? It must have taken something out of him. She was slightly out of breath by the time she got up there, the policemen following respectfully behind. She knocked on the door. The girl came out, dressed in a faded blouse and wrapper. "Good morning," she said to Mrs. Anoliefo.

Mrs Anoliefo did not answer. Instead she pushed into the sitting room and said, "Go and pack your things and leave my house."

"You cannot make me leave. This is my house too," the young woman said defiantly, turning to face her from the door. The defiance was, however, blunted by the fear that gleamed so clearly from her eyes when she looked up at Mrs Anoliefo, and the shaky tone coated with tears in which she delivered this bold statement.

"Where were you when I built it with Innocent? Where were you when I came to Awka to order the sand, the cement? When I organized and paid the labourers? You were sitting in your mother's hut in the village, thinking of stealing another woman's husband instead of working hard and making something of yourself. I am not here to argue with you. Just go and pack up your things. And while we are at it, do not, I repeat, do not ever step into my house in the village."

"He married me," the girl shouted, the muscles in her thin neck working. "He paid my bride price. I am as entitled as you are to this place and to the house in the village. The *umunna* won't let you do as you wish."

"I let you come for the funeral. And that was generous of me. If I ever see you in my home again, here or in the village, your mother will regret the day she went into labour to have you," Mrs Anoliefo spat at her in a low bitter voice, shaking her index finger in warning. "The *umunna* cannot make me do anything. Go and ask them if you can come live with them since they love you so much" As she spoke, her thoughts were churning. Innocent did not leave a will; she was certain of that. Not that it would make any difference if he did because she would fight tooth and nail for everything she had worked for, she told herself. As for the *umunna*, she would take care of them if they tried to cause her any trouble. It helped that the child was only

a girl. She was not entitled to property; that would make it more difficult for her mother to enlist the *umunna*. A boy would have been a more complicated matter.

The policemen knew what they were there for. The taller one said, "Madam, *oya* go and pack your things. Otherwise we will throw them out for you." The shorter one moved closer to the girl, a menacing look on his face.

"Move," he snarled. "I say, move," he pushed the girl. The girl knew when she was overpowered. She went into another room. Mrs. Anoliefo congratulated herself on her wisdom in bringing them along. Although she had come prepared for anything, she had not been sure how the girl would react. The last time she came to the flat, a little over three years ago, she had been turned away at the door. The girl had not had to do anything. Her husband, crazy and suddenly powerful with the love potion the girl had fed him, would not let her enter the flat and warned her not to come back.   Her friends and her sister had told her then to give him some space, time for the potion to wear off. Her sister's prophet had given her some holy water to bath with at midnight every night, calling his name aloud and ordering him to come back. But the love potion never wore off, until he died. That stroke was a result of overexertion, she was convinced. An old man trying to satisfy a young, insatiable woman. She gagged at the picture this created in her mind.

She waited a few minutes, and then followed her into the room, walking with the assurance of a house owner. At the doorway, Mrs Anoliefo stopped and watched the younger woman coldly. She was sitting on the disheveled bed, her face in her hands. In the dim room darkened by gloomy curtains, it was difficult to see a little girl no more than three years old, younger than some of her grandchildren, sleeping on the bed. Or the tears running down the young woman's face. In any event, these would have made no difference to Mrs Anoliefo: this was no time for pity. If there was to be pity at all, she told herself, she was the one to be pitied – she who had lost a well-planned life, her dignity, even a womb. She wondered why the silly girl was not packing up her things as she had instructed. But perhaps it was just as well, she told herself, she could supervise the packing and make sure the greedy thing would take only her filthy rags.

What did Innocent see in this girl who, at this moment, seemed so young, so lost, she asked herself? A little curiosity crept without permission into the space occupied by her bitter outraged anger. Although the tears poured out of her red, swollen eyes and she wore a dirty-looking brown scarf over her hair which could not have grown much – Mrs. Anoliefo knew because hers had not grown much either, but she covered it with a fashionable wig – one could still tell that the girl was somewhat pretty, if a little young. But then he must have been going for young, Mrs Anoliefo mused. The girl was only a year or two older than Ozioma, Mrs. Anoliefo's youngest daughter. She could not bring herself to think of her in any way other than 'the girl.' She knew that the girl was young, that she was from a neighbouring village and that, like her, she was a teacher. But she knew little else.   What was there to know, except that she had stolen and killed another woman's husband, she asked herself, her anger returning with full force, strangling the unwelcome curiosity.

"Why are you sitting down?" she asked the young woman.

The young woman sniffled and wiped her nose with the back of her hand. Disgusting, Mrs. Anoliefo thought. She would have to get people to clean the flat from top to bottom once the girl left. She found it hard to believe that Innocent had left their tastefully furnished house to live in this gloomy flat with dark curtains, non-descript furniture and, if the messy flowery sheet on the bed and dirty clothes piled by the wall were any indication, an inept housekeeper. The bookcase with some of his books in a corner in the sitting room was the only indication that her husband, who had enjoyed the immaculate house that she kept, could ever have lived here.

"Please, ma," she began to plead. "I have nowhere to go. And my daughter is sick. She has

been sick for the past one week.”

“And why should that concern me?” Mrs. Anoliefo asked the girl angrily, her voice shrill. “Did you think about that when you stole my husband? Now that you have killed him, did you think that I would let you live here on my years of toil and sweat?”

It seemed like hours before the girl packed her things in three suitcases, and a *Ghana-must-go* bag. Mrs. Anoliefo locked the door of the flat herself. The policemen took the bags out and kept them outside the gate. Mrs. Anoliefo warned the gateman, at the risk of losing his job, not to let the girl back into the house. The policemen remained to make sure she did not go back in. Mrs. Anoliefo had paid them some money, and she promised to give them some more when they came back to Enugu.

As Mrs. Anoliefo’s driver drove her away, the girl stood weeping outside the gate, carrying her sick child lying limp in her arms, her things on the ground beside her. The sky was dark, a storm was coming. The sight of the girl crying reminded Mrs. Anoliefo of the way she had stood crying by the side of the grave at the funeral four months before – very visible evidence of Mrs. Anoliefo’s public humiliation. Mrs. Anoliefo congratulated herself on taking care of a long overdue matter – taking back her identity. The girl could not convincingly call herself ‘Mrs. Anoliefo,’ not in her mother’s house in the village. Now Mrs. Anoliefo could mourn in peace.

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