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NYITOR ALEXANDER SHENGE

Tribulations

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Nyitor Alexander Shenge



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Dedication

Juliet Adamma,
my darling wife
and

Alexander Terver,
my lovely son.

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Sir George Tyoikyaa Korgba
for his wise counsel and support; and

Engr. Gabriel Dooior Tongo

Dr Emmanuel Abo

Dr Joseph Ushie

Dr Okolo-Nwakaeme

who at various times assisted in reading through
the manuscript while offering useful ideas.

Tribulations

Nyitor Alexander Shenge

Dedicated to:

Sir George Tyoikyaa Korgba

together with

Distinguished *Bam La* members, Lagos.

For their love in those trying mid and late 1990s.

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Engr. Gabriel Dooior Yongo

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SYNOPSIS

Tribulations sets a socio-cultural background against which the thrilling story of Terfa, a highly determined young graduate, is told. His dream of a rewarding compulsory one-year Ijovgemanya national youth service is shattered owing to series of disappointments. First, he arrives home at the end of his bachelors degree examinations and begins a heart-warming relationship with Pauline, whom he meets and loves at first sight. Pauline, incidentally, has also graduated from the same university as Terfa. Both, having been emotionally attached to each other, nurture their relationship, which culminates in their strong desire to serve together in Yashaageva City, Ijovgemanya's centre of excellence. Upon release of the national service postings, however, only Pauline gets posted to Yashaageva. Terfa, on his part, is posted to Awenabo, another state in the southwestern part of Ijovgemanya. He blatantly rejects the posting but Pauline and his other friends persuade him to accept it. His experiences at the Saaiutu orientation camp are many and varied. He wholeheartedly commits himself to orientation camp activities. Even as he awaits posting to his place of primary assignment, Terfa resolves to participate in community development activities with even greater zeal. He hopes to win a national merit award for outstanding service. But the stark negative realities he meets during his primary assignment mark the beginning of a different story. His relationship with Pauline goes on smoothly until close to the end of their service year when she called to

inform him that she had found someone else. On the day of passing out from the service year, Terfa does not win an award. Frustrated, he hurriedly leaves the venue of the passing out ceremonies with just his discharge certificate in hand. He is already set for Yashaageva to sort out issues of his relationship with Pauline. But most unexpectedly, his cousin, Ankpam, arrives from home with the shocking news that his relatives have been engaged in a bloody land dispute with their neighbouring Mbaikyo clan. Terfa is later to discover that his father, Damsa, is among his relatives who have been hacked to death in the wake of the hostilities. His mind is poisoned by the unexpected turn of events; a dashed hope of experiencing a fulfilled and rewarding national service and Pauline's sudden jilting of him; the tragic death of his father and uncles as breadwinners, and the bleakness of his future in an already saturated labour market.

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CHAPTER ONE

Terfa had just woken up from sleep. It was about 9 o'clock on a chilly Sunday morning. He knew he would be late for church service, but at the same time he did not want to miss an appointment at the church. The mass normally commenced at exactly 7:45 AM, but the extreme cold of that Sunday morning suggested to him that it might start a little late.

He hurriedly made the bed, hung his towel on his shoulders and applied some toothpaste on a toothbrush. He was already set for the bathroom when he heard a gentle knock on the door.

"Excuse me, please," a sweet feminine voice accompanied the gentle knock.

"Please come right in," he replied, heading for the door to see who it was. The door opened and a beautiful slender looking lady in a tight fitting blue skirt came out. The lady, whose name Terfa later knew to be Pauline, appeared to be still in her late teens. Terfa could hardly believe his eyes. But he manifested enough confidence to prevent her from noticing his disbelief.

Pauline was the person he had arranged to meet at the church after the Sunday's service. The previous day, he met her for the first time and enjoyed her company. Her coming so surprised him that he wondered how she could have located his house so easily without his having given her a detailed description. Could she have come early to the church, waited impatiently and decided to attempt locating him without first attending the service? But who could have shown her the way to his house? Their first meeting was just the previous day at the Catholic youth lawn tennis club where Terfa went to play as a club member. It was on a Saturday evening and he had gone there to play a game

and also inform his friends that he was home from school, having finished his Bachelors degree examinations at the University of Mabugu.

Pauline too had just graduated from the University of Mabugu. She went home temporarily to wait for her one-year Ijovgemanya youth service posting. More than four decades since Ijovgemanya's only civil war ended, the leadership of the country had made it mandatory for all eligible bachelors and higher national diploma graduates in the land to be mobilized for one year compulsory national service. Designed to facilitate post-war national integration, the one year national service scheme required graduates aged thirty years and below to live and work outside their states of origin.

Terfa and Pauline did not know each other at the University of Mabugu. After all, they belonged to different departments and faculties. But that was not enough reason to explain that. For when the opportunity for them to know each other came they both traveled all the way from Mabugu to Deinyakperan town where Pauline's glaring beauty naturally could not escape Terfa's eagle eyes. She was born and brought up in Mabugu where her parents lived and worked. But her ancestral home was Anzaabo, a small but notorious town some sixty five kilometers south of Deinyakperan.

After her degree examinations, Pauline had come to stay briefly with her maternal aunt, Susanna, in Deinyakperan. Deinyakperan was a lively town whose name sounded familiar to very many people, both far and near. It was unarguably the second largest and most lively town in the central Ijovgemanyan state of Nyigh-sha-nyi. Terfa was well respected even by his outside friends for coming from this town. To earn him more of that respect, he was consistently one of the best students in his class. And as if that was not enough, he was also not left out in the bubbles of social life.

He came from a good home with strict discipline. His parents were devout Christians and fairly well to do. His father, Damsa Yamakwagh, was a member of the laity council in their local Catholic Church parish. Terfa's mother, on her part, was an active member of the church's choir. Both parents were well known in Deinyakperan town and even beyond. Their relative wealth amidst streams of poverty-stricken inhabitants of Deinyakperan town earned them so much fame. As was typical of most indigenous Deinyakperan people, talking about the affluent and successful in the society was akin to unravelling the traditionally spiritual ways the affluent allegedly acquired their wealth.

Such was Terfa's father's case. It was consistently alleged in several quarters that Damsa's wealth was a fortune from the *imborivungu* which his father, Yamakwagh, inherited from his ancestors. Pauline's aunt, Susanna, knew Damsa and his family too. And so did her husband and children. Just like Terfa's mother, Susanna belonged to their local Catholic Church choir. Her husband, Tsavwua, similarly served on one of the church's standing committees.

Imborivungu, known in its plural form as *amburavungu*, was a dreaded inheritance of fortune among Terfa's people. Said to be designed and carved in form of a mermaid's head, human bone such as tibia, femur and humerus or some other human and non human body part, *imborivungu* was handed down to children and grandchildren by spiritually crafted parents or grandparents. The *imborivungu* artifact was also believed to be a force behind success and affluence. Deaths in families were similarly blamed on *imborivungu* or *amburavungu* disputes.

People who struggled to possess, own or assume custodianship of *imborivungu* themselves hardly enjoyed its accompanying benefits in their lifetime. Rather, possessing or owing it was something like an investment in the future. It was on this basis that Terfa's people had a popular saying that, "those who labour and bring about success in their lifetime do not live long to enjoy the fruits of their labour". Bad omen, nightmares and afflictions were similarly blamed on misunderstandings relating to *imborivungu*, and any *imborivungu* owner or custodian was branded an object of dread. Dreaded as they were thought to be, it was quite rare to find any alleged *imborivungu* owner or custodian who physically manifested any signs of affluence. Apparently, they were coarse and passed for the wretched of the earth.

The common belief among the people was that children whose parents or relatives were strong enough to own, possess and dedicate *imborivungu* to them were sure to acquire immense wealth and spiritual protective powers. Indeed, there was nothing their hands touched that was not successful. They could labour less yet succeed far more than others who laboured all their lives, but lacked the multiplicative benefits of *imborivungu*.

In spite of the numerous benefits it allegedly offered, the cost of possessing, owning or taking custody of *imborivungu* was, nevertheless, enormous. Apart from the numerous problems and the grave consequences that disputes arising from *imborivungu* ownership or custodianship presented, possessing or owning of *imborivungu* required occasional sprinkling of precious human blood. In a very subtle language, the human sacrifice was referred to as "the giving out of a chicken". Such were the circumstances surrounding Terfa's father's wealth as was rumoured in Deinyakperan town and back home in Tse-Yamakwagh, their ancestral home.

Terfa did not envisage any difficulty seeing Pauline in her aunt's house. He had been visiting them long before he came to know Pauline and discover that she was Susanna's niece. That was at the eastern side of Deinyakperan town where he, incidentally, had the bulk of his friends residing.

On the Saturday that he first met her, Pauline had gone to the Catholic youth lawn tennis club to watch tennis. It was not very far from her aunt's house. Terfa, as a member of the Club, had gone there to play. Having not played the game for months, he lost his stamina and was easily defeated in the very first round. Out of the court, he joined some of his friends on the bench as a spectator.

While he had just finished explaining why he was easily defeated in the game, Pauline came and stood by to also watch the game at the opposite side of the tennis court. Her elegant looks enforced momentary silence, something that ever-vigilant eyes of most Deinyakperan youth could hardly resist.

Terfa sought excuse from his friends, walked across to her and, in his characteristic friendly style, greeted:

"Good afternoon pretty lady."

"Afternoon," she replied in a typical Euro-American accent of many an educated Ijovgemanya lady.

"I hope you won't mind if I provide a chair for you," he demanded.

"I won't mind, thank you," she replied, her tone conveying appreciation and surprise.

Terfa dashed out to where his friends were sitting at the other side of the court and came back with a plastic chair for her. She thanked him once more just as he dashed out again, apparently to bring another chair for himself.

“Thank you very much,” Pauline said again as he returned with his chair and sat down by her.

“It’s my pleasure,” he replied and went into some momentary silence, obviously due to lack of readily available words to initiate a discussion.

“It appears to me,” he resumed, “that today’s game is dull or what do you think?” Pauline took another look at the players, then at Terfa and replied, “I am watching them play for the first time.”

“Even so,” he retorted. “Tennis is tennis anywhere, anytime.”

“Well, you may be right. My opinion is, the standard is neither too low nor too high,” she added. Terfa shook his head in approval. He stole another look at her face, and, not wanting to run out of appropriate words again, opted for an introduction.

“My name is Terfa,” he said. “I am a member of this Parish and also of the youth tennis club. Once again, it’s my pleasure to be with you.”

“Thank you very much,” she responded. “My pleasure too.”

“What’s your name?” he enquired with a tone that conveyed curiosity.

“Oh, my name? I am Pauline,” she said softly. “And you can also call me Menshima.”

“Lovely names.”

“Really?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“Thank you very much,” she reciprocated and momentarily shifted attention to the spectators’ applauding for a just declared winner.

Terfa’s interest in the game was fast diminishing. The urge to chat with Pauline and know more about her increased, yet he suppressed it consciously to prevent her from guessing his desire correctly. Pauline’s courageous, but friendly disposition, on the other hand, made him to infer that the intimacy between them was fast developing. Amidst interruptions by a few friends who called Terfa on his mobile phone, his discussions with Pauline randomly shifted focus from one point to the other. Having discovered in the course of their discussions that they both graduated from the same university, the duo expressed surprise.

“Do you mean you were in Geo-Mining Department at Unimabugu?” She inquired, still expressing surprise.

“That was my department,” he replied. “I stayed in Ornguanryaga hall in my first year and in Ayatutu in my final year.” Pauline tried to recollect the names of some of her friends in Terfa’s department, but not a single one of them readily came to her memory.

“I was in Management Studies Department,” she said. “And all through my first, second and third years in Unimabugu, I was in Deidya Hall.”

“That’s right. Did you know Lola in Management Studies?” he asked eagerly.

“Oh yes, she was my course mate and we were very good friends too. In our final year, we both stayed in Ayatutu.”

“She was in room A45, I think,” added Terfa.

“You are quite right,” Pauline concurred and momentarily focused attention on the umpire’s verdict on a disputed point. Terfa sought her excuse, just as she was about

to resume her discussion, to dash out to a male friend who beckoned on him from the opposite side of the tennis court. True to his guess, Terfa's friend called him out to tease him for abandoning his guys for "a new catch." Terfa cut short his friend's teasing of him and returned to Pauline. He apologized for the interlude and continued:

"You should know Chucks, then?"

"Chucks. Is it not Lola's boyfriend you are talking about?"

"You've got it," he replied, indicating more interest even as he spoke.

"Chucks? Who did not know Chucks and his love affair with Lola? Ah, Chucks Damawange. That sugarcoated tongue twister. Who didn't know him in the whole of Unimabugu? I remember when GSM phone newly came out, Chucks was among the first students in Unimabugu to own it. In those days, he, along with other fast guys used GSM to mess up all those reckless girls and dump them".

Terfa appeared to have remembered so much about Chucks even as Pauline similarly demonstrated good knowledge of the guy while in Unimabugu.

"I am sorry to tell you frankly," he said to Pauline. "That guy called Chucks is a hard guy. I will be most surprised if he was not a cultist." She agreed with him and their discussions on their experiences in Mabugu continued.

"What do you have to say about the alarming rate at which universities and other higher institutions are closed in Ijovgemanya these days, Pauline?" he asked.

"Ah, my brother," she began, quite prepared to bare her mind on the issue. "It's a really sad story; really sad story indeed. Students' unrest, secret cults, IASUU strikes, closures here and there and what have you. I tell you it's a terrible thing to recall. Do

you know that we were supposed to have graduated about two years ago and not just last month?”

“Of course I should remember,” he responded. “Why shouldn’t I? Was I myself not a victim of IASUU strikes? Six and half solid years spent on a four year programme. It’s really incredible.”

“But should we heap all the blame on IASUU?” Pauline asked.

“I am not saying that,” he retorted. “The fact of the matter is that leaders of Ijovgemanya nation are not serious with the affairs of this country. In all that they do, swelling up their accounts with stolen public funds is what preoccupies them. What one sees as each day passes is a more impoverished nation with more impoverished people.”

“It is a shame that Ijovgemanya of all nations is experiencing all these,” Pauline added. “What is it that God has not blessed this country with? We have abundant mineral resources and talented and skilled human resources.” Terfa looked her in the eyes and added:

“Why can’t the nation experience all these. Are you not aware of the billions of gerasha that one single individual leader steals in this country? Yesterday they said it was Achaba; today it’s Fata, the *Olopa*-General. How do we survive all these? Honestly. It irritates me when I see our leaders squander the wealth of this nation.” “The nation has for long been at a standstill. Just imagine the level of corruption that abounds all over the place. In government, in private life, even in places of worship and in educational institutions, there is massive corruption.”

“But not many Ijovgemanya citizens are openly complaining about this mess,” added Pauline.

“Ijovgemanyans are tired,” he responded. “All the same, scores of people are actually speaking out. Indeed, a few actually sing and even dramatize the nation’s problems. A good example is that artiste who sang about the moral decadence among lecturers in the universities and other higher institutions of learning.”

“Ah,” Pauline exclaimed. “That artiste is creative. What’s that his name again?”

“E-m, e-m. Kareemabdul.”

“And can you remind me the title of his album, please?”

“E-e-e-m, Mr. Lecturer,” he responded.

“Oh no, I love the guy’s music a great deal,” said Pauline.

“Mr. Lecturer,” he cuts in. “Ha-ha-ha-ha. The guy’s music really illuminates what is happening in higher institutions in Ijovgemanya today. All the same, I think people should not be focusing on the poor teachers alone. There is far more corruption in higher places. I just hope that the service year will provide succour for both of us.”

Pauline did not understand his idea of getting succour from the service year well. He too noticed it from her facial expression, but did not say something in addition until she remarked:

“Well, that’s a prayer for both of us. I just hope the year will turn out to be an enjoyable and productive one for us. All the same, I still reserve my comments on this whole idea of national service as it is today.”

Both of them identified several problems with the national service, which they were soon to be part of. As they did this, they touched on other related issues. Not wanting to delve so much into the problems they both identified with the scheme, Terfa indicated his intention to serve in Yashaageva or Aboshansha to Pauline. As he spoke,

she listened attentively and sought to know exactly why he was interested in serving in either of the places. Although he was not quite sure of a satisfactory answer, he explained that compared to any other Ijovgemanya state, Yashaageva and Aboshansha offered better employment and related opportunities to corps members.

“Yes,” she continued. “As convincing as your reason sounds, it appears to be self-centered and negates the whole idea of the national service scheme, doesn’t it?”

“In a way, you may be right,” he responded, laughing. “But how many Ijovgemanya citizens still have national interest at heart these days? The fact remains that I am so bent on serving in either of these places that I traveled to the IYSC national secretariat a fortnight ago to concretize my plans for that. My dad’s friend is a senior inspector at the national secretariat of IYSC in Aboshansha.”

“Really?” she asked hastily.

“Sure,” he replied. “At the beginning of the second semester in our final year, I also spoke with my father’s friend in Aboshansha concerning Vangerwua’s posting. Vangerwua is that my course mate that I earlier spoke to you. He too wants to serve in Yashaageva or Aboshansha. Both of us would like to work in an organization whose activities relate to our disciplines.”

Although, Pauline had earlier frowned at corps members’ undue influencing of their postings, Terfa’s heart desires, as he communicated them, caused her to develop more interest in their national service discussion.

“I am aware that besides the monthly stipend that IYSC pays, some organizations pay mouthwatering additional monthly allowances to their corps members. That is in addition to the decent accommodation and other benefits such organizations provide to

their corps members.” Before he could end his statement, Pauline, with a rekindled interest in the discussion, added:

“It’s really good for one to have resources enough to enjoy one’s life. Concerning this service, my sincere prayer has been that God should take me to an organization that will recognize my academic training and tap it maximally. Even as beginners, we need appreciable professional challenges to be able to forge ahead in life. Looks like in a good number of organizations, especially oil and other blue chip companies, corps members do not face very difficult times. Even as I’m prepared to work in which ever place I am posted, it is still my desire as any rational human being to be in a fine place.”

“By God’s grace things will be alright,” he re-echoed.

“Let’s continue to pray things are alright,” she responded.

“There are still a good number of corps members whose organizations provide them with free or highly subsidized lunch in their places of work. Indeed some companies even organize lavish parties for their outgoing corps members.”

“You surely must be talking about the past, not the present,” Pauline interrupted. “As far as the welfare of corps members is concerned, what obtains in most establishments presently is not so much a pleasant story. These days, it is no longer unusual to hear of mass rejection of corps members by prospective employers. And in case of organizations that accept them, the treatment of corps members, like I earlier said, is not as good as it used to be.” Visibly not convinced, he argued further:

“But I know of three corps members who are presently serving in the company that my father works with. The accommodation the company has given them is pretty decent and the company pays each one of them ten thousand gerasha monthly.”

She expressed surprise, but added that the example Terfa cited did not apply to all cases. Indeed, it was a once-in-a-while case.

The last game at the tennis club that evening was over so Terfa left the club facility area in the company of Pauline. Two of his other male friends who were at the club also accompanied them but the bulk of the other club members stayed behind for the club briefing, which normally held beside one of the tennis courts on Saturday at the end of the game. Pauline had, shortly before the end of the game, indicated her intention to get back to her aunt's place. Having enjoyed her company, Terfa missed the club meeting to walk her home.

From the tennis court the duo, in company of Terfa's two other friends, walked past the main Church building to the first tarred street that linked the popular Mbanunjaa market with the Ityowanye Street on the right.

As they moved on and chatted Terfa's two male friends stylishly accused him of deliberately refusing to introduce his newly found female companion to them.

"When it comes to relating with ladies, I am afraid of my guys," he laughed and said jokingly. "You Deinyakperan young men are too smart to be entrusted even with a long standing lady friend, talk less of a new catch. Bear with me and just relax for a while. Quite soon, you will get to know my new friend." She laughed and wondered in what way she qualified for their definition of "a new catch."

"Jokes apart," Terfa continued. "I am sorry for not making an introduction in good time. Trust that I was so carried away by my discussion with this beautiful lady that I completely forgot to do the right thing. In any case, it is my pleasure to introduce Pauline, my new found friend and fellow Mabuguite, to you guys. Pauline, meet Sammy,

another powerful Mabuguite, and Dickson, a Tsuetseleite. Both of them are my very good friends.”

Just as he had finished making the introduction, Sammy loudly rendered the popular University of Mabugu students and alumni solidarity slogan of “Greatest Mabuguites” to greet Pauline. Pauline, in response, rendered the slogan even much louder and all, including, Dickson joined in the general response of “G-r-e-e-e-e-e-e-a-t.” The atmosphere suddenly grew livelier. Sammy and Dickson shook hands with Pauline while expressing their pleasure at meeting her.

Meanwhile, the speedy and chaotic meandering of the numerous commercial motorcycles on the roads and streets of Deinyakperan intermittently disrupted their movement as they chatted along. Pauline, being unfamiliar with the speedy and meandering style of the motorcyclists, was persistently cautioned by them to steer clear of the road and street sides. She visibly expressed her surprise at the burgeoning number of commercial motorcycles in Deinyakperan town within a relatively short period of time. The development, she noted, could be compared with Yakunya and Udamngee towns of North-Central and South Eastern Ijovgemonya.

Sammy and Dickson parted company with Terfa and Pauline at the Mzehen Road end of Mbanunjaa Market. Dickson had particularly left at that point to avoid likely molestation by touting *agbero* youth at the Mbanunjaa night market. On the other hand, Pauline who had heard so much about Mbanunjaa market but was not opportuned to visit it even once, pleaded with Terfa to take her there.

“This time that I am in Deinyakperan, I would like to pay a brief visit to Mbanunjaa market. Please kindly take me there,” she said.

“I am not surprised that you are itching to visit that place, Pauline,” said Terfa. “Mbanunjaa is known in both far and near places. Tonight, you will surely watch activities at the market yourself.”

The activities at the open air, lantern- and candle-illuminating Mbanunjaa market were just about peaking when Pauline and Terfa stepped into it at about 7.30pm. Perfectly doing justice to its name, which, literally translated from Awange language, means “near absence of character,” Mbanunjaa was a beehive of activities with children, youth and adults alike adequately represented in selling and consumption of assorted foods.

The environment typified a showcasing of who was who in sumptuous food display, sale and consumption. Typically accommodating singles and the married alike, Mbanunjaa had no much respect for anyone, no matter the class. Neither did the market at any time experience paucity of morally undeserving behaviour.

Sellers and buyers of sumptuous food items transacted their businesses almost as if without problems just as the battalion of children, youth and adults alike milled round the market, most of the times demonstrating their abusive language use skills. Illicit heterosexual relationship initiation and consolidation together and idle talking were similarly characteristic features of Mbanunjaa market. Most uncommon in the market too were solicited as well as unsolicited quarrels and the fights that frequently resulted from them. Many a time in a day or week, a single fight in one part of the Mbanunjaa market was capable of escalating and spreading to the other parts of the market. Quite surely, such fights did bring confusion and disorder among sellers and buyers who, in some cases, ran to take cover from dangerous acts of rampaging fighters.

The creative and inviting manner in which cooked and assorted food items were displayed formed a unique feature of Mbanunjaa market. From irresistible whole chickens and chicken parts through pork, goat meat, cow meat, fish, assorted meat and bush meat all prepared in different sumptuous ways, Mbanunjaa offered so much for many an intending buyer in the market. Such delicacies as fried cricket, smoked and peppered doves, boiled and peppered eggs among others were not rare sights at the Mbanunjaa market.

Interestingly, even typically traditional delicacies that were known to have disappeared from the faces of other Awange towns and villages were available at Mbanunjaa for the asking. And given the high patronages which even the not financially well-to-do provided, business at the market was guaranteed every other night. Even Deinyakperan garage and street touts as well as casual workers at the town's popular cement factory could hardly be recognized at the Mbanunjaa night market. In a manner that depicts a chameleon, the social miscreants and cement factory labourers would discard their haggard or dust-covered daytime looks only to appear in flamboyant attires at Mbanunjaa.

Within minutes of stopping at the market to buy fried cowpeas, which she desired, Pauline in company of Terfa saw more than what she bargained for. A beautifully dressed young lady, seemingly responsible from her looks, stopped to price fried doves which an aged woman was selling. In a surprise twist, she was rudely accosted by a mean-looking tout who was probably attracted by her looks.

“Can I see you at close range, young lady,” said the miscreant whose haircut and dressing depicted arrogance and rascality. The lady rebuffed him, saying:

“I do not see strangers at close range.” In a dramatic response that gave no breathing space, the young man rained abuses on her.

“Look at this ugly thing. What do you think you are? Shouldn’t you be happy that someone of my calibre called you? I do not blame you. I blame men that deceive you that you are beautiful”.

The obviously responsible lady, in order to avoid a squabble, uttered no additional word in reply. She kept her cool as her attacker rained more abuses on her and walked away.

Pauline was attracted to yet another scene where a young man was engaged in a fight by a group of *agberos*. According to a middle aged food seller who spoke as an eyewitness, the social miscreants falsely accused the young man of talking to a girl they were walking along with.

“It was nothing,” the eyewitness concluded, “but a ploy to humiliate that innocent young man.”

Out from the market, Terfa and Pauline chatted and laughed over the embarrassing unruly behaviour of some indigenous Deinyakperan youngsters. They observed that the misdemeanor was capable of discouraging outsiders and influential Awange children resident outside from coming to the land to invest. As they discussed and moved along, Terfa and Pauline intermittently stopped on the way to watch and comment on other things that caught their attention. They headed for Susanna’s place and arrived there at about 8: 25 PM.

On reaching her aunt’s place, Pauline introduced Terfa to, Susanna.

“Auntie,” she said. “This is Terfa, a fellow graduate of the University of Mabugu. Both of us met at the Church this evening. Terfa incidentally was no stranger to Susanna and her husband, Tsavwua Gesa. The Gesas and Terfa’s parents knew themselves quite well in the church. Both couples also met regularly at social and cultural meetings in Deinyakperan. Thus, rather than merely exchanging pleasantries with the Gesas, Terfa discussed quite freely with them. He even played and cracked some jokes with the Gesas’ three kids all of whom were already used to him. It was much later that he left the house of the Gesas that evening.

Since he returned home that evening, Terfa’s mind was occupied with thoughts about his new found friend, Pauline. He recollected the discussions they had throughout their encounter. Reviewing the mental images of their interaction, he admired her and her dressing. Of particular attraction as he mentally reviewed Pauline’s outlook and mannerisms were her beautiful charming face, her frequent infectious smiles, and her soft feminine voice. All these blended with her properly sized mouth which contained a fantastic set of dentition to match.

The more he thought of Pauline, the more he recollected their plans to meet at the Church the following Sunday morning. He was anxious to be with her once again, but the passage of time seemed to be unusually slow. Preferring to be on his own, he did not even go out of his bedroom to interact with his family members. Fortunately, none of his friends came to see him that night. On his bed, he lay face-up as thoughts and images of his encounter with Pauline kept coming to his mind until sleep walked in to perform its natural but seldom announced assignment.

Pauline's unexpected visit to his home that Sunday morning lifted Terfa's spirits. It appeared to him like something given from above. As far as he could reason, Pauline's coming was a sign of love and affection. It grew even in a short while and led to a surprise visit the following morning. Her kind of love was something that a good number of Deinyakperan youth spent days and good fortune seeking.

In spite of the joy her coming provided, Pauline's unexpected visit caused Terfa some little embarrassment. Having not given him prior notice, he did not make any elaborate plans to impressively welcome her as was the tradition among educated and uneducated youngsters alike in his hometown. When notified of such visits, most young people would go about like wounded lions, making up their apartments and even borrowing money and other decorative items to make an impression on their guest.

Terfa's wish for a prior notice was, however, far from hinging on a desire to make a false impression. It emanated from the fact that at the time Pauline visited, his apartment was in a disorganized state. To confound matters, he also had no drinks or snacks with which to entertain her. Grudgingly but politely, he explained his inability to entertain Pauline.

"You do not need to worry yourself," she responded. "I know, of course, that now is time for mass and more over you were in the least aware that I was coming."

"Well, thanks for your understanding," he replied in a tone of relief. "I equally sincerely appreciate your coming. With this kind of surprise visit, we really will not be able to make it to the mass again."

"If you say so, it's okay by me. All the same, it will be good if we can attend the evening mass."

“I was also going to suggested that. That settles the matter.”

Pauline stayed in his home until the mass was over. Within her, she wondered how her earlier plan to attend mass easily gave way to a visit to Terfa’s home. She really did bother that he did not even bother her. Amidst cool gospel music, she chatted with him and looked through his photo album with keen interest. Frequently, she sought explanation about people and places contained in some of the photographs.

While continuing her chatting with him, she remembered that she did not even inform Susanna and her husband that she was missing mass to visit Terfa. But the thought that she was too mature a girl to be queried over such matters consoled her. An unusual love for Terfa had developed in her in so short a time. It was deep-rooted in his versatility and good conduct. Indeed, so strong were his manifesting good attributes that she reasoned they were enough to keep the most adamant of girls turning on.

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CHAPTER TWO

Terfa's life was filled with determination. His need for achievement was considerably high. This stemmed from the equally high standards that his parents had set for him. Being the first of his parents' five children, three boys and two girls, he completed his secondary education at the age of sixteen. That was an age at which only very few boys in his town could complete their secondary education. The educational backwardness of girls in the community was even more lamentable.

There was a society where most people counted their achievements in the number of wives and children they had. Many of the community members also took pride in how much money they spent on land cases and the number of lawyers whose services they could hire. Hooliganism among youth was increasingly becoming an acceptable way of life. Consequently, social miscreants or *agberos* went about causing disorders in the streets, at motor parks as well as other public places almost unchallenged.

That he left Deinyakperan for far away Agenor at the age of eleven was an indication that Terfa was determined to succeed in life. That was several years back when he gained admission into the Holy Trinity College at Agenor.

As a young man years later, he had also satisfied his burning desire to acquire university education. His father, a Massachusetts-trained mechanical engineer, was loving and supportive of him. He worked with the Wuayacicha Cement Company at Mbaatsuku, near Deinyakperan. Wuayacicha Cement Company was an economic lifeline on which Deinyakperan and Nyigh-sha-nyi as a whole depended for survival. So dependent were Deinyakperan and Nyigh-sha-nyi on Wuayachicha Cement factory that

even a week of no production at the factory could grind the socio-economic activities of the town and state to a halt.

A rare couple that Myina and Damsa were, it was due to their encouragement and support that Terfa attained higher education at a tender age. Both parents, but particularly Damsa, had experienced quite some challenges of life. So challenging were his father's recounted life challenges that Terfa once sat alone at home in the evening to recount them.

"Judging by his relative wealth," Terfa recollected. "One would hardly think Damsa ever went through very difficult times. At age fifteen, he had lost his father to a land dispute. Their friends-turned enemies from a neighbouring clan falsely lay claim for ownership of an expansive piece of land that belonged to Damsa's father, Yamakwagh; a vast acreage of land that children of many generations before Yamakwagh inherited from their parents. Just that land! The only possession that Yamakwagh himself could pass on to his children.

Instigated and supported by jealous neighbours and kinsmen, the enemies came to falsely and forcefully take over the land. This led to a bloody clash that took the life of Yamakwagh and several other lives on both sides of the disputing parties. As was the norm in Nyigh-sha-nya and in Deinyakperan in particular, lawyers were hired with staggering amounts by both parties to the dispute. As it had again similarly become a vogue in the land, the court case dragged on for more than ten years. Indeed, it moved from one court grade to another through the appeal process.

At certain times, bloody clashes between the warring factions gave rise to multiple police and court cases at a time. Indeed, the corrupt law enforcement agents and

judicial officers of Deinyakperan and Nyigh-sha-nyi were all the better for it. In a greedy and shameless manner, they fed fat on the bribes they habitually collected in cash and in kind from citizens who were involved or interested in police or court cases. By so doing, justice was denied or perverted in no small measure. It was in such a circumstance that Yamakwagh and his brothers squandered their fortunes and descended into penury. But alas, the land case went on until Damsa himself grew up to take over from where his father and uncles had stopped.

As he recounted these unfortunate events, Terfa was moved by emotions and he wept in the privacy of his apartment. Damsa suffered so much in school due to his father's land case-induced poverty. Indeed, his suffering aggravated following the demise of Yamakwagh. Even as his uncles were favourably disposed to assisting him after his father's demise, they realistically had no practical means to do so since every dime they raised was still expended on the land case.

Of all his father's numerous children, Damsa alone struggled to go to school. His intelligence and hard work earned him an overseas university scholarship. Through the hardships and now a worker, he was now solely responsible for the inherited land case which actually started while he was just ten years old.

The recollection of his father's life experiences caused so much bitterness in Terfa. Consequently, he concluded within himself that human beings were themselves responsible for most evils that exist in society.

The visit after her graduation was the longest time that Pauline ever came to spend with her maternal aunt, Susanna. Her first visit to Susanna was when she was still in her primary five class and she spent just two days. But this last visit that she knew

Terfa, she spent more than two weeks with the Gesas. Susanna loved and respected Pauline so much. That was due to Pauline's high level of intelligence and determination which she manifested at a very tender age.

She too loved Susanna and her family such that her desire to visit and spend sometime in Deinyakperan town increased. Her coming to know Terfa and beginning a relationship with him had probably accentuated that desire. The love for him got strong in so short a time that she sensed a more enduring future relationship coming out of it. As dramatic as their new friendship was, it developed so fast and strong that she thought it was wise to talk to her aunt about it. Terfa too did inform his parents about the relationship and they did not comment negatively about it.

As he thought about his father's life experiences, the desire to see Pauline again suddenly came to him. It was then he remembered that he forgot to fulfill his promise to meet with her at her aunt's place the previous day. Making up his mind, he set out immediately to see her, walking as fast as he could.

Susanna was seated under a mango tree learning to sing a hymn from a Catholic hymn book. Her eyes turned towards him as she folded the page from which she was singing, probably to memorize a verse. Terfa gave a friendly smile as he drew closer to her and greeted:

"Good afternoon, Ma."

"Good afternoon, Terfa," she responded and put aside the hymn book. "I hope you and your people are fine."

"I am alright, Ma and everybody at home is fine except Ikpensaren who had mild fever yesterday. But I think she is much better today."

“E-i-y-a-a-h! Poor girl. She will recover fully,” responded Susanna.

“I believe so. And how is your family too?”

“We are equally fine and grateful to God almighty,” she said.

“And how is Pauline?”

“Your new found friend too is fine. You can meet her in the sitting room.”

“Thanks again, Ma,” he said and moved away from her into the sitting room where Pauline was. Her attention was fully focused on an entertainment magazine she was reading. But when she raised her head and sighted him, she placed the magazine on the table and welcomed him with a greeting. He returned the greeting and sat down next to her.

“So how are you doing, my dear,” he inquired.

“I am okay. And you?”

“I am fine too.”

“I thought you were going to come yesterday,” said Pauline.

“I am very sorry that I could not turn up yesterday to see you,” he said, looking into her face to see her expression. I would have called you but the battery of my mobile telephone handset went down completely and there was no electricity to recharge it. You can trust your people when it comes to supplying electricity irregularly.

“Don’t even talk about IEPA. It does not in the least live up to its expectations as an electricity supply company. All over the country now, there is nowhere that one can enjoy electricity for two days. Even in the places where electricity comes, you can be sure of its going off at least six times in a day,” Pauline lamented.

“That is why people now call it Irregular Electricity Power Authority instead of Ijovgemanya Electricity Power Authority. But the interesting thing is that government keeps pumping money into all these moribund parastatals,” he added.

Pauline visibly appeared to be no longer interested in the discussion on IEPA and irregular electricity supply, so she switched from the topic and sought to know why Terfa was unable to see her the previous day. He took another prolonged look at her and replied:

“My father and I traveled to our village. Although I had a very short notice for the trip, I did not want to miss going with Dad. We came back same day but late in the evening.”

“Oh, I see. Hope there was no problem?”

“Absolutely no problem,” he responded sharply.

“That’s lovely. So how were your relatives there?” she asked curiously.

“They were all fine. I particularly talked to my grandmother about you and she sent her greetings,” said Terfa as he watched her face once again to see her expression.

“Are you serious? What did you tell her?” she put up a smile as she inquired.

“I am very serious. The old woman was very happy to hear the good things I said about you.”

Amidst surprise and curiosity, she wondered what exactly he could have told the old woman about her. Most particularly, she wondered what could have led to such a discussion with his grandmother. But having been equally close to her two grandmothers, she knew how curious and cunning old women could be when talking to their grandchildren about heterosexual relationships generally and marriage in particular.

Sooner had they finished talking about Terfa's grandmother than she told him about her intention to travel back to Mabugu, where her parents lived and worked. She had received a telephone call the previous day through which she was informed that the Ijovgemanya youth service corps posting was out. As a result, she was eager to see the posting and know her state of deployment. Terfa understood her sudden decision to get back to Mabugu to check her IYSC posting. However, he was not happy that she would be leaving him so suddenly. Consequently, he spontaneously arranged to travel with her so as to equally check his Ijovgemanya youth service posting and also know her parents.

As he received the news of their youth service posting, Terfa was exceedingly anxious about his fate regarding the issue. He feared that he would be posted to a state other than the two he had prayed and made arrangements for. The fact that he was assured of a posting to Yashaageva or, at worst, Aboshansha by some key officials of IYSC did not give him a hundred percent conviction. In spite of his worry, he still hoped for the best not only for himself but also for his new found friend, Pauline, with whom he desired to serve together. But even as he similarly wished Pauline well, the thought that Ijovgemanya ladies could always have their ways where guys could not repeatedly came to his mind and he suppressed it vigorously.

Based on the disclosure he made of his posting intentions as well as the efforts he had made to bring his intentions to reality, his friends were invariably aware of where he was to be posted to. It was for this reason that Terfa did not want events to go contrary to his wishes and thus prove him a liar. Though worried, he concealed his anxiety from Pauline and his other friends while also wishing he had not disclosed his IYSC posting information and efforts.

He remembered having once spoken his mind before his friends on the kind of life he would live in Yashaageva or Aboshansha as a corps member and his guaranteed employment thereafter. Indeed, recollecting this made Terfa to be more apprehensive about any unfavourable posting.

All was set for his trip to Mabugu with Pauline the following morning. Terfa had earlier intimated his parents of his plan to travel with her to check his national service posting and as well meet with her parents. His parents did not object to his move, but since he had never even discussed his relationship with any girl with his parents, his mother was particularly surprised at his bold decision to meet Pauline's parents. The fact that he showed serious interest in Pauline rather gladdened Terfa's mother's heart. For no specific reason, however, she half-concealed her gladness. At one time or another, he visited home with girls which by all indications seemed to have been mere acquaintances. Thus the issue of which one of them he would later have as a wife did not arise.

Early marriage amongst youngsters in Nyigh-sha-nyi was a thing of fashion and pride among parents. Even the educated ones were hardly an exception. For this reason, not many youngsters in the state escaped abandoning schooling to satisfy their parents' curiosity of "seeing their faces" through their grandchildren.

Terfa's case was remarkably different, however. Unlike many of his age mates who had already dropped out of school and married or similarly married and dropped out of school, he had just introduced a girl of his choice to his parents. Again, very much unlike parents of his many other contemporaries, his parents made it a duty to give him sound education. Marriage, they reasoned, was a life-long relationship which needed careful planning and adequate preparation.

With this orientation, therefore, the Damsas detested the generally accepted practice where by parents in Nyigh-sha-nyi persuaded their male and female children alike to get married ill-prepared. They observed with bitterness that most of those teenage couples, not having any skill or independent source of livelihood, ridiculously shared living apartments with their parents or parents in-law until they were able to afford their home.

The following morning Terfa's mother and two sisters saw him off to the motor park to travel to Mabugu. He and his relatives were to meet with Pauline at the motor park at 8.30 AM. His father earlier bid him farewell and left for work. As Terfa walked to the motor park in the company of his mother and two sisters, one of the sisters carried a sizable sack of yams, which their mother had insisted that Terfa should take to Pauline's parents in Mabugu. Such a kind gesture, as Awange people had come to believe, generated camaraderie in new relationships.

While his sisters walked ahead of their mother and brother chatting happily, Terfa took slower steps with their mother as she educated him on the proper way to relate with Pauline's relatives who had invariably become his in-laws. Additionally, she also chipped in a word or two on what it takes to recognize a potential good wife.

As they got to the motor park, all the loading points within were full of passengers intending to travel. Many of the passengers were with friends or relatives who came to see them off. Food sellers and road transport union workers also swelled up the number of people at the park. Equally adding to the number were social miscreants, commercial load carrying wheel barrow owners and beggars many of whom showcased varying degrees of physical deformities. In succession, vehicles loaded and left for their various

destinations. Indeed, it was business boom for motor park food and drink hawkers.

Meanwhile, Pauline got to the motor park with Susanna and her children much earlier than the scheduled time of 8.30 AM and they were waiting at the Mabugu and Achiatar loading point. An anxious Pauline wanted to get back home to see her people and also know her national service posting. Just before her graduation, she had heard the news of IYSC's introduction of internet scratch cards for checking national service postings. But as it turned out months after the rumoured introduction of the scratch cards, not a single prospective corps member in the whole of Ijovgemanya could get even a card to use.

Very much like Terfa, Pauline expressed fears that she might be posted to a state she might not like. The night before her departure to Mabugu, she had light and intermittent sleep, having spent a great deal of time thinking about steps she would take if her wish of being posted to any of the states she desired did not materialize. After considering several scenarios, she resolved that if the posting seriously did not work in her favour, she would rush to Aboshansa to effect a change.

The next vehicle that pulled up to carry Mabugu and Achiatar passengers by the time Pauline, Susanna and her children got to the motor park was a Nissan Urvan federal government-assisted mass transit bus. Passengers rushed into the vehicle to take their seats just after the vehicle's destination was announced. Those who carried load also struggled to ensure their items were safely placed in the boot of the bus. Pauline, assisted by Susanna, speedily secured the two front seats next to the driver. One seat was for Pauline and another for Terfa who was not yet in sight. Time was about a few minutes to their appointed meeting time of 8.30 AM so she knew he would soon arrive.

Road transport union officials and the vehicle's conductor demanded for passengers' bus fares and these were being paid accordingly. Still Terfa had not yet arrived. With only Pauline in the front seat of the vehicle, the conductor repeatedly asked her about the whereabouts of the person she had reserved the seat for. After the conductor made series of inquiries about Terfa, Pauline pleaded with the conductor to allow a little more time for Terfa to arrive. In spite of Pauline's plea, the conductor threatened to substitute her and Terfa with other passengers that were ready to move right away.

She was still appealing to the obviously irate conductor when Terfa got to the loading point with his mum and two sisters at about 8.34 AM. He sighted Pauline in the front seat and gave an apologetic smile. Susanna stood by Pauline and, together with her children, was waiting for the vehicle to depart. Terfa greeted them and sincerely apologized for coming late. His mother also joined in the greetings and apologies. She was quick to blame their late coming on the extra vigilance and care that pedestrians in Deinyakperan always needed to escape being knocked down by rampaging motor cyclists or Okada.

In an unusually speedy manner, the conductor took Terfa's Load into the vehicle and arranged them in the boot of the vehicle. The already seated driver sounded a warning rhythm from the horn and Terfa hurriedly paid their fares and took his seat. The driver banged the bus door and roared the engine. In a flash, union officials and touts milled around him and demanded for loading commission and union dues. Almost immediately, disagreements, banging of the vehicle's body and exchange of abusive words broke up as the driver gave out some amounts that the union officials and touts considered to be grossly insufficient.

As the episodic banging of the vehicle and rendering of abusive words in typical garage slang continued, the driver, who could no longer withstand the heat generated by his colleagues' confrontation, pleaded for leniency. He counted a few more gerasha notes and added to the protesting union official and touts. Though not fully satisfied with the amount given, the driver's protesting colleagues left him to take off for the journey. He thanked him and they in turn wished him and the passengers safe journey. Relatives and friends hurriedly rounded off their discussions with those traveling. As the driver fired the engine repeatedly and zoomed off, scores of friends and relatives waved hands at their departing loved ones.

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CHAPTER THREE

The high speed of the Nissan Urvan government-assisted mass transit bus made the journey to Mabugu much shorter than expected. Just after the vehicle took off, passengers began to chat with one another as the vehicle went out of Deinyakperan town and sped down to Nyigh-sha-nyi's capital city of Jimetso. But the chatting did not last long before silence descended on everyone. The warm breeze that blew in from across the lower Orfetarga River sent some passengers to sleep, while those who were still awake peeped through the windows in admiration of the luxuriant vegetation that adorned the roadsides.

Up and down the steep, hilly road, the speedy bus increasingly drove in some cool air which later awakened some sleeping passengers. Those who were awakened by the coolness of the breeze sat up to take a vivid look at the beautiful scenery which, the luxuriant vegetation on the roadsides provided. Some others read newspapers or magazines, which they had bought at the Deinyakperan motor park.

As the bus approached Yakunya town, which lay mid way between Deinyakperan and Mabugu, it built up acceleration, only slowing down at the road's numerous sharp bends and handful of railway crossings to negotiate. Speedily, the bus made its way through the much colder and more mountainous zone of the old Asorinja province.

The driver raised the volume of the music in the bus and not a few passengers shook their bodies in response to the melodious tunes that were being rendered. Into the Mabugu city, the bus finally made its way through the beautifully decorated Nor Tar Way down to the Mabugu city's main motor park. Even as the bus driver parked the vehicle and an army of commercial wheelbarrow operators milled around to compete for the load

and baggage in the vehicle, passengers' attention was still consumed by the ever melodious *Swange* music that was being played. Thus, many were not in a hurry to alight from the bus.

Terfa and Pauline disembarked with their Load assisted by a lanky young boy operating a wheelbarrow. They stood waiting by a nearby road for more than half an hour without getting a taxi to Pauline's house. The part of the city they were going was not a walking distance more so that they carried load. With them along the roadside stood a stream of other arriving passengers waiting to get intra-city transport to their various destinations. The waiting was, to say the least, unpleasant due to the very cold weather that had become the characteristic feature of Mabugu City and other areas within the old Asorinja province.

As minutes elapsed without an empty taxi stopping by, the wheelbarrow boy Terfa and Pauline hired became impatient with the waiting and complained that his business time was being wasted. Pauline promptly paid him fifty gerasha, which he accepted graciously and left. Meanwhile, taxi cabs and commercial buses full of passengers passed in streams without stopping. Repeatedly and with great anxiety, waiting passengers waved down at the vehicle drivers. The drivers, in typical Ijovgemanya style exploited the chaotic situation by hiking intra-city transport fares.

Terfa hissed after a long waiting and looked at his wristwatch. Time was 12:35 PM.

"I am afraid", he said in desperation, "it may take us unusually long to get a vehicle here."

“Well”, responded Pauline, “let’s hope for the best.” “However, my mind tells me something is wrong in the city”.

But as she still guessed, they overhead another waiting passenger saying that there was acute fuel scarcity in Mabugu city.

“No wonder”, she screamed, “did you hear that man just say there is fuel scarcity in town”.

“I heard him,” he responded reluctantly.

While they were still conversing, Pauline waved down yet another passing taxi. This time there was luck. The driver slowed down and stopped just after them. The vehicle was surprisingly empty and scores of passengers repeatedly chanted their destinations and rushed to it. But the driver only yielded to Pauline’s request for a charter or drop. Assisted by Terfa, she put their load into the boot and both of them hopped into the cab with great relief. A multitude of disappointed waiters looked at them with apparent jealousy as the cab took off and left.

It was evident from the deep grease stains on his clothes that the driver of the cab was just returning from a mechanic workshop. A curious Pauline did inquire this from him and he confirmed her guess. It took him more than ten minutes to reach Pauline’s house in the Denekpe area of Mabugu.

Pauline’s place was not very far from Mabugu main Motor Park, but the rather unusual traffic jam they encountered on the way delayed them. The taxi driver drove past the State Secretariat road diversion near the Mabugu International Brewery and went to park in front of Pauline’s house as she showed the direction. Her two younger sisters saw the approaching taxi cab and, sighting Pauline inside it, came running from within their

house to welcome her. Both hugged her at once and greeted her joyfully before turning to greet Terfa and the driver. They carried the Load from the car into the house while the driver collected his money from Pauline and went his way.

Terfa was fascinated by the warm reception he received in Pauline's father's home. It did not take long before he was served a sumptuous meal of *Luam kumen* with *Inyam viha* and *Ishwa*. Her father was not in when they arrived, but he met and was introduced to her mother on arrival. Pauline's sisters did not hide their joy at seeing him. So did her mother as she joined her younger daughters in asking after his people. But when Pauline's mother noticed that her little kids were beginning to repeat their questions about the welfare of Terfa's people, she cautioned the more inquisitive of her daughters saying:

"It's enough, Ngodoo." "Remember it is our custom to allow visitors reasonable period of rest."

"You need not restrain them, Mummy," Terfa made a case for them. "I am not really tired." But the girls got their mother's message and did not ask him any more questions. They quickly switched over to Pauline and asked after Auntie Susanna and her family.

"They are fine," Pauline answered them. "Auntie Susanna and everyone sent their greetings. Auntie promised that she will be here during Easter".

Terfa listened to them with rapt attention as they discussed. Inwardly, he was making a casual impression of the family while also admiring the healthy looks of the Kpojime sisters as well as the seemingly cordial relationship that existed among them. If they continued in that way, he reasoned, they would certainly grow up to be responsible

in-laws as his people popularly wished, and he would have no problem relating with them.

Pauline was the very first of her parents' four children. Her immediate younger sibling was a boy and the last two were the girls with whom Terfa was already interacting with. Even in the absence of their only brother who was away in a boarding secondary school, the girls, judging from their frequent mention of their brother, appeared to have had so much respect for him.

Apparently, they recognized him as the future backbone of the Kpojime family. Such was the kind of respect girls specially accorded their brothers, and much more so, their only brother. Among the Awange people, it was customary for boys (especially the oldest boy) to be considered heirs of their father. Indeed, they grew up to possess their father's inheritance. Expectedly and in actual terms, first or only sons were the ones who had a say in whatever problems their sisters or other siblings faced in the absence of their father. Those of them who showed great wisdom even at a tender age were indeed given the leeway to handle serious family issues even while the father was still alive.

Relating with his mother's kinsmen on issues of personal and family wellbeing was also part of the oldest son's heritage in Awangeland. Parents were well aware of these roles and therefore almost always discouraged their sons from marrying a girl who did not have a full blood brother. In their reasoning, it made more sense to marry a girl who would, in the absence of a father, have a dependable relation to wisely look after the father's dependants, including daughters who were already married.

Selflessness, justice and good neighbourliness were among the virtues that Awange elders and people of generations gone past were known for. But all these had

become history. It was believed that due to increasing *iyuhe* in the land, hardly did a relation play the role of a foster parent for an orphan as dependably and reliably as a blood brother. A blood brother it was who stood doggedly behind his sisters and brothers in times of joy and sorrow. If and whenever the situation demands, he consulted the oracles of the land with the hope of unravelling possible causes of his problems his relation or family's misfortunes.

Whenever an oracle revealed that a family member's ill health, problem or misfortune was as a result of a *Bua*, *Ingyor* or any other debt that was owed a kinsman, action was immediately taken. In most cases such debt was discussed among the elders of the extended family and appropriate settlement made with the concerned kinsman or his heir. In not a few cases, *Bua* or *Ingyor* dispute settlement entailed giving commensurate amount or money in lieu of the *Bua* or *Ingyor* owed. In other cases, however, a live *Bua* would be actually bought and paid back to the creditor kinsman or family. Still in a few cases, a young girl (*Ingyor*), and mostly of marriageable age, was handed over to the kinsman who was owed *Ingyor*.

An aggrieved kinsman who was settled with actual *Ingyor* did not only have a say in the affairs of the affected female relation, he it was who principally benefited from the girl's bride price when she is eventually given out in marriage. The *Ingyor* sharing formula among the Awange people of ages gone past was as complicated as the people's communal life itself. It was, indeed, this very factor that contributed to the number of *Angor* disputes that the land witnessed in age after age. These fortunately were settled by the then elders who had great wisdom and sense of morality and justice.

Pauline's parents were lucky to be blessed with a future family backbone in the person of their only son, Ushahemba. Just as he still admired the peaceful co-existence in Pauline's father's house, Terfa glanced through the window and sighted a Peugeot 505 salon car being parked in front of the compound. It was Pauline's father, Mr Iyuhende Kpojime, who returned from work. Pauline and her two sisters ran out to welcome him and collect some raw food items from the boot of the car.

A handsome, light complexioned young man with average height and slightly bulging shoulders, Mr. Kpojime entered the sitting room and warmly greeted Terfa. He went straight into his bedroom, apparently to change his wears. His shiny skin and likeable outlook oozed out the self-confidence of an accomplished banker that he was. When he came out from the bedroom, her daughter, Pauline, did not hesitate to introduce Terfa to him.

He did all he could to make Terfa feel at home. Terfa was impressed by the hospitality that was accorded him throughout his short stay in their house. One striking thing about the Kpojime family, which he still remembered long after he left the family house, was the unusual humility of the couple and their children. Unlike most well placed married women in Ijovgemonya of their time, Pauline's mother did not fancy the home help syndrome which had become an avenue for oppressing less privileged people's children in the land.

She and her husband not only looked at the house help ownership and maltreatment vogue as an unpardonable form of injustice visited on less privileged children, they also saw it as a route through which housewives and their children escape family or matrimonial responsibilities. Not only were the housewives and their children

saucy to house helps, most of them became lazy and insensitive to the house helps' sufferings. Terfa remembered the genesis of Pauline's mother's disapproval of house helps' maltreatment as she vividly related the story of her life to him during a discussion.

"My younger brother, Bemdoo, and I were still adolescent orphans," she said, "when we went to live with our uncle in far away Atemityoland. The man worked in a brewery located in Idyawua, the then capital of Atemityo. Known to be a very carefree person, our uncle, Kauno, had four children from a reckless, stubborn and merciless *Akya* woman. The first wife he married and divorced before our coming to Atemityo was *Yagege* woman. Although she was said to be much more humane and understanding than our wicked *Akya* madam, Kauno's *Yagege* wife was childless for a prolonged period and, for that singular reason, she was sent packing by her husband's irate brothers."

"Even as adolescents," Terfa recalled the very words with which Pauline's mother related her woes, "Bem and I were older than all of Kauno's four children. We tried all we could to please Madam of the house, but our efforts were far from being appreciated. All of Madam's children were perpetually exempted from doing any domestic chores, including even removing plates after eating."

"In spite of the fact that we did all these without complaining, my brother and I were many of the times denied food for no just cause. Madam was fond of thundering and flogging us over things that she ordinarily would pet her children for doing. But the helpless orphans that we were, my brother and I could only cry and pray for God's intervention. For whenever we complained to our uncle he would promise to call his wife to order only for them to laugh over it as if nothing went wrong. But any time we made such report to Kauno, we were assured of receiving a harsher form of treatment for

daring to report Madam. Our uncle on his own is not a very bad person. I think his wife's wickedness and domineering disposition made him to be apathetic to our suffering"

"All four but one of their children were girls and aged eleven, eight, six and four years respectively at the time we came to Atemityo. In physical outlook and character, the girls were carbon copies of their mother. As tender as their ages were, the girls were capable of insulting an adult to a point of crying. Even though the parents were medium income earners, the girls boasted about their parental background as if it was the most solid in the land."

"With the connivance of their mother, whom they were most used to, Kauno's daughters habitually and falsely accused me and Bem of stealing their mother's money, meat in the soup pot and other imagined items. A mere touch of their parents' belongings such as electronic gadgets and other household items earned us serious and prolonged abuses."

"Kauno's personal driver, Orvesen Andyar Tsuebagen, also suffered the same fate as we. A man of well over fifty years old, Orvesen Tsuebagen would drive Uncle Kauno's children to school everyday without complaining despite the usual early morning verbal harassment he too suffered in the hands of Kauno's wife and children. I am sure I can recollect the number of times my brother and I were privileged to enter that family's car."

"After each morning's rigorous domestic activities, Bem and I would stay at home without going to school. Of course, there were always other activities lined up for us to do in the course of the day during which time we also entered public transport in the afternoon to fetch my uncle's four children from school."

“Madam’s only son, Ordedoo, who was also the oldest of her children, I must confess, was not so nasty. A quiet, relatively understanding boy, he was apparently not much loved by his mother unlike the girls whom there mother was fond of. Whereas madam’s son occasionally appreciated the sacrifice we were making in daily fetching them from school and doing other house chores, the girls literally thought it was an obligation we owed them. That my brother and I did all these without being sent to school was a non-issue to the Kaunos.”

“As far as madam was particularly concerned, the education and well being of her children were the only things that the family could think of. It was a thing of fashion and pride for her and her husband to strain themselves to hire two or three private tutors for each of their children at exorbitant costs. Added to that, and at the expense of any competing need, was madam’s craze for extravagant shopping during festivals. Her preoccupations were, in fact, not only parochial, but also devilish. This was evidenced in the growing number of fellow women who came to her to be tutored in all manner of things including stringent ways of handling home helps, keeping husbands’ relatives and friends at arms length as well as other diabolical ways of taming husbands.”

Pauline’s mother was very emphatic on the lessons Terfa could derive from the personal life experiences she had just related to him.

“My son,” she concluded, “these experiences that my brother and I went through for over six years taught us to be hard working, humane and, above all, God-fearing. Fortunately for me, my husband shared and still shares the same ideals as me. That is why we do not consider having home helps a big deal, having been blessed with beautiful children who can do almost everything that is supposed to be done in the house.”

“My husband’s niece came to live with us for years. I never discriminated against her. In fact, I treated her just like any of my children and not like a home help. Today she is in the Polytechnic and happily comes around regularly to visit us. As I am talking to you right now, my uncle, Kauno’s family, from whose hands Bem and I suffered so much, is in shambles. Both my uncle and his *Akya* wife are now old, retired and helpless. Those three daughters of theirs, who, along with their mother, showed us hell, are now mothers like me. But unfortunately, none of them is staying with her husband.”

“Ordedoo, my uncles’s only son, is married with children and doing relatively well; but the burden of catering for his aged parents, divorced sisters, together with their children, is completely weighing him down. But to God be the glory, here I am with a happy family today. Remember, I said Bem and I did attend any school when we were with Uncle Kauno.”

“My husband really loved me for who I was and still am. I had no education but God led him to see the potentials in me.” It was he who facilitated my excellent adult education up to university level after we got married. That is why I respect him and owe him so much. By the grace of God again, my brother, Bem, is also enjoying a peaceful and successful married life. He too struggled on his own to go to school despite being relatively over age. Now I can say we are laughing last and best. That is life for you. Bem and I know that this is God’s doing. Therefore, we do not hold any thing against Uncle Kauno and his people. The Almighty God knows the best.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Terfa spent two memorable days in Mr. Kpojime's home. He probably would have stayed longer but for the eagerness to know of his national youth service posting and that of Pauline and get back home. The more he thought of the national service posting the more anxious he became about it. For the two nights that he spent in the Kpojime family house, Terfa was accommodated in Ushahemba's bedroom.

Ushahemba was Pauline's younger and only brother who was a Senior Secondary class two student in a boarding school in Mabugu Township. Although he was still in school as at the time Terfa visited, his parents and sisters had already fondly made references to him in their conversations.

Whenever Ushahemba was away in school his bedroom remained vacant unless a cherished visitor was received by the family and temporarily accommodated there. In the past, sound moral upbringing was seriously upheld by the Awange people. Therefore, tradition did not permit a girl and her suitor to sleep in the same room or have unwarranted close contact until they finally got married. It was against this background that Terfa had to sleep in Ushahemba's bedroom away from Pauline.

On the Wednesday that he was to leave Pauline's home for the University campus, Terfa got up early from bed and went to the sitting room to remind her. Having been already aware of his departure plan, she opted to accompany him to the campus.

"I guess you will be coming back here before eventually traveling back to Deinyakperan," she inquired.

"I do not think I will be back here," he replied. "You already know the tightness of my schedules back home."

“I am not unaware of your schedules, but have you informed my parents of your intention to leave today?”

“I am yet to,” he said, “but I hope to do that as soon as they wake up.”

“Dad and Mom have already woken up,” she clarified and sent her youngest sister to request her parent’s attention in the sitting room.

Pauline’s father walked into the sitting room moments later and exchanged greetings with Terfa who had already risen up from the sofa in anticipation. Mr. Kpojime and his wife were just commencing their annual leave that Wednesday and consequently did not wake up early as they ordinarily would have. The entire family had planned to embark on a holiday trip to the Akyayuhwa Games Reserve in Ngueinjaga. Schools were soon to close for the session, so the Kpojime’s were waiting for their children in school to commence their vacation and join them on the holiday trip.

“Pauline has just informed me that you will be traveling back home today,” began her father.

“Yes, sir,” he responded. “I intend leaving this morning. I plan to get to the University to ascertain my national youth service posting before travelling back to Deinyakperan. I just used the opportunity of my coming to Mabugu to meet with you and your family.”

“You have done well, my son,” he remarked and turned round to call his wife’s attention from the inner room. Pauline’s mom walked into the sitting room to meet them. She greeted Terfa who was already standing to respectfully greet her.

“Good morning, ma,” he responded and sat down. Pauline’s mother had hardly sat down before her husband spoke to her.

“Mama Ngodoo,” he said, “our son has just informed me that he will be going to the university campus this morning. He plans to check his IYSC and go back home from there.”

“Is that right?” she responded amidst a smile. “I was thinking he will spend more days with us here, or have you not enjoyed our company, my son?”

“I have been very much at home here, madam. By the grace of God, it won’t take long before I will visit you again,” Terfa assured her. “This time around, I have quite a number of pressing issues to sort out at home before eventually leaving for national service.”

Pauline’s father adjusted himself in the sofa. He looked at the clock hanging on wall of the sitting room and called on her daughter to hasten up the preparation of breakfast. Time was 7:45 AM.

“Won’t you at least come back home from campus to have lunch with us before leaving for Deinyakperan?” asked Pauline’s father. “Travelling from Mabugu to Deinyakperan by road is a pretty long journey. More over, your coming back here will enable us to also know your IYSC posting.”

“Sir, it would have been nice to be back here for lunch as you have suggested,” Terfa responded. “However, my programme is quite choked.”

“I see,” Pauline’s father remarked.

“In any case,” continued Terfa, “Pauline has agreed to go to the campus with me so as to be able to also ascertain her posting. She will certainly come back to tell you my posting. My father and I have been invited to an appeal fund launching ceremony at my

mother's place. The event is slated for tomorrow beginning from 12:00 noon. That is why I need to be home in good time."

"Oh, I see," Mr. Kpojime said while nodding his head. "Your reason is quite plausible."

A brief silence fell just as Mr. Kpojime acknowledged Terfa's words. But Pauline's mother broke the silence with a question to Terfa on the purpose of the fund that was to be launched.

"It is for the pursuit of one of those numerous land cases they have in court there," he replied. "For over a decade now, my mother's kinsmen and their neighbours have been locked in series of land cases in Deinyakperan courts. Some how, one single dispute resulted in a court and out of that sprang so many other court cases. Both parties have been spending huge sums of money to win in the courts. It appears they no longer have money to spend. That is, my mother's people are calling daughters and in-laws of the land to assist. In fact, every married daughter of the clan has been mandated to donate two sizable he-goats, four cartoons of beer and two thousand gerasha cash."

Mr. Kpojime looked at him with great surprise as he spoke.

"My gracious God!" he screamed. "Where are we heading for in Awangeland? We sons-in-law in that land are no longer allowed any breathing space. Today, it will be launching, tomorrow, burial of a mother-in-law, next tomorrow father-in-law and then and thereafter brother-in-law. All these events go hand in hand with in-laws periodic calls for review of their sisters' bride price."

“Was it barely a month ago that I attended a similar launching at my in-laws place in Mbausu? Incredibly, I was mandated to donate three thousand gerasha cash plus four cartoon of beer there and two goats.”

“These events have now become fashion among our people,” cuts in Pauline’s mother. “But the annoying aspect of it is that the bulk of those donations are spent recklessly. And you know that these days, these invitations never sound like appeals, indeed, they are threats. Can you imagine my father’s senior relatives issuing me threats in their invitation letter? I cannot recollect the exact words they used, but they were something like “if you don’t yield to our request you are not ours and we too are not yours.”

“That is typically the kind of warning they issue these days, madam,” Terfa responded as she rose to join her daughter in the kitchen.

Pauline was taking the breakfast she had just finished preparing to the dining table in the sitting room and almost collided head on with her mother who was just entering the kitchen. Her mom withdrew promptly and gave way to her to avoid knocking off the food.

“I thought you were yet to finish the food preparation,” her mother said apologetically and went into the kitchen. Pauline placed the food on the dining table which she had already set. She went into the kitchen again and brought out two breakable drinking cups and a sizable jug with cold water. The meal served was white rice with stew, stock fish and beef. Pauline invited her father and Terfa to the dining table and dashed into the kitchen again.

Her dad re-echoed the invitation to Terfa and both of them went over to the dining table almost at the same time. Upon Mr. Kpojime's prompting, Terfa prayed over the food before they began to eat it. Although he enjoyed the meal as much as Pauline's father possibly did, Terfa was the first to leave the dining table. Pauline's father urged him to continue eating but he declined politely, saying, "I am full, sir."

It was not long after the meal that Pauline got ready to go to the university campus with Terfa. Her parents were waiting in the sitting room to see her and Terfa out to the road where they would board a taxi to the university campus. Terfa held his handy traveling bag and walked down the road with Pauline on his left and her parents on his right. As they made their way down the road, Terfa lamented his inability to wait for Pauline's younger sisters to close from school before leaving. He acknowledged that the girls were already very much at home with him. Pauline's mother guessed how sad the girls would be when they returned from school and discover that Terfa had gone.

Just as the observation about Pauline's younger sisters was concluded, Mr. Kpojime opened up a more serious discussion with Terfa regarding his relationship with Pauline.

"My son" he said, "I think our daughter is now mature enough to know what is good for her. She has not discussed a man even casually with us before and we her parents have allowed her to take her time and make her choice of a man. Quite frankly, you are the very first man she has brought to introduce to us. When she called me from Deinyakperan two weeks ago that she was going to bring me a surprise package soon, my imagination did not even lead me to think about a man in her life. Having said this,

therefore, my wife and I wouldn't raise any objection concerning your relationship with our daughter, at least for now."

Terfa listened attentively to him.

"I appreciate what you have said, sir and I feel so honoured getting to know you and your family. Your daughter and I met only a few weeks ago, but you yourself can see the intimacy that has already developed between us. My parents too were taken by surprise considering the fact that I have not introduced a girl to them before. All I can say is that, it is God who has brought me and your family together. My parents too will get to know your family soon. Once again, I am indeed very grateful for your hospitality and words of wisdom. Madam, thank you too"

"Excellent," responded Pauline's father. "You speak wisely like a well experienced adult. We look forward to meeting with you again soon."

"And your parents too," cuts in Pauline's mother.

"May God bring that to pass ma", he responded.

"And please do remember to extend our greetings to all your people when you get home", she added.

"I will surely do that, ma", said Terfa.

"And Susanna with her husband and children too."

"They too will receive your greetings by the grace of God."

On getting to the adjoining road, a taxi cab with only one passenger drove from the direction of Nornajime Stadium and promptly stopped by them.

"*Kahana?*" the driver asked for their destination with an air of curiosity that suggested the easing up of the fuel situation in the city.

“Ngueinjaga Road,” answered Pauline. The driver speedily opened the door and Pauline and Terfa hopped into the cab. Her parents bade them farewell as the vehicle took off and left.

They disembarked at the Mabugu University main gate in less than fifteen minutes and headed straight to the University’s central administration building. The thought of going to their respective departments did not even come to them even as they passed their faculty buildings on the way. In previous years, the list of national service postings did appear on the student affairs building notice boards in the university’s registry. Therefore, they did not want to waste a lot of time going to other places on campus.

On reaching the ground floor of the administration building Terfa inquired from two supposedly non academic staff of the university if the IYSC postings were out. Both officials replied in the affirmative but were not sure which notice boards actually contained the information. Pauline and Terfa got to the student affairs office on the second floor of the central administration building. Unfortunately, however, only two or three outdated circulars were pasted on a notice board there. There was no sign of IYSC posting. Terfa looked at Pauline and saw disappointment all over her face. He then looked near empty notice board and spoke to himself saying, “What kind of confusion is this?”

“Didn’t the two people you asked downstairs say the postings were out?” asked Pauline as she gazed at outdated circulars on the notice board again.

“Yes, they did,” replied Terfa. “Let me find out from within the office of the dean of student affairs.”

They left the notice board, walked past two doors on the right of the corridor and entered the third. The secretary to the dean, whom Terfa was quick to recognize, was seated in the outer office while the door to the dean's office was open.

"Madam," he said after exchanging pleasantries with the woman, "I have come to check my IYSC posting, where is the list pasted?"

"You will have to go to the Guidance and Counselling Centre within the Ayatutu Common Services building. It is not far from Deidya hall. Do you know the exact place I am describing?"

"Yes, I do," Terfa replied and thanked her. He clasped Pauline's hand and both of them walked out of the dean's secretary's office.

Pauline saw her former roommate as she and Terfa moved towards the university staff school near the new faculty of science lecture theatre.

"Lara, Lara" she called out the girl's name. Lara turned back in bewilderment and, seeing it was Pauline, ran fast to embrace her.

"Longest time," she said to Pauline.

"Long time no see," Pauline re-echoed, flashing her eyes at Lara's.

"How are you, my dear?" she inquired of Pauline.

"I am fine, and how about you?"

"O girl, I am also okay, thank you."

"Have you seen your posting yet?" asked an anxious Pauline.

"Yes I have. You can trust that I have been posted to Yashaageva," she replied.

"Oh, that's beautiful. You are very fortunate, indeed," she said and embraced Lara again while Terfa looked on impatiently.

It was in the course of their discussion that Lara told her that she needed to obtain clearance from her faculty to be able to collect her call-up letter. Their discussion so interested them that Pauline almost forgot to introduce Terfa to her former roommate. When at last she realized the omission, she briefly introduced them to each other and asked for pardon. Thereafter, Lara left for her faculty. A moment later, Terfa and Pauline also headed for their respective faculties. They arranged to meet again after completing their faculty-centered activities.

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CHAPTER FIVE

The hallway by the office of the environmental sciences faculty officer was besieged by fresh graduates from the faculty who had come to obtain clearance from the office. The faculty officer was not on seat at the time. He was said to have been attending the faculty's faculty board meeting which had allegedly lasted for about two hours already. Expectedly, graduates from the faculty who were already waiting grew impatient. Many chatted among themselves with their eyes fixed to the direction of the faculty boardroom where the faculty officer and his faculty colleagues allegedly were attending a meeting.

Terfa looked around for a chair to sit and wait for the faculty officer, but he could not find any. Due to the large number of his colleagues who were similarly waiting, he could not easily recognize faces among them. Suddenly, two of his former course mates spotted him in a corner and they made their way across to greet him.

"Prof. Damsa!" one of them named Steve shouted Terfa's name and held out his hand to shake him. Terfa greeted and shook hands with them.

"My Prof., when did you arrive here?" demanded the second guy whose name was Nelson.

"It's getting to two hours," he replied.

"And you did not see us on arrival?" Steve and Nelson chorused.

"Honestly, I did not see you guys," Terfa defended.

"How has the going been?" Steve inquired.

"There is no problem. Life has been a bit tough, but God is taking care," Terfa answered. The trio chatted and decided on taking a walk down the hallway to briefly greet their favourite former lecturer whom students had nicknamed "Dr. Revolution." He

was so nicknamed because of his avowed criticism of corrupt people in government as well as his persistent calls for a revolution to dislodge non-performing governments. So critical was Dr. Ayoosu (for that was Dr. Revolution's real name) of Ijovgemanya's central government that, in no time, he became a foremost regular host of the nation's state security service operatives who came to either chat or pick him up.

It was when Terfa and his former classmates reached the academic staff office area and discovered the offices to be under lock and key that they realized that all the lecturers were equally attending the faculty board meeting. The meeting, it was learnt, was to, among other things, approve results of non-graduating students for onward forwarding to senate. Another contentious issue that was said to form the agenda of the faculty board meeting was the proposed dress code for students.

Faculty board meetings in Unimabugu were typically known to last for hours even when normal faculty issues were discussed. But when students' result and some other controversial issue formed the meeting's agenda, then one was sure that an unusually lengthy session was underway. With this in mind, Terfa and many of his former classmates did not expect the faculty officer to return to his office before noon. Inevitably, however, every one of them waited eagerly for him.

Their guesses were not so accurate. By the time Steve, Nelson and Terfa returned from Dr. Revolution's office area, there was already a long queue in front of the faculty officer's office. The man was back from the meeting and he directed all waiting graduates to queue up to collect their letters of clearance. Pandemonium ensued and lasted for several minutes. People struggled and pushed to take vantage positions in the queue. Those who had already taken vantage positions squeezed those in their front to

prevent others outside the queue from shunting. Terfa, Steve and Nelson returned and regrettably joined the queue at its tail end. They were visibly tensed and impatient.

One after the other, the waiting graduates went in to sign for and collect their clearance. Everyone who collected theirs rushed to the Guidance and Counselling Centre at the Ngueinjaga Road campus of the university to be further attended to..

By the time Terfa collected his clearance and went for his call up letter, the premises of the Guidance and Counselling Centre were crowded like a market place. Unlike the collection of clearance which was a faculty affair, the gathering at the Guidance and Counselling Centre was a university-wide activity involving graduates from all faculties.

It was jubilation galore for graduates who collected their call up letters and discovered that their postings matched their wishes. But for many others who thought they were not fortunate with their posting, loud lamentations and sobbing were their due. As he waited for his letter, fear of the unknown gripped Terfa. He looked around to see if he could spot Pauline in the crowd, but Pauline was not in sight. Going deeper in and out of the large and noisy crowd, he still could not see Pauline.

He stood still for a while with heightened anxiety. Suddenly, he heard Pauline's shout of joy and then spotted her as she collected and read through her call up letter. She and three of her former female classmates were struggling to maneuver their ways out of the thick crowd. Terfa pushed himself through the crowd and emerged at a corner where Pauline and her friends were waiting for him. He was still anxious about what his posting would be.

Meanwhile, Pauline was still screaming and jumping with her call up letter held up in the air.

“Oh girl, take it easy,” one of Pauline’s friends teased her.

“Vero don’t mind Pauline,” remarked another of her friends. “She is fond of staging her drama.”

“You people should leave me alone”, Pauline jeered at them. She turned back and unexpectedly saw Terfa come close to them. Seeing an expression of indifference on his face, her elated mood quickly gave way to an expression of concern. She wondered if he had yet seen his posting. Perhaps, he saw it and was disappointed. Perhaps, not. But having not been sure of what happened, she felt reluctant to ask him for fear she might offend his feelings.

She stared at him and smiled mildly. Terfa smiled in reciprocation. Her three female friends did not know him, so they stood still and stole intermittent looks at him.

“Hi ladies,” he greeted them in a feigned cheerful spirit.

“Hi”, they chorused a response.

“I’ve been looking out to see you”, he said to Pauline.

She flashed her eyes at his face and said, “I am sorry that you have spent some time looking out for me. As you can see, the crowd here is something else.”

He looked at her in return and asked, “Has it been so long since you returned from your faculty?”

“Yes, it’s been quite some time now. I was among the first ten persons that received clearance.

“Lucky you”, he said. “Ours was more like a waiting game. Will you believe that I spent more than four hours waiting for the faculty officer?”

“What really went wrong?” she asked curiously.

“The faculty officer and all academic staff of the faculty were at a faculty board meeting. This lasted for more than three hours. Again, when he was out of the meeting and ready to attend to us, it was another tug of war. There were whole lots of people waiting for him. As a result, I ended up getting my clearance at about 12:45 P.M.

Pauline screamed in seeming disbelief.

“I cannot believe this,” she said. “It did not take me up to ten minutes before I collected my clearance. Our faculty officer was already in his office by the time I got there. Indeed, he promptly attended to all of us around.”

“Have you seen your posting yet”? Terfa asked.

“Yes, I have”, she replied.

“And where have you been posted to?”

“Yashaageva, surprisingly”, she said softly.

He staggered in excitement and embraced her, pretending not to have heard her leap for joy upon getting her letter and seeing the posting.

“This is pretty good, my dear. It’s a dream come true, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is. Not only for me, but for you too,” she said and quickly turned to her other friends who were with her before Terfa came around.

“Ada, meet my one and only darling, Terfa. He graduated from the Geomining here in Unimabugu.” Pauline made the same introduction to her two other friends. Turning back to Terfa, she introduced the three girls who in turn warmly exchanged

pleasantries with Terfa. All expressed their pleasure at meeting with Terfa and shook hands with him. “It’s my pleasure meeting with you ladies too,” he said. “I will try not to forget your beautiful names and faces... Ada, Funmi, and Ngunan”.

“It’s great getting to know you too,” Ngunan said on behalf of the others. Terfa shook hands with the ladies again and said, “I suppose you all have collected your call-up letters”. All answered in the affirmative.

“So where are you ladies been posted?”

A still excited Pauline replied on their behalf. “Ngunan and Funmi have also been posted to Yashaageva. And Ada will be going to Ashamena”, replied Pauline.

“That’s incredible,” he screamed and congratulated them.

Having been informed by Pauline of the procedures for collecting the call up letter, he took leave of her and her friends and pushed his way into the mammoth crowd. Pauline remained at the spot chatting with her friends and waiting for him to come back.

CHAPTER SIX

The crowd on the Guidance and Counselling Centre premises seemed not likely to reduce in a hurry. As Terfa found himself in the crowd, he noticed fellow prospective corps members submitting their clearance letters to designated officials of the centre and waiting for their call-up letters. As those who were attended to left the premises, graduates that still came from the different faculties replenished the number. Terfa too submitted his clearance and waited for a call-up letter.

By the door of one of the offices at the Guidance and Counselling Centre stood a young university official who called out the names of prospective members from the call-up letter that were ready. Encircled by the crowd, which left him and his colleagues gasping for breath, the young official shouted names on top of his lungs. But it was not easy to hear him clearly due to the background noise that the people rendered ceaselessly. The more he shouted on top of his voice in order to be heard, the more the background noise swallowed his voice and compelled him to shout even louder.

Terfa waited anxiously for his name to be called. He felt his heart beating much faster than normal and sweated in his palms. The official went on calling the names until it was Terfa's turn at last.

"Terfa Damsa," the official shouted. Terfa heard his name very faintly and strained his ears to listen again. Having not been sure it was his name that was called, he decided not to answer. If he did answer and answered wrongly, he knew, he definitely would be teased and booed by some of his tension-soaked colleagues.

Everyone looked around to see who was coming out to call the next call-up letter that the young university officer had just called, but no one came out. He paused to take a deep breath and shouted again:

“Who is Terfa Damsa?”

At that point Terfa yelled an answer and pushed his way in. The official matched the name on Terfa’s identity card with the one on the call-up letter, nodded his head and handed the letter to its owner. Terfa’s heart beat even faster as he collected the document and his identity card from the official. Even as he still struggled to get out of the crowd, he raised the letter and anxiously tried to glance through it.

But the more he attempted this, the more he felt the pressure of being sandwiched. Compelled, he gave up the idea to prevent the letter from getting rumbled or torn. So chocked was he that he took a deep, prolonged breath and stood firm to push back the people in his front. The push was impactful and caused many to stagger and fall on one another, thus creating enough space for him to go out of the crowd.

He stood aside sweating profusely and read through the call-up letter. Eventually, he sighted the portion of the letter, which indicated state of deployment. Terfa could not believe what he saw. “Awenabo State” was boldly printed in black colour. His heart jumped in utter disappointment.

“Ah, God!” he sighed, “Couldn’t you have mercy on me? Was it not Yashaageva I kept praying and hoping for? What has gone wrong, father?” As he grieved, a funny thought came to him that another person’s letter must have been wrongly given to him. Thus, he looked at the letter again. No mistake! Terfa Damsa stood out in bold letters.

He shook his head and stood still, wondering what he would tell Pauline and his other friends.

Quickly, his mind went to his father's friend who worked with the Ijovgemanya Youth Service Corps Secretariat in Aboshansha. He it was who assured Terfa time without number that he would work out his posting to Yashaageva. It was indeed based on those assurances that the thought of being posted to a state like Awenabo never for once occurred to Terfa. His heart desire to spend the service year in Yashaageva with Pauline was burning. But the issuance of an unfavourable call-up letter clearly marked the beginning of a different story.

Realizing that he had kept Pauline and her other friends waiting for so long, he sluggishly moved to meet them, trying as best he could to conceal his displeasure. Pauline and her friends were commenting on the closeness of the October 1 orientation commencement date for the national youth service for the year. Appearing to have already exhausted the topic, they quickly dropped on seeing Terfa and welcomed him cheerfully. He greeted them with a mean smile and apologized for having kept them waiting for so long.

He did not know where to begin his story, but the ladies waited eagerly to listen to him. From his looks alone, one could scarcely know that he was not happy. However, his hesitation to speak made Pauline and her friends to guess that all was not well. Nevertheless, none of them was courageous enough to take a lead in asking him questions.

“Ladies, I am very highly disappointed by what has happened to me,” he broke the silence.

“What has happened to you?” an anxious Pauline asked immediately.

“I never knew I would be posted to Awenabo,” he replied sorrowfully while handing over his call-up letter to her to see for herself. Ada and the other ladies drew closer to Pauline to take some look at the letter. As they did this, they momentarily remained quite, not knowing what to say. Pauline looked at him with seeming empathy and said:

“It’s unfortunate, but do not be weighed down, my dear.”

“We too are appealing to you not to despair,” Ngunan said on behalf of the others. “I am telling you that there is nothing so spectacular about Yashaageva. Your consolation should be that Awenabo state also has quite a number of industries, which can absorb corps members. Such opportunities may not be as abundant as those in Yashaageva but who says God cannot provide for us wherever we are and however He wants?”

“Let me also add, Terfa,” Funnii cut in, “That as an added advantage for you too, Awenabo has far less accommodation and transportation problems than Yashaageva. Even if it is staying close to your babe that is your worry, Awenabo is still not far away from Yashaageva. Indeed, it is the state closest to Yashaageva. Why then bother yourself about a mad city whose fortunes have drastically dwindled since the re-location of the federal capital to Aboshansa?”

The more Pauline and her friends tried to convince Terfa to accept his posting to Awenabo in good faith, the more he talked about traveling to Aboshansa to seek to effect a change. He did not want to come to terms with the fact that there were only four days left for corps members’ orientation to commence nationwide. However, he knew within him that effecting a change within that period was not so feasible. It was clear in

his heart too that his insistence was more or less merely serving him face-saving purpose. Indeed, he knew that even without having to run around for a change in service posting, he was already running short of time to attend to pressing issues at home. Quite prominently, he needed to unfailingly travel back home to attend the appeal fund launching ceremony at his mother's ancestral home.

It was becoming obvious to Pauline's friends that convincing Terfa to change his mind about his posting was not going to be an easy task. As a result, they felt uneasy discussing with him and consequently took leave of him and Pauline.

No sooner had they gone than Terfa decided that he would go and spend the night with one of his friends at the Shimanyian area of Mabugu. It was already past 4 P.M and he felt it was rather late to leave for Deinyakperan. Pauline objected to his going to spend the night outside her home, stressing that her parents might read meanings into it if they get to know about it. According to her, it was better for Terfa to return to her parents' house and leave for Deinyakperan the following morning. But having already made up his mind not to go back to her house that day, Terfa did not accept her suggestion.

Pauline knew that she would feel his absence, but there was nothing she could do to change his mind. Her major concern was his refusal to accept his posting gentlemanly. She really saw no need in his having to travel to Aboshansha. As such, she persuaded him and changed his mind at least about travelling to Aboshansha before they finally parted company. In a desperate move to awaken his spirit, she left with a promise to possibly visit him in Deinyakperan within four days prior to the commencement of their orientation.

The date for the commencement of the Ijovgemanya Youth Service orientation course for prospective corps members was just four days away. Thus, Terfa wondered if Pauline could really pay a visit to him at Deinyakperan as she promised. He recalled that she made the promise to pacify him and might understandably not be able to fulfill it. More over, Pauline took the impromptu decision without consulting with her parents. It was simply out of love and affection that she suddenly resolved to visit him in so short a time. Nevertheless, her promise alone had a therapeutic effect on Terfa. At least he saw an indication that she loved and cared even in his distressful circumstances.

The fantasies he had about her in the night that followed made him to think less about his posting disappointment. Apart from that, his friend with whom he spent the night in the Shimanyian area of Mabugu also encouraged him to accept his posting without question. With all this, he left for home the following morning with a more rational thought about his posting to Awenabo. This made Terfa to begin to care less about what his friends at home would say. For time without number, he had told them that his posting to Yashaageva was as sure as the rising of the sun. It was interesting, however, that contrary to his expectations, none of his friends teased him when he told them. Rather, they all counselled him that it was not only in Yashaageva that corps members would enjoy their service year or gain employment thereafter. The contrary, they reasoned, was the case with very many corps members posted there.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The appeal fund launching event at Mbaazagee, Terfa's mother's birthplace took place in Orvesen Tordue's compound. The programme commenced at the setting of the sun and lasted till daybreak. Orvesen Tordue was Terfa's maternal grandfather and the oldest surviving member and head of the Zagee extended family. By every traditional standard, he was a wealthy man, having had several wives, scores of children and grand children, abundant food as well as livestock.

Events such as launching of appeal funds and other important extended family meetings normally held in the compound of the oldest living extended family member. In this regard, therefore, Orvesen Tordue's expansive compound was to remain the venue for major events in Mbaazagee extended family for as long as he lived. As a mark of respect, a family head usually presided over all ceremonies. But when he was indisposed or unavoidably absent, he normally delegated a member of the family next in age to him to preside. Among his kinsmen and well beyond, Orvesen Tordue was noted for his generosity. As such, whenever an occasion of such importance was to take place in his compound, kinsmen and guests alike waited eagerly to partake in great merriment. Orvesen Tordue had so far led the Zagee family for more than twenty years. Indeed, oral historical accounts had it that, as head of the Zagee extended family, Orvesen Tordue never failed to live beyond people's expectations, especially regarding entertainment of guests at functions, which he hosted.

On the day of launching, guests had started trooping into the expansive and well-swept compound of Orvesen Tordue before sunrise. Most were daughters of the clan popularly referred to as *onkasev* who came with their families and friends to grace the

occasion. While many came on foot with plenty of Load carried on their heads; others rode on bicycles, motorcycles and in cars. They brought with them cartons of beer, wine, non-alcoholic drinks, livestock as well as raw food items. Members of the extended Zagee family and people from the neighbouring communities were all on ground to show solidarity.

Arranged in rows under the big flourishing mango trees shedding the centre of Tordue's compound were chairs and benches for guests. As they arrived in droves and were welcomed by their relatives and hosts, the guests were ushered to their seats. Those who indicated desire to eat were served food and drinks of their choice. These ranged from Luam kumen or pounded yam with *egusi* soup, boiled yam with stew as well as starch with different kinds of soup. Other local delicacies such as fresh garden eggs, fried peanuts and beniseed, bean cake and yam porridge were also in abundant supply. Locally brewed beer or *burukutu* and kolanuts were also available. On different spots and with desired choice of food, the guests ate in-groups of three, four or even more persons.

The expansive compound of Orvesen Tordue was as busy as an anthill, and as noisy as a market place. Smoke steadily rose into the air through a handful of round huts in Tordue's compound as women went on with their endless cooking for guests. Even before the real event commenced, guests drank and ate to their fill. Indeed, there was no dull moment within the waiting period for the commencement of the event.

Terfa arrived Orvesen Tordue's compound in the family car and were greeted by highly spirited relatives who were on hand to welcome them. His father, Damsa, went round and embraced his numerous in-laws. His wife and Terfa's mother, Myina, ably supported him.

While the exchange of pleasantries lasted, a handful of energetic youth within the Tordue household assisted in off loading the numerous items that the Damsa family had brought. These were taken from the boot of Damsa's car into Terfa's maternal grandmother's round hut.

Three hefty goats that the Damsa's brought along with the other items were brought out and tethered to some guava trees, which stood metres away from the centre of the compound. Terfa and his parents later took their seats and were served with food and drinks while waiting earnestly for dusk to descend.

It was obvious from the large number of people already present at Tordue's compound that most in-laws and daughters of Mbaazagee would attend the appeal fund launching. Even though many guests arrived early enough, the commencement of the occasion was delayed to allow enthusiastic family members and friends to exchange banter for quite a while.

At last, dusk came and dozens of lamps fuelled by kerosene and palm were lit and strategically hung across the compound. These supplemented the lighting, which was provided by the medium size Kawasaki generator that Terfa's father brought. The background noise caused by numerous conversations among guests was high. It combined with the noise from the power generating plant to make listening to a whisper impossible.

While the eating and drinking was still on, a young man who was later introduced as the master of ceremony or MC came out to formally welcome guests and declare the intention of the head of the extended family, Orvesen Tordue, to address guests and declare the occasion open. Everyone sat on the edge of his or her seat to listen attentively

to Orvesen Tordue as he mounted the rostrum. He scratched his forehead, cleared his throat and started:

“I greet you all in-laws, daughters and sons of the great Zagee family. It is my pleasure to see all of you gathered here upon our invitation. You all are aware of our reason for calling you here together. Our people say a man has children so that they can help him when he is in distress. It is the distress that we have found ourselves in that has necessitated our calling on you in-laws and daughters of this great clan for help. The people of Mbaanyam are out to exterminate us. They have taken most of our lands and are hell bent on taking what is left.”

At the mention of this, the crowd roared in rage and compelled Orvesen Tordue to pause for the open expression of anger to subside. He then continued:

“If you our in-laws and children allow the people of Mbaanyam to humiliate and annihilate us, it is you that people will laugh at. If we your people no longer exist, from whom again will you seek refuge when you have problems?”

In response to this, the crowd thundered, saying, “from no one.” He paused again for audience and went on.

“Our children born and yet unborn will have no future; they will have no single acre of land to cultivate and pass on to subsequent generations. There will be no place for them to bury their dead; no place to build a hut; indeed, nothing for them to eat.

“And what will become of the graves of our parents and numerous relatives who are no more? My in-laws and children, as you are all aware, the court case involving us and Mbaanyam people has been in court for the past nine years. We have been earnestly looking forward to seeing the end of this case to no avail.”

“But the Mbaanyam people are not interested seeing the end to this legal battle. Just last month, they instituted a second suite against us. It is for these reasons that we have decided to call on you all to come and assist us. Our in-laws and daughters, we need money to prosecute the case and to also arm ourselves in readiness for any eventuality. These days, people do not allow themselves to be invaded defenselessly like children or women. If this happens to us, the whole world will laugh at us.”

“As you all know, we can no longer fight this cause alone; not with the extent our legal system has become corrupt; not with the boldness and openness with which judicial officers and lawyers in our country demand for bride these days. My children, it is based on this that the Zagee family has decided that each of our in-laws assists us.”

“As a standard, we demand that every one of our in-laws contributes two thousand gerasha cash, two cartons of beer and two sizable goats. We would graciously welcome more contributions from those of you who might be willing to give more than what we have stipulated. Great daughters of Zagee family and my in-laws, let me not take too much of your time explaining every bit of the situation on ground. I know you will not disappoint us. Thank you all.”

Soon after Orvesen Tordue ended his address and went down the podium, the whole crowd rendered a thunderous applause in appreciation of what he said. His entire compound was still in a frenzy of activities as women continued to cook and serve rounds of assorted delicacies. Several cartons of beer, bottles of wine and pots of *burukutu* beer were served guests over and over again.

After Tordue’s address, the MC rose again and began to call on the visiting married daughters of the land to come out with their husbands and make their

contributions, beginning from the eldest to the youngest. As he called on each of the daughters from a prepared list, each went out with her husband to present what they they brought, with the husband first making a brief remark.

Every invited couple brought at least two thousand gerasha cash, two sizable goats as well as two cartons of beer. Some couples who could afford gave more money and other items than what was stipulated. These included foodstuffs such as yams, flour and rice. As they presented these items and the master of ceremony announced, they were thunderously applauded.

Altogether, more than one hundred and fifty daughters of the land were present at the occasion, most of them with their husbands and one or two of their children. Terfa's mother, Myina, was not among the eldest daughters of the Zagee family unit and so was not called out early enough. Among Tordue's biological children, however, Myina was the very first daughter. It was more than two hours after the first set of daughters were called that it came to her turn.

At last, the MC shouted her name. She and her husband together with Terfa rose in response. Even at that the MC did not stop sounding the Damsa family name into the microphone repeatedly. Being the first biological daughter of Tordue, the head of the Zagee extended family, everyone waited eagerly to see what Myina and her husband would present.

The MC was well aware of his audience's curiosity. Therefore, he cleared his throat, looked up to read the collective mood again before calling for absolute attention.

“Ayoosu v-i-i-i-i-n ku-l-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e. I am calling on another of our much respected daughters and sisters, the very first issue of the head of the Zagee

extended family, Mrs. Myina Damsa to come out with her family and make their contribution.”

The audience’s curiosity had now reached its zenith but the MC continued.

“You all know that the name of Damsa, Myina’s husband, is synonymous with wealth and generosity. You are all living witnesses to the numerous things that this in-law and our daughter have done for this community in the past. The couple is not here alone. They have come with their first son, Terfa Damsa, who has just graduated from the university. Please, join me in welcoming the pride of the Zagee extended family, Mrs. Myina Damsa to the centre.”

Just as the MC finished his carefully worded introduction of the Damsas, the audience applauded for the Damsa family. Their applause persisted until the MC waved his hand at the people in a bid to subdue the noise.

Terfa’s mother went out to the rostrum with her husband, while Terfa was still seated. Three muscular young men of the community who helped carry the items that the Damsas brought for presentation closely followed the former behind. Also following the Damsas were two other young men who helped drag the three goats that Terfa’s parents also brought.

Before announcing the items, the MC requested Damsa to make a brief remark. Amidst jaw-cracking jokes, he greeted his in-laws and presented all that he and his family had brought. Then he and his wife left the podium to take their seats amidst an even more thunderous ovation.

The MC brought the microphone to life again.

“Ayoosu v-i-i-i-i-n ku-le-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e!” he yelled.

“Something exceptionally great has happened here again. Did I not say it before, that the name of our daughter’s husband is synonymous with wealth? He and his respectable wife have done it again. Our honourable son in-law, Engineer Damsa, and his wife, Myina have presented the sum of five thousand gerasha cash, three hefty goats and four cartons of beer which you are seeing right here. Is that not fantastic?”

“It is fantastic,” thundered the crowd.

“Is that not spectacular,” asked the MC again.

“It is more than spectacular,” the audience roared once more, again applauding.

“That is not all,” continued the MC, “The Damsas have also brought more than one hundred tubers of yam and a full bag of corn and cassava flour to be used at this occasion. What again should I say? ”

“They have carried the day,” came another loud response from the audience. The MC went further:

“Some of you,” resumed the master of ceremony, “may not be aware that it is Myina and her beloved husband that brought the generator that is supplying us light here.”

At this, not a member of the audience kept mute. With different words of appreciation, members of the audience requested that Damsa and Myina son, Terfa be called to the podium and introduced.

The MC granted their request without hesitation. Some of the uneducated elders around who heard that Terfa had just graduated from the university expressed happiness stressing that at last a lawyer had emerged from within fold to help them with their land cases in court. When the MC realized their expressed thought, he told the uninformed

elders that Terfa was not a lawyer. Obviously, the elders were disappointed because of their thinking that all that people went to the university to study were “lawyer” and “doctor.”

The appeal fund ceremony at Terfa’s mother’s place recorded a huge success. Indeed, there was no one present at the occasion that did not approve of its success. The event went on from dusk till dawn amidst much eating and drinking. The following morning, just before sunrise, the MC announced the proceeds from the launching. Thereafter, Orvesen Tordue declared the occasion closed and guests began to leave for their homes. Before noon, the compound of Orvesen Tordue became almost empty except for the women of the local community who went round to tidy up the environment. By the time Tordue’s compound totally became clean again in the evening, it was difficult for one to imagine that a very large gathering of people had just taken place there.

CHAPTER EIGHT

It was 28th day of September and Terfa was just finalizing arrangements to report at the Ijovgemanya national youth orientation camp at Awenabo. The orientation course was scheduled to start on 2nd October throughout the country. He had finally made up his mind to accept his posting in good faith.

Upon returning from the appeal fund ceremony at her mother's birthplace, he was still in doubt as to whether Pauline would really rush down from Mabugu and visit him as promised. When he was at his mother's birthplace, his maternal grandmother had insisted that he spent a few more days with her. But given the limited time he had to prepare and report to the camp, he only assured her that he would visit some other time. He did not want Pauline to come to Deinyakperan and not meet him.

Although, Pauline knew the date which the appeal fund event was to take place, she was not certain about how long Terfa would stay with his mother's people after the event. When he returned home and waited for a whole day without seeing Pauline, he wished he had satisfied his grandmother's desire of having him stay a little with her.

He knew he was only visiting the old woman for the first time in a long while, therefore staying longer with her would have made her a lot happier. That was the joy of most grandparents in Awangeland. It was typical of them wanting their grandchildren to spend some time with them so they could pet and overindulge in the name of giving love and affection.

Terfa's friends who were aware that Pauline had promised to visit him briefly really doubted her coming. Indeed, one of them out rightly ruled out the possibility of her

coming given the closeness of the national service orientation which she was also part of. He argued that Pauline only made that promise to calm his nerves and prevent him from travelling to Aboshansa to seek for a change in his posting.

The date for the commencement of the orientation course, his friends insisted, was too close for Pauline to come down to Deinyakperan and then get back to Mabugu to again proceed to her camp in far away Yashaageva. Even though Terfa reminded his friends that Pauline had telephoned to assure him of her coming, one of them expressed disappointment over Terfa's unwarranted optimism.

"Terry," he called Terfa by his other nickname, "I am most surprised that you can easily be deceived by a girl at this age. What makes you think that girl will risk visiting you here at this time time-sensitive period? Do you think she is not interested in reporting to her orientation camp early enough?"

Terfa was weak when his friends stressed their point and teased him. He became a little enraged and barked at them, saying, "Young men, why do you argue like fools? Do you mean it's impossible for her to come down here and still report to camp right on time?"

"No sir!" one of his friends mocked with a reply, "We did not say it's impossible. All we have been saying is that the probability of her coming is very, very low."

Terfa's countenance changed noticeably. His friends read that he was touched by their words, they quickly withdrew from the argument and went on to discuss other issues. But having no interest in their new discussion, he left them to take a walk down to Susanna, Pauline's aunt's home. He earlier went there the very day he returned from Mabugu to convey Pauline and her relatives' greetings to the Gesas.

Susanna expressed surprise at Pauline's promise to visit again at that time. However, she postponed a religious appointment she had at their Church's outstation to accommodate Pauline's said visit. Rather than express pessimism about her coming to an already worried Terfa, Susanna assured him that Pauline always kept her promises strictly. His heart gladdened by Susanna's reassuring words to him, Terfa spent a long time with her only to realize on his way home that he did spend a longer time than he thought he would.

Back home in the evening, he did not spend much time with his parents in the sitting room as he used to do. His staying away must have left his parents and sibling wondering what went wrong with him. It was almost a daily practice for the entire Damsa family to stay together in the sitting room for a while after super. Each member of the family enjoyed the almost daily post-dinner interaction. It typically ended with the praying of the Rosary after the network news of the Ijovgemanya Television Authority (ITA).

But that evening's super time was different for Terfa as he quickly withdrew into his bedroom as early as 7 P.M. While in the room, he continued his search for a Macmillan elementary atlas, which he remembered having kept in a drawer. Apart from merely passing through Awenabo to Yashaageva, he had never actually visited the former. It was for this reason that he needed the elementary atlas to locate in the Ijovgemanya map some towns and places in Awenabo which he had only been hearing of.

After ransacking the drawers in his room without finding the atlas, he opened one of his boxes and found the atlas right on top of his books. He took it out and dropped it

on the bed in order to organize the room just before his mother knocked on his door. Terfa asked who it was, hearing his mother's response, opened the door.

She entered and sat down while a surprised Terfa stared at her.

"Mom", he said, "You hardly enter my bedroom and much less so at this time. I hope there is no problem?"

"There is no problem," she smiled and responded. "I just want to talk to you briefly. Again, all of us were wondering what could have made you to leave us in the sitting room so early today. Is any thing amiss?"

He stopped arranging the books and went to sit down.

"There isn't any thing really, Mom. I was back in the room early to look for some documents in my files."

In her characteristic motherly style, his mother smiled and asked, "Could that be the reason why your books are scattered all over the place?"

"Yes, Mom," he replied.

His mother kept mute for a while, possibly thinking out with which point she would start her discussion with him. Terfa noticed her calculated silence and similarly remained quite for a moment until she cleared her throat and began:

"Terfa my son, I want to seize this opportunity to say a few words about life to you before you leave for your national service. It is true that you have come of age capable of staying in a far place on your own. But let me assure you that the world today, as you know, is becoming much more complicated. It is increasingly becoming full of problems and temptations."

“The kind of terrible stories and happenings that one was not used to hearing of in the past have become common place today. Therefore, you’ve got to be prayerful and also keep yourself in check. I know you have been a nice child, but I believe you can even be a better one. The world outside the university environment especially no longer as tolerant as it used to be. You are going to live among a people whose culture differs in so many ways from ours. So you should always learn to know the people’s values and culture. I hope you will not forget also to mind the kind of friends you will be making in that place?”

Terfa listened attentively to his mother’s advice. Her words sunk into his hear and he thanked her a great deal. She rose to leave the room and wondered aloud if Pauline would really visit as she promised.

Terfa still expressed hope, saying “Aunty Susanna told me that Pauline hardly fails in her promises.”

“It’s alright, let’s hope she comes,” she replied and walked out of the room, shutting the door behind her.

Terfa completed arranging the books and files back in the drawers and lay on the bed to flip through the pages of the atlas he had just found. The first page, which he stopped at, contained the map of Ijovgemanya federation showing the country’s thirty-six states and the new capital, Aboshansha.

He particularly focused his attention on some prominent locations in the state of Awenabo while wondering which of the towns he would later be posted to. He looked at the position of the state’s orientation camp, Saaiutu, and knew that he would be there very shortly. Although he had been passing through Saaiutu on his way to Yashaageva,

Terfa never thought that he would be reporting there someday for an orientation course. “Such is the unpredictability of life’s events,” he reflected within himself and slept off with the Macmillan atlas left covered on his chest.

In the early hours of the following morning, he was awakened by the loud cry of Mr. Tyohuna Zanzanje’s most senior wife, Ngunyi. Tyohuna was a notorious drunkard and next door neighbour of the Damsas. He was notorious for battering his wives and children over trivial matters. Over the years, his irresponsible behaviour had become a source of concern to his immediate neighbours. In fact, many of Tyohuna’s neighbours who got tired of separating fights in his home did resolve not to intervene in the commotions in the home again. It was always said that members of his Tyohuna’s family were somehow used to his harassment.

A typical Awange man, though seriously lacking in character, Tyohuna had over a dozen children from his five wives. In physical appearance and character, most of Tyohuna’s children looked exactly like him. Not a few of the children dropped out of school to take to touting in the neighbourhood and well beyond. Like father like child, some of the grown up children had the guts to beat up their mothers and Tyohuna’s other wives at the slightest provocation.

Tyohuna Zanzanje’s home was a hub of immorality. His unmarried daughters and sons indulged in sexual immorality with their visiting lovers right in their father’s home. No one had the moral ground to tell the children a thing since they all grew up in their father’s house practically fending for themselves. The ones who cared a bit even supported their mother and siblings with whatever material things they brought from outside unaccounted for.

That Tyohuna's lifestyle was not an isolated case in Deinyakperan community had come to be a well-known fact. To quite a number of Deinyakperan residents whose consciences were still intact, the rising wave of immorality in the community was a thing to be ashamed of. Very much like what obtained in some other notorious households in the town, two of Tyohuna's daughters who both absconded with men in the name of marriage, ran back after a year or less to stay in their father's house. There, the girls remained and produced children out of wedlock. Quite regularly, they showed up at social functions with all sorts of men.

Their brothers and half-brothers were not any different. Expectedly, they too were not given to marrying and staying up to a year with their spouse before calling it quit with the marriage. That very morning that Tyohuna's eldest wife, Ngunyi, cried and awakened Terfa, it was the eldest of her sons who bullied her. His reason for beating up his mother was as embarrassing as the act itself. He had returned home the previous evening and asked his mother for food, which was not available. Infuriated and without shame, he picked quarrel with his mother the following morning and indeed gave the poor woman some hard blows.

His mother's early morning was unusually loud and did attract the attention of many neighbours and sympathizers. Even neighbours who previously vowed to not have anything to do with the Tyohunas showed at the scene in sympathy. At first, they thought that the bully at work was Tyohuna himself. They were wrong. It was Ngunyi's eldest son, Ihomkor, who had shamelessly engaged her in a fight.

Terfa rose from his bed and went to Tyohuna's home to find out what happened there. He met scores of other neighbours there sympathising with Ngunyi and haulin curses on her son, Ihomkor.

Terfa's cell phone rang twice when he was at Tyohuna's place. But as due to the very high noise level in the compound, he did not even bother to find out who the caller was. Sooner after he ignored the two phone calls, Terfa's youngest sister, Ikpensaren came running from their home that a visitor had just arrived and sought to see him. He wondered who it was that came so early in the morning to see him. But his sister told him that it was Pauline who came.

"Is she the one that just called me twice?" an excited Terfa asked his sister as both of them turned to get back home.

"Yes, she called twice but you did not receive the call, that's why I had to come and inform you," replied Ikpensaren.

"It least occurred to me that she was the one calling. And again, there was no way I could answer the calls in that noisy place."

Pauline was in the sitting room with his parents when Terfa returned from Tyohuna's house. She got to Susanna's home the previous evening and was told that Terfa had just left there. Although she made several attempts to call and notify him on his cell phone that she just arrived, she was unable to get through due to poor network coverage. The following morning, she rose early to see him and his parents and quickly get back to Mabugu the same day.

His parents were very glad to see her once again. They both expressed appreciation to her for taking the pains to come. And so did Terfa, more so that Pauline

by her coming proved the pessimistic posture of his friends wrong. Fortunately for him, two of the friends were around to greet Pauline when he sent his younger sister to inform them that she was in town.

Pauline, on her part, was so satisfied with the warm reception that Terfa and his relatives accorded her. His parents particularly lamented that she had only a very short time to spend with them. Given her eagerness to timely report to her orientation camp, she assured his parents that she would visit them again as soon as time permitted. Apparently appreciative of her efforts at coming, the entire family happily trooped out and saw her off to the motor park.

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CHAPTER NINE

Terfa's journey to Saaiutu was quite memorable. He took off from Deinyakperan as early as 7 A.M on October 1, which is Ijovgemanya's Independence Day. He could wait to listen to Radio Ijovgemanya's network news at 7 A.M. Terfa never missed the early morning national network news, ordinarily. But the IYSC orientation course was due to commence on the second day of October. Therefore, he took off for Saaiutu on the first day of the month to arrive on time for orientation. His maternal uncle lived and worked in Saaiutu.

Terfa had met with his uncle only once. That was when the former was just five years old. His uncle left Awangeland after college for the southern part of Ijovgemanya in search of greener pastures. His long-term employment with Ijovgemanya Telecommunications (IJOVTEL) Plc took him to many places across the nation, the most recent being Saaiutu. Although he met him only once, Terfa heard so much about his uncle, Mr. Tordue's hospitality. Most people at Terfa's mother's place really spoke well of Tordue. Indeed some of them did visit Tordue in the various locations that his work took him and never went back disappointed. He was said to be very popular among his IJOVTEL co-workers.

From his home in Deinyakperan, Terfa's relatives and friends saw him off to the town's main motor park. Ikpensaren, the youngest of his sisters, carried his bag and while Mimidoo, her immediate younger sister helped with his compact disc player and suitcase.

A couple of his friends and extended family members who earlier participated in the national youth service called his attention to the rampant theft cases at orientation camps. As a result, he decided on taking along with him just a few important items that

he would need at the camp. But his mother advised him to take all the items that he would need even after the orientation camp and keep them in his uncles's home at Saaiutu pending completion of the orientation exercise. This, according to her, was better than risking his life on the deadly Ijovgemanya roads to rush home after orientation exercise.

The desire to be part of the national service had grown so strong in Terfa that he did not so much feel his departure from home. At first he was disappointed that his posting to Yashaageva did not materialise. But after repeated appeals to him to be calm, he finally took a rational decision to accept his posting to Awenabo. Pauline's worry over his predicament also encouraged him. She too was truly not happy that he missed the Yashaageva posting. All the same, it was she who persuaded him the most not to risk going to Aboshansha to seek for a change in the posting.

In an even more consoling manner, she promised him a brief visit and actually lived up to her promise. His mother actually acknowledged that fact when she told him at the motor park on his way to the orientation camp that but for Pauline's persuasion, he would hardly have accepted his posting.

There were very many intending travellers at the Mbamanahom Motor Park in Deinyakperan that one could hardly believe it was Ijovgemanya's Independence Day. Commercial vehicles with their destination tags on top of their roofs were loading and leaving the park one after the other. Road transport union officials and conductors were also busy with their destination verbal announcements and passenger loading duties.

On arrival at the park, Terfa realized that the last car had just loaded fully and left. Consequently, a conductor advised him to sit and wait for the next vehicle that was

booked to load. He sat but, however, expressed surprise that the independence celebrations did not deter many people from travelling. An intending traveller next to him made the same observation, saying, "I am surprised that many people are travelling on Ijovgemanya's Independence Day. Years back, when the country was still good, it was not like this."

"That is quite true, sir," Terfa supported his statement.

"But what do you think is responsible for this change of attitude?" the man inquired.

"Well, I cannot really say why," said Terfa. "But I think that because Ijovgemanyan people are simply tired of politician's continued performance. People have become more business-minded. Again, not many Ijovgemanya citizens still look up to government and politicians for improved quality of life. This has led many citizens not to have much regard for public holidays again."

"You seem to be making a good point here," said the other man. Terfa shook his head and shifted his attention to a discussion his mother's was having with a motor conductor.

"Are you sure another Saaiutu-bound vehicle will load here again today?" She asked.

"I no dey sure, Madam," the conductor said in Pidgin English. "The last buses to Yashaageva and Saaiutu don already go. Make una enter motor reach Swemkalagbe. Na there una go get Saaiutu-Yashaageva motor direct."

"Thank you," said Terfa's mother.

"No problem, Ma," the teeth-stained conductor said and went his way.

Just after the discussion with the conductor, Terfa decided that it was better for him to board a taxi to Swemkalagbe. His parents left him at that point to return home.

It was not difficult getting a Yashaageva-Saaiutu bound vehicle at Swemkalagbe main Motor Park. Terfa entered a Peugeot 504 station wagon at the park. It was already half-filled with mainly Yashaageva passengers. He sat in the rear seat beside a young man who was reading through a newspaper with keen interest. The young man casually greeted him as he entered, and before Terfa could reply he had already resumed his reading.

The day was sunny and everyone in the car sweated profusely. Even with all the doors of the Peugeot Salon car opened, there still was no significant improvement in air supply. A road transport union official in uniform kept announcing the vehicle's destination in anticipation of more passengers even as already seated passengers grew impatient as they sweated in the vehicle. One particularly irritant man hissed rhythmically and rendered some angry words while the other passengers insulted the driver who was said to have gone to eat at an adjoining makeshift restaurant.

"Just imagine that idiot," a harsh voice came from a passenger in the middle seat. "How can he leave us in this scorching sun and go his way."

"Don't worry," the passenger with a newspaper next to Terfa interjected. "If he doesn't come back in the next ten minutes we will all get down and look for another vehicle."

But just before he could finish his statement, yet another passenger in the rear seat started to sound the vehicle horn in long rhythms. As he sounded the horn, the driver came running with clenched fists to call the person sounding his horn to order. Without

rendering apologies to any one, he sternly warned the man that sounded the horn not to try it again. Almost immediately, he ordered the road traffic union official in uniform to collect passengers' fares. Enraged by the driver's lack of etiquette, all the passengers in the car rained abuses on him. A few threatened to get down from the vehicle if he did not come to his senses.

"You fit go down if you no wan pay money," said the unrepentant driver in Pidgin English. The passenger who sounded the horn grew more annoyed following the driver's words and threatened, "My friend, respect yourself or else I will slap you".

"No be me you go slap", replied the driver, pointing his forefinger into the man's face, "Na your Mama". The passenger seized the driver's hand and jumped down from the vehicle to give him a good fight, but other passengers timely separated them to forestall pandemonium.

The uniformed union official paid no attention to what was happening but rather moved round to collect fare from passengers. After he counted the money he had collected from the first passenger, he asked him where exactly he was going to alight. The man told him it was Yashaageva. At that, the union official shook his head in apparent disapproval.

"Yashaageva na two thousand gerasha, no be one one four," he said. The passenger counted six hundred gerasha and added to the one thousand and four hundred he had earlier given him and the union official moved on to other passengers.

"You na where, sir?" he asked the next passenger.

"Na Gberbo I dey go," the man answered.

“Gberbo na one five,” he clarified. The Gberbo-bound passenger also counted the stipulated fare and gave the fare collector.

“And you?” He proceeded to Terfa.

“Saaiutu,” Terfa replied and gave him one thousand eight hundred gerasha which he rejected, saying, “Saaiutu and Yashaageva na de same thing.” Terfa protested but the official stood his ground as he said:

“Whether na Akombowua sef you wan drop, your money na two thousand gerasha.” Infuriated but helpless, Terfa drew out two hundred gerasha more from his shirt pocket and gave to him.

When he had finished counting the money, the union official called the driver who came and drove the vehicle to refuel at a nearby gas station. He gave out an unspecified amount of money as commission to the union official and instructed him to share with the boys who helped to call out for passengers. The union official told the boys how much he was given on their behalf. As soon as they heard the amount, they protested to the driver and asked him to add something significant to the amount. The driver pleaded for leniency but the boys stood their ground. They milled around the front of the vehicle to prevent the driver from zooming off.

Unable to escape without dancing to their tune, the driver counted twenty gerasha and added to the initial amount. Apparently now satisfied, they all beamed with smiles and thanked him. The driver then started the engine again and drove off while his colleagues in the motor park waved at him with chorused Awange safe journey wishes of “za dedoo.”

It was about sunset that the Peugeot 504 Station wagon car stopped by the Yashaageva bye-pass on the outskirts of Saaiutu for Terfa to disembark. He was so tired and almost losing his bearing when he went down from the vehicle. After flexing his muscles and waiting by the bypass with his load for a while, he decided on crossing to the opposite side of the bye-pass to inquire of his uncle in Saaiutu. He held his box with one hand and his tape recorder and suitcase with the other. The items were quite heavy so he could not walk a long distance without stopping to rest and wipe off sweat from his face.

Slowly but without another option, he went down the street the bye-pass and stopped at an intersection to ask two approaching young men for the location of IJOVTEL office in the town. Although they spoke their native Akya language as they came, the young men replied Terfa in polished English. They were indeed very friendly. So friendly were they that they helped carry Terfa's load and led him back to the street he had passed behind. He was rather surprised and skeptical about their kindness considering the increasingly new patterns of crime that the Ijovgemanya society had come to witness.

After describing the location of the place he was going, one of the young men waved down a taxi and pleaded with the driver to take Terfa to his destination.

"Aga aza ya?" the young man asked how much in Akya language.

"Gerasha mgba tu," the driver mentioned forty gerasha as Terfa was told. The young men did some bargaining with the driver and they finally agreed on fifteen gerasha. Terfa thanked them, entered the car and the driver zoomed off.

The main gate of the IJOVTEL zonal headquarters was closed when Terfa arrived there with his load. There was no one around from whom he could inquire about his uncle, Mr. Tordue. Consequently, he waited in front of the gate till it became dark. After about an hour of waiting, an elderly man in security outfit came around from the opposite side of the main gate. He appeared to have been IJOVTEL's security man in charge of the gate.

Terfa spoke to him in English but he responded in Akya instead, shaking his head to indicate that he did not understand Terfa. Unable to communicate with him in English, the elderly man signaled Terfa to sit on a high wooden stool and wait for him. He headed for the gate, pushed it wide open and went into the building only to reappear with a younger colleague wearing a technician's overall. Terfa greeted the technician who replied and asked who Terfa was looking for.

"I am looking for my uncle by name Mr. Kugba Tordue," Terfa replied.

"Mr. Tordue? Which department is he?" Terfa quickly brought out his address book from his pocket to locate where he wrote his uncle's particulars. He flipped through the pages of the address book and told him it was accounts department.

"Yes, I can recollect the name," the younger man replied. "The unfortunate thing is that Mr. Tordue went on transfer to Ukebaja last July.

"Sir, are you sure we are talking about the same person," a dumbfounded Terfa asked.

"Yes it is the same man. I remember him very well," he said, "is it not that Awange man."

“You are right. Now I know that we are talking about the same person. That’s my uncle,” replied Terfa who also wondered aloud why his uncle did not notify anyone at home that he had gone on transfer since July. His immediate concern was where he could spend the night without any danger to his life and personal effects. Having not immediately found a solution, he took a deep breath and sat on a stool to figure out the next line of action.

The young man who had told him that Mr. Tordue was on transfer understood his plight and offered to accommodate him in his home overnight. But Terfa reasoned that accepting such an offer in a strange land would amount to risking his life unduly. Thus, he turned down the offer. His mind was not at rest especially as he remembered some of the dreadful stories of kidnapping and ritual killings that were alleged to have taken place in Akyaland in the past. With all these thoughts fresh in his mind, he opted to rather proceed to the orientation camp that night than be a victim of kidnapping or ritual killing.

Not knowing what to say to Terfa again, the young man whispered something to the elderly security guard’s ear. Terfa could not even vaguely insinuate what the duo had just discussed. Nevertheless, the two men stepped out and were about to bid Terfa goodbye when the latter asked for direction to the IYSC orientation camp. The younger of the two HOVTEL workers gave Terfa the description and immediately left with his colleague.

Terfa got to the Methodist High School venue of the orientation and found a variety of household wares displayed on wooden stacks and tables. There were no fewer than fifty men and women from the gate down to the point where wares were displayed by the time Terfa arrived. Sheds were also being constructed with more wares displayed

within completed sheds. Items displayed ranged from plastic products, cooking utensils and general provisions. Everyone around looked busy and appeared to have been speaking Akya language. To a stranger like Terfa, there was nothing yet about the environment that suggested that it was an orientation camp.

As he came in, Terfa wondered what was really going on within the premises. He would have thought himself to be in a wrong place but for a large banner outside the gate which bore “Welcome to Awenabo State IYSC Orientation Camp, Saaitu.”

He lifted his load and approached a handsome young man in glasses who seemed to have been overseeing every activity that was going on within the premises. The man who later turned out to be the camp director was very jovial. His handshake with Terfa was warm and he spoke at length using humorous words. When Terfa told him that he was a youth corper and had just reported to camp, the young man laughed and jokingly asked what was chasing him away from his home.

“My home state is far away from here, so I had to leave home early enough to arrive here in good time,” Terfa replied.

“From which state are you?” asked the young man.

“I am from Nyigh-sha-nyi,” replied Terfa.

“Oh, Nyigh-sha-nyi!” echoed the man.

“Yes sir,” said Terfa.

“Don’t worry,” the man said, “You are going to see many things here.”

As he was still speaking, one of his boys passed by and the senior IYSC official beckoned on the boy to come. He instructed his subordinate to lead Terfa to a temporary common room where he would stay till he was offered proper residential accommodation

in the camp. The junior official did as his boss had directed. He helped carry Terfa's box and suitcase to the brightly illuminated common where he showed Terfa a chair to sit and wait for the camp director. The temporary common room later served as registration hall for corps members.

By this time, Terfa began to discover the atmosphere within and outside the room to be peaceful and reassuring. In the large room, scores of ceiling fans were running at very high speed. The breeze emanating from the fans dried up his sweat immediately. In a short while of his arrival, news went round among some junior staff of IYSC that the first corps member for the year had just reported.

Following the news, a handful of the junior staff rushed to the large hall to catch a glimpse of the first corps member of the year. Each one of them congratulated Terfa for being the first corps member to arrive the camp. The seriousness with which they discussed the issue of reporting first to camp and the kind of attention his presence registered indeed embarrassed Terfa. Apart from the congratulatory messages they extended to him, the junior staff curiously asked for his personal information, which he provided with great humour.

One of the workers privately informed him in confidence that he would be made a Corps Liaison Officer or CLO for short. Terfa's hopes were raised by his informants' assurances even though he did not know what a corps liaison officer entailed. It was not so long after Terfa was taken to the room that the camp director came back to meet him there.

As he entered the room, all of the camp directors' boys who were already in the room rose to greet him. He returned their greetings, cracked some jokes with them and

directed that Terfa be assigned the first corper's code number for that tier of service. His instruction was carried out without hesitation. The rectangle-shaped laminated number code tag was pinned to Terfa's chest pocket. It bore the service year with "AW 001" written beneath it. The reverse side of the card contained the IYSC inscription and logo.

Having interacted fairly well with the camp director, Terfa became somewhat familiar with the man. He discussed freely with him and both of them laughed a great deal. But the camp director's boys, however, did not have the courage to join in the discussion with their boss. The camp director spent a couple of minutes more with them and left again with a charge to his boys to take good care of Terfa.

It was not long after the camp director left the room that his boys escorted Terfa to one of the newly erected food selling canopies in the compound to eat. On arrival, they introduced him to the food sellers as the first corper in the camp. All congratulated him while a few among them advertised the wares which they displayed, pleading with Terfa to buy from them whenever he felt like shopping for camp provisions.

When he was tired and reported to the young man's subordinates that he wanted to sleep, they took him to one of the corporers' hostel some metres away from the food selling spot. However, the hostels were still being tidied up in anticipation of the mass arrival of corps members in the days following.

One of the camp director's junior colleagues whom Terfa later discovered to be a porter suggested to his colleagues that a mattress be sourced and placed in one of the yet-to-be-occupied offices for Terfa to sleep on. The porter's colleagues agreed to his suggestion without hesitation.

The keeper of the camp's main store was approached to release a mattress for Terfa for the night. He accepted to do that but on the condition that Terfa would leave his call-up letter behind and picked it up the following day after returning the mattress. Terfa did as he was advised. He signed for the mattress on the page of a notebook which the porter gave him. His new friends assisted him to place his load in the room he was to sleep and departed for their homes. Alone in his interim bedroom, Terfa stayed awake for a short time and sleep off, having being already assured of a meal ticket the following morning.

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CHAPTER TEN

It was still dark when Terfa woke up in the morning to get ready for camp registration process. He cleaned up, returned the mattress he collected overnight and got to the registration venue. A few corps members were already queued up there when Terfa arrived the registration centre. All but one of the corps members had their baggage with them and some stood by a notice board to read registration guidelines.

As they waited, a female young IYSC official wearing marked T-shirt and face cap came out to make some announcements on the registration procedure. She instructed corps members present to step out and collect registration forms. Attached to each set of forms was a registration instructions sheet, which the IYSC official advised the corps members to read carefully before completing the forms.

Terfa was among the first ten corps members who presented their registration number tags and collected registration forms and meal ticket. Colleagues who came after them did the registration in the order they arrived.

As corps members filled their forms, the same female IYSC official went round the registration hall to repeat the announcements for the benefit of corps members who were just arriving. She even went ahead and pasted samples of completed forms at corners of the registration hall for all to see.

“Attention, please,” repeated the young lady as she moved from end of the hall to the next. “P. O. Box is not allowed in the home address column. Clearly indicate your street number and phone number.”

The registration process typically required corps members to queue up on arrival and submit relevant documents to the IYSC officials for sighting and ratification. After

that, the issuance of clearance papers to corps members for the purpose of hostel allocation and kits collection followed. At nearly every five-minute interval, more corps members arrived the registration hall and joined their colleagues who had already commenced registration.

The young IYSC official in charge of hostel allocation was one of the camp director's subordinates with whom Terfa interacted the previous night. Indeed, he was quick to recognize Terfa in the midst of many other corps members. After briefly exchanging pleasantries with him, the official asked how far Terfa had gone with registration. Terfa smiled and answered that all was well with the registration. Thereafter, he collected his kit, got a hostel allocation and went to the hostel to inspect his bed space.

There were only scores of corps members in the cafeteria when Terfa got there from the hostel to eat breakfast. Even as corps members were seated in the cafeteria, breakfast was not yet ready. Indeed, there was no indication that breakfast would be ready in good time. Although the camp cooks and cafeteria attendants were seen preparing the meal, they informed the obviously hungry corps members that breakfast would be late by at least two hours. Consequently, the corps members dispersed to their hostels and other parts of the camp, apparently to show up at the cafeteria again later.

Terfa went back to the camp store to collect beddings and kits. In front of the stores, there were separate queues for the collection of items. Thus, he joined the shorter queue, which was for beddings.

There were as many female corps members as there were males in the camp. Curiously, corps members engaged one another discussion as they waited. The camp

storekeeper who was giving out mattresses and pillows recognized Terfa as being the first corps member that the camp welcomed the previous night. So when it was Terfa's turn to collect mattress and pillow, the storekeeper greeted him warmly and asked how the registration was going. Terfa informed the camp official that all was well with him.

Corps members who heard from the store keeper that Terfa was the first to report to camp heartily congratulated Terfa. Other colleagues however ridiculed him both loudly and in low tones.

"Were you running away from home to have reported to the camp so early?" one of the corps members asked Terfa.

"No I wasn't, sir," Terfa replied.

"Na wao!" another corps member exclaimed, "you will surely win an award." The rest burst into laughter much to Terfa's embarrassment.

But rather than pay much attention to the scolding by some of his colleagues, Terfa abandoned their topic of discussion and talked about kits collection. That compelled his colleagues to give up their scolding for the newly introduced discussion on kit collection. When eventually he collected his pillow and mattress, Terfa thanked the storekeeper and walked away from the store area amidst shouts of "Corper 001."

The number of corps members that had already occupied their bed spaces in Terfa's hostel was fast increasing. By the time he went to keep his items there, the first four apartments in the right half of the hostel were fully occupied. Only two apartments on the side were not yet occupied. However, not one corps member was yet seen in the side of the hostel.

He placed the mattress and pillow on his assigned bed, which was the first and the closest to the hostel's main door. Curiously, Terfa took a walk down the hallway. He met and greeted three colleagues who had just arrived and were arranging personal belongings in their assigned wardrobes. One of the guys, Atahiru, returned Terfa's greeting and introduced himself and his two friends to Terfa. All were pleased to meet with Terfa.

"My name is Terfa Damsa," he reciprocated. "It's also my pleasure meeting you guys." As Terfa introduced himself, Charles, one of the three guys rightly guessed Terfa's state of origin.

"Your names sound like those of people from Nyigh-sha-nyi," he said.

"You are absolutely correct," Terfa replied.

"Interesting!" resumed Charles, "where did you study?"

"Unimabugu. I read Geology and Mining there."

"Ok – a – a – y, Mabugu is a very nice city with fine weather. And its university too is good, isn't that right?"

"You are right," said Terfa. Charles nodded his head in seeming approval and continued with the discussion.

"All three of us read from Unikumashe," he said. "Jude read Microbiology; Atahiru read Chemical Engineering and I read Political Science."

"That's lovely," Terfa complimented. "You guys are fortunate to have been posted to the same state." Charles and his colleagues from Unikumashe agreed to Terfa's observation and resumed the arrangement of things in their wardrobes. Terfa stood by

and discussed with them for a while before leaving them to go to the camp store again for his remaining kits.

At the stores, Terfa noticed that the queue for kits collection became longer than it was before he left for the hostel. All the same, he joined it at the tail end. Moments later, many colleagues filed behind him. Due to the long stretch of the queue, an IYSC official came round and split it into two. This enabled the store attendants to attend to corps members more speedily.

There were heaps of branded IYSC supplies in the camp's two stores. Each corps member who went for the supplies collected one crested vest, plain white singlet, and a pair of khaki trousers. Also given to every corps member were belt, shirt, socks, jungle boots and canvas. There was provision for corps members who received wrong sizes of items to exchange them for the right sizes. Corps members who collected defective supplies also returned them in exchange for good ones.

At the camp's mammy market, sellers of wares experienced business boom as corps members went there to buy items they needed. Tailors, photographers, and other service providers too were not left out of the business boom at the mammy.

Terfa had no problem with any of the items he collected from the camp stores. As the first corps member to report to Awenabo orientation camp that service year, the store officials knew and related well with him. When he was done with the officials at the stores, Terfa ate lunch in the cafeteria and went to his hostel. He dressed up in the IYSC khaki outfit and went round the camp to snap photographs.

Apart from activities relating to registration, there was no other definite programme on the first day in camp. Corps members who were done with registration

and collection of supplies either relaxed in their hostels or strolled round the camp to familiarize themselves with the new environment. By the time Terfa went back to the registration venue with Nathaniel, more corps members were trooping into the camp with their baggage. The number of registered corps members as indicated on the registration hall's notice boards had risen to three hundred and fifty up from the ninety-five that were recorded only just hours earlier. Due to the large number of people that turned up at the mammy market to buy things, prices of most commodities at the market increased considerably. Despite the price increases, there was little or no room for buyers to negotiate. It turned out that majority of the mammy market shop owners were IYSC employees or their relatives.

Terfa and Nathaniel walked to the registration building and sat in front of it to chat and while away time. Deliberately, they stayed away from the mammy market to avoid persuasive calls of sellers who were determined to make brisk business. As they discussed, Terfa found it difficult to convince that the construction work on the mammy market ended hours after Terfa arrived the camp the previous night.

"I am still telling you that most of the structures you are seeing there were not in place when I arrived yesterday," Terfa reaffirmed.

"I find it difficult to believe that," Nathaniel said, "Did you not say you arrived here by 7 PM yesterday? More over, the structures we are seeing don't look new"

"Yes, I arrived here by 7 PM yesterday," Terfa replied.

"That is to say that construction work got on till about late yesterday night?"

Nathaniel continued.

“Yes,” Terfa agreed, “As at the time the structures were being put in place, I did not have a clue that what was being constructed was a market.”

Nathaniel still found it difficult to fully accept the claims. As he paused and adjusted himself in the chair he was sitting, he caught sight of a who was just arriving the camp. The corps member was carrying heavy baggage.

Terfa also looked in the direction of the new comer. He was pleasantly surprised that it was his former schoolmate at the University of Mabugu.

“Akoji! Akoji!” he shouted the young man’s his name and got on his feet. Akoji heard his name, paused and turned sharply to find out who he caller was. He too was surprised to see Terfa. Quickly, he dropped his load and both embraced each other.

“Aluta Connection,” Akoji shouted Terfa’s other nickname. “I did not know that you too have been posted to Awenabo”

“I am surprised to see you here too” Terfa replied. “When did you leave home?”

“Very early this morning,” Akoji replied.

“And you?”

“I left home yesterday morning and arrived here in the evening.”

“Eh-e-e-n,” he screamed and carried belongings again. Terfa helped carry one of Akoji’s boxes as they walked in the direction of the registration hall. Nathaniel was still seated in front of the registration hall building. He rose from his chair and greeted Akoji just before Terfa began an introduction.

“Akoji meet Nathaniel, he read Theatre Arts from Unitem” said Terfa as he drew out a chair for Akoji to sit.

“It’s my pleasure meeting you, Nathaniel,” Akoji responded and held out his hand to shake the former. Terfa again turned to Nathaniel to complete the introduction.

“Nathaniel,” he said, “Meet Akoji. He is a colleague and just arriving camp. He and I both graduated from Unimabugu.

“It’s nice meeting you too, Akoji,” said Nathaniel. Both shook hands before Akoji asked Terfa about the camp registration procedure. Terfa explained the process and Akoji went into the hall to commence his registration. He was a strong former student activist who was respected for his charming leadership qualities. Terfa spent a great deal of time telling Nathaniel about the great achievements that Akoji recorded as a student leader.

“He was the PRO of our University’s Student Union,” Terfa said.

“Is that right? Nathaniel asked with deep interest.

“I tell you that guy wasn’t just a PRO, he caused great things to happen both within and outside our campus,” he said.

Nathaniel smiled and remarked, “Looks like the guy is a radical.”

“Of course, he is,” Terfa said. “I cannot recollect the number of times that operatives of the State Security Service invited that guy for a chat over students’ violent demonstrations, which he masterminded.”

“That is incredible!” Nathaniel screamed. “What did he read?”

“Sociology,” Terfa replied.

Nathaniel stared in Terfa’s face and nodded his head.

“I am not surprised,” he said. “Radical-minded people like him typically have Marxist orientation. At first sight, they appear unable to kill even a fly.”

He had hardly completed his statement before Akoji came out of the registration hall to meet them. As soon as they sighted him, Terfa and Nathaniel discarded their topic of discussion and Akoji questions about his registration.

“I have finished filling the forms and submitted them,” he replied. “It’s quite a rigorous exercise.”

“How about your number tag and meal ticket?” asked Terfa.

“I have collected both of them,” he answered, presenting his meal ticket and oblong-shaped laminated number tag.

“Congratulations,” Nathaniel complimented. Now you can fix your number tag and go for mattress and other supplies.” Akoji nodded his head, thanking them in appreciation of their assistance as they all walked to the camp stores.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

Akoji stood with Terfa by the window of the camp's main store, wondering if his undersized pair of khaki could be changed for him. It was about 6:00 PM but the queue for kits collection was still very long. Nathaniel had earlier complained of headache and departed for his hostel.

It was obvious from the large number of people waiting to collect kits that the store officials would spend several hours before attending to everyone. Terfa felt a stream of sweat running down his cheeks. He looked at Akoji and yawned.

"We may not be able to change your kits today," he said. Akoji replied in low tone saying, "I am equally thinking so."

"Can we then go for dinner and check back here tomorrow?" Terfa asked.

"It's up to you," Akoji replied, stepping back to straighten his muscles.

"It appears," said Terfa, "that everything in this camp entails either rushing or waiting for so long."

Akoji looked at Terfa and commented. "In this kind of environment," he said, "one does not need to be too gentle." Terfa took a deep breath and turned to him.

"Are we being too gentle?" he asked.

"Of course we are," an apparently frustrated Akoji replied and turned to read Terfa's countenance.

"We are not," said Terfa.

"Then why couldn't we change the kits today?" retorted Akoji.

Terfa took a prolonged look at him.

"Let's be sincere with ourselves. Were we being too gentle?"

“I did not say what I said to offend your feelings,” responded Akoji.

“Then what was your reason for saying it and at this time?”

Akoji looked at him and gave an apologetic smile.

“Just let’s forget that,” he said. “Remember, we have got to take plates from the hostel before going to the cafeteria.

“You need not remind me of that,” Terfa said softly. Both turned to a shorter path that led to their hostel.

“You are not serious,” Akoji replied amidst laughter.

Terfa did not say a word in response. He simply took quicker steps into the hostel and came out with a plate and meal ticket to wait for Akoji. Akoji similarly walked into the hostel moments after and locked his kits up in the box. He went out speedily and walked to the cafeteria with Terfa. Akoji ate his dinner in the cafeteria while Terfa took his to the hostel.

Terfa’s apartment mates had equally gone to the cafeteria for dinner and were not yet back. One of them returned to the room minutes after Terfa came out of the bathroom where he had gone to shower. Both of them exchanged greetings and soon after sat to eat and recount experiences they had as students in their respective university campuses.

Terfa found his apartment mate to be quite good at story telling. Throughout their more than thirty minutes of discussion, his roommate spoke humorously with renewed zeal. Terfa listened to him with keen interest and laughed a great deal, while offering several exciting words.

His apartment mate how fellow students in the university had devised unique hunger survival strategies to cope with the ever-worsening Ijovgemonya economy. Chief

among the survival strategies, which thrilled Terfa so much, were formulas 0-0-1, 0-1-0 and 1-0-0. These entailed a student's deliberate and continuous skipping of one or two meals per day to make ends meet.

The general study classes for fresh students in his university also formed part of Terfa's apartment mate's discussion. He related how some of his former could not graduate because they failed their general study courses, which they always took for granted. He also spoke about the scramble by returning male undergraduate students for their fresh female counterparts which was popularly known in their university as the "September rush."

Festus, for that was the name of Terfa's apartment mate, coated his stories with layers of humour and ended each with a fresh outburst of laughter. His irresistible words and funny gesticulations threw Terfa into prolonged rhythms of laughter, which caused him momentary pains in the lungs.

After discussing with Festus for quite a while, Terfa lay on his bed and thought about Pauline and his relatives back home. He also remembered the experiences he had during his last trip to Saaiutu. While this went on, the silence of the night inevitably descended on the entire orientation camp.

He desired to sleep but could not immediately do so as recurrent thoughts of Pauline and his relatives raced through his mind. When he remembered his firm promise to call Pauline, he rose from his bed, took his mobile telephone and went out of the hostel to call her.

They spoke at length about their camp experiences and issues relating to pending postings to places of primary assignment. Pauline was indeed happy that Terfa called.

Aware of the very high tariffs that Ijovgemonya mobile telecommunication companies charge their customers per minute, she spoke as fast as she could to save Terfa's credit. Despite the fast speed of their conversation, the telephone went off due to lack of credit just as Pauline was about suggesting a date that she would visit Terfa in the later's orientation camp.

Terfa retired to his bed after discussing with Pauline. He tried to sleep but sleep was not forthcoming. Once more recurrent thoughts about Pauline and members of his family kept coming to his mind. This made him wonder if he could have an hour's sleep before daybreak. Thus he remained awake for quite a while before sleep eventually ceased him.

The deafening sound of the bugle at dawn awakened every member of the camp community. The bugler, a funny lanky army lance corporal went from hostel to hostel and stopped in front of each to wake corps members up with his instrument. Scores of other rank and file soldiers followed the bugler. They entered the hostels and directed corps members to assemble at the parade ground immediately. Recommended dress for all corps members were the physical training outfits of white shorts, white singlet and canvass.

Terfa got up from the bed sluggishly. He sat up with cheeks in his palms. Fellow occupants of his apartment trooped to the parade ground. After a while of blowing the bugle, the bugler and two other rank and file soldiers went to the different hostels again. This second time, they banged doors and wardrobes while shouting at corps members who were still in the halls to speedily report to the parade ground.

Terfa hurriedly dressed up and was stepping out to the front of the hostel building to brush his teeth when a rank and file soldier shouted at him, saying, “wetin you dey still do here?”

“I want to brush my teeth,” Terfa responded.

“Quickly drop that thing and run to the parade ground,” the soldier ordered. Terfa immediately withdrew from him and was about dropping his toothbrush when the second soldier pleaded with his colleague to allow Terfa brush his teeth. Terfa hastily did that and headed to the parade ground. The two soldiers rushed to the other wing of the hostel and continued with their harsh operation.

Terfa was amazed at the large number of corps members that turned up at the parade ground. There must have been over two thousand, yet more corps members were still trooping in from the hostels.

Scores of mostly rank and file soldiers were also present on the parade ground. Also present were a few dozen policemen also mostly rank and file as well as Man O’ War instructors and physical training instructors. All wore physical training outfits and were positioned according to their professional groups.

For most corps members, it was difficult to guess what the early morning gathering was all about. All that one could speculate was that the meeting was to mark the commencement of camp activities in full swing. Based on the discussions that he had with camp officials in the evening of his arrival to the camp, Terfa had an idea of the process of forming platoons and appointing platoon leaders. However, he did not know the sequence which camp activities would follow.

On the parade ground corps members waited impatiently for IYSC officials to address the early morning gathering. From a couple of minutes the waiting went on for about thirty minutes without any official coming out to give an address. At a point, some corps members got tired of standing and sat on the wet lawn.

The sound of the bugle was heard again when dawn came. This time around, the sound of the instrument came from the direction of the hostels and was approaching the parade ground. The bugler and other rank and file soldiers had finished chasing away corps members from the hostels and were heading to the parade ground. The deafening sound of the bugle prompted those who sat on the lawn to rise up again quickly.

Before the bugler and his colleagues reached the parade ground, a Land Rover van installed with sophisticated public address system drove in from the direction of the hostels. It stopped near a platform positioned in front of the parade ground. On both sides of the Land Rover van was a bold inscription, “Federal Ministry of Information – Public Enlightenment Unit.” Soon after the van was parked, its driver, a soldier with the rank of lance corporal, and two Ijovgemanya young army officers disembarked, leaving the ignition and headlights of the van on.

One of the army officers, a captain, mounted the platform. A microphone with a long cable was quickly pulled from the van and handed over to the young army captain. The crowd looked steadily at him as he appeared bright under the lighting provided by the van’s headlamps.

He cleared his throat and rendered some greetings.

“Good morning all,” he shouted.

“Good morning sir,” the crowd yelled a response.

He took a deep breath that communicated outright dissatisfaction with the audience's response.

"Good morning gentlemen corporers," he greeted again with a much louder voice.

This time around, the audience thundered with a more prolonged response of "good morning, sir". The officer approved of the response and then announced the aim of the early morning gathering. He thanked everyone there present, particularly corps members, for reporting to the parade ground on time. Without wasting time, he introduced himself as the camp commandment much to the admiration of everyone present.

Although he deliberately refused to disclose his ethnic group and state of origin, there were rhythmic shouts of "Damawange" immediately the army captain announced his name.

After waiting for the shouts from the audience to subside, the army officer went ahead and introduced other key officials of the camp. It was already daybreak and the audience could clearly see anyone the officer introduced. He started with the camp director, a smartly dressed young-looking gentleman whose fine appearance attracted prolonged applause the audience. Terfa was quick to recognize the camp director as the official he first met on arrival to the orientation camp. It was the camp director who instructed his boys to take good care of Terfa and to offer him temporary accommodation the first night.

The second person that the army captain introduced was the deputy camp commandant. He was a slender assistant superintendent of police with bulging eyes and thick lips. His appearance attracted neither shouts nor applause.

After him came the chief inspector of IYSC in Awenabo state. A thickly built woman, she was noticeably dark skinned. Unlike the other camp officials that were earlier introduced, the camp commandant gave the chief inspector microphone to briefly address corps members. Her authoritative tone and good command of the English language rendered her admirable to many. Not a few corps members felt dissatisfied that the chief inspector had finished speaking rather too quickly. The camp commandant called out and introduced the chief physical training instructor and the Chief Man 'O' War instructor in succession.

The last official that the army captain introduced that morning was the regimental sergeant major, popularly known as the RSM. He was middle-aged and had widely spaced dentition. The emphasis which the camp commandant placed on his position caught everyone's attention.

Immediately he was called out, he smartly saluted the young army captain and took position, much to the admiration of everyone. His heavily starched and well-ironed khaki uniform distinctly stood him out among his colleagues. The camp commandant introduced the RSM as the father of the camp and the person in charge of general discipline in the camp.

Without wasting much time the captain handed the microphone to the RSM and, going down the rostrum, ordered him in military jargon to "carry on".

As the commandant was stepping down, the RSM saluted him again and climbed the podium, apparently to fully take charge of activities. His action was smart such that the audience could not conceal their admiration of him.

He took hold of the microphone to speak and everyone paid keen attention to hear what the 'father' of the camp had to say. He took a deep breath and cleared his throat before enjoining his rather unsuspecting audience to stand on attention for the singing of the Ijovgemanya national anthem, which he led. The recitation of the national pledge followed immediately.

Thereafter, the RSM thanked everyone in the assembly for having cooperated with him thus far. Instantaneously, the audience thundered another round of applause for the man who later was known popularly throughout the orientation camp as "Alias No Easy". There was no doubt that the RSM was most excited about the audience's response. He waited for the applause to die down before going ahead to explain the kind of person he was. That the RSM came to be popularly called "Alias No Easy" was, according to him, not an accident. As a matter of fact, his manner of doing things left no one in doubt that he was indeed a man of minimal words but plenty of actions.

Terfa was impressed by the simple but orderly manner in which the grouping of corps members into platoons took place on the parade ground. No sooner had the RSM finished introducing himself than he instructed all corps members present to move to his right while the camp officials as well as soldiers and policemen moved to the RSM's left hand side. There and then began the assignment of corps members to platoons.

Corps members whose code numbers ended with 1 were asked to assemble together to constitute platoon one. Those with registration numbers ending with 2 got together and constituted platoon two. The same method was used to form platoons three through nine.

Terfa's code number was 001. Therefore, he belonged to the first platoon which at the initial time of formation had 28 male and 21 female corps members. As it was later found to be the case with other platoons, members of Terfa's platoon 1 were almost totally new to one another.

Each platoon had an army sergeant as its commander. These were assisted by police, Man O' War and physical training instructors. The combined team of trainees immediately marched out members of their respective platoons to designated spots on the parade ground to commence parade training. As at the time platoons commenced physical drillings in full swing, the beautiful rays of the rising sun were already beginning to appear.

What still remained unresolved in Terfa's mind was the mode by which platoon leaders were to be chosen. If the platoon leader selection hints he got from some camp officials on the first day of his arrival to camp were anything to go by, Terfa thought he would definitely be appointed a leader of his platoon. If other hints from the same camp officials were anything to go by, Terfa reasoned that he would as well be appointed a corps liaison leader, having already secured the first corps member position in the camp. All these thoughts gladdened his heart and he wished that they came to pass.

The commander of Terfa's platoon was a handsome, middle-aged army sergeant with amiable looks. The commander was light-complexioned and of average height. His plenty grey hairs and exceedingly neat appearance stood him out among other platoon commanders in the camp. He spoke slowly but with great wisdom even as he tried to subtly allay the fears which the RSM's obvious tough stance instilled in most corps members.

As they moved to and settled in their designated area of the parade ground, Terfa's platoon commander introduced himself to the members as Sergeant Noah Olubodun. His military base was the Ijovgemanya Army Artillery unit in Ishe-sha-she. With his introduction now completed, Sergeant Olubokun instructed the platoon 1 members to form two equal queues with the shorter members in the front and the taller ones at the rear. His instruction was quickly carried out while he cracked a few jokes to relieve tension before the drilling started.

Little did Terfa know at the commencement of the drilling exercise that the appointment of platoon leaders would be based solely on the abilities of would-be leaders to march well and command platoon colleagues in a parade. It did not occur to Terfa that there would be intense competition among corps members for platoon leadership.

As he watched his platoon commander demonstrate parade steps and jargons to platoon 1 member, Terfa still contemplated his likelihood of being appointed a platoon leader. The Sergeant had seriously raised Terfa's hopes when he momentarily suspended the matching demonstration and demanded to see the corps member with the code number 001.

Terfa quickly came from the queue at the commander's request. His fellow platoon members all fixed their eyes on him. However, the commander simply congratulated Terfa and asked him to get back on the queue. And the matching went on again.

That morning's physical drilling exercise was supervised by the camp commander and his deputy. Both of them went round the parade ground and observed the happenings in one platoon after another. For those platoons whose activities were considered

unsatisfactory, the commandant and his deputy stopped to personally make practical demonstrations and offer some words of advice. The supervision went on till about 8.15 AM when the bugle once again sounded and everyone on the parade ground was asked to go for breakfast.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

The breakfast for the day was served and eaten on time, so most corps members reappeared on the parade ground before the stipulated time of 11.30 AM. The cafeteria arrangement was fast becoming more organized and result-oriented. In the cafeteria, Terfa ate his meal of bread and poach egg which was served with hot tea. He then hurried to the hostel to take his bath. When he was out from the bathroom, one of his apartment mates was going out to the registration venue and Terfa gave him some letters to post for him.

Left with many more minutes to rest in the hostel before going to the parade ground, Terfa lay back on the bed and waited for the sound of the bugle. He picked a copy of the IYSC handbook from under his pillow and flipped through it. What he found most interesting as he flipped through the document was the IYSC anthem. The anthem was written in three stanzas. Although Terfa could not get the correct tune of the anthem, he read its wordings with much clarity and understanding. The words were a plea to the youth of Ijovgemanya to obey the clarion call to serve their fatherland, with humility and spirit of oneness. More than anything else the creative bent of the author of the anthem did impress Terfa so much.

It was exactly five minutes to 11 PM that he rose again to go to the parade ground. Terfa got dressed up and sat down to wear his boots when his friend Akoji came in. Akoji was also set to go to the parade ground and had come from his apartment to fetch him Terfa.

“You have come at the right time”, Terfa said to Akoji after they exchanged greetings, but Akoji declined to sit down saying “let us not risk getting to the parade ground late.”

As they stepped outside and made for the parade ground, Terfa did not realize that he left the hostel without his code number tag. Akoji had his own clipped on to his chest pocket, although he did not at the time take notice of it.

As they hurried past the cafeteria area Terfa and Akoji saw a male corps member running back towards hostel with his code number tag noticeably flapping against his chest. Both wondered what must have prompted the guy to run at such a great speed.

As the corps member ran past them, Terfa looked into the pockets of his khaki shirt to check if his code number tag was there. He did not find it. Surprised and confused, he turned to Akoji and saw his own code number tag noticeably clipped on to the right pocket of his shirt. Akoji stared at him and asked if he had misplaced something.

“It’s my code number tag”, he replied. Akoji quickly looked at his chest to find out if his was there and indeed, it was. He then stood still at the spot and waited. By the time Terfa returned from the hostel to meet Akoji, the piercing sound of the bugle had once again started to rent the air.

Unlike the 5 AM morning drills, the 11.30 AM drills did not last long. Most corps members gathered at the parade ground before the last warning sound of the bugle was sounded at 11.30 AM.

To quite a number of the corps members that were gathered at the parade ground for the 11.30 drills, the absence of the camp commandant and his deputy was quite

noticeable. Only the RSM and the other camp officials were noticeably seen together with corps members on the parade ground.

As soon as he arrived, the RSM assembled all the platoon commanders and briefed them on the schedule of events earmarked for the second round of the morning parade. When the briefing was over, the RSM activated the portable battery-powered loudspeaker. He directed all corps members to “fall in” according to their platoons. But contrary to general expectations, the national anthem was not sung before the 11.30 AM drilling session commenced. After their meeting with the RSM, all the platoon commanders simply dispersed to take charge of their respective platoons.

The reassuring smiles of sergeant Olubodun kept most members of platoon 1 at home with their commander. Unlike some other platoon commanders, sergeant Olubodun did not unnecessarily intimidate or harass any erring member of his platoon.

When he returned from the RSM’s briefing, he instructed his platoon members to form two equal files. Everyone stood in their normal positions with the shorter ones in the front and the taller ones at the rear. It was obvious from his looks that commander Olubodun had something to say before the commencement of the parade practice. Terfa’s mind quickly went back to the issue of selecting a platoon leader. And his heart jumped in anxiety.

Just as Terfa thought, what commander Olubodun said centred on the selection of platoon 1 leader. According to the sergeant, the instruction to select platoon leaders came directly from the camp commandant to all platoon commanders. To that effect, the sergeant called for volunteers from platoon 1 to come out and demonstrate their abilities to match and also lead their colleagues in a parade.

Terfa quickly sensed in his mind that things might not necessarily go the way he expected. He reasoned that if the first corps member in the platoon, or even the whole camp, was to be made a leader, sergeant Olubodun wouldn't call for any volunteers.

Though disappointed, Terfa went out as a volunteer along with seven other colleagues. Altogether, seven male and one female corps members came out as volunteers in platoon 1. Thus, sergeant Olubodun allowed each volunteer three minutes to lead the entire platoon in a match past.

Sergeant Olubodun gave the first of the platoon 1 volunteers, a male corps member, a go ahead to prove his worth. The young corps member stood at ease facing the generality of his colleagues who formed a squad. He then shouted on top of his voice and called the platoon to stand at attention. Before he could say any other thing, the platoon commander faulted him that he had called his squad to be at attention while he himself was at ease. Everybody laughed at the first volunteer a great deal before sergeant Olubodun asked him to go back into the queue. Visibly, the young volunteer was terribly embarrassed.

The second and third volunteers displayed excellent demonstrations of their matching and commanding abilities and were asked by the platoon commander to wait aside. Terfa made a fair trial and was similarly told to wait aside with the second and third volunteers. But the last four volunteer corps members were all sent back to the queues on various grounds of incompetence. Among them was only female volunteer.

It later became the decision of all the platoon members to choose a leader from among the three volunteers that were asked to wait behind. Tension heightened as some members of the platoon disagreed over their choice of a platoon leader. Some said they

favoured the second volunteer. Others said they preferred the third. And yet others settled for Terfa.

Following a heated argument over the platoon members' choice of a leader, the platoon commander decided on giving the leadership contenders some additional time to prove their mettle. In spite of the commander's strategy, it was interesting that platoon members still could not reach a consensus due to the excellent repeat performances of the remaining three contestants. It therefore became imminent that an open vote cast was going to be used as a deciding factor.

Thus, the third volunteer polled the highest number of votes and was declared platoon 1's leader. The second volunteer, who also polled the second highest number of votes, was made an assistant to the platoon leader. But Terfa who had the least number of votes was told to join the generality of his colleagues in the queue amidst remarks that he lacked a loud and clear voice to lead a parade.

A similar selection procedure was carried out simultaneously in all the other platoons. In fact, it was scarcely concluded in some platoons before the state IYSC director walked into the parade arena to deliver a short inaugural address to members of the camp community. All the platoons and their commanders reconvened. The state director delivered her short address after which platoon commanders went back to their designated spots to round off morning's physical drilling exercises. Thereafter, corps members were allowed to return to their hostels.

Terfa was so disappointed by the unexpected turn of events that he decided to share his disappointment with two of his friends who were junior IYSC officials. Soon after the 11.30 AM, he removed some of his valuable personal effects from the hostel and

went to keep them with his platoon commander for more guaranteed security. The first of the IYSC officials he discussed with reassured him that even as he lost his platoon leadership contest, he would be made a corps liaison officer or at least be given a good place of primary assignment.

His second IYSC friend similarly gave him good assurances but observed an irregularity in the process of selecting platoon leaders that service year. He, however, advised him not to take the issue much to heart.

Thus, Terfa left his two friends and went to the hostel much more relieved. He learned, on getting to the hostel, that corps members' transport and October allowances were ready for collection. News of the allowances payment had gone round the camp like wild fire and, before Terfa could reach the collection spot, two long queues had already been formed. He joined the first queue where his number was indicated and waited impatiently.

Both queues moved at snail speed due largely to corps members who came late but fraudulently joined in the front. The afternoon heat was so intense it made everyone to sweat profusely. As a result, corps members trooped to the mammy market to take some cold drinks upon collecting their allowances. It was interesting to note the recklessness with which many male corps members spend money on their female colleagues without an ounce of reciprocity on the part of the later.

Terfa collected his allowances and went to the mammy market to take lunch. He, like many corps members who collected their allowances, shunned the lunch at the IYSC cafeteria in favour of expensive dishes at the mammy market. Their one and recurrent excuse then was that the food at the cafeteria was of low quality. It was only when corps

members finished spending their allowances that many of them resumed eating the food in the cafeteria.

That first day of allowances payment was quite a lively one for the entire camp community. It was a day for lavish spending. Business boomed for sellers at the camp markets as corps members rushed to buy the things they and their friends needed.

Terfa too observed this trend and wondered if Ijovgemanya men would ever be freed from this attitude that is a singular exception in Ijovgemanya's women's equality struggle with men. If it were Pauline, he thought to himself, spending all his money on her would not be a problem. After all, there was no doubting the fact that she was the one and only person after his heart; her being away in another a Yashaageva orientation camp, notwithstanding.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The fifth day of the month of October marked the end of registration for fresh corps members in orientation camps across the Ijovgemonya nation. It was a day after which corps members who showed up for registration were turned back by registration officials. The exercise precisely ended at twelve midnight. Although it was scheduled to end on the fourth of October, it had to be extended to the fifth day of the month to accommodate more late comers.

At the end of the registration exercise, a total number of two thousand and six corps members were registered in the Saaiutu camp. More than fifty other corps members were turned back at the camp following their late reporting. By the time registration was fully completed, the number of platoons in Terfa's orientation camp shot from ten to twenty-two, thereby making the use of the not-so-spacious parade ground difficult.

There was also an acute shortage of hostel accommodation for corps members as the number of registered people increased. Corps members who were registered in the middle or close to the end of the registration found themselves in overcrowded hostels.

The sharp rise in the number of registered corps members also worsened the sanitary condition in the orientation camp. Nearly all the pit latrines scattered all over the female and male hostels in the camp were messed up with human excreta. Similarly, the continued use of the grossly inadequate common bathrooms by the large camp population made those facilities to stink from untidiness.

Coupled with the smell of leftover foods that filled dustbins across the camp, the air around the hostels got polluted and became hazardous for inhalation. Flies could be seen on top and hovering around the dustbins in large swarms. The situation was

aggravated by the constant rains, which made the camp's muddy roads that were perpetually littered with used packaged water polythene bags to be sticky to foot wears. As each day passed and the sanitary condition of the camp, especially the pit latrines, worsened, Terfa's dislike for the camp environment increased.

The physical drilling exercises for corps members were intensified after registration in readiness for the swearing in ceremony. As the swearing in day drew nearer, Terfa was indeed happy that corps members spent longer time at the parade ground away from the increasingly nauseating hostel environment.

He was among the corps members who were selected ten from each of the twenty-two platoons to form a special squad that would later welcome the Executive Governor of Awenabo State at swearing-in ceremony. Unlike some other corps members, the special squad members spent longer time rehearsing on the parade ground in preparation for the swearing-in ceremony. It was quite a strenuous exercise which went on for four consecutive days.

In an attempt to boost the morale of the special squad members and get them more committed, platoon commanders and physical training instructors gave members of the selected group extra attention and recognition. The RSM and his commanders also promised the special squad members choice primary postings in appreciation of their concerted efforts.

The corps commander of the special squad, a tall, huge and muscular young man was directed to compile a comprehensive list of all his group members. Every member of the group gave their names to the corps commander and expressed optimism for a choice primary posting within the state capital or some other good town or organization. With

all these expectations, the special squad members did their best to impress the RSM and his subordinates. But all these promises later turned out to be a fake promise as membership of the squad never formed the basis for posting of corps members to their places of primary assignment.

The parade rehearsals went on in full swing until the day of the swearing-in ceremony. It was a memorable day to Terfa as it was for most corps members. The Executive Governor of Awenabo State, along with his large entourage, graced the occasion and made it tick. The army and police bands were also invited to play at the occasion. Expectedly, they performed to everyone's expectations.

Following the arrival of the State Executive Governor and his entourage at the parade ground, all the military and police band men, together with members of the special squad gave a national salute to the state's chief executive. The national anthem was sung and the Governor read his address. After the address, the special squad commander led the Executive Governor to inspect a guard mounted in the State's Chief Executive's honour. Pressmen, some with their cameras, milled around, and snapped photographs tirelessly. The atmosphere was, for a while, exciting and also entertaining.

When the Executive Governor had finished inspecting the guard mounted in his honour, he went back to the podium, escorted by two corps members holding Ijovgemanya's national flag, and stood at attention. Again, the special squad commander swung into action, calling on members of his group to be at attention. Following the squad commander's instruction, the members of the group advanced fifteen steps towards the Executive Governor.

Again, the squad's commander gave a loud instruction to his group, saying:

“P-a-r-a-a-a-a-de, we remove hair dresses, r-e-m-o-o-o-ve hair dresses”.

With an instantaneous response, all his squad members removed their hair dresses and held them still above their shoulders. Then came another command from the squad commander: “P-a-r-a-a-a-a-de! We give three happy cheers to the Executive Governor of Awenabo State”.

And for each of the three happy cheers the special squad commander would hold his cap with the right hand high above his head and shout:

“H-i-p! H-i-p! H-i-p! H-i-p”.

In each case, his squad members would do same with their caps and shout:

“H-u-r-r-a-a- h”.

At the end of the three happy cheers to the Executive Governor, squad members replaced their hair dresses on the instruction of their commander. Thus, the State Executive Governor dismissed the parade and departed from the orientation camp with his entourage. As ear-piercing sirens followed the governor’s departure, there was no doubt that swearing-in exercise was indeed colourful and successful. And the camp’s radio station did not fail to acknowledge the success of the event.

It was on the day of the swearing in ceremony that the camp’s radio station first went on air. Known as the Orientation Broadcasting Service, OBS, the transmission room of the radio station was located in the same building which housed the two stores in the camp.

Within the transmitting room were various electronic gadgets, which included tape recorders, amplifiers, a transmitting machine and microphone. A loudspeaker was connected to the transmitting machine with a long cable and hung in front of the cafeteria

about a hundred metres away from the stores. There were two other speakers positioned near the registration centre and opposite the mammy market in the camp. A message broadcast from the transmitting station was simultaneously relayed to the two loudspeakers and clearly heard in every corner of the orientation camp.

Soon after the Governor left the orientation camp at the end of the swearing-in ceremony, the duty announcer at the camp's radio station sent waves in the air, beginning with an introduction.

“This is the Orientation Broadcasting Service (OBS) Saaiutu,” he said. “We are reaching you from the stores building here in the camp. I am Agbo Nathans Onwuzurike, your duty continuity announcer, saying have a nice time with us”.

The sudden emergence of a radio station was a surprise to many corps members who did not anticipate such an innovation communication system in the camp. Some of the surprised corps members quickly rushed to the stores building to see the workings of the obviously effective radio station.

Meanwhile, the duty announcer kept announcing the station's programmes for the day. Other announcements were also alternated with cool music on the radio station. Through the same medium also, words of appreciation were extended to officials and corps members who helped in making the swearing-in ceremony a huge success.

The emergence of the orientation broadcasting station brought life to many of the activities that went on in the camp. The station's programmes were entertaining and educative such that almost everyone enjoyed them. There were regular request programmes involving corps members and camp officials. Lost and found items were also brought to the station's studio for announcement. Apart from that, the station

occasionally made announcements on behalf of guests that visited the camp and had difficulty locating their friends and loved ones. In a similar vein, the Orientation Broadcasting Service, OBS, was used as a medium for calling the attention of corps members who were needed urgently for one activity or another.

Even within its short period of operation, corps members and officials alike came to associate the OBS station with the most current and reliable news. In the early morning of Monday through Saturday, before the physical drillings for corps members commenced at the parade ground, the station aired its Christian religious programme which included prayers and meditations. The Christian programme was typically followed with news and news commentaries. It was only after all these programmes that the drillings commenced. Other news bulletins came up in the afternoon and evening of every Monday to Saturday.

It was indeed on the OBS station that Terfa heard the shocking news of the sudden demise of Tor Awange, his ethnic group's first class king, His Royal Highness, *Orchivirigh* (Dr.) Abanyam Atekombo. *Orchivirigh* Atekombo was respected by his subjects throughout Awangeland before and during his days on the throne. Indeed, it was as a result of the respect that the monarch had earned throughout his long civil service career that made the land's kingmakers to favour his ascension to the throne of his ancestors over and above many other more prominent contenders.

His high level of education and vast experience in government, coupled with his religious virtues, were valuable assets that *Orchivirigh* Atekombo ascended the throne with, much to the benefit of his entire people of Awangeland. During his reign, Terfa recalls that, *Orchivirigh* (Dr.) Atekombo confronted numerous social ills bedeviling his

community. He battled the emerging culture of expensive burials and high bride price among his people. Incessant land disputes and hunger were fought almost to a standstill just the way witchcraft, superstition, money politics, political thuggery, high rate of school dropout and teenage pregnancies were tackled.

A committed Christian that he was, Dr. Atekombo was least known to be politically partisan. While promoting peace in Awangeland, the monarch abhorred politically motivated antagonism and idle talks among his subjects. He it was who curtailed the growing levels of alcohol consumption and drunkenness among his people. Before his ascendance to the throne, *Orchivirigh* Atekombo's subjects had largely become addicts to the locally produced gin, *Ogogoro*, as well as to all sorts conventionally brewed beer.

That was the extent of His Royal Highness' popularity as the first class king of Awangeland. But just as late T. Number 1 Golozo, an erstwhile leading traditional singer in the land once sang, destiny has always had it that wonderful leaders of the calibre of *Orchivirigh* (Dr.) Atekombo do not live long on the throne. This, according to the late legendary singer, is particularly the case with the obviously unfortunate land of Terfa's people, the *Under vee*. To all well-meaning people of Awangeland, therefore, the sudden demise of *Orchivirigh* Atekombo justifiably raised serious concerns. There were serious concerns about rightly or wrongly choosing the late monarch's successor who would follow in his footsteps by further uniting the people of Awange rather than plunging it into chaos. In comparison to other ethnic groups in Ijovgemanya nation also, there were, indeed, serious concerns about the way and manner Awange monarchs stayed only briefly on the throne before death unceremoniously snatched them.

As for the Orientation Broadcasting Service, OBS, Terfa also remembered one early morning when he and his colleagues in the camp jubilated over the news of an increase in corps members' monthly allowances. The news item was similarly broadcast on the OBS. Upon hearing the news item, some of the elated corps members could not help but instantly sought to know how much the increase in the allowances would be.

On two separate occasions, commentaries on football matches between visiting teams and the IYSC team were run on the OBS. The last of the matches attracted a lot of spectators from within and outside the orientation camp. It was played in the second week of the orientation programme. Terfa and some of his friends equally watched the match. The corps commentator for the game was so fluent and fantastic in his analyses that not a single spectator could hide their admiration for him.

Spectators at the football match were not just happy that the IYSC team carried the day. The corps commentator's fantastic commentaries also refreshed their memories of the late legendary Ijovgemanyan football commentator, Ernest Okonkwo.

It was after the last football match in the camp that Terfa heard a radio announcement which requested him to report in the newsroom to receive his visitor. Upon hearing the announcement, Terfa wondered who could have come to the camp to visit him. As a matter of fact, the time that Pauline promised to visit him had not yet come. As such, he could not remember any other who had promised to visit him in camp.

With Akoji and two other friends, he rushed to the stores building housing the newsroom. To his surprise and excitement, he saw Pauline sitting on a chair close to the main door of the newsroom. Her expectant eyes were fixed on the way leading to the door. On sighting her host, Pauline jumped from her feet and screamed ecstatically.

Within the blink of an eye, the two were locked up in each other's arms, completely in deep emotional expression. Onlookers in the newsroom only managed to conceal their jealousy.

Terfa gave Pauline a warm peck on the cheek and, in a low tone, said, "you are welcome, my dear". She responded with a broad smile before they disengaged from each other's arms. Almost at the same time both of them thanked the corps radio workers who were present in the newsroom before walking out.

Terfa's other two friends, together with Akoji, were still waiting outside when he and Pauline went out of the newsroom. Pauline was quick to recognize Akoji whom she knew in Unimabugu. As a popular student activist in their Alma matter, Akoji was well known to most students of his time. Pauline exchanged greetings with Akoji and other Terfa's other colleagues.

Although Pauline easily recognized him, Akoji, on his part, did not seem to have known her before. But the cheerful manner in which Terfa introduced them and the other friends to one another made their interaction to be quite lively.

When they all left the stores area for Terfa's hostel, Pauline indicated to him her intention to get back to Yashaageva that same evening. Terfa did not object to her plan but only complained about the probable lateness of her return journey. Although his friends persuaded Pauline to spend the night in their camp, she did not yield to their persuasion. The law which restrained visitors from staying in the hostels outside the official visiting time was observed strictly. Being herself a corps member, therefore, she knew regulation well and did not want to put Terfa in trouble.

Terfa sat in his apartment with Pauline and two other colleagues. They chatted for a while about camp life. The other officially assigned occupants of the apartment were not in as at the time. He offered to make a cup of tea or coffee for Pauline but the latter politely declined the offer. Terfa made the same offer to Akoji and the other friends but none of them accepted to take tea or coffee.

Left with no other way to entertain her, he brought out a photo album containing the pictures which he snapped in the camp and handed it to her.

“All these,” he said, “are the pictures I snapped in the camp.”

“Ahh,” she responded with her eyes fixed on the topmost pictures in the album, “the photographs are many and nice”.

“And that must have cost a lot of money,” said Akoji. Terfa took a quick look at Pauline, then at Akoji and his other friends.

“You are quite right,” he said, “I really spent some good money on the photographs.”

One of the other two friends shook his head in seeming approval.

“You did just what you were supposed to do”, he said to Terfa.

“How do you mean?” Terfa asked curiously.

“Because you are a senior corper”, he said.

“Senior corper?” Terfa asked.

“Yes, of course”, his friend said, “You are corper 001, are you not?”

Terfa cunningly answered in the affirmative and he and the others all burst into laughter.

“How much per copy do the photographers charge here in your camp?” Pauline asked Terfa just after the laughter subsided.

“Two of the smaller copies cost eighty gerasha while a copy of the 5’ by 7’ inch dimension cost fifty gerasha,” Terfa replied.

“Surprisingly photographs are very cheap here”, she said. “In our orientation camp two small copies of photographs cost a hundred gerasha while a 5’ by 7’ inch copy costs seventy gerasha.”

Terfa looked at Akoji and their other two colleagues and shook his head.

“It seems we guys here in this camp are better off in so many respects”, he said.

“Are you sure?” asked Akoji.

“Yes I think so”, he replied. “Look at the way our visiting colleagues from other orientation camps complain about the small quantity and poor quality of food they are served in their respective cafeterias. The same goes for the non-cordial relationship that allegedly exists between them and their camp officials.”

“It’s true in a way”, another of their other two colleagues said. “We were together with Nathaniel’s brother when he called yesterday from Vesega orientation camp. The visiting young man was really surprised at the generous quantity and quality of food they serve us here. And look at the way he expressed shock over the enormous sizes of the cows that were brought to the camp ready to be slaughtered for consumption by corps members.”

“And yet corps members in this camp still complain in spite of all these”, said the third.

Akoji gain spoke. As he was still lamenting the exorbitant cost of commodities sold at their camp’s mammy market, there came an OBS announcement calling on all members of the drama group to report at the cafeteria with immediate effect. Pauline

fixed her eyes on one of the photographs that exceptionally caught her attention and listened to the OBS announcement.

“So you too have a drama group here,” she remarked.

“Yes, we do”, Terfa replied.

“And the four of us here are members”, Akoji added.

“Is that right?” She screamed, “It’s really interesting knowing that”.

As they spoke about the drama group, Terfa knew within himself, even as the OBS announcement went on repeatedly, that he would not be able to attend that evening’s rehearsal owing to Pauline’s visit. From their looks, his three friends guessed his seeming inability to attend the rehearsal. So they only bade him and Pauline goodbye and rose to go for the meeting.

“Please tell Nathaniel, guys, that I have a visitor and will not be able to go for today’s rehearsals”, Terfa pleaded with them.

Pauline hurriedly looked at the photographs once again and pulled out a copy from the album. It was one of the photographs that Terfa, in his complete khaki outfit, posed for in front of some Man O’ War training gadgets in the camp. Pauline handed back the album to him and looked with keen interest at the photograph she was holding.

“May I go with this copy?” She asked as she stretched her hand to show him the copy she made her mind on.

“Y-e-e-e-s, you can”, he replied after taking a glance at it.

“The photographer that snapped this has really got some good experience,” she complimented while unzipping her small handbag to keep the picture in.

“Yes, the man snaps good photographs”, Terfa said.

She brought out a small mirror along with some sweet smelling powder from her handbag to make up her face.

“I should be on my way back to Yashaageva now,” she said.

Terfa placed the photo album in the wardrobe and went out with her. It was getting late. They branched at the mammy market where he brought a plate of food and a drink for her. She ate the food and took the drink hurriedly while intermittently looking at her wristwatch. As soon as she finished the meal, Pauline and Terfa left for the Yashaageva motor park, which was less than a hundred metres away from the Awenabo orientation camp’s gate.

At the park, she entered a Nissan Urvan brand of bus and occupied a window seat in the middle row. He stood by the window outside the bus and discussed with her until the bus filled up and took off. Left alone and emotionally touched by her departure, he walked back to the camp, wishing they had spent a longer time together.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The marvelous things, which the almighty God does, are many. Not quite long ago, while Terfa was still an undergraduate at Mabugu University, he had an experience with a friend and agemate, which greatly revealed the good works of God among his people. As at the time of recalling his friend's story, Terfa still had it fresh in his memory; as fresh and well registered in his memory as anyone would recognize their spouse.

Jimmy, the focus of Terfa's meditation, was a native of Mbaazohozwa clan just as Terfa. Both were good friends and agemates, having been brought by their respective parents in Nyigh-sha-nyi. Terfa's parents were devout Christians who professed their faith with all sincerity. Being devout Christians, they brought up their children in the same faith.

Such was Jimmy, Terfa's friend's case. He too had parents who held religion very dear to their hearts. Terfa's primary and secondary education was also not without Jimmy. Both were enrolled in the Roman Catholic primary school in Deinyakperan town. They commenced school on the same day and passed out together. Their relationship grew even stronger when they both gained admission into Trinity College in far away Agenor and spent another six years together.

Terfa's friendship with Jimmy became a reference point both in school and in their hometown. It was indeed based on the inseparable nature of their relationship that after college Terfa and Jimmy worked out their admission into Unimabugu together.

University admission into Ijovgemanya's universities had become unusually competitive but Terfa and his friend studied hard for the matriculation examination and recorded a huge success. Although they were admitted into different courses, being in the university together opened another chapter in Jimmy and Terfa's friendship.

Registration of fresh students for the new session had commenced and the two friends wasted no time in reporting to school to complete the registration processes. As it was the case in all Ijovgemanya public tertiary institutions, Unimabugu had always had serious students' accommodation problem. The year that Terfa and his friend entered the institution was not an exception. Nevertheless, they secured accommodation in different halls of residence. Terfa was in Orngueinyaga Hall and Jimmy was allocated to Ikpayongo. Their stay in different halls nevertheless did not affect their relationship. Almost on a daily basis, one visited the other.

As at the time of registration and thereafter, many students' societies went round campus to recruit new members. In spite of the heavy advertising campaigns that leaderships of different societies embarked upon, Terfa and Jimmy joined only the Young Catholic Students Society. All went well with the two friends until the beginning of the second semester when Terfa began to notice that his friend was no longer showing much interest in religious matters. When approached, Jimmy's ready excuse was that academic activities had intensified and left him with little or no time for religious activities.

Terfa was equally beginning to experience the stress of academic work and reasoned with Jimmy to some extent. Nevertheless he advised his friend to balance the worship of God with academic work, remarking that it is actually God that provides everything to humans. Terfa's advice to Jimmy was great as Jimmy himself

acknowledged, but it did not have any effect. Rather than resume regular participation in his religious activities, Jimmy completely withdrew from them. He failed to even attend masses on Sundays, least of all, other weekday programmes.

Concerned members of the Catholic Students' Society fellowship approached Terfa to find out if, as Jimmy's close friend, he could do something to help Jimmy. Once again, Terfa approached his friend but there were no positive results. The fellowship resorted to serious prayers for Jimmy's redemption and twice sent its members to visit him. Jimmy's readily available excuse for boycotting religious activities still remained increasing academic stress.

At a time a lot of young Catholic students society members began to give up completely on Jimmy, news started reaching Terfa and other fellowship members that Jimmy had for long joined a secret cult. He was also neck-deep into the use of hard drugs. Initially, Terfa refuted the allegations with a wave of the hand. Indeed he spoke further in favour of his friend saying, "the Jimmy that I know has neither abused drugs nor been a member of a secret cult." Prompted by the drug abuse allegations against Jimmy, Terfa intensified interactions with him to see if Jimmy's behaviour was reminiscent of a drug abuser or secret cult member. Although he found no basis to believe the things that were said about his friend, Terfa nevertheless confronted Jimmy on the allegations.

Despite Terfa's dismissal of stories about Jimmy, the allegations rolled in unfettered. Curious observers even pointed out the times and places that Terfa could pin down Jimmy and confirm the allegations on the latter. One Friday evening, at about 8:00 P.M., Terfa again went to Jimmy's room straight from the lecture room. He met Jimmy

sleeping in his room and snoring unusually loud. Jimmy's roommates were not present in the room at the time. Thus Terfa sat on the edge of Jimmy's bed and tapped him twice on the kneel. He turned drowsily and went back to sleep. Terfa tapped his kneel a third time and called.

"Jimmy, Jimmy", he said, "Wake up and let's have an important discussion".

"Ah Terry," he called Terfa by the later's other nickname and sluggishly got up from the bed. Terfa looked him in the face but Jimmy avoided prolonged eye contact with his friend.

"Jimmy, my friend," Terfa continued. "What are all those things that people have been saying about you?" He pretended not to have heard Terfa and stole a look into Terfa's face.

"I ask again, what are all those things that people keep talking about you, Jimmy?" he asked again.

"I don't understand. What are people saying about me, my friend?" Jimmy soberly demanded.

"Reports keep reaching me that my friend is not only abusing drugs but also in secret cult," Terfa said.

"Damn it, boy! Damn it!" Jimmy thundered. "I say bullshit! These are entirely not true." His thunder sent cold shiver down Terfa's spine. Not only was Jimmy's response vexing, it was also unusual. Throughout their many years of friendship, Terfa never knew his friend to speak in slang.

When, however, his friend abruptly denied what he was asked, Terfa told him once again to desist from any acts that were capable of endangering his life. He also

urged him to return to God even as he said he was preoccupied only with academic work. Jimmy thanked his friend for the advice and Terfa went off to his hall.

A caring friend that he was, Terfa did not stop at that. Two weeks after confronting Jimmy, he neither saw an improvement in Jimmy's behaviour nor stopped receiving reports from people about his clandestine activities and drug use. That made Terfa to accost Jimmy for the second and third times. Jimmy similarly feigned ignorance of what his friend was talking about and told Terfa to stop taking the rumours that people peddle seriously.

Even though he was constantly praying for Jimmy along with members of their fellowship, Terfa resolved to notify Jimmy's parents of the sudden change in the behaviour of their son. In spite of the advice by some people that Terfa should just leave Jimmy alone, he went ahead and spoke with Jimmy's parents. His friend's parents did not only call several times to call their son to order they also immediately dispatched a strongly worded letter to him. Jimmy was not at all pleased with his friend. And his negative behaviour did not abate.

One Saturday evening, about two weeks to the commencement of second semester examinations, one of Jimmy's course mates came to Terfa's room and informed him that Jimmy was detained and interrogated at the campus security office. Reason. He fought and seriously injured a fellow student over a girlfriend. Terfa could hardly believe the story. The Jimmy he knew had never fought in his life. On the contrary, he had always been a man of peace. Although it was difficult vouching for a fast-changing friend, Terfa thought that going to the extent of fighting over a girlfriend would be unbecoming of Jimmy.

Nevertheless, Terfa went to the security office in search of his friend and found that the report Jimmy's friend gave about Jimmy was nothing short of the truth. Indeed, Jimmy did not only fight and injure his rival over a 200 level female *Ngbati* Microbiology student; he threatened to "waste" the guy if he did not steer clear of his girlfriend. But for the timely intervention of a very senior official in the Mabugu University registry, Jimmy's action would have, for the first time, landed him into serious trouble.

Following his release by the campus security personnel, Terfa quickly sent for Jimmy's parents to come to the Mabugu University campus without delay. The parents came speedily as demanded. But right in the presence of his parents, Jimmy denied all the allegations that were levelled against him. It was then that Terfa knew that something had really gone wrong with his friend. Jimmy's parents were furious and did express great disappointment in their son. Their son's behaviour, as they observed and openly confessed, had changed quite noticeably. His mum particularly observed, and rightly too, that Jimmy looked moody and somewhat unkempt. Up to the time of their visit he still bore the facial bruises which he sustained during his fight.

It was in his third year when he was neck-deep into drug use and cult activities that Jimmy, for the first time in his relationship with Terfa, warned him to get out of his life. That was during one of Terfa's regular visits to Jimmy's room. That day, Jimmy was unusually furious with Terfa to because the latter invited Jimmy's parents to school to harrass Jimmy. All efforts by Terfa make his friend see reason failed and he left Jimmy's room that day with a resolve not to go back there. That to a rather concerned Terfa, was no easy decision, and he stuck to it for only few weeks. Barely a month after

that incident, Terfa again continued to think of a way to save his friend from imminent destruction. But given the complex nature of the problem, he just could not arrive at quick way out.

Not long after, something distressing happened to Jimmy that was to later bring him closer to God even as Terfa thought of solutions to his problem. He had developed sudden and very serious eye problem, which caused him much pain and made seeing in the affected eye difficult. The problem resulted from the terrible beating and mishandling Jimmy received as part of activities marking the end of his phased initiation into a secret cult on campus.

For three consecutive days, he had nagging headache and experienced serious pains in the affected eye. He tried hard not to disclose his problem to anyone. But when he could not bear the pains any longer he came to Terfa and regrettably narrated the story to him. Terfa asked if he had received any medical attention. He said he did not and Terfa accompanied him to the university's health centre. The doctors that examined Jimmy's eyes at the Mabugu University's health centre said that Jimmy needed specialist medical attention. Consequently, the doctor gave him referral to an eye specialist at the Mabugu University Teaching Hospital (MUTH). Jimmy went to see the consultant the following day.

At the teaching hospital, series of eye tests that spanned two weeks were carried out on Jimmy. Still in the third week, the eye specialist seemed to have strangely found it difficult to diagnose Jimmy's problem. The results of his numerous eye tests were quite impressive. But the headache and the pain in his right eye did not subside. It was at the point of the eye specialist giving Jimmy another appointment in the fifth week that

Jimmy made up his mind to not honour the appointment. He reasoned that he was responsible for his ordeal and needed to do the right thing to alleviate his suffering.

Jimmy's attitude towards Terfa began to change for the better even as he still experienced serious eye pains and nagging headache. He damned the consequences of whatever would happen to him and confessed all clandestine and drug activities to his friend. For the many days that they interacted very intimately again, Terfa was utterly amazed at the ordeals of Jimmy as he related them to him. It baffled him that within a spate of just two semesters in the university, Jimmy could be so seriously influenced and almost destroyed by bad company. All the same, he was happy that Jimmy did not get to a point of no return before retracing his steps due to circumstances.

In spite of the pains in his eyes and his inability to carry on with normal academic activities, Jimmy was nevertheless happy that he confessed his activities to Terfa and resolved to stay out of bad company. Fear of reprisal attacks sized him as he resolved to pull out of his clandestine activities. But Terfa encouraged and drove him closer to members of Jimmy's fellowship who even organized a deliverance session for him. It was in the course gradually re-integrating into the Catholic Students Society that Jimmy was invited to a crusade at which God used a charismatic pastor to heal Jimmy and hundreds of other faithful. It was a life-changing experience, which both Jimmy and Terfa would for ever recognized as one of God's marvelous works among His chosen people.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The post swearing-in activities in the orientation camp turned out to be what many corps members perceived as routines. A day after the swearing in ceremony, an OBS radio announcement informed all corps members to go to the registration centre to collect their IYSC identity cards. The collection exercise was planned to be without any hitches.

But as was typically of most Ijovgemanya social settings, disruption of the process was experienced just after its commencement. A group of disorderly corps members who came late forced their way into the already formed queues, thereby bringing confusion to the erstwhile peaceful environment.

The initial arrangement required corps members to queue up in front of the registration hall. Every corps member was to submit their code number tag and in return collect a blank identity card to which he or she was expected to affix a passport photograph. Four fine artists invited by the camp authorities waited around to assist interested corps members write required information on their respective identity cards. This service, of course, attracted a charge.

Terfa admired the stylish way which the fine artiste he engaged printed on his identity card. Satisfied and elated, the former appended his signature in the space provided on the identity card and went to submit it for official signing and lamination.

When he had presented his yet-to-be laminated identity card to the official collecting them, the man looked at the code number tag, then at Terfa and recollected him. He read through his other particulars and smiled.

“Where are your passports”, he asked him. He dipped his hand in the pocket of his shirt and brought out his two passport photographs.

“Sorry that I have forgotten to affix the passports,” he said and handed the items to the official. “You’ve got to write your call-up and code numbers at the back of each passport.”

Terfa collected back the passports and did as he was instructed. He handed the items back to the official whom he also thanked.

“Come back for your identity card in two days beginning from today,” said the man.

“It’s alright, sir,” Terfa said and walked out of the registration hall. Quite a number of his colleagues still struggled to submit their code number tags in return for blank identity cards. It was the disorderly behaviour of some corps members that made the verification exercise to be slow and difficult. Indeed, it ended late in the night.

The breaking of each day in the camp marked the commencement of another round of camp activities. In the morning of each weekday and Saturday, the bugler woke up residents of the camp with his instrument precisely at 5:30. Consciously or unconsciously, corps members had started getting adjusted to the camp’s routines.

Virtually every one of them had come to know the bugler. He was a lanky, cunning army lance corporal whose built earned him his popular nick name of Cokeli. In his limited leisure time, Cokeli was in the habit of hastily drinking and getting drunk at the camp’s mammy market. Even in his drunken state, he would still request his admirers, notably corps members, to buy more drinks for him. Quite interestingly, such requests of his were hardly ever turned down.

Shortly before the commencement of the early morning physical drilling activities, the OBS resumed its transmission for the day. Latest by 6:00 AM each day, the station aired its prayer and meditation for the Christian members of the camp community. Then came the day's news and news commentary. After this the RCM or his designated representative would make some announcements before the physical drilling exercises commenced.

Breakfast time on Mondays through Saturdays was 11:30 AM. It lasted for forty five minutes thereby ending at 12:15. Even within this short period, scores of corps members would still eat their meal in the cafeteria and dash to the mammy market to eat, drink or briefly play one or two games before returning to the parade ground.

Quite contrary to the spirit of the camp, Terfa did not have special interest in any of the ladies he interacted with in and outside his platoon. He merely admired one or two according to the dictates of his feelings. Even as many colleagues tended to like and admire him, Terfa was not led to relate with them so intimately.

Many of his male acquaintances, however, had a different disposition as far as ladies were concerned. For these determined escapees from parental monitoring, camp freedom was an opportunity that must not be missed. Making the best out of the opportunity appeared to be akin to befriending and, if possible, sleeping with as many ladies in the camp as possible.

A male corps member in pursuit of this unholy mission only needed to arm himself with sweet words and sufficient paraphernalia for building castles in the air. With these in place, he could engage willing ladies in series of long friendship-seeking discussions that popularly came to be known in the camp circles as "toasting business."

Toasting was an expensive venture, not just because, it required the male corps member doing it to arm himself with sweet words and mouthwatering promises to the lady being toasted; it required patience, calculation, and when the chips are down, real time financial expenditure in form of mammy entertainments and also handouts to the targets . To female corps members who mostly had no business spending money on their male colleagues that ran after them toasting cost was noticeably and comparatively minimal.

Without in any way complaining, generous and determined toasters lavishly spent their allowances entertaining the ladies they sought to befriend. But it turned out that a good number of guys never heard about their female friends after the orientation period, not to talk of seeing them.

The second session of the physical drilling exercises usually came up at 4:00.PM. Typically, it lasted for about an hour and half. Soon after the session was over, corps members that registered for lessons in one of the three major Ijovgemanya languages went for lectures. Corps members who were interested in Man O' War activities went to a different venue to partake in them. Further, corps members that were interested in playing or watching football rushed back to their hostels after the afternoon drilling sessions exercises to rest for a while and return to the soccer pitch.

Skill acquisition lectures by officials of the Ijovgemanya Directorate of Employment - IDE - also held every Tuesday and Thursday evening. The IDE training session held in the cafeteria. It typically commenced at 5:30 PM. On those training days, all other camp activities scheduled after the physical drilling activities in the evening were cancelled to create room for the IDE lecturers. Attendance at the lectures was

mandatory for corps members and any corps member who failed to meet minimum attendance requirements risk being denied a certificate of participation.

Some of the resource persons for the IDE skills acquisition programme were drawn from the employment directorate's corporate headquarters. Other resource persons for the programme were staff of Administrative Staff College of Ijovgemanya (ASCOI) and other industrial and academic organizations. Apart from gaining new knowledge writing feasibility studies and managing of private businesses, participants were also taught the procedures for obtaining small and medium scale graduate agricultural loans. During and after the lectures, official IDE files and writing materials were distributed among participants.

Attendance taking at the IDE lectures brought Terfa and his platoon much closer than they were before the event commenced. In the course of the training session, Terfa sought his platoon leader's permission to be away from the lectures for three whole days. The young man's cooperation with Terfa made the later to receive his certificate of participation in spite of the three day's absence. In the last week of the orientation period too, Terfa sought and got the approval of his platoon commander and platoon leader to visit Pauline in Yashaageva.

But other members of platoon one who were not close to the platoon leader always complained about his seeming difficulty. Ekama, for that was his name, was variously described as arrogant, boastful and nasty. Terfa's colleagues from other platoons also complained about the Ekama's style of relating. He had on several occasions seriously clashed with his teammates on the soccer training pitch. Not a few

who played with Ekama on the pitch said he was the most physically aggressive soccer player they ever met.

His platoon was the first to participate in the designated one-day cooking which all but three of the camp's participated in. A schedule was worked out by the food committee and made available to all platoon leaders well ahead of time. Each platoon prepared all the meals for the day that it was assigned cook. The same platoon was also required to serve the meals it prepared, wash all used cooking utensils and tidy up the kitchen environment. Throughout the day it was assigned to cook, a platoon was exempted from all other camp activities.

As early as 5:30 AM on Wednesday, in the second week of October, which was the cooking day for Terfa's platoon, all members of the platoon assembled in front of the cafeteria. They were all in their physical training outfits of white shorts, white singlet and white canvas. The platoon commander, the platoon leader and the platoon's physical training instructor were all present. As platoon members waited with sleepy eyes, they spoke among themselves and yawned relentlessly. There was intense cold which made platoon members to shiver as they waited.

None of the kitchen officials was yet around to open the kitchen stores, provide foodstuff, cooking utensils as well as ingredients to be used by the platoon. To cheer the platoon members up and also make the waiting time less boring, the platoon's physical training instructor went in front of the gathering to commence some physical exercises. He started a song which the platoon members soon joined and clapped.

The physical instructor went about five to six rounds with the song and then stopped. But the now invigorated platoon one members asked for more. They were given.

About thirty minutes into the singing and clapping, the kitchen staff reported to work. They provided cooking utensils and ingredients while making some basic instructions regarding use of the items. Platoon one members quickly set out to work. They divided themselves into groups and assigned specific tasks to the groups. One group peeled a heap of yams, another did the washing of the peeled yam tubers and yet another sliced the yams. A fourth group fetched water and also rinsed cooking utensils and plates. Thus the kitchen staff were left with only the preparation of stew.

At intervals of twenty to thirty minutes, one of the four groups sat down to share some jokes, play and even sing and dance. Once, and while the food was on fire, all the members of the platoon sang and danced together again. There were few among the group who came with their cameras. These snapped several shots.

Terfa enjoyed the cooking experience a great deal except for the fact that some of his fun-making colleagues teased him for being the first person to report to their camp. One of the guys said that Terfa's early arrival to camp was a strategy for him to win a service award. Another remarked that Terfa's enthusiasm was an indication that he was the very first graduate in his locality. The third said, "I am still trying to figure out what the hell the guy rushed to Iwotange to do." As they said all these, Terfa's colleagues laughed a great deal. All these touched his heart, but he remained calm in order to avoid any ungentlemanly behaviour.

All the meals on platoon one's designated cooking day were ready right on time. For breakfast, the platoon prepared boiled yams and stew. For lunch, it was rice and beans. Eba with egusi soup was served for dinner.

Serving the meals for the day was another exciting activity for members of platoon 1. Again, they shared the work among groups which they constituted. While one group actually served the food to members of other platoons, others performed sundry duties such as washing and rinsing of plates and pots as well as tidying up the place. Kitchen personnel served other camp officials. As members of the camp community ate the meals that platoon one prepared and served, they generously gave compliments on the quality of what they were served. Most were to remark at the end of the rotational platoon cooking exercises that platoon one was the first and the best in kitchen organization and food quality.

Just as corps members were beginning to get used to camp life, they discovered that the orientation was fast approaching an end. Two and a half solid weeks had passed with lots of interesting activities being carried out. Corps members in their hundreds mailed camp greeting cards and personal as well as group photographs to friends and relatives.

The mammy market was now a hub of activities. Both day and night, corps members gathered at the market to interact, play games, take some drinks and snap photographs. The visit of the IYSC national director had also come and gone even as the tempo of drilling activities also lowered drastically.

Every blessed day, a cow was slaughtered for the consumption of members of the Saaiutu camp community. Although meat availability to members of the camp community was generally okay, corps members and camp officials who had friends working in the kitchen received more than their fair share of the supply. In spite of the

general sufficiency in food supply, allegations loomed in the camp that the heads and legs of slaughtered cows never went to the kitchen but to apartments of camp officials.

Apart from meals of bread and tea and rice, almost no corps member, except a dare-devil, was able to finish at once a meal served in the Saaiutu orientation camp cafeteria. The complaint about the food in the cafeteria sometimes had something to do with quality but absolutely nothing to do with quantity. It was quite noticeable that even members of the camp community who arrived the camp lean and hungry became robust and healthy within days and weeks.

There was a camp sick bay, which took care of the sick. Appreciably equipped with drugs and other necessities, the sick bay even admitted ailing corps members and camp officials on in-patient basis. Not a single doctor or pharmacist at the sick bay was not a corps member. Indeed, their number was large enough to comfortably run a number of shifts comfortably.

Quite some huge resources appeared to have been expended on corps members and officials in the Saaiutu camp. So huge was the quantum of expenditure on the camp community that a few fanatically patriotic observers tended to question the justification for such a huge and arguably unprofitable spending.

As each day passed and camp activities went on and, life in the camp appeared to have had a new lease. Members of the drama group staged interesting plays almost on a daily basis. Corps members and some camp officials always attended the plays in company of friends. There were also Christian and Islamic religious programmes in place for members of the camp community. Even the mad rush for female corps

members by their male colleagues had also slowed down as even the most flirtatious of ladies trimmed down their number of boyfriends to a manageable figure.

At nights, and especially before bedtime, the football field which doubled as a parade ground was never an attractive spot for anyone who detested immorality. Sights of male corps members engaging their female lovers in illicit sexual and other romantic acts were common. Much as male corps members routinely saw their girlfriends to the later's hostels, some mischievous female corps members saw their boyfriends right off to the male hostels. Nevertheless, the camp authority did not hide its dislike for indecent behaviour by members of the camp community.

Three nights never passed without some alumni of one university or polytechnic in the camp having their carnival. Such alumni gatherings were usually marked by merry making, high level social interactions and snapping of photographs.

Terfa was beginning to notice his popularity soar up as more of his colleagues and officials came to know him as the first corps members to have reported to the camp. On account of this, some of his colleagues congratulated him while a few others teased him. He remembered one of the teasers, a platoon nine member, who was surprised beyond reason, on knowing that Terfa was the first person to have reported to camp.

“Were you running away from home?” The guy asked Terfa after expressing much shock. Terfa downplayed the seriousness of the guy's question and simply responded that he was not running away from home.

“But what time did you arrive the camp?” the young man asked again.

“A day to the commencement of registration”, Terfa told him.

“Na wao! You will win an award”, he said and went away laughing with his friends.

It was that same guy who was later arraigned before the camp court, charged with stealing and impersonation. According to a source very close to the theft victim, the guy tore a bag belonging to his roommate in the camp and removed some money as well as his victim’s IYSC identity card. The impersonator’s victim, the source said, promptly reported the incident to camp officials who immediately swung into action.

It so happened that the day of the incident coincided with payment of corps members’ bicycle allowance. Thus, when the impersonator and thief went to present the stolen identity card to collect the real card owner’s bicycle allowance, he was caught in the act by a vigilant paying cashier. But as soon as the fraudulent deal was discovered, the bad guy dropped the stolen identity card and took to his heels. Although there were spontaneous shouts of “ole!”, “ole!” or “thief!”, “thief!” no one actually attempted chasing the thief. Nevertheless, the impersonator was later apprehended and arraigned before the camp court.

On the first day of hearing for the stealing and impersonation case, members of the camp community filled the registration hall-turned courtroom to capacity. The camp commandment and all the senior camp officials were also present. The presiding judge, the corps prosecution and defence counsels as well as other court officials were seated. The complainant and the accused were also personally in court.

Although the case was called and the charges against the accused read, the IYSC paying cashier who was the principal witness in the impersonation charge did not turn up at the court. Consequently, the case was called but struck out for want of witness and

evidence. The large number of the camp community members who came to hear the judgment left the courtroom disappointed. And the court never sat again till the orientation ended.

As the end of the orientation course drew closer, more corps members approached camp officials to lobby for choice postings to places of primary assignment. Most of the corps members lobbied to be posted to Iwotange, the state capital or at least some other urban major towns. The lobbying and scheming for postings to big companies and organizations were also intense. This was done regardless of the relevance or irrelevance of the lobbyists' area of training to the organizations they sought to enter.

The jostling of many corps members for choice positions made not a few camp officials the envy of the camp community. Even some very junior officials in the camp promised desperate corps members heaven and earth. The very morally bankrupt male officials realized the desperation of some ladies for choice postings and exploited the later sexually. Very desperate male corps members were exploited materially.

Terfa did not offer a dime to anyone in anticipation of a good posting. Nevertheless, two IYSC officials assured him that he would be sent to good place. The first of the two friends, a porter, told Terfa that he would either be made a corps liaison officer in a prominent local government area. If that did not materialize, the official added, Terfa would at most go to good company in the state capital.

As for the second official, being posted to a popular Saaiutu cement company was likelihood for Terfa. That, according to the official, was due to Terfa's geology and mining background. Terfa was not carried away the officials' assurances to him. All he

prayed for was an opportunity to put his training to practice and probably win an award at the end of the service year.

Other than direct lobbying of camp officials for choice postings, some corps members sought avenues to distinguish themselves in various camp activities as a way of impressing the people in authority and getting added attention. Members of this group were the ones who served on most of the camp's committees. They were also the ones almost always seen in the company of senior as well as junior camp officials, assisting in carrying out one task or the other.

On the night of the Miss IYSC and Mr. Macho competitions, members of the impression-seeking caucus group who dominated camp's social committee worked themselves to a point of exhaustion. Though held in one night, the Mr. Macho competition came before the Miss IYSC contest. In order to ensure a hitch-free social entertainment night, members of the social committee reported at the venue of the contests as early as 3:30 PM. They were the ones who arranged the hall and sold out entry tickets in addition to carrying out many other tasks.

Throughout the competitions, some of them stood at designated entry points and checked ticket holders in while barring people without tickets from entering the contest venue. The impression-seeking caucus was also responsible for selection of judges for the contests. Its members also manned the dressing room for both male and female contestants. And when at last winners of the Mr. Macho and Miss IYSC contests were announced, the inner caucus group members they were the ones who crowned them. By the time the twin events ended, every member of the social committee present at the venue of the competitions was completely worn out from ensuring excess activities.

Nevertheless, attendees at the events agreed that the programmes were not only successful but also provided much fun. Attendees at the events equally commended the sagacity and fairness of judges.

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Corps members throughout the camp received the news of the planned premature ending of the orientation course with mixed feelings. A rumour on the issue filtered into the camp on a Sunday evening. The news covering the plan was later broadcast on OBS station at 5:45 AM on Monday. As early as 5:45 AM on the said Monday, corps members throughout the camp had already “fallen in” on the parade ground. As usual, they stood according to their platoons.

Platoon commanders and other camp officials were also present. The broadcast of the morning meditation on OBS had also just commenced. The singing of the national anthem and the recitation of the national pledge followed that.

The news bulletin then came next. Top on the headlines was the change in date of passing out from the orientation camp as was announced by the IYSC national directorate. According to the news, the passing out event that was originally slated for October was being rolled back to October 29. A circular to that effect was reportedly sent to all IYSC state directorates across the country. No reason was, however, given for the change in the passing out date.

Immediately the news was broken corps members on the parade ground shouted for joy. Their thunderous shouts momentarily rendered the details of the news scarcely audible. The joy of the corps members’ apparently stemmed from the fact that they would soon be free from some of the rigorous and rather uncomfortable activities in the camp.

On the other hand, many of the corps members realized the fact that leaving the camp meant that they would begin to fend for themselves. Outside the camp, they remembered regrettably, there would be neither free food nor free accommodation.

Terfa listened to comments made by some of his colleagues in the platoon. One of his male colleagues, apparently not happy with the change in the passing out date, hissed and asked, "Why did they have to roll back the passing out date?" His question was not directed to any particular person.

"May be," replied a fellow platoon member, "The IYSC authorities want to save costs by cutting short the number of days that corps members were to originally stay in camp."

"That means we have just six days from today to leave here?" remarked another member of the platoon.

"Yes. It's exactly six days from today," a fourth member of the platoon replied.

"But Ekama," came yet another question, this time directed at the platoon leader, "Do you think they will slaughter the more than seven cows tied in front of the cafeteria within these six days?" There were loud outbursts of laughter.

"You will do well to find that out from camp director, my brother," Ekama replied the fun-making guy. Everyone laughed again following the platoon leader's funny reply and resumed listening to the remaining part of the news.

As usual, the news commentary followed immediately after the main news. After that the RSM made a few announcements. He spoke particularly about the planned endurance trek, which was scheduled for the next day. Ikyaator, a fairly big town about eight kilometers north of Saaiutu was the intended destination for the endurance trek.

With regards to the endurance trek, the RSM instructed all corps members to get their water bottles ready before the next morning preparatory for the activity. On the change in the date of passing out from camp, the RSM spoke briefly and then gave orders for usual morning drills to commence. And smoothly, the drills started and ended.

In spite of the emphasis placed on it, the endurance trek appeared to have been unfamiliar to most corps members. Quite a good number of them neither knew the importance of the activity nor could guess its nature and course. Consequently, they bombarded the camp officials with questions about the endurance trek when the parade ground activities ended that morning. Although the camp officials took time to explain the activity's significance and relevance, not a few corps members were left unsatisfied with the explanations given.

Among the officials that corps members approached and asked questions was Terfa's good friend who was a porter. The explanation that the official offered was to the effect that endurance trek was meant to expose corps members to a high level of stress by leading them to walk a long distance. The exercise, he added, was intended to prepare corps members for the various life challenges that they might face in their lives from time to time.

At the end of the interaction with his friend, the porter, Terfa returned to his apartment. He was satisfied with the explanation the official gave regarding the endurance trek. Terfa did not wake up on time the following day, although he slept early enough when he returned to his apartment to prepare for the endurance trek. Like most other corps members, he had relied on the earlier morning sound of the bugle to wake him up. In the morning of the day for the endurance trek, the bugler did not blow his ear-

piercing instrument early enough. It was blown only at about 10 AM during which time Terfa woke up.

Not long after he woke up, Terfa brushed his teeth and ironed his khaki dress. By the time he took his bath and emerged from the bathroom, breakfast was already being served in the cafeteria. Many of his colleagues in the hostel had already gone to the cafeteria and some were returning to their hostels with food.

As was expected of everyone attending the endurance trek, he dressed up in the khaki outfit and then went to the cafeteria to collect breakfast. The serving of the meal was quick and orderly. Terfa ate breakfast in the cafeteria and returned to his hostel to rinse and fill his water bottle with water ready for the great trek.

Hardly did he finish rinsing his water bottle than he heard a sound of the bugle coming from the direction of the parade ground. The bugle man went about the hostels and persistently blew his small instrument. Some smartly dressed soldiers followed him and kept announcing that it was time to assemble at the parade ground.

Terfa filled his water bottle with drinking water and went out to the parade ground. Other corps members were equally leaving their hostels to converge on the parade ground. Each one of them carried a water bottle and most a loaf of bread as well. Indeed, it was clear from the smiles on corps members' faces that the endurance trek would be an adventure.

In less than ten minutes of its being first heard, the sound of the bugle came blasting again. Its persistence this time around suggested that it was a last call for corps members. Just after minutes of their last call, the corps member fully assembled and, as

usual, stood according to their platoons. They waited for further directives from the camp officials.

The commander of Terfa's platoon stood before the platoon members and made some funny jokes in his characteristic style. As part of his jokes he asked whomever that felt him or herself unfit to embark on the trek to indicate there and then. A few platoon members raised up their hands in response to the platoon commander's call. But because they too were only kidding, no one actually came out.

At exactly 10:25 AM, the camp commandant, having ascertained the presence of all platoons and their commanders, came out to announce the rules governing the endurance trek. When he was done the camp director and the Man O' War chief Instructor also spoke briefly. After them, the RSM also spoke. His speech was much briefer than his colleagues' were. Then the great trek to Ikyator began.

Six appointed physical training and Man O' War instructors led the movement of the 22 platoons out of the camp. Two of the instructors each carried a large Ijovgemanya national flag and walked meters ahead of the contingent. The 22 platoons actually followed behind in descending numerical order. Members of each platoon moved in three lines and maintained a distance of about ten feet between from the next platoon.

As the two official flag bearers led the platoons and marched out of the camp through the main gate and on to the main road, designated security officials halted all approaching human and vehicular traffic. The road was indeed clear for the platoons to march on without any obstruction.

The platoon commanders together with other camp officials walked up and down the roadsides to ensure an orderly movement of the contingent. Also present and moving

along with the contingent was a group of over twelve photographers who snapped different segments of the procession almost ceaselessly.

An ambulance attached to the camp's sick bay slowly moved behind the procession obviously to attend to any corps member or official that needed medical or some other attention. Immediately following the ambulance was the camp's information van, which was adequately equipped with state of the art communication gadgets. Unlike the ambulance, the driver of the Land Rover information van routinely sped past the platoons at the rear, through the ones in the middle to the front and back to the rear again. As the procession got on, there were singing and clapping by members of the various platoons.

The singing and clapping persisted as the procession meandered its way through the numerous traditional Akya settlements and headed for Ikyaator Township. Silence only began to steal its way in when the contingent, on crossing the Yashageva-Temtakera expressway, made for the narrow tarred road leading to Ikyaator. At that point moving in three lines became difficult. The three lines consequently came so close to each other that circulation of air within the mammoth crowd was no longer free. As a result, there was intense heat, which even defied the generous transpiration that the countless giant trees on both sides of the colonial Ikyaator road offered.

The flag bearers kept marching on. They moved for about half a kilometer well off the Yashageva-Temtakera expressway and stopped at a disused fuel station for members of the contingent to rest. All the platoons behind marched on and caught up with the ones in the front at the disused filling station.

Some corps members and camp officials sat on the bare floor of the disused fuel station to replenish their energies. Many ate their food and took their drinks on that spot. Others carried their snacks and drinks along. The resting at the disused fuel station lasted for about fifteen minutes before the officials ordered the continuation of the trek. The group was again organized in the previous manner.

The procession reached Ikyator Township at about 1.30 PM. The Man 'O' War and physical training instructors who led the procession halted at an old primary school building on the outskirts of Ikyator town. All platoons and various members were instructed to "fall out" of the lines and have some rest. As they rested, corps members who still had food and drink with them ate and drank again.

While the people rested, a trailer loaded with assorted soft drinks pulled in from the direction of Saaiutu and stopped by the primary school football field. The driver of the trailer alighted from the vehicle to meet and discuss with some IYSC officials. After a brief conversation with the trailer driver the officials, the camp commandant called the platoon leaders and handed out three crates of soft drinks each for a platoon. The platoon leaders in turn distributed bottles of the soft drinks among their members and officials.

Terfa still had with him a loaf of bread which he had kept in his back pack and brought from the camp. While chewing the loaf, he drank a bottle of soft drink that his platoon supplied. Just by his right were seated three tired-looking female colleagues from his platoon. He cheered them up and they all talked about Ikyator town. Alice, the lady sitting immediately on the right of Terfa appeared more critical of Ikyator than the others during the discussion. She wondered why the name of the town was known far and near while the town itself wasn't so developed. But Terfa cautioned her by chipping in

that they might merely be on the fringe of the town without actually knowing its size.

After about two hours of resting at the Ikyator Primary School, the camp commandant directed everyone around to arise for the return journey to Saaiutu. All platoon commanders speedily mobilized their members and the return journey commenced in earnest.

For the return journey, the Man 'O' War instructors still led the procession at the front. However, the movement of the platoons was reversed such that those who were at the rear now came to the front.

In spite of efforts by officials to get everyone involved in the trek back to camp, scores of corps members got too tired and sneaked out of the queues to enter public transport back to the camp. Expectedly those escapees got to the orientation camp two hours or less before the generality of corps members and officials. By the time all the platoons reached the camp at about 4:30 PM, corps members who did escape the rigour of trekking were already on ground to welcome them. It was jubilation galore as the mammoth crowd of corps members and officials shook one another and shared their experiences of the endurance trek. More than a quarter of an hour elapsed before the endurance trek returnees dispersed to their various hostels.

Although it was rigorous, the trek was a good experience for all and expectedly, it remained the talk of the camp throughout the remaining five days of the orientation.

As camp activities drew to a close, all the twenty-two platoons finalized arrangements to organize parties or award nights. The aim was to bring members of each platoon together in a relaxed atmosphere. To this end, each platoon agreed on a levy to be imposed on its members. The levies ranged from 20 to 50 Ijovgemanya gerasha.

In Terfa's platoon, members agreed on the upper limit of 50 gerasha. Indeed all but two platoon members paid the levy in just two days following its approval. As it was done in other platoons, platoon one used part of proceeds to buy snacks and drinks for the award night. Another percentage of the money was used to purchase gift items for the platoon's officials in appreciation of their good rapport with platoon members. The remaining money was expended on rentals and sundry expenses during the award night.

Platoon one's award night held on the second of the three days that platoons were allowed to hold their parting social events. The event commenced on time at exactly 8: PM. The platoon officials most corps members dressed gorgeously in native and western attires. After the opening prayer, each of the platoon officials made a brief remark. The platoon commander was the last to speak. He spent his few minutes commending his colleagues and corps members for the understanding they had shown. Rounds of applause intermittently interrupted his short address which many agreed captured the mood of the event.

The award night was, by and large, without any strict formalities. Just after the presentation of gifts to platoon officials, corps members stood up one after the other according to sitting arrangement to once again introduce themselves. Each called his or her name and mentioned the institution he or she attended as well as the course read. When the self introduction was over, soft drinks and snacks were served everyone while exchange of banter filled the air. Lively music filled the air and everyone present was on their feet for a dance which turned out to last longer than anyone had expected.

Terfa and his colleagues had a good time at the award night. The event afforded them the opportunity to interact more with one another. With regards to quality of social

interaction, only the camp fire night later compared to platoon one's award night, perhaps because the former turned out to be the last activity before the end of the orientation.

Due to the publicity it attracted, corps members waited anxiously for the coming of the camp fire night. At last, it was right on hand. Preparations for it commenced as early as 7.30 AM with camp officials handing out a goat and a ram to each platoon. The goats and rams were to be slaughtered and used for preparing pepper soup for the camp fire night.

As members of each platoon took hold of the animals, they assembled at a chosen spot to slaughter them. Terfa's platoon did the slaughtering behind the camp cafeteria. Four muscular male members of the platoon volunteered to do the animal slaughtering and mutilating jobs. While they were in action, their colleagues watched in awe but tried to cheer them up.

The dismembered parts of the animals were handed over to selected corps female members to wash and do the cooking. It was another interesting scene which was characterized by riddles and jokes.

The occasion of the camp fire night proper started at 8:00 PM. Minutes before commencement time, the bugle sounded all through the camp as a reminder to corps members and officials to assemble at the parade ground. Based on some announcements days earlier, corps members and camp officials went to the parade ground each with a plate, drinking cup and cutleries. Sitting arrangement was based on platoons with each platoon commander taking charge of activities in his group.

From platoon to platoon, the camp commandant and the IYSC state director went round to sight the pot of pepper soup that had already been prepared. At each point, the

two officials stopped to say a few words and taste the pepper soup which a platoon representative served them. It was just at the end of the two officials' platoon to platoon inspection that the pre-arranged pyramid of camp fire wood was showered with kerosene and lit.

Flames grew, roared and went high up above the firewood pyramid. Officials and platoon members who were now being served pepper soup and palm wine consumed the delicacies and watched the fire flames in the centre of the gathering shoot further. There were loud and sporadic sparks from the fire which oozed out fumes and caused sections of the firewood pyramid to break up and tumble.

The pepper soup and palm wine consumption went on amidst jokes by corps members and officials. The fire flames subsided after going wild for more than thirty minutes and a rhythmic dance round the fire commenced. Platoon after platoon went out to dance round the fire amidst singing and clapping.

The intensity of the heat generated by the fire, coupled with the level of physical activity, caused dancers to sweat profusely. Minutes after members of a group went back to take their seats, they remained soaked with sweat. Jokes and stories kept making the rounds until the generality of the people got tired and started leaving the camp fire arena for their hostels. By now, time had gone past 12 midnight and justice had already been done to the numerous pots of pepper soup and palm wine.

Terfa returned to his apartment at about 12.15 AM and scarcely had an hour of sleep before daybreak. He, like many of his colleagues, stayed awake imagining where they would be sent on primary assignment. Unable to sleep, he got up and sorted his personal belongings in readiness for departure from camp after the passing out ceremony

scheduled for the day. There were some other corps members who similarly stayed awake and sorted their personal belongings.

Terfa had a nap and got up at 6.30 AM. He carried the mattress on his bed and returned it to the store where he had collected it. The activities that later climaxed the passing out ceremony commenced at about nine in the morning. Throughout the orientation camp, corps members ate their breakfast and gathered at the parade ground, most with their baggage ready to proceed straight to their places of primary assignment when the passing ceremony was over. Terfa got back his personal items, which he had earlier handed over to his platoon commander for safekeeping. Like most of his colleagues, he went to the parade ground with his baggage.

The mass departure of corps members from the hostels did create unusual silence there in no time. The immediate surroundings of the parade ground were so full of bags and other personal effects that it became difficult to rightly identify one's items. Cell phones of countless corps members and camp officials rang in different tunes even as other corps members made calls on their cell phone. Both callers and call receivers rendered the atmosphere with various rhythms of "hello, hello" and then all manner of talking.

In glamour and style, the siren-blaring Executive Governor of Awenabo arrived with some of his commissioners and other state officials to perform the passing out ceremony. The entourage was long and intimidating. In characteristic Ijovgemonya societal style, traditional rulers in all manners of royal regalia and paraphernalia, pressmen and dignitaries from all walks of life accompanied the governor. As soon as guests arrived, they were ushered into designated seats under the canopies on the fringes

of the parade ground. Many of the institutions and establishments where corps members were posted sent vehicles to convey the corp members from the camp. They were all parked on all the sides of the parade ground. Scores of armed stern-looking police personnel and plained cloth security operatives milled the entire orientation camp to provide security. Men of the Ijovgemanya civil defence corps assisted the policemen in providing security.

Soon after the Executive Governor arrived the parade ground with his entourage, he inspected a guard of honour mounted by members of the corps special squad. His Excellency, the governor, then read his address and the address of the IYSC Awenebo State director followed. At the end of their speeches both dignitaries posed for some snap shots with the special squad members. Joined by other distinguished personalities, the governor and the director went round the platoons to also snap with the generality of corps members waiting in the queues.

Corps members staged a drama sketch soon after the governor and his officials went to take their seats. The drama was about certain corps members in an orientation camp who bribed camp officials to influence their postings to places of their choice. Regarding the desired postings, the bribe receivers promised the unsuspecting corps members heaven and earth. It was not until the passing out day, when postings were made, that most of the affected corps members realized that unscrupulous camp officials swindled them. But quite interestingly, not a single one of the affected camp officials was in the camp on the day of the passing out. And the swindled corps members left for their unexpected places of primary assignment in frustration and tears.

The action-packed drama sketch was captivating and everyone enjoyed it. The governor so enjoyed it that he dipped his hand in the inner pocket of his overflowing *agbada* and brought out a bundle of mint gerasha notes which he presented to the leader of the drama group. With the bundle of the donated money clearly showing the colour of Ijovgemanya's newly introduced one thousand gerasha notes, it was clear to everyone that the amount the governor donated was one hundred thousand gerasha. A prolonged applause followed from the audience in appreciation with some fun-making corps members concurrently echoing some shouts of 'Alami' and 'Metropo.'

The passing out parade was over and corps members were advised to meet their respective platoon commanders to collect their letters of posting. Prior to collecting the letters of posting, most corps members were in high spirits. But as the letters were being distributed, there were wild jublations mixed with exclamations, grief and weeping. Those who were posted to places they desired or liked openly expressed their joy. They went about the parade ground jubilating and generously showing their letter of posting to friends and colleagues. But corps members who felt that their posting did not favour them wore long faces. Scores of them were seen angrily going about in search of known camp officials to lodge complaints. But apart from platoon commanders, no other camp officials were available in the camp. In frustration and deep shock, two female corps members who were bitter about their postings to remote villages broke down and wept in the open.

Terfa collected his letter of posting and rushed to the spot he had kept his personal baggage and other personal effects. On the fringe of the parade ground, he stood and opened the letter. "Atsehe Tsuegbatsele Mining Company Limited, Iwotange" was the

name he saw boldly printed as place of primary assignment in his letter. His heart jumped in disbelief, as he had not heard the name even once prior to seeing it in his letter. As he wiped his face in response to a cluster of already appearing goose pimples, one of his familiar platoon mates ran to him, curiously asking “Damsa, where have you been posted?” Terfa could do no more than sadly hand the letter to his platoon mate to take a look by himself.

“You like the posting, don’t you?” he inquired

“I am indifferent as of now,” Terfa replied. His platoon mate nevertheless congratulated him and left.

“I really would have preferred being made a CLO to being sent to this kind of place,” he said to himself and stared at his letter of posting once again.

Meanwhile, vehicles that some organizations sent to convey corps members were beginning to leave the orientation camp. While some vehicles left with only a few corps members in them, others could not carry all the corpors posted to their organizations all at once. For organizations that did not send vehicles, corps members posted to them had to find alternative means of getting to their destinations.

There was no vehicle from Atsehe Tsuegbatsele Mining Company Limited to convey designated corps members. Indeed Terfa did not know of any other person that was also posted to the company. However, Akoji, his former schoolmate at Unimabugu assisted him to board a waiting Ijovgemanya Television Authority Coaster bus to Iwotange. Akoji was not posted to the television house, but with the assistance of other friends, he too left for Iwotange by the same bus. As they departed, some cheerful

occupants of the bus sang and clapped while the thirty minutes journey lasted. And that made the mass departure from the camp less emotional.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

It was about quarter past three that the Ijovgemanya Television Authority coaster bus arrived the Awenabo State Capital. The driver of the bus sped past the federal secretariat complex and stopped just before the roundabout by the federal secretariat complex. Most corps members who were entering the ancient city of Iwotange for the first time peeped through the bus windows to catch a glimpse of the city.

Terfa and Akoji went further down with the bus driver and alighted at the Patisongu market roundabout. He and Akoji were the only two corps members in the bus who were not posted to the Ijovgemanya Television Authority, I.T.A. The duo stood by the roadside and waited to take taxis to their respective destinations. Not long after they waited Akoji got a taxi that was going to his destination, the Ijovgemanya National Orientation Agency. But Terfa found it difficult to get a Taxi to the Atsehe Tsuegbatsele company site. He remained by the roadside, waving down Taxis and momentarily turning round to gaze at the ancient Iwotange City.

Many of the Taxis that drove past were full of passengers and the drivers refused to stop. Even the few empty ones that stopped by blatantly refused to go to the Atsehe Tsuegbatsele company site at Ikyoive. Each of the drivers that slowed down said a few things in their native Akya language. But Terfa did not understand what they said, not to talk of replying them.

Suddenly, it occurred to him that the Taxi drivers were asking him to make extra payment for the load he had. The normal taxi fare per drop within the city area was ten gerasha. But as he realised later, Ikyoive was well on the outskirts of the city. To the

driver of the next taxi that came, Terfa announced his destination and offered to pay twenty gerasha.

“Akwen su”, the visibly excited driver in his native Akya language asked Terfa to get into the cab. The latter quickly put his belongings in the boot of the cab and hopped into the front seat of the vehicle and the driver left immediately.

He drove right through the heart of the rocky Ancient City and out to the other end, stopping on the way to pick and disembark passengers at shorter destinations. Iwotange noticeably had many old buildings mixed up with the new. Some of the old buildings had unique architectural designs, some of which were better sights to behold than even the new modern structure. Terfa stared at the mixture of old and new buildings with keen interest. The permanent multi-coloured stains and rust on most of the building roofs particularly fascinated him. Indeed, he so focused his attention on the city's structures that he did not notice when the driver reached his destination. It was only after the later slowed down and parked in front of the mining company gate that Terfa suddenly looked up and saw a signboard bearing the name of the mining company he was posted to.

He alighted from the cab while the driver assisted him to remove his load from the boot of the car on to the ground. He gave the driver the money for the fare and the latter, while thanking Terfa, drove away. Terfa lifted his box and other luggage from the ground and went closer to the company's gate. A middle-aged male security guard accosted him. He spoke with unadulterated Akya language accent, but Terfa replied him in English while signalling at the same time that he did not understand the language that

the security guard spoke. Quickly, the elderly man switched from Akya language to a not-so-polished English. He demanded to know whom Terfa wanted to see.

“It’s the General Manager that I want to see,” Terfa replied. The security guard took a closer look at him.

“Na who you be, oga?” he asked.

“I be youth corper posted to this place, oga,” replied Terfa in pidgin.

“Oh, I see, welcome,” said the security guard, “but GM don already close today”.

“Em em, eeem,” Terfa murmured. “How about the other workers?”

“They too don close,” replied the security guard. “Na 5 o’ clock we dey close here, but see time don reach 6 now”.

“I see, oga,” said Terfa who became confused and at the same time short of words. He was worried about where he would spend the night so as to see the General Manager the following morning. The heavy luggage he was carrying was also a additional burden to him. Being a stranger in the Iwotange City, he did not know anyone with whom he could spend the night. He also did not have enough money left on him to lodge in a guesthouse for the night. Not really knowing what to do, he asked the security guard if he could allow him to stay in any available space within the company premises till the next day. The elderly man was blunt in his refusal of Terfa’s request.

“No, no, no, no,” he roared. “Me I no know you, how you dey make that kind request.”

“But oga,” said Terfa with a shaky and desperate voice, “I don tell you say I be new for this town. True, I no know anybody here.”

“My brother, me I don tell you say I no go allow any stranger stay here with me,” the security guard said. “Me I get family o. Make you no put me for trouble o, I beg.”

Terfa continued to plead with the security guard in spite of the latter’s adamance. The elderly man surprisingly was touched and did softpedal. He allowed Terfa into the premises but not without collecting the latter’s IYSC identity card. The small empty room, which the security guard took Terfa in, was well illuminated. From all indications, it looked like a disused store. Apart from being so dusty, the room emitted mucous odour. There was nothing in it to rest on except its dust-layered floor. Even at that Terfa felt grateful to the security man for obliging him.

It was about 7:00 PM that Terfa locked up his luggage in his “new” room and strolled out of the company gate in search of something to eat. The security guard described the way to nearby canteen to him. On arrival there, the filthy condition of the canteen and the unkempt looks of the caterers there repelled him. He turned back and walked to a nearby provision shop where he bought a loaf of seemingly stale bread with a bottle of soft drink. After taking the snacks there, Terfa returned to his “new” room.

He bolted the door of the room from within and removed a bed sheet from his box to spread on the floor and sleep. But after he lay on the bed sheet and switched off the light, mosquitoes started flying over him and making annoying noise in his ears. The noise increased in intensity and spread such that Terfa wondered where the earlier-unfriendly creatures were emerging. As many flew right into his outer ears he chased them away with the wave of his hands. Unable to bear it any longer, he got up and switched on the light. To his amazement, the entire louvers on the two windows of the room were wide open. Quite angrily Terfa closed them and lay back on the bed sheet.

And as the mosquitoes still disturbed him, he stayed awake all through the unusually long night. All he did while the night lasted was hiss and scare away mosquitoes as they flew under the bright illumination.

At 5:35 AM, he got up and folded the bed sheet back into his box. He went to the security guard and got some water to brush his teeth and clean up. The elderly man returned Terfa's identity card. Terfa thanked him and came out of the room with his baggage to wait for the General Manager.

The General Manager was in the office a few minutes before 8:00 AM. The company's driver who drove the general Manager in carried his boss' briefcase to the office. Terfa greeted them as they walked past him but the General Manager responded with a casual "hello" without looking back. He entered his office while Terfa entered the reception and saw the receptionist who urged him to wait. Thirty minutes later, he was called in to see the General Manager.

"Good morning, sir," Terfa said as he entered the General Manager's office.

"Good morning, young man. Please sit down." Terfa thanked him and took his seat directly opposite the General manager who was flipping through a voluminous document.

"So what can I do for you," the man inquired of Terfa.

"Sir, I am a youth corps member posted to your company", the latter replied.

"Interesting," the General Manager said. "From where and on whose request?" Terfa was taken aback, but he tried to conceal his surprise. Handing over his IYSC letter of posting to the General Manager, Terfa answered:

"Saaiutu orientation camp, sir."

The company's helmsman went through Terfa's letter of posting.

"You've not answered the second part of my question," he said, "But it's a pity we have no place here for corps members." A cold shiver quickly ran down Terfa's spine. He sat speechless for a moment, and then said:

"But sir, you've gone through the letter yourself. It's addressed to your company." The man, through his eyeglasses, looked Terfa straight in the face.

"Young man", he said, "My company did not request for any youth corper. Only the person that sent you here knows what he or she has done. You will have to go back to the person that sent you here."

Terfa thanked him and walked out of the office, disappointed. He lifted his load and walked to the company gate. He was weak and his feet could hardly carry him. The security guard asked him at the gate how his meeting with the General Manager went.

"Oga said he has no place for coppers," Terfa told the security guard.

"Ajagbo-ungwa-o-o," the elderly rhythmically expressed what Terfa guessed to be sympathy in the security guard's native Akya language. "And what are you going to do now?"

"Oga, I am going back to the IYSC secretariat, thank you," Terfa replied.

"Ogbamue jo. God go help you," prayed the security guard. Terfa thanked him for his obvious concern and demanded to know where he could find a Taxi back to the IYSC secretariat at Iwotange city centre. Having received a description from the man, Terfa walked across to an adjoining street. There he waited to catch a Taxi to the IYSC secretariat.

As he waited, four male corps members in IYSC khaki outfit alighted from a Taxi on opposite side of the road where Terfa was waiting. They carried their luggage and headed for the Atsehe Tsuegbatsele Mining Company gate. Terfa was convinced that they too were posted to the company. They met and conversed with the security man who allowed them into the premises of the company, obviously to see the General Manager. In less than ten minutes of their entering the company premises, the four corps members were out of the gate, each of them wearing a long face. They walked across and joined Terfa in waiting for a Taxi to the IYSC secretariat. It was obvious that the company rejected them as well. Terfa indeed recognized two of the corps members when they came to the spot he was waiting.

All exchanged pleasantries and the four informed Terfa that the company's General Manager had just rejected him. Terfa told them that he was rejected minutes earlier. It was after he said this that the four remembered that he was the first rejected youth corper that General Manager made mention of. As they still discussed, an empty Taxi pulled up in front of them. Agreeing on the fare with the driver, they all hopped in and headed to IYSC Secretariat.

They got to the IYSC secretariat at about 9.30 A.M. The driver of the Taxi they entered avoided the "No Parking" sign that were put up in front of the secretariat and discharged them several metres away from the building. Terfa carried his baggage and walked along with his four colleagues. All entered secretariat gate with their load. Unexpectedly, they saw a large number of their other colleagues there who looked restless.

“Boy!” shouted one of the four that just arrived with Terfa, “what’s happening?” It was easy to guess that something was amiss at the secretariat. Terfa and his four arriving colleagues quickly made inquiries from some of their colleagues who were at the secretariat before them. They spoke with their other colleagues who informed them the generality of the corps members seen at the secretariat were rejected by organisations.

What Terfa and the other four arriving corps members saw shocked them seriously. They listened to sad experiences of their numerous colleagues without making responses. At last, one of the four who came with Terfa opened up and asked what action the IYSC officials had so far taken concerning the mass rejection of corps members. No one concretely answered the young man’s question.

As corps members shared their experiences, more of their colleagues who were similarly rejected arrived the secretariat with their luggage. Surprisingly, some that had the previous day rejoiced over their postings at the camp were also among the rejected that returned to the secretariat. Terfa spoke to a lady who said she was rejected and did return to the secretariat in the evening of the passing out day. She said she was not alone in that ordeal.

“Where did you people sleep then?” Terfa asked her.

“About nine of us, male and female alike, squeezed into one room in the first floor of the secretariat here,” she replied. “It was flat on the worn out carpet in the room that all of us slept. Can’t you see how unkempt some of us are looking? We have not taken our bath.”

“But I am not looking any better,” Terfa responded. “Mine was a real battle with mosquitoes last night. And just like you guys, I did not take my bath this morning because the place I slept is a disused store within an office setting.”

The mass rejection of corps members by prospective employers obviously alarmed IYSC officials at secretariat. They were seen running up and down, trying to work out a line of action. The IYSC State director was at the secretariat herself, sweating and dishing out instructions from one office to the next. The state director openly confessed that she had not witnessed that extent of rejection of corps members by prospective employers.

Corpers whom prospective employers rejected in rural local governments suffered the most. Unlike their rejected colleagues in the local governments near the state capital, the rejected corps members from distant places had to travel all the way back to the state capital. The bitterest experience that a corps member in that category recounted to Terfa was difficulty with transportation. The transportation situation, the young man said, was aggravated by the protracted fuel scarcity that had come to characterize the Ijovgemonya nation. It was while Terfa was still sympathizing with him that IYSC State director came out to address the battalion of rejected corps members present at the secretariat. All converged to listen to the state director’s address.

Calm and soft-spoken, the state IYSC director was brief and straight to the point. First, she lamented the sufferings which corps members had undergone as a result of their rejection. Next she instructed rejected corps members to submit their rejection letters to the secretariat workers and wait for the fresh postings. The rush by the corps members to submit their letters of rejection was as chaotic as their arrival from the places they were

rejected. Not long after he submitted his rejection letter and sat to wait for a fresh posting, Terfa still saw scores of rejected corps members arriving at the secretariat. They were carrying their baggage and other personal items like buckets and music sets.

As another group of three corps members approached the secretariat gate, Terfa spotted Akoji, his former schoolmate, among them. He beckoned on Akoji with a wave of the hand and the latter saw Terfa and drew near him.

“Why are you back here, boy?” Terfa asked him. Akoji gave a mean smile and shook his head.

“Need you ask that again, my brother,” he replied. “The God-forsaken guys rejected me.”

“I was rejected too,” Terfa said as Akoji interrupted with the recounting of his personal experiences. He told Terfa that of the twenty-two corps members that were sent to the Ijovgemanya Orientation Agency, only twelve were accepted. But unlike Terfa’s case, the corps members rejected at the agency, Akoji said, were properly accommodated overnight in the agency’s guesthouse. The following morning, an official bus belonging to the agency drove the rejected corps members to the IYSC secretariat.

Terfa cut in to inform Akoji that the latter needed to submit his rejection letter in order for the secretariat officials to do a fresh posting for him. Akoji did as he was advised and returned to where Terfa was seated. Meanwhile, the IYSC officials worked tirelessly on the new posting letters until they were ready for issuing at about 4:30 in the afternoon.

The day was already far spent, so majority of corps members who collected fresh letters of posting did not report to their new places of primary assignment that evening.

A few, however, proceeded immediately to their new places of posting. Corps members who stayed back at the IYSC secretariat spent the night in the more than seven spacious offices and stores that the secretariat staff made available to them. Very many corps members lumped together in each of the seven offices or stores which served as their temporary accommodation.

Terfa collected his new letter of posting but joined the majority of his colleagues that slept at the secretariat. He and Akoji found their way into one of the rooms located on the second floor of the secretariat building. They, along with about fifteen colleagues, slept on the carpet in a fairly large room. The four corners of the room were littered with corps members' baggage and personal belongings. In six other rooms, more than a hundred and fifty other corps members also distributed themselves in greater or lesser numbers than Terfa's room. It was indeed a busy period for the secretariat security staff that moved from one wing of the secretariat to the other trying to assist the corps members.

The next morning, the numerous unexpected guests at the secretariat woke up and got ready to depart to their various places of posting. Although there were weakly running taps within the secretariat complex, it was not possible for any one to take their bath, as bathrooms were unavailable. Corps members who had long destinations to reach left the secretariat much earlier than those that were posted to places within or around the state capital.

Terfa's new posting was to a quarrying company. The company was located about two kilometres off the busy Iwotange-Yashaageva road south of the state capital. Early in the morning, he cleaned up, obtained a detailed description of the way to the company

from a secretariat security guard and left. Although it did not take him long to get transport from the secretariat area to the quarry site, the driver of the Taxi charged him an outrageous sum of thirty-five gerasha.

The quarry manager was not in when Terfa got to his office. Thus he waited for the manager for about an hour. The manager's secretary allowed Terfa into her boss' office as soon as the latter came back. Terfa greeted him and the manager reciprocated with a beaming smile. Looking up at Terfa, the manager sank deeper into his chair and swung from left and right.

"Yes my friend," he began, "what can I do for you?"

"Sir," Terfa responded, "I am posted to your company."

"Are you a corper?" asked the quarry manager.

"Yes sir", Terfa replied. The man paused and adjusted himself again on the chair.

"May I see your posting letter?" he demanded. Terfa quickly brought out the letter from his bag and gave it to the manager. He read through it and held the letter still in his hand.

"You read geology and mining, isn't it?"

"Yes, I did, sir," Terfa replied him.

"I see, from which university?"

"From the University of Mabugu, sir".

"That's right. It's ok," he said and went into momentary silence. Terfa watched him as he stared at the posting letter, and then at the ceiling. He knew that the manager was thinking out something to say to him. But what it was Terfa could not guess. The

manager looked at the posting letter again, then at Terfa and broke his momentary silence.

“You see, my friend,” he began, “it was only yesterday that we accepted two corpors who were sent to us. One of them read geology from the University of Anyiin while the second read mining engineering from Vaase Polytechnic. But the truth of the matter is that, up till now, we are not able to provide them office and residential accommodation and other basic needs. For these and other related reasons, I don’t think we will be able to accept you,”

Terfa was flabbergasted. He did not know the appropriate response to make and the quarry manager too knew that his words demoralized Terfa. When, after a while, Terfa, was able to say a word, he pleaded with the manager to use his discretion and accept him in the company. To attract the manager’s sympathy, Terfa related his previous rejection to the man. Although he was visibly sympathetic, the manager maintained that there was nothing he could do to help Terfa. That sealed the case. With nothing more to say, Terfa collected back his posting letter and left the quarry manager’s office while thanking him again.

He returned to the IYSC secretariat at about 11:30 A.M. On his second coming to the secretariat, Terfa still met some corps members who, like him, were rejected for a second time. Some of the corps members had returned before him while others came after him. He was to notice later in the day, as more corps members arrived the secretariat, that the number of people rejected for the second time was about half that of those rejected at first.

Unlike during the first round of rejection, the IYSC officials appeared to have been helpless at the second time. They could not do anything but ask individual rejected corps members to go into town themselves and search for places that could absorb them. Corps members from distant rural local councils were not allowed to look for places outside their initial places of posting. The directive to them and their rejected colleagues in the cities spelt clearly that they had to find new places for themselves and then submit their acceptance letters through their respective CLOs.

Terfa stayed at the IYSC secretariat till late in the evening. There he met with his former apartment mate in camp who was the Secretary of the Awenabo State Christian Corpers Fellowship. His apartment mate took Terfa to the secretariat of the Christian corpers union where he was to later stay for two weeks, looking for places in which to serve. Most times the search was a nauseating experience, but a few number of times it was fun tackling the problem along with numerous other colleagues in the same category.

They always left the Christian fellowship secretariat each morning and went out to different federal and state ministries as well as agencies, looking for places they could be absorbed. For several days they would only return late in the evening without getting a place. Terfa was increasingly becoming fed up with the difficult search. In less than a week, he, along with some colleagues had covered all the state and federal ministries in Iwotange. With negative responses coming their way all though, they began to turn their searchlight to private companies and organizations in the second week.

Feeding and transportation were in fact, becoming increasingly difficult as many rejected corps members had exhausted their monies. Yet there was no indication that payment of the IYSC monthly allowance for the month would be made in good time.

Close to the end of his second week at the Christian corpsers fellowship secretariat, Terfa had started making frantic moves to redeploy to another state. It was at the point of concretizing his redeployment move that a male colleague at the Christian corpsers secretariat found Terfa a place. It was yet another mining company located in the southeastern part of Iwotange, the state capital. Although the manager of the company clearly told him that the company had no residential accommodation and extra allowance to offer corps members, Terfa was all the same very grateful that he had at last found a place.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Terfa did not find it easy getting residential accommodation close to his place of work. The company was located on the outskirts of Iwotange where there wasn't enough residential accommodation. Few vacant apartments were actually available, but the rents, which the owners fixed, were too outrageous. On the average, the landlords charged between three hundred and four hundred gerasha per room. In addition, the landlords demanded down payment for one or two full years. That was a requirement that an average corps member with a meagre earning could not meet.

After a protracted search, a friend and colleague showed Terfa another vacant room not very far away from the latter's place of work. It was not so decent but manageable for someone who was in near distress. The landlord demanded for three hundred gerasha for the accommodation. However, he was kind enough to accept down payment for only eight months instead of the one-year that his colleagues insisted on. Fortunately for Terfa, the allowance for November was paid just a day after he went to inspect the room. Thus, he paid for his accommodation and some amount for his upkeep through the next month.

Not long after he moved into the new accommodation, he obtained permission from the IYSC secretariat and traveled to Deinyakperan, his hometown. He spent only three days at home and returned to Iwotange to fully face the realities of service life in the Ijovgemanya nation. It was a day after he returned from home that Pauline called again and spoke extensively with him. His heart was filled with joy when she called again and spoke at length.

From her conversation with Terfa, Pauline appeared to have been fully enjoying the service year in Yashaageva. She spoke of the fifteen thousand gerasha monthly allowance that the bank she worked with paid her and indeed every other corps member in the bank's employment. A fantastic residential accommodation, Pauline said, was also provided for all the corpsers that worked in the said Afro-Euro-American Fountain Bank Plc. Their shared 3-bedroom residential accommodation was, according to her, located in the Atakpa area of Yashaageva.

The aspect of the conversation that particularly gladdened Terfa's heart was Pauline's promise that she would visit him in a few weeks. This was in spite of her very tight schedules at the Afro-Euro-American Fountain Bank Plc. As she rounded off their discussion, Pauline subtly reminded Terfa to remain absolutely faithful to her. Humorously, she cautioned him not to yield to some *Ngbat*i girls that would desperately be out to tempt him. Terfa was equally happy that she found a good place of primary assignment and was enjoying the service year. Even though he sincerely wished her well, the regret that his condition far from being okay came to Terfa's mind.

Terfa deliberately did not relate his bitter experiences to Pauline when she called. He did not want to dampen her spirit considering the heartwarming experiences she related. It was only during a return call two days after that Terfa informed her of all that he experienced and was still going through. Certainly, she was not happy over Terfa's travails. For when she visited him at the camp in Saaiutu, Pauline got to know of the solid promises that Terfa's friends who were IYSC officials made to him concerning his posting. Quite assuredly, the officials gave Terfa their words that they would either make him a CLO, or have him posted to Saaiutu Cement Company. The least in their

consideration for Terfa was a posting to Atsehe Tsuegbatsele Mining Company. Given the firmness of these promises, therefore, both Terfa and Pauline did not foresee any disappointment.

As he spoke with Pauline during his return call, Terfa was as plain in relating his experiences to her as possible. What worried him and which he similarly did not hide from her was his lack of sufficient money to open a bank. Although the IYSC November allowance was paid by hand, those for subsequent months were to be paid through the bank and every corps member needed to open an account and provide the account information in good time. All these he related to a rather sympathetic Pauline who acted promptly the following day by surprisingly sending him a thousand gerasha, the minimum amount he needed to open a bank account.

Prevailing circumstances prompted Terfa to think about the real essence of the IYSC service year. Although he had left hometown with enthusiasm to serve his country, the predicaments, which he found himself in, were already dampening his spirit. To start with, two establishments where he was posted rejected him, a fate that hundreds of other corps members similarly suffered. It was a friend who became sympathetic to his suffering that sourced even the third place for him.

In spite of the difficulty in securing a place to serve, Terfa was most unhappy that his employer left him in a state of redundancy during the service year. Throughout the first three months that he spent in the company, there was practically no task that his supposed immediate boss assigned to him. Each working day, he would get to the office in the morning, greet his immediate boss and the General-Manager and then proceed to a small poorly furnished office that was given to him and two other corps members. There,

Terfa and his colleagues would chat for a better part of the day before leaving for their homes when it was closing time. On some days, the corps members moved from one wing of the company to the next looking for familiar junior workers to while away their time with. The IYSC secretariat in Iwotange Township was another place that Terfa and his office colleagues sometimes strolled to interact with other similarly idle corps members.

It was during such visits to the state IYSC secretariat that corps members who thought they were experiencing the worst of times had a rethink when they heard their other colleagues relate the poor conditions in which they were living or working. There were many, like Terfa, who were not paid a dime outside the normal monthly allowance paid by the IYSC. Quite certainly, the IYSC monthly allowance alone was grossly inadequate. As a matter of fact, it could hardly cover the living costs of an average corps member. Consequently, corps members earnestly looked forward to an increase in their monthly allowances, which the IYSC Director-General promised during his unscheduled visit to the Saaiutu orientation camp.

Only a few corps members that went to the IYSC secretariat ever mentioned that their employers fully utilized them. But of the several that complained of idleness and lack of basic amenities, Terfa easily saw disappointment and suffering written all over their faces. Although his situation was no less pitiable, some of his colleagues' emotional way of venting out their frustrations made him sympathetic to their feelings. More than five months after he moved to his residential accommodation, Terfa discovered that some corps members were still sleeping at the IYSC secretariat. Their plight really touched him

and he wondered why the IYSC scheme had come to be plagued with unimaginable problems.

But there was a small number of fortunate corps members whose employers paid them very attractive extra allowances and provided other benefits. These few expectedly became a source of envy to the generality of corps members. Wherever they went, they caught the attention of their less fortunate colleagues. With the generous offers from their employers, the fortunate few could stay for months without touching their IYSC monthly allowances. On the contrary, those who depended on the IYSC monthly allowance always engaged their bank's cashiers in verbal wars over the latter's insistence that the minimum deposit be at least left in each corps member's bank account.

Terfa was learning to adapt to the new condition he found himself, though without ease. Due to idleness, he noticed himself spending more money on food than he would have. When his monthly allowance could no longer sustain him, he creatively formulated cheap nutritional combinations. In the middle of December, after Pauline had visited him and gone back, he tried many local food combinations that were readily available. Having found some combinations to be really cheap but nevertheless delicious, he consolidated on his new formulas.

Still in the month of December and also for the first time, Terfa combined sliced ripe pawpaw with beans. There were many fruit-yielding pawpaw trees all around his house, which he plucked without any hindrance. He found the pawpaw and beans combination even cheaper and similarly adopted the formula. Although he felt like finding something worthwhile to do on his own, Terfa felt it was just proper for his boss to assign him work rather than him asking. Community development programmes

involving corps members were to start in January, so he earnestly looked forward to them.

Owing to the high cost of travelling, he remained in Iwotange during Christmas and New Year holidays. But quite a number of his colleagues travelled during the festive period. Alone and without much money, Terfa experienced a most uneventful Christmas ever. It was indeed the first he had spent out his hometown. As such, Iwotange, on December 25, looked really dull and uninviting. But for the many corps members who returned from Christmas break and were completely broke, Terfa would have for long regretted having not travelled during the festivities.

The much-awaited increase in corps members' monthly allowance finally became a reality in January. However, majority of corps members who thought the increase would alleviate their sufferings was wrong. The monthly allowance was increased by a hundred gerasha and with effect from January. That was contrary to earlier speculations that the increase would be between two and three hundred gerasha, and with retroactive effect from the previous October.

At the most, corps members felt the little impact of the increase in the first two months following. At the beginning of the third month, there was already a steady rise in the prices of food items and other goods. The media and the propaganda-inclined Ijovgemanya government publicized the marginal increase in the corps members' allowances beyond reasonable proportion. Consequently, market women and other product dealers raised the prices of food items and other goods well beyond the much-advertised increase. Quite painfully, corps members became financially worse off than they were prior to the increase of their allowances.

Terfa could recall that a measure of beans, which he bought for ten gerasha in December suddenly, rose to forty gerasha in March the following year. Similar rates of increase applied to other food items. Even *garri* that was hitherto referred to as the common citizen's staple food rose from eight gerasha to thirty-five gerasha per measure.

As each day passed and life proved to be tougher, Terfa rationalized his spending. The minimal savings, which he planned to make from the increase in his monthly allowance, did not come to reality again. When his convocation came up at the Mabugu University of Mabugu in February, he was unable to attend the occasion due to lack of money. A few other alumni of his Alma Mater also serving in Awenabo State attended the occasion and came back to testify that it was a really wonderful ceremony.

Months after the convocation, some of his friends and former classmates in the university called him to find out why he was not seen at the convocation. But Terfa simply informed them that he stayed away from the event to avoid unnecessary expenses. Pauline too called from Yashaageva and lamented his inability to attend the convocation. Although she was aware of his financial situation, Terfa still stressed reason as having being responsible for his inability to attend the convocation. Once again, Pauline pleasantly surprised him. She sent in some money to him two days after they both discussed convocation and related matters on phone.

His love for Pauline grew from strength to strength and he could hardly spend a day without calling her. Pauline too called him quite frequently and Terfa indeed appreciated the concern she had shown over his difficult situation. When she visited him in December, she bore the cost of all that they ate and drank. And just before leaving for

Yashaageva, she advised him not to despair, but make the best out of the challenging situation.

Pauline's words of encouragement remained fresh in his mind long after she left Terfa's place. He continued to regularly report to his office in spite of having being grossly underutilized. On certain days, his General Manager would notice Terfa's boredom and surprisingly ask him to leave for home quite early if he so desired. A few times, he accepted and went home before closing time but most times he stayed back in the office till it was time to close. The question that came to his mind quite often was why a manager in a private company would accept corps members and not bother to make use of their skills even once.

As months passed, some junior staff of the company began to mock Terfa and the other two corps members for staying idle all the time. Quite a number of times, the fun-making junior staff did question the rationale behind government's huge spending on an unprofitable scheme that is the IYSC. Though inwardly moved by the junior workers' uncomplimentary remarks, Terfa never angrily reacted to them. Quite a number of times, he simply laughed or ignored them completely.

One thing he never failed to do monthly, however, was collect a clearance from his boss to enable him collect his monthly allowance. That at least was an unforgettable monthly function that every corps member performed. Even those who notoriously stayed away from their places of primary assignment almost all through the month normally returned briefly to submit clearance letters and collect their allowances. Only in extreme cases did absentee corps members make arrangements with their colleagues to sign and submit clearance on their behalf.

When it finally commenced, Terfa's likeness for the community development programme was so strong he never missed it any day. By virtue of his company's location in the southeastern part of Iwotange, Terfa was assigned to zone three for the purpose of participating in community development programmes. Altogether, there were seven community development zones in the state capital. Corps members in each zone progressively executed their community development projects on two different days that were designated for the exercise in a month.

Zone three's meeting days were every second and last Thursdays of the month. Zonal members were required to attend the function in their Khaki outfits. Usually, they first reported at the IYSC secretariat in the morning to register their presence and thereafter performed whatever community task they were mobilized to do. Community projects sites, of course, spread across the area that each zone covered. Even though not much work was done on the community development days, Terfa enjoyed the exercise since it afforded him the opportunity to interact with a good number of his colleagues.

In the first few months of the commencement of the programme, the only strenuous project zone three members executed was clearing of drainages at the abattoir area of the state capital. Attendance at the beginning of the community development meetings was high and encouraging. But as time went on, it dropped considerably thereby forcing the IYSC secretariat to introduce punitive measures against perpetual absentee corps members. The most severe of the punitive measures was withholding of erring corps members' monthly allowances until they met minimum attendance rates.

From the months of April through June, all community development activities involving the seven zones took place on the IYSC farm outside the state capita. The

expansive farm was located about ten kilometers away from Iwotange, far off the road leading to the Ijovgemanya-Mimihemba border town of Utekyor. The road leading to the farm was unpaved and indeed rough. So rough was the road to the IYSC farm that during rainy season, corps members and IYSC officials who were primarily assigned to the farm were cut off from the state capital. The farm settlement centre had within it a power generating set which served the residents most of whom were corps members. There was also a mini dam as well as a fish farm.

Each year one or two crops were grown on the expansive farmland. In the year that Terfa and his colleague served, the principal crop that was grown on the state's corps members' farm was maize. Because the crop yielded bountifully, each of the zonal community development teams spent many cumulative days on the farm before the harvest was completed. A lorry conveyed corps members to and from the farm on each zone's designated days. Whenever the corps members reached the farm centre in the morning, their colleagues that were resident there came out and welcomed them cheerfully. Then the actual work on the farm commenced.

The corn harvesting activity was very interesting as corps members interacted extensively with their colleagues while having a lot of fun. Many of them who visited from the state capital were in the habit of teasing their farm-resident colleagues. They asked the farm-based corps members all sorts of questions ranging from their survival strategies to how they felt being in a remote settlement. Indeed, it was a settlement that lacked market, telephone and other basic amenities. Nevertheless, corps members resident on the farm had a different outlook of their life there. They surprisingly did not show any concern that they were cut off from city lifestyle. Almost all the time the farm-resident corps members

looked cheerful and satisfied with their place of assignment. Even on the farm, they were the ones who worked more and with the most commitment.

Terfa remembered a particularly fun-filled day that he and his colleagues from the state capital were returning from the farm. In the lorry was one farm-resident corper who joined the vehicle to disembark at the state capital en route to his village in a neighboring state. The young man was indeed a talkative and a very humorous one for that matter. While the journey to the state capital lasted, he made everyone in the vehicle to laugh ceaselessly and uncontrollably too. By the time he boarded the lorry with his heavy bag hung over his shoulder, the seats were full, so he stood up along with some other corps members. One of the corps members based in the state capital recognized his farm-based colleague and jokingly asked him,

“My rural friend, where are you going?” The humorous farm-based corper adjusted his bag on his shoulder, smiled and looked up to see who it was that spoke to him.

“I am going to Iwotange,” he replied, “any thing else?”

“To do what,” his questioner went on.

“Ha-ha-ha,” the farm resident laughed. “I just want to go and see how the place dey. Any thing else?” Every one in the lorry burst into laughter especially as the farm-resident corper answered questions and made his face to look funny. The laughter subsided and the interrogator went on,

“Do you mean you have not been going there before now?”

“My brother,” continued the farm-based guy. “I don’t go there all the time. But as free motor dey today, na wetin man go do?”

There was a more prolonged laughter over the young man's funny reply and he too joined in the laughing and made funnier grimaces. The laughter died down again and a different person asked the humour merchant if he had been enjoying his stay at the farm centre.

"Why not? We don't have many problems with our stay here," he said. "We have food, we have generator and we even have a dam here with plenty of fish in it. Although there isn't plenty of meat, we make do with fish. And e-e-m, e-em, when there is less work to be done, we travel out of this place and stay for as long as we can. Any other thing you want to know?" he concluded and elicited another round of prolonged laughter from the lorry occupants.

The making of fun went on until the lorry reached the state capital. Corps members whose homes were on the way disembarked before the vehicle got to the IYSC secretariat. The driver of the truck finally got to the secretariat and parked beside the secretariat gate. At this point all passengers disembarked and went to their various destinations.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

It was the beginning of the month of July and the service year was fast approaching an end. Majority of the first-tier corps members could hardly believe that they had barely two months to end the service year. Many could hardly believe that their stay in their various places of primary assignment was almost getting to a full year; a year that proved tough to many and enjoyable to just a few. Arrangements for corporers' week, which was scheduled for between July ending and first week of August, had already reached top gear.

Tension concerning unemployment was building among corps members who were due to pass out in a matter of weeks. Even though lots of employment applications were made, the unemployment situation across the country made job applicants not to have assurances of getting employment easily. This made majority of corps members to obtain application forms to enable them go for higher degrees in the absence of any employment after service.

Terfa also made some employment applications and as well submitted two applications for graduate admission. Pauline also assisted him to submit employment applications to two consulting firms both based in Yashaageva. As for her, there was no

doubting the fact that the Afro-Euro-American Fountain Bank would retain here at the end service.

Even as events did not work out the way he anticipated, Terfa still had the hope winning an award. This dream motivated him to be deeply committed to all community development projects in his zone. Apart from that, he was the first corps member to report to the state that service year. That alone, he thought, was enough to earn him an award. Earlier at the orientation camp, some IYSC officials advised him to continue with his full participation in service programmes and activities. They alluded that his arriving first to the camp gave him advantage over all other corps members as far as consideration for service awards was concerned. Convinced and full of expectations therefore, Terfa participated in service activities without relenting. What held him down though was the fact that his primary employer rendered him and his two colleagues there redundant.

At last, the much-awaited corpsers' week came up at the Anyamazenga Social Centre in Iwotange. Commencement date was twenty fifth July. The event lasted till August third. Expectedly, it was an avenue for corps members throughout the state to come together as a group and enjoy themselves. Almost all corps members within and outside the state capital attended the week and partook in the merry making. Apart from light refreshments, the weeklong event accommodated riddles and jokes. There were short speeches as well as dramatization of short plays. Some community development projects, which various zones completed, were commissioned as well. Re-establishing contacts with old friends who served in distant places was also a great experience for corps members.

It was two days after the corporers' week was concluded that Terfa obtained one week's permission and travelled to his hometown. With the service year almost coming to an end, he took home his personal household items that he rarely used. The aim was for him to have small luggage to travel home with when the service year was over. He planned to spend the one-week leave he was given at home and return in the first week of September to get ready for the passing out ceremony. As part of the rounding off activities, every corper was required to obtain end of service letter from their employer and submit at the IYSC secretariat. Organizations that planned to organize send forth for their outgoing corps members also concretized arrangements for such events.

Terfa reached Deinyakperan and noticed an uneasy calm at home. The lingering land dispute between his people had again assumed a violent dimension. Terfa's people had just won an appeal but their neighbours outrightly ignored the court's ruling. To make matters worse, they resumed farming activities on the disputed land and dared anyone who did not like it to physically challenge them. But Terfa's father kept advising his elder brothers to be calm and resist taking laws into their hands. The Yamakwagh family led by Damsa, Terfa's father, lodged series of reports to the local police station at Anzaabo, but no action came from the police. The repeated response of the police was that they were advised to leave all land matters to the courts to adjudicate.

Due to the tension he met at home, Terfa spent only three days there and returned to Iwotange. The interaction he had with his family members was brief and uneventful. Quite sadly, he realized that within the one year he was away, violent land disputes had finally brought perpetual famine and misery to Awangeland. The long stretches of

Awange cultivated lands which previously boosted the national food basket status of Nyig-h-sha-nyi State surprisingly, became a hunger zone.

On the last day of August, he got to Awenabo in the evening. Four days later, he and his colleagues that served in the same company attended a send off party, which the organization organized for them. The party took place at the company's small conference room. Almost all the staff of the company, including the General Manager attended the occasion at where Terfa and his colleagues were presented with gift of a wall clock each.

On the fifth day of September, Pauline called while Terfa was at the IYSC secretariat. Due to the noise level within the area, he ran several metres away to take the call. Quite strangely, Pauline did not sound as friendly and jovial as Terfa knew her to be. Apart from skipping her usual lovely greetings to Terfa, Pauline did not give Terfa feedback on his employment applications in Yashaageva as she earlier promised. Terfa was worried and asked if some unpleasant thing happened to her. But Pauline avoided answering his question and instead kept repeating she had some important thing to tell Terfa.

“But what is it you have been saying you want to tell me without actually saying it, my dear?” Terfa asked with a tone that conveyed deep worry.

“Am. Am sorry, Terfa Am sorry, but...” She said amidst sobs. He did not know what she was sorry about and asked her.

“No-o-o-o, oh no, you just have to forgive me Terfa, I am really sorry.”

“But what is it you are sorry about, Pauline?” Terfa asked with a sharp tone that indicated he was running out of patience. She comported herself and informed him that even though she hated offending his feelings, someone else had just entered her life.

Consequently, she decided to inform Terfa that she was calling it quit. The development, she said, was quite sudden borne out of love and necessity. She begged Terfa's forgiveness and off the line went.

Terfa could not believe what had just happened. He immediately made several attempts to call Pauline back but was not successful. Standing alone and staring at his telephone set without even blinking, he wondered what could have led Pauline to hit him so hard without notice. He tried to reflect on the way both of them had been relating but there was no coherence in his thinking. Nevertheless, both shock and confusion descended on him.

Coupled with the problems at home that had already occupied his mind, he felt the whole world turning against him. Some of his colleagues present at the secretariat who saw him standing alone and clenching his fist drew closer and demanded to know why he changed his mood so suddenly. But preferring to be left alone, Terfa did not disclose the unpalatable news about Pauline to them.

His bitterness increased as he tried hard to figure out the reasons for Pauline's action without success. As far as he remembered, she had not even for once complained about his behaviour, let alone did something to offend his feelings. The more he thought about her action, the more he felt like getting to Yashaageva immediately to discuss with her in flesh. But there was no way he could do that without missing the passing out ceremony which was only a day away. Again, he feared that not giving Pauline breathing space to re-think issues might earn him greater embarrassment.

At last the passing out day came. Very well organized, the event commenced on Wednesday morning at the Awange-nder-nen Stadium in the state capital. Almost every

first-tier corps member graced the occasion. The State Executive Governor and other important dignitaries came. Though colourful in every respect, the passing over ceremony was quite snappy. As part of the commencement activities, the IYSC state director read the address of the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Federal Republic of Ijovgemanya. Next, there was parade by members of the special squad, which the State Executive Governor briefly inspected.

Closely following the parade was the presentation of service certificates and awards to corps members who distinguished themselves in their places of primary assignment or in community development projects. Tension mounted as the large audience waited eagerly to see the corps members that would be honoured with awards. As the hour of reckoning came, anxiety struck some corps members who felt they were qualified for awards. Guesses were made in low tones as to who would be called next to collect the awards.

Terfa remained quiet but uneasy as the award winners were called out one after the other and presented with certificates and plaques. He feared that he would not make the award list. Dutifully, the master of ceremony called the award recipients one after the other until he exhausted the list. Terfa did not hear his name! It was then he realized that his high hopes of receiving a service award were dashed at last.

Most disappointed, he collected his discharge certificate and left the venue of the venue immediately the event was over. He was indeed bitter but, however, decided on proceeding to Yashaageva to see Pauline. Convinced by this decision, he hurried home to notify his landlord that he was packing out finally and then return the door key to the man. Just as he knocked at his landlord's door and stepped in, Terfa was most surprised

to see his cousin, Ankpam, in the landlord's sitting room. Ankpam had just arrived from home and the landlord accepted him into the sitting room to wait for Terfa. Earlier in Terfa's service year, the cousin visited once and Terfa's landlord knew him.

His cousin was visibly apprehensive and Terfa knew it. He greeted Ankpam and quickly sought to know if all was well at home. His cousin breathed heavily and said,

"Things are not in order at home at all."

"What is happening at home?" Terfa asked again.

"I said there is serious trouble going on at home".

"What!" he shouted. "What kind of trouble".

"There is serious fighting" his cousin replied as both of them dashed out of the landlord's sitting room for Terfa's room.

"Who are the people fighting?"

"Our Mbaazohozwa brothers and Mbaikyo people", his cousin replied. "This one is not a small clash at all. Already six people on the side of Mbaikyo and three on ours have lost their lives".

"My God!" Terfa cried. "When did it start?"

"It was last Monday", said Ankpam, almost in tears. "Infact, the situation at home now is very critical. You just have to hurry up so we can travel immediately," he added.

"Jesus!" Terfa screamed again. "So these people have finally succeeded in dragging us into a bloody fight over land".

Assisted by his cousin, Terfa hurriedly carried his luggage outside and locked up the room. Amidst sobs, he went back to the landlord's sitting room and handed the room

key to him. The landlord who already knew what happened back home had pleaded with Terfa to take heart. Terfa and his cousin bid the landlord goodbye and left. Things had become worse and the plan to see Pauline at Yashaageva was no longer feasible.

On their way to Saaiutu Motor Park en route to home, Terfa persistently asked his cousin to tell him the names of the casualties in the bloody cash. Ankpam was, however, not forthcoming. But when Terfa did not relent, his cousin called out only two names of the people that were already dead on their side. He also mentioned that several homes on both sides of the conflict had been destroyed.

Painfully, but surely, Terfa and his cousin undertook the long, uneventful return journey to Nyigh-sha-nyi. It was only after they reached their ancestral home at Anzaabo late in the night that Terfa realized that his father, Damsa, also lost his life in the violent land dispute. It was bad news that was unbelievable.

Unable to hold himself, he wept bitterly for his father and other deceased relatives. His friends and other sympathizers tried to console him, but Terfa refused to be consoled. The series of disappointments that he encountered in so short a time were painful and so difficult to bear. He worried about the fruitlessness of his service year and his estranged relationship with Pauline, the tragic death of his father and uncles as breadwinners, and the bleakness of his future in an already saturated labour market.

Meanings of keywords used in the text

<i>Agbero</i>	-	Local name for a social miscreant
<i>Agberos</i>	-	Plural form of <i>agbero</i>
<i>Akwen su</i>	-	Enter or to enter in Awange language
<i>Angor</i>	-	Plural form of <i>ingyor</i>
<i>Atemityoland</i>	-	A neighbouring community south west of Nyigh-sha-nyi
<i>Ayoosu v-i-i-i-i-n</i>	-	Awange way of seeking for a noisy audience's attention
<i>Bua</i>	-	Cow
<i>Burukutu</i>	-	Locally brewed beer made from sorghum, maize or corn
<i>Chokeli</i>	-	Nickname of an army bugler in Terfa's camp
CLO	-	Corps Liaison Officer

- Corper - A youth corps member
- Damawange* - Stereotypical reference to a community in the South-eastern part of Ijovgemanya
- Damsa Yamakwagh - Terfa's father name
- Demekpe - An area in Mabugu town
- Egusi* - melon or melon soup
- Ekama - Terfa's platoon leader
- Forward ever - Terfa's nickname. Others are Terry and Ansson
- Gerasha* - Ijovgemanya's currency
- Gerasha mgba tu* - Two gerasha
- GSM - Global System for Mobile Communications
- I.T.A. - Ijovgemanya Television Station
- IASUU - Ijovgemanya Academic Staff Union of Universities
- IEPA - Ijovgemanya Electric Power Authority

- Ihomkor - Nganyi's son
- Ijovgemanyan - A citizen of Ijovgemanya
- IJOVTEL - Ijovgemanya Telecommunications Plc
- Ikpensaren - Terfa's youngest sister
- Imborizungu* - A dreaded inheritance (such as cast human bone, mermaid head, a piece of carving, etc.) known to bring fortune and sometimes misery among Awange people.
- Ingyor* - A person's sister or other female relative.
- Inyam Iviha* - Grasscutter meat
- Ishwa* - Beniseed or beniseed soup
- Ityowanye - Name of a street in Deinyakperan town
- Iyue* - Jealousy or acts that seem to convey jealousy.
- Iyuhenande Kpojime - Pauline's father's name

- Kahana* - Reference to where or asking for where one is going (in Awange language)
- Kauno* - Pauline's mother's uncle
- Kolanut* - A subtle reference to bribery made in Awangeland
- Lola* - Pauline's friend and course mate.
- Mabuguite* - A graduate of Mabugu University
- Mbaanyam* - Mbaazagee's neighbouring community
- Mbaazager* - Terfa's mother's birthplace
- Mbaazohozwa* - Terfa's clan
- Mbaikyo* - Mbaazohozwa neighbouring community
- Memshima* - Pauline's other name
- NDE* - National Directorate of Employment
- Nelson* - Terfas's course mate
- Ngbati* - A derogatory reference to Akya people

- Ngodoo* - One of Pauline's younger sisters
- Ngunyi* - One of Tyohuna's several wives
- Nyamiri* - Stereotypical name for a dominant ethnic group in another Ijovgemanya region south east of Nyigh-sha-nyi
- IYSC* - Ijovgemanya Youth Service Corps
- OBS* - Orientation Broadcasting Service
- Onkasev* - Daughters of the land (both married and unmarried)
- Ordedoo* - Kauno's only son
- Orfetarga* - A major river in Ijovgemanya
- Orvesen Andyar*
- Tsuebagen* - Kauno's personal driver
- Pa. Tordue* - Terfa's maternal grandfather
- RSM* - Regimental Sergeant Major
- Ruam kumen* - pounded yam
- Shimanyian* - Race course area of Mabugu town

- Steve - Another of Terfa's course mates
- Susanna - Pauline's aunt
- Swange - Popular cultural music of the Deinyakperan people
- Tsavwua Gesa - Susanna's husband
- Tsuetseleite* - A graduate of Tsuetsele university
- Tyohuna Zanzanje - Damsa's neighbour who drinks and batters his wives
- Underoe* - Morning greeting in Awange language. Could also be used as general reference to the Awange people.
- Unitem - Short form of university of Temtakera
- Ushahemba - Pauline's only brother
- Vangerwua - Another of Terfa's friends
- Vero - Another of Pauline's friends
- Zager - Short form of Mbaazager clan

Tribulations set a socio-cultural background against which the chilling story of Terfa, a young graduate, is told. He arrives home after his degree programme and begins a heart-warming relationship with Pauline. Despite their desire to be together, Terfa and Pauline are posted to different states; the former to Awenabo and the latter to Yashaageva. Although he blatantly rejects his posting, Terfa is persuaded by Pauline and other friends to accept it.

His experiences in and outside the Saaiutu orientation camp are many and varied. He wholeheartedly commits himself to orientation camp activities with the hope of winning a national merit award for an outstanding service. But the negative realities during his primary assignment mark the beginning of a different story.

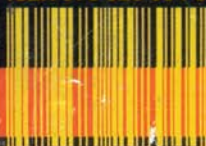
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