

CHAPTER ONE

The sun stood bright overhead. A light warm breeze was coming in from the direction of the forest towards his face and he could feel some grit on his tongue. He looked left and then right before he spat on the ground beside him.

Twenty-two years old and still very aimless in life. Things had been bad ever since he could remember. He had never been a lucky chap at anything, good or bad. A cloud of bad luck seemed to hang over his head at all times. Luck always seemed to evade him at all times too. He had no friends, no steady job, and no money to spend around. He looked at the forest in front of him, he wished he could go in there and have himself hanged from a tree.

The thought only came to his mind for a short while before he discarded it. He liked himself too much to contemplate suicide for a long time.

The heat of the sun was beginning to get to him. He looked up at the sky. All he saw was pale blue with white patches of clouds, the typical tropical sky. He looked down at his watch; the time was a quarter to two. He decided to go in for a snappy lunch before thinking of his next move in life. He walked towards his right for some yards before he came to the back of the home. His father's house as he always thought of it. He did not consider this his home at all. The forest was at the back of the house a very long way off. But he could still feel the presence of the forest even at that

distance due to the cool breeze which came from there at all times.

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‘Time for prayers, everybody come in here for prayers’.

His immediate younger brother was calling out from the kitchen. As an Islamic family, they all had to say their prayers in the congregational manner, unless any one person was absent. Rashid came out to the front of the kitchen and went to the front of the house, a three bedroom flat with paint that had started peeling off. The color used to be a dull yellow but now it was almost white where the paint could be seen.

‘Jabbar, time for prayers’ Rashid said to him. Jabbar was then sitting on a chair in front of the house, staring straight ahead. He did not even bate an eyelid. He just kept staring with an indefinable look on his face. Rashid folded his hands on his chest and looked around the veranda hoping to catch a glimpse of what Jabbar was seeing. All he could see were many other buildings of the same type as their own with a few people walking up and down the road in front of their house.

Their house was in an estate built by the federal housing authorities in the early 90’s. The estate was located in Makurdi, the capital of Benue State near the River Benue’s north bank. There was nothing particularly special about the environment. It had the air and quiet of all reserved residential areas.

‘Jabbar, I’m going inside to pray now’

He turned and went inside to gather his remaining brothers for prayers. Rashid was a very devout Muslim who saw other faiths as against the will of Allah.

Jabbar was the first son of a man named Bello Mohammed, a civil engineer working with a construction company. He had not really made it big in life like some of his contemporaries who were cheating and stealing from their respective firms. He was a good fellow and he had a wife and four fine boys Jabbar included. He also had a Mercedes Benz 230 “E” class. The type popularly called “V-boot”. He loved his family and his car. He was also very religious and he endeavored to instill good morals on all whom he came in contact with. He was a good man by every standard.

Jabbar had no time for such things as prayers and sanctimonious ranting. He got up from his seat as he heard the first sounds of his brother’s prayers. He stretched and started moving down the road towards anywhere his legs could take him. His mind drifted off as soon as he started strolling.....

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.....”Jabbar, you seem like a nice guy. I wish I could get to know you better” she was saying.

He was just smiling in return. Why he had not said anything to her was almost baffling even to him. Maybe he was stunned by her presence he thought. Her presence made his mind stop functioning properly, he could not think straight any more.

He had just been introduced to her at a party, which he had stumbled on. The introduction had been made by one of his former secondary school mates. The girl’s name was Bola and she was Yoruba by tribe. She had a beautiful fair face, and all the natural endowments that a girl could need at the tender age of eighteen.

They had only been talking for some minutes when Bola started her come-on-nice-guy-talk move on him.

'You don't seem to talk much,' she said with a little frown touching her fore head.

'You know, I won't be happy if you were the introvert type you know'.

Her voice seemed to be rolling on oiled rollers to Jabbar. He could not speak. He just stared sheepishly at her face. She stopped talking and started smiling too. The place was crowded with boys and girls of ages between sixteen and twenty-four. A young man who had just come back from the United States of America was hosting the party. The party was held in his father's house, the parlor being the dance floor and the other rooms excluding his parent's room being abodes for those who wanted to have a quickie with a partner. The place was really groovy. There were lights everywhere and drinks were on the house and plentiful.

Jabbar and Bola had both been quiet for some time before out of the crowd someone detached himself and came towards where they were standing.

'Hello lady, may I have this dance?'

The young man charmingly asked bowing from his waist. Jabbar looked at his face and what he saw was not pleasing at all. The gentleman was about twenty-four years old and extremely handsome. He had the kind of face you normally see on billboards advertising cell phone brands. Thin aquiline nose, sexy eyes, low cut hair, nice little moustache, side burns and cool beards cut very low and then trimmed. His smile was devastating with clean white teeth. To top it all he was tall, about six foot-three. Bola smiled and extended her hand and Jabbar knew that the game was lost.

He watched as they left his side and went to the dance floor. They started dancing and Jabbar could see that she was not holding anything back from the young man. They were holding and caressing each other there on the dance floor. Jabbar looked down at his hands and wondered. Why

was he such a loser? Why couldn't he hold on to what was his own by right? He felt foolish. He could not understand it at all. He knew he was not as handsome as the other fellow but from his reflection in his bathroom mirror, he knew that with his face, high cheekbones, little goatee and piercing eyes and a height of six feet, he could compete favorably with the other fellow. He also knew that he had a good body build.

Maybe it is money and class, he thought. Obviously to him the other young man was one of those really upper-class kids. He chanced to look up. There they were, going upstairs arm in arm and laughing loudly. Though he could not hear what they were saying, he knew they were really enjoying themselves. He decided to follow them upstairs. As he came to the bottom of the stairs, he saw them disappear into one of the upstairs rooms and he did not have to do a lot of thinking to guess what they were about to do. He wished them luck silently in his heart and left the party to go home

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.....All these had happened to him a little while ago 'Get out of the way. Do you want to get killed?' Someone shouted behind him from a car that was directly behind him. Peep! Peep! The horn of the car blew at him. He got out of the way for the car to pass through. The car was a Volkswagen Bora and it contained young men who shouted insults at him as the car passed. The car had broken his reverie.

He just continued on his way without any sign of comprehending what had just happened. 'I just have very bad luck', he thought. He stopped at a kiosk; the boy who sold there had a sort of friendship with Jabbar. Jabbar usually borrowed money from the boy when he was broke which was almost always. The boy seemed to be busy with some

customers. Jabbar walked on. The sales boy glanced up at him as he passed. He did not want to talk to Jabbar today; he was not in a lending mood. Though Jabbar always paid him his money in due time, he was not ready for anything of that kind today. The sales boy looked at Jabbar with mixed feeling of pity and anger. To him, Jabbar had a funny behavior, but he was just a good chap blessed with a lot of bad luck as he had learnt from some of his own friends

Meanwhile Jabbar kept moving on and his mind drifted again.....

..... *'Jabbar there is a deal that I want to do and I think I will like you to join our group. Your part would not be much but you'll make quite a bundle. Even you will start smiling'* Wole said *'Abi I dey lie?'* he asked his cohorts in Pidgin English.

Wole was a young man living in the estate with Jabbar, but he was a very loose boy. He had been involved in a lot of petty theft in and around the estate. Infact he was a most undesirable character. Parents tried as much as possible to keep their children away from him. How he managed to connect to Jabbar was something that slightly worried Jabbar. Though he may be a loser, he felt that associating with Wole would be the final straw that would seal his doom in this life. Jabbar decided to see if he could just listen to Wole for once.

'You no dey lie now' his cohorts said meaning that he was not lying.

'What am I to do? Hope it does not involve killing or stealing I can't stand such things,' Jabbar explained to Wole.

'No not at all, we are not involved in that kind of stuff. We are honorable gentlemen'

He said this shaking his head and raising his hands in seeming protest of the accusation of his being an outright criminal

'Our deal is simple Jabbar. The part you are going participate in will be to serve as our lookout. You do even have to know what we are doing or why you are on the look out. If you just see anybody coming, you will communicate with us through a radio transceiver that I am going to give you' he smiled as he finished. 'Your part is very simple indeed, and as I have said before, you don not even have to know or see what is going on. If anything goes wrong you walk away clean.' He ended his repartee.

'I'll think about it' Jabbar said

'Man Jabbar there is no time to think, the deal is pulling off in three hours,' Wole pressed.

The thought of making some money appealed very much to Jabbar, since according to these fellows he would not have to do much. But the snag about the deal was that he did not know what they were going to do.

'Come on man what are you waiting for? Let's go.' Jabbar's thoughts were broken. He reluctantly followed them.

When they got to the front of a house at the very extreme end of the estate, he was given the radio and told to go under a mango tree directly opposite the house. The radio was a two-way FM radio that was mean for short-range communication. It was a kiddie's toy that could be bought at any store of shop in town, but it was about to be used for something dastardly.

He went there and the three young men went towards the back of the house. The house looked empty to Jabbar. He knew the owners of this house were wealthy from the models of cars parked outside. Jabbar could see the cars through the chain link fence. Two Mercedes and another model that

Jabbar could not identify. He stood there looking up and down the road. He knew now that they were stealing.

Jabbar waited for more than one hour there. Nobody came out came up from the road and boys inside were nowhere to be found. He looked at his watch and he realized that the time was already 6'o clock. Then it dawned on him that those boys were no longer near the house. He had been waiting for about three hours and he then came to the conclusion that he had been used and discarded. He started walking away towards home with the radio in his hands. He was so broken down and depressed. He kept cursing himself on the way home.

He heard some shouting and loud laughing at a house close by. He looked up and saw that it was Wole's house. With the radio in his hands, he went towards the house. He knocked on the gate. Immediately the laughter died down. He knocked again. There was no answer. He pushed the gate open. There before him were the three boys he had been with this afternoon. They were very quiet. All of them were staring at Jabbar.

He walked over to Wole

'I just came to return your radio' Jabbar said, handing back the radio to him. He tentatively collected the radio from Jabbar. Jabbar turned to go.

'Jabbar if you reveal what happened today you would be finished.' Wole threatened

Jabbar turned back and walked over to him. Jabbar towered over Wole who was shorter him

'The next time you try this on me I swear to God I will personally string you up a tree' Jabbar said between clenched teeth then walked away.

Wole heaved a sigh of relief because he knew that Jabbar would not talk. He was sure of that. He also knew that he could never perform the same trick on Jabbar again

without losing his head. He turned to his friends as Jabbar closed the gate behind him.....

..... All these had happened two years ago and these events seemed to occur repeatedly and with varying degrees and frequencies. Everybody seemed to enjoy cheating him and taking advantage of him.

Jabbar finally got to the estate club. He was surprised that he had gotten there in one piece, because his mind had been turning off and on all afternoon. He reasoned that his safe return was by the special grace of God.

The club was a small building with a swimming pool outside. The interior of the club was cool. It had a bar, many round tables buried in the floor with chairs around them. The floor was marbled and shone very well. There was a television set at one end of the club that was on for most times of the year. A DSTV satellite receiver was connected to the TV. This was where the young and old met to cool off the day's heat. Banana palms surrounded the swimming pool outside. A wire mesh fence enclosed the whole area with two gates at the opposite end of the club.

There was a lot of noise as a lot of people were playing and swimming at the same time. Girls in swimming trunks were all enjoying themselves.

Jabbar took a seat facing the pool and started surveying the crowd of swimmers. He heard a high shriek of excitement. He didn't even have to look at the figure at the other end of the pool to know who she was. The shriek made him turn towards the direction.

Their eyes met just for only one second before she turned towards her companion a heavily built fellow in trunks too tight for him. In that instant, Jabbar had the time to quickly survey the face. She was very pretty and seemed lovelier as water wet her long hair. She was Linda his former

girl friend. She was a half-caste. Her father was a Briton and her mother a half-caste too. She was extremely fair with sharply pointed nose hazel eyes.

Jabbar's mind drifted again to their first meeting.....

..... 'Jabbar Abdul! Come out and face your opponent, hurry!'

His Taekwondo teacher shouted out to him. Jabbar had been a Taekwondo student for sometime now. This was grading time. A time when people moved from one belt level to another. Jabbar was moving from brown belt to red belt. From red belt you can move to black belt, which is the highest. From there you then grade for the different type of black belts. When grading is about to begin, you are called out to face an opponent who is usually from a higher belt level. After the fight or sparring, you are called out to show some "pumsys" which are very familiar to karate carters. After which you are asked to demonstrate one powerful thing you can do with your hands or legs like breaking cement blocks, planks, and such other things.

The training was done every Mondays and Thursday in the estate football pitch. The trainer was a worker at one of the companies in town and lived in the estate. When grading time came, someone was sent from the National Association of Taekwondo fighters to do the grading. Training for grading was always rigorous.

Jabbar came out of his group to face his opponent. The young man was heavily built and he looked very tough. Jabbar was not a bad fighter at all. He had done a bit well during training class. The majority of the young men and women in the estate always came out to watch the tough boys do their thing. The presence of girls in the crowd geared

Jabbar into fearlessness. The crowd calmed down and silence reigned.

Jabbar walked forward towards his opponent.

“Ready?” the voice of the referee rang out clearly in the still afternoon breeze.

The two contestants bowed to each other.

“Fight”

They circled each other taking good stances. All of a sudden, there was a maniacal scream from Jabbar. He shot a quick glance at the side of his opponent as if there was an element of supreme danger coming towards his opponent. The young man in consternation looked around him to see what his opponent was shouting at.

That was his undoing. Jabbar needed that little break in his opponent’s concentration. He rushed the boy with punches and kicks coupled with chops until the boy was on the ground. The boy was on the ground in less than seven seconds flat. It was a knockout and also a new record. Jabbar had won the fight. There was a wild cheer followed by a round of applause.

‘Now show your move!’ called out Jabbar’s trainer ‘show what you have got!!’ he shouted

‘Yes teacher!’ Jabbar shouted back.

Jabbar called out to two of his friends. They had already been notified that they would help him. One of them climbed the back of the other one and sat on his neck. The person sitting on the neck of the other held up a piece of plank. What Jabbar had to do was to use an axe-kick; one in which the leg is thrown up and then let down with tremendous force on the target object. It was called an “apoligi”. It is a very powerful kick. One that can kill an opponent if well delivered.

Jabbar came towards the boys, measured the distance, went back two steps then threw his kick. The force

of the kick was so tremendous that the piece of plank shattered on impact.

People rose up from their seats to cheer Jabbar. He had done well. He did his 'pumsys' and was finally graded upwards. Other contestants made their own performances some were graded while others were told to come back for the next grading period. The day came to a close and a party was scheduled that evening at the club. The organizer was the manager of the Coca-Cola bottling company.

At the party, things were really going hot and fast for Jabbar. He had been dancing with numerous girls and he was also a little bit tipsy from the amount of alcohol he had taken.

'Excuse me please?' a voice called out to him He turned to see one of the most beautiful girls he had seen in his life. Hazel eyes, almost blond hair, aquiline nose and all the other descriptive qualities that Jabbar could not express or even understand. Time stood still for him. He was speechless.

'My name is Linda and I watched your performance earlier today and I am extremely impressed' To Jabbar, her voice seemed to flow like milk from an uncorked bottle. He finally found his voice.

'My name is Jabbar and I think you are the most beautiful girl I've ever seen in my life. Do you know I feel God is a woman just to have made a specimen such as you? Are you living in this estate? Who are your parents? What school do you attend?'

He could not stop himself from asking questions. From then on Jabbar and Linda became lovers developing a friendship that was admired by everybody. Everybody wondered how the queer Jabbar could have caught such a wonderful bird for himself. Even Jabbar's parents liked the match.....

.....Jabbar smiled as he remembered all the good times they shared for a very short period of time; Three weeks. Those three weeks were some of the best times in his life. Jabbar and Linda both brought themselves into adulthood. They learnt very much from each other.

Sitting on his seat facing the pool, he tried to remember when and what really happened to their relationship. Everything seemed hazy because he was too deeply in love to have noticed anything until the day he went to her house and found out that she had gone out with some other guy. He traced her to a restaurant where she and the other young man were enjoying dinner.

He barged in and went over to their table. He demanded in a loud harsh voice what she was doing with the other man.

‘Jabbar, I have been trying to let you know for sometime now what was going on’ she said this with such innocence that Jabbar only stood still and listened.

‘I like you Jabbar, but you know that alone is not enough. I needed something else and I needed it badly. I couldn’t figure out what it was but I know I have found it in this man here’

She pointed at the other young man who was sitting quietly like a true gentleman. She finished her speech by holding the shoulders of the other young man.

‘You mean its over?’ Jabbar asked with suppressed rage.

‘Over and out’ she replied passionately.

Jabbar smiled quietly and walked out of the restaurant into the evening. He was wondering what she had been looking for that she had found in the other young man. He left Linda and her new man more confused than he had ever been in his life.

Thinking of what she had said and seeing that the guy she was with now was different from the one that had taken

his place, he felt that that her problem was a psychological one and he pitied her. He diverted his gaze and attention from her and looked at the crowd of swimmers all as one.

Jabbar tried to figure out why all through his life things had been moving slowly for him. He did not seem to get the things he really wanted and liked. He finally concluded that what he needed to do was to have money. Money he figured made the world go round. There was something he had heard some time ago, that “*when money talks, bull shit walks*”. He seemed to get the general idea, but it sounded funny if you considered it in the literally sense. *How can bull shit walk?*

Acquiring money seemed to be the only solution to his immediate problems. Lack of money seemed to be the reason why all through his life others whom he considered to be less than the dust under his feet had graded him as a loser.

He took a seat in the club, and summed up the fact that if he had enough money to spend, he would not be considered a loser again. How to make the money? He had not even the slightest idea. He knew he had to get money no matter how and where it lay.

A smile finally broke out on his handsome face as the makings of an idea came to his mind. To him, it was simple. The idea stemmed up from what he had heard from some boys in his neighbor hood. They spoke of a land of milk and honey called Italy. A place where even a messenger boy could own a motor car if he was smart enough. The story spoke of a lot of Nigerians who had made it to the top of wealth by just one journey to Italy. But the story did not think of the thousands of Nigerians rotting in Italian jails from crimes committed against Italy by criminal minded Nigerians.

Girls were also going to Italy but the only profession they could take part in was prostitution. They seemed really good at it from reports given by Italian men.

Jabbar was feeling the twinges of excitement. The idea of going to Italy was a tempting one. He imagined himself going there to work for just a short time and coming back with a lot of money. He would buy himself a car, he thought and go off to rent an apartment all to himself. His problems would be finished and he would have unlimited fun.

He looked at the frolicking kids around him and thought of how they would feel when he came back with enough goodies from Italy.

Someone ran past him splashing some water droplets on him. He turned to look at the young boy and thought how this same boy would revere him when he came back from his trip to Europe.

‘Where do I start?’ he asked himself. He knew that an operation must have a starting point. The question almost knocked out all the excitement from his head. He looked at the group of swimmers, his mind lost in thought of how he was going to start. He decided to go home and sleep on the matter.

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‘David, why don’t you go and sweep the backyard and then clean daddy’s car?’

David stretched and yawned. The night had seemed very short. He sat upright in bed, looked at his watch, {he was fully clothed when he went to bed he hadn’t even remembered to pull off his shoes}, the time was eight fifteen AM. The person who had dropped the message had already gone leaving the door open. He yawned again and started

changing his clothes to his work clothes; torn jean trousers and faded t-shirt.

‘You look like hell’ his mother said

‘How does hell look like mama?’ David asked his mother who was at the backyard feeding some chickens. She looked at him for one moment, turned her back on him and continued with feeding her chickens.

‘Good morning ma’ he called out in their native Yoruba language.

She did not answer him, she just continued feeding her beloved chickens. He picked up a broom and started sweeping the backyard. He used hard and angry strokes to do the job. He finished in no time and went to the garage in front of the house, to his father’s car. A new Toyota Crown white in color. He washed the car quickly and went to sit by the side of the house.

David finished secondary school the year before and since then he had been facing peer pressure. He was only eighteen years old and very big and strong. Like Jabbar, he was very handsome. And also like Jabbar he also felt the pressure of not being from a wealthy family. Wherever he went for a party or an outing, he always ended by fighting one or more persons. He could not help himself at all. Since did not have money like the other kids, he used his fists as a substitute. He was very good with his fists. Boxing was his arena. He was a good boxer. He also attended one of the gym clubs at the Makurdi stadium. His home was situated in the High-Level area of Makurdi, a relatively crowded area, which was the busiest in the capital city

He was a person who always yearned to be in the class above his and this usually brought him a lot of trouble. He did not seem to fit well his middle class level. This usually caused him trouble. He saw success in life in terms of how much money you can spend and what model of car you

drive. He was an only child and his mother disliked him intensely though his father almost spoilt him with love.

Sitting beside his home, a bungalow, he decided that he was going to have a lot of money and he was going to have it by any means, hook or by crook. He remembered the events of the day before.....

... ‘c’mon every body, let’s have a party’

The DJ shouted into the microphone. Music was blaring from huge loud speakers and the whole place was really groovy. David got in through the door and went directly to where the Dj was; in front of the audience. He scanned the dancing audience then turned back to the Dj and shouted into his ears

‘I am looking for someone in this crowd and I want you to call her name now’ David said

‘I can’t do that,’ the Dj declared

‘Why can’t you do it?’ David asked in dismay. The Dj looked him up and down, and then went back to his equipment. David looked around in exasperation. He turned to the Dj and grabbed the microphone from him. The young man stretched out his arm to grab the microphone from him. David at six foot-four inches was almost a foot taller than the Dj and many kilograms heavier. He shoved the Dj away with one hand and called into the microphone

‘Please does anyone know the whereabouts of “Lizzy the gun”?’

He looked around the still dancing people

‘Please if you know, come to the Dj’s table’ David concluded and gave the microphone back to the silently fuming Dj and waited

The girl he was looking for was called Elizabeth Terser, a Tiv girl, a native of Benue state. She was called “Lizzy the gun” because it was rumored, that at some point

in her life, robbers came into her home to steal from them at gunpoint. Some how, as the story went, she disarmed one of the robbers, using his gun to shoot the other two robbers at point blank range. Whether the story was true or not, she was still referred to as “Lizzy the gun”. She was a ruthless and unscrupulous girl using any means to gain her ends.

Everyone wanted to be her friend, young men wanted to bed her at all costs because she was beautiful. David had not done much to secure her as his girlfriend. She saw him, liked him, and decided to make him her man. Now he wasn't seeing her. She was supposed to be at this party. He had told her before that he was not going to come early because he had some business to do in town. Now he was here and she was not. He didn't know what to do.

Someone tapped him on the shoulders from behind and he turned to face a girl. She was about twenty years or so and very skimpily dressed.

'Lizzy is in the back of the building' she said to David Obviously she already knew David.

'What is she doing outside?' he asked, immediately sorry for it. He knew asking the girl what Lizzy was doing was wrong, and he apologized to her for it and then moved out.

Outside, the air hit him like a cool blast from an air conditioner. He inhaled the fresh air into his lungs, slowly exhaling. There were several cars parked outside and a good many people too. Some were in groups, others were just singles, a few were couples. He walked towards his right until he got to the back of the building.

He had almost bumped into a couple kissing passionately. He stopped and apologized to them before realizing that the girl was Lizzy. He stared at her calmly, looked at the boy and then understood at once. She didn't even try to apologize or show any form of remorse

'David you know the truth now'

*'The truth?' his eyebrows went up
'Yea' she answered ' I have stayed with you long enough and
I am changing over now'*

He was silent.

*'You've never really given me much. I know I did not ask,
but you know a girl needs some basic things and money
helps to provide for those things'*

*She was still holding the other boy whose face was no so
distinct in the almost lightless side of the building.*

'So he can provide those things you need eh?'

*Before she could answer the question, the young man
answered ' Yes I can provide for all her needs. I know I can
do it' that was the mistake he made he, he told his friends
later.*

*The words had hardly left his lips, before David
started pounding him. In a few seconds he was down on the
ground with blood flowing out of his mouth and nose. David
did not even think of turning to Lizzy, he just walked way into
the party*

*Inside the party hall, he could not even move his feet
well. He was extremely upset and did not know what to do
about it. He felt so bad that he wanted to string his neck up
the nearest ceiling fan. After trying without success to have
fun, he went to sit at an empty table. He didn't even think of
using alcohol to drench his sorrows because he knew of the
hang over that would result the following day.*

*Money, he thought, the other boy had more money
than him, so invariably he had more power than him. He
thought long and hard about his life before deciding to go
home. He knew that before long, he would have to find a way
to get as much money as possible.....*

*... 'David boy how are you doing? You don't look so happy.
Boy you look down at the heels man'*

This was his father speaking to him. His name was Tsarvka. He was a businessman. Though he was not rich. He was a kind father to David, who never had cause to have any problem with him.

David looked up at his father, smiled and then stood up to his full height,

‘Dad, I am okay’ He said ‘Just a little bit tired perhaps’

‘If there is any prob, just tell me, you know you can count on me every time’. He confided.

‘Yes I know dad, but there is no problem at all’He tried to smile convincingly but failed. His father just shrugged and went to the back of the house. If the boy wanted to hide his problems from him, then he couldn’t force him to talk. To him it would have been better for the youngster to relate fully with him. David looked at his father going and knew that his father was not convinced with his noncommittal answer. He was not happy about hiding his problems from his father, but there was nothing he could do about it at all.

He moved into the house to shower and dress up. He wanted to go out today for a different purpose from that which he had been doing. Today he was going out to look for a way forward. Before he had been going out to look for fun, but today, he was going out to look for a way to get some money that would make him cope better with his environment.

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Jabbar woke up today feeling elated about the conclusions that he had come up with after a lot of turning around in his mind’s eye of the various obstacles and successes of the journey he was planning to undertake.

His major plan was that he would look for at least three other accomplices. They were going to reach Spain by traveling by land using a heavy-duty four-wheel drive car

like a land rover. They were going to do a robbery from which they would get finances for the journey. When they got to morocco, they would then cross the straights of Gibraltar with a ferry or ship then continue their journey through Spain, France and then finally into Italy. It all sounded simple enough in theory, but he knew that in reality, it was not going to be one easy trip.

He knew that the reason they could not go by airplane was because they would not be able to secure for themselves adequate papers to take them into Italy. So the only way open to them was the hard way; the land journey that would take some time. He was very convinced that they were going to make it.

His first problem was the problem of how to get accomplices. He was going out today to begin the recruitment of his crew, as he would later call them. He did not know how to start, but he knew he had to start somehow. He would go out today, he told himself, not for fun but for business.

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He took a bus going to the high level area of Makurdi. Jabbar was in a good frame of mind. He took the bus going to that area without any particular stop in mind. His mind was occupied with lots of thoughts flipping through at an amazing rate. He looked at the other passengers in the bus and smiled within himself. They knew not what was coming. He was going to make money in Italy he thought to himself.

A big signboard passed his gaze. He looked back and saw that the sign was that of Mr. Biggs, a fast food joint very similar to Mc Donald's in the United States of America. He stopped at the next bus stop. Then walked back a few blocks to the joint.

The place had a very bold sign at the top of the roof. If one imagined how Mc Donald's were built, one could imagine how Mr. Biggs was also built. There was a big parking lot in front, an ice cream bar to the right side, a lot of potted plants, and cool music coming from the inside. There were lots of cars parked outside. Some of them were new and expensive models.

Jabbar walked into an air-conditioned interior. There were round glass tables spotlessly clean surrounded by four chairs to each table. Inside the joint was full. There seemed to be no space left to sit down. He decided to look around more so that he could find an empty seat. On and on he looked until he saw a table that had two empty seats. He looked at the two occupants of the table. One was smallish with clear sharp eyes that seemed to know all. He was talking to the other young man who seemed to be a man mountain, because he was big and huge. He was wearing a body hug vest that was a little too tight for him showing bulging muscles. He was handsome too, Jabbar noticed.

Jabbar sat down on the seat facing the huge boy. A waiter came over to him as if he were summoned by telepathy.

‘What do you want sir?’ he asked

Jabbar looked at the yogurt the other boys were having.

‘The same as those’ he said pointing to the other glass cups on the table.

‘Anything else?’

‘Yes one meat pie too’ Jabbar ordered

‘Okay’ the waiter was off with Jabbar’s order.

The other boys only turned for a moment to look at him then went back to their meal. After about ten minutes two people came into the joint. A boy and girl. They were a handsome pair. There was apparently no place for them to sit down, so they called the headwaiter, whispered to him and

passed him a small bundle of money. Jabbar sat was watching it all.

The waiter then went to a table occupied by some other four boys obviously enjoying themselves. Jabbar watched as he talked to them coolly at first, then harshly and finally he threatened them. Though Jabbar could not hear their voices clearly but he knew what was happening. The waiter went to the back of the building and came back with two hefty men Jabbar knew to be bouncers. After talking again to the boys, they stood up and left the place, then the other couple who passed money to the waiter then took their space. Jabbar could not imagine a system that would allow this kind of thing to occur. A table meant for four people now belonged to only two people. Jabbar was saddened by the whole episode and he said a little bit aloud

‘When I have money, people like you will pay’

He meant the waiter.

‘Sure they will’ a voice said from his side.

Jabbar turned to face him, the big one

‘What did you say?’ Jabbar asked

‘I said that people like that will pay when the time comes’

David repeated.

‘I am Jabbar Bello’

‘I am David Tsarvka’ replied David in kind ‘and I didn’t like what the waiter did to those guys. The fact that these two are rich does not mean that the others should be treated poorly. If I were the one, I would have fought seriously’ he added.

Looking at his build Jabbar had no doubt that he would have fought and even won the other two fellows.

‘Yea, that’s just the country. Nobody respects you unless you have money’. Jabbar put in

‘I am going to make some money and make it soon. No one would stop me. Not even the law’. David said vehemently.

Jabbar stared at him and smiled. He knew that he had found the first member of his crew.

‘If you had the chance to make some money, would you do it?’ Jabbar put straight forwardly to David.

‘I think I would’ he answered

‘This is not a thinking matter, this is a matter of action’ Jabbar stressed

‘What is it you want to do?’

This was the other smallish boy talking. He had been quiet during the discussion between Jabbar and David. Now show was interested, but would not show it much.

Jabbar turned to face him, appraised him, and scored him. He would be the third of his group including himself.

‘Now this is the story.....’ Jabbar began.

Seven minutes later, he ended.

‘ And the only thing left is to find the last of us.’ Jabbar ended.

They looked at each other in silence, all trying to digest the idea brought to them by Jabbar.

‘I think my brother will be the last of the crew, and by the way my name is Joe’ said the third man.

‘Let’s try to meet here in three days time and try to make arrangements. Joe, come along with your brother. What did you say his name was again?’

‘James’ answered Joe

And they dispersed.

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He sat at a table awaiting the rest of the group he had just assembled. The waiting was filled lots of thought concerning the feasibility of his project and whether the other young men will join up with him in this endeavor. Would

they fail him? He asked. Were they competent enough? Questions like these plagued him as he sat at his table.

Mr. Biggs was empty this morning save for himself and the waiters. He had a glass half empty with yogurt. A plate nearby showed the uneaten remains of a meat pie. He had polished his plans all morning in readiness for the meeting.

The first person to come was David, swinging his huge bulk into the place like he owned it. He was putting on a body hug vest and black baggy jeans trousers. He looked quite cute Jabbar thought.

‘How’s the morning?’ Jabbar asked.

‘Yea cool as hell’ David answered in greeting.

‘Where are the others?’ Jabbar asked

‘They are just outside. Joe’s girl wanted to come in with him but the two brothers have worked out a way out to take her back home. They would soon be on their way’ David finished.

Just then they entered together. James was the larger of two, but by normal standards they were both small human beings. James had a slightly broad face, sharp eyes like his elder brother Joe and animal cunning that could scare any body trying to have an intellectual contest with him as Jabbar soon found out. The two brothers were orphans and they lived all by themselves, having no one to help them, not even uncles and aunts. They did odd jobs for a living.

They were masters in procurement of any kind of equipment. They knew where to get what they were looking for. Nothing was impossible for them to get their hands on.

Taking their various seats, with Joe sitting opposite Jabbar, they started to review Jabbar's polished plans. All was set fifteen minutes later. They were going to rob the Makurdi community bank, they were going to steal a land rover, buy maps and set on their land journey through North

Africa to Spain and then Italy. They scheduled their robbery in five days time. During which Joe and James were going to organize the arms they needed for the operation.

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The bank wasn't very crowded this morning. Sitting on a chair facing the cashier's counter and the other parts of the bank's money operations facilities, Jabbar studied the going ins and outs of people. He was dressed in his only suit. Through a bit uncomfortable in the newly dry-cleaned suit, he was pleased with himself. He looked smart, like somebody about to carry out some good transactions with the bank staff. He also carried a small briefcase to supplement his dressing.

Entering the bank would not be a problem. There was just one guard outside armed with an automatic rifle. Jabbar knew he would not be much problem to subdue. Inside, he could see that behind the cashier's work place, there the strong room was. Some one entered the room to collect some money. In the brief interval of the door's opening, he was able to get a glimpse of money stacked one on top of the other in neat rows inside the room. The attack day was in three days time. The brothers' Joe and James had already organized guns. All that was needed now was a general reconnaissance of the bank. Jabbar's own was today; the others' would follow shortly.

Jabbar looked at his wristwatch, the time was a quarter to eleven. The sun was just beginning to rise in the sky. Inside the bank was very cool from the split unit air-conditioner placed at one corner. A man walked into the

bank; he was dressed in tight body hug shirt and black plain trousers. His black shoe gleamed and he carried a bag that seemed full of money. He went to sit at the other side of the bank's lobby.

Jabbar stood up and took leave of the bank. It was now David's turn to get acquainted with the territory. The two brothers will be going into the bank the next day for their own check up.

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Sitting inside Mr. Biggs, the four young men put the final touches to their plans. They did not want to steal much. Just a few thousands to enable them travel to their destination. They knew they could not make stealing their main occupation. They were basically honest young men living in a society that gave no room for honest progress, but they still decided to stay clean even though they were going to be thieves for a while. Only those ready to cheat, steal and lie and even commit other crimes enjoy the nation's booty. They thought the fault was theirs, not knowing that the society had one basic problem; the problem of absolute corruption. Nigeria was a country that was known world wide as a country that most of its population lived under the burden of the results of corruption.

Jabbar was a little bit nervous about the automatic pistol resting in the pocket of his jeans. His accomplices looked very calm, especially the two brothers. They seemed extra happy with themselves.

'Let's bow our heads in prayer' Jabbar said
They bowed and were silent for some few minutes and then Jabbar got up and the four of them trooped out of the fast food joint.

They took a bus directly to the Federal Housing Estate where Jabbar lived. They did not go to his house. They went to one other lady's house. She was the second wife to a senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. She was very rich and had several expensive cars.

Jabbar knew that the woman would not be at home. He already knew this from his reconnaissance; that she was with her husband in Abuja, the capital city of Nigeria. They four young men went to the gate and knocked confidently.

'Who is that?' a security guard asked from inside the security post.

'I am the one, I dey look for madam' Jabbar answered in Pidgin English.

'Who are you?' the security guard asked again.

James pulled out his pistol and shot the guard in the leg. Jabbar was shocked. He had known before hand that they may need to harm someone, but he did not know it was going to be like this and he did not want to kill any innocent person.

'Collateral damage' James said while pushing the gate open for the rest to enter.

It seemed there wasn't anyone at home except the guard. He lay on the ground writhing in pain and a pool of blood gathering below his injured leg, but surprisingly, he was not making much noise. Inside the compound there were arranged six cars. Two Mercedes Benz 230E models popularly called 'V-boot', one Range Rover, two BMWs looking like twin sisters, and what they finally came for; a Land Rover Discovery. The car was all they needed for their journey.

Joe walked to the car, put in his master key, opened the door, started the engine and put the car in reverse. The others got in and they drove off.

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They drove the car to a place called Lafia Park on the main expressway from Makurdi to Lafia the capital city of Nasarawa state. The place was a haven for all kinds of traveler's vehicles especially the big ones. All kinds of trucks were represented there, DAFs, MACKs, Mercedes, Leyland, and numerous others. They looked like monsters, which in reality they were. Their horsepower was great and they could travel over long distances with very heavy loads.

The Land Rover was parked behind one of these monsters. They all got out and scanned their immediate environment for any sign of a car that they could snatch. The only one in the vicinity was a small Toyota saloon car popularly called "pure water" because of its cheap price. This particular brand of Toyota was quite inexpensive and was affordable to a lot of individuals. The car was a two-door affair.

Joe walked up to the car confidently and put in his master key. The door opened and he started the vehicle with another key from his bunch of master keys. He drove the vehicle to where the others were nearby. They all got in, David in front with Joe because of his size. The rear seat would hardly have contained him. They drove off to the Makurdi community bank.

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The car pulled up in the parking lot of the bank. There were other cars parked there. Jabbar pulled on his facemask. They did not want to be identified at all. They all got out of the car, stood for only a second then walked towards the armed guard. He was talking with someone and had not noticed the armed masked men. The person he was talking to

gesticulated in fear at the commencing masked men. Before he could turn, a pistol was already fixed at the small of his back

‘Don’t move or you are dead’ said a deep voice, David’s.

The man raised his gun above his head; Jabbar picked it from his hands. The other fellow was dumfounded.

‘Both of you come with us inside’ Jabbar said.

The two men walked in front of the masked men and led the way into the bank. James shot his pistol twice into the air as they got in.

‘Everybody just lie down flat on the floor, we would not hurt anyone who keeps cool’

Pointing his gun at the cashier, he said

‘Count out exactly one hundred thousand Naira into any bag you have got. We don’t want pranks. Just do as you are told. Nobody gets hurt’

Every one was on the floor already. Jabbar knew that an alarm would already have been triggered at a police station nearby. So he moved with speed. Time was limited now he knew. As a Taekwondo man, he jumped over the counter in one swoop and was counting bundles of money with the cashier. There was no bag around; theirs was forgotten in the car. He looked around and saw a carton lying on the ground. He picked it up and put the money into it. He picked up the carton filled with money and in another single bound; he was over the counter again.

‘Let’s clear out’ he called to his crew. They moved out and they moved very fast. Being caught now would not be to the advantage of the mission at all.

They were clearing a bend when they saw police cars, their sirens blaring, moving in the opposite direction to them. They were lucky by just a few seconds. Their vehicle will be described to the police, but they still had a little time to switch cars before the police caught up with them.

All was quiet as they parked their car about one kilometer from the Lafia Garage. They took a bus from there and were soon at the garage. They didn't waste anytime getting into the Land Rover because they knew they might have been identified with missing Toyota car. They drove at high speed towards Lafia; the time was just twenty minutes past noon. Their long journey had just begun.

CHAPTER TWO

Within two hours they were in Lafia. The road to Lafia from Makurdi was one that passed through a lot of mountainous areas. There were steep areas that many vehicles found hard to climb. The Land Rover Discovery was specially made for this type of roads, climbing with the four-wheel drive car was like a ride in the park. The car was fast and smooth and it even possessed a two-changer CD player sound system. That had good speakers and a sub woofer.

To make things better, Joe was also a very good driver. He told the rest that he had formerly been a driver for a big shot some time ago but was dismissed after the man found out that Joe was sleeping with his daughter almost on a daily basis.

Lafia was a bubbling city that had never witnessed any of the religious and political upheaval that was taking over many cities in Nigeria. Lafia was a city filled with many Muslims, and the general language there was the Hausa language. Every man around seemed to be putting on long kaftans. Hawkers were trading their wares and motorists were doing own share by honking continuously.

The young men decided to take a short rest, equip themselves, and then take off for night. They stopped at a filling station and got out of the car.

‘What do you think that we are going to need Jabbar’ asked Joe.

‘I have already made a mental note of what we are going to need and they would be quite much’ Jabbar put in.

‘What are they?’ David growled ‘I hope we can acquire them all before moving. I want us to get moving before the cops fall on us and identify the robbery of this morning with us’

‘We need two plastic one-hundred and twenty liter drums for drinking water, another two for petrol, foodstuff, a camp gas cooker with at least four extra cylinders, blankets and groceries. We need all we can get our hands on, no matter the cost. This is because we may not have to stop for anything on the way except for replenishments. The less we stop on the way the faster we move on’ Jabbar ended.

‘Who does the buying?’ James asked while scratching his head. He was sitting on the bonnet of the car and he made a funny picture that brought a slow smile to Jabbar’s face.

‘Joe, go for the drums, James go for foodstuff and the camp gas cookers while I’ll stay behind and take care of the car with David.’ Jabbar looked at them ‘agreed?’ they nodded assent.

‘Then take as much money as you would need’ he ended.

They dispersed leaving Jabbar free to think of the next phase of their operation. He leaned on the car and fell into deep thought.

When they left Lafia, they would have to press north until they got to the border between Nigeria and Niger. They had to cross the border some how he ruminated. He thought deeply about his mission, he did not even think about his family and how they were going to feel about his absence. He was so bent on carrying out his mission that he did not care about family ties anymore. He decided to pass time by putting on the radio. There was nothing on the news about their robbery. A few minutes later he put some music on.

There was only one CD in the vehicle, so he decided to go and buy some more. By the time he came back, the others were back, and they had already started loading things into the rear of the car. The four drums entered without any problem. The vehicle was a big one. They had removed the parallel back seat so that there would be enough room for all of their things.

Hailing as he came to them, he asked where they were going to put petrol in the drums.

‘Right here’ David replied with some irritation he had been trying to fit some other thing in the back of the vehicle.

‘Alright, we do it when we are done packing’ said Joe.

‘I have a feeling this is going to be along nice trip’ James started ‘and I want us to change hands at the steering wheel so that nobody gets fatigued quickly’ he finished.

Incidentally they all knew how to drive though Joe was the best amongst them. He had his driving license.

‘How do we drive a stolen car into northern Africa? We don’t have papers’ James asked looking a little bit puzzled.

‘We just take our chances’ answered Jabbar while getting into the drivers seat.

‘David did you just hear what Jabbar said?’ James asked

‘Yeah, and he’s right, we just take our chances’ he opened another door and went into the car leaving the two others outside. It was some minutes to five and they wanted to start their journey by seven pm.

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It was Jabbar that took the first turn in driving the car. The journey started some minutes to seven. Half an hour later night caught them in its dark grip as they drove at very high speed towards their next destination on the map, Kafanchan.

Kafanchan was in Plateau state. A town set at the base of the Jos plateau. There was music coming out of the speakers of the car stereo. Jabbar and crew were all comfortable. Jabbar looked over at Joe who was sitting by his side; the passengers seat.

‘How’re you feeling?’ he asked Joe.

‘Kind of okay’ he answered, not taking his eyes off the road.

‘You know we are all gentlemen, we are simply carrying out this current action because we want to leave our motherland to go else where to work for money’ he glanced at Joe, he then continued

‘When I finished secondary school sometime ago, I thought that I was done with suffering. I had always seen suffering as going to school. So on finishing secondary school, there was nothing to do. My grades were just average, but I could not secure admission into the university unless I had “long legs”. My father being a stout disciplinarian swore that he would not go and beg any body for his son’s admission into the university. And so here I am. The less privileged manage their lot while the rich leaders and politicians live like kings and behave like small’.

He paused to change gears as the big car started to climb a little high rise. He then continued.

‘I do not regret my leaving home; despite the heartache that I know my family would feel. I believe that is their sacrifice to my cause’ he finished and lapsed into silence.

The vehicle was silent, except for the music and the dull hum of the engine coming through the completely wound up windows.

‘I think you spoke for all of us’ James said.

‘Yea that’s true’ put in David.

‘Open up some coke lets feel good’ David added.

‘I think I need one too’ Jabbar demanded amid a big smile.

The journey continued.

Just ahead, a police check point. By their maps, they were just on the outskirts of Kafanchan and the time was a quarter to four in the morning.

Luckily, Joe was the person on the wheel.

‘Police check point’ Joe called to his sleeping partners

‘What did you say?’ Jabbar asked sleepily

‘Police’.

They were all alert now. The car slowed down to a stop though the engine was still idling. If anything were to go wrong, they would take off, thought Joe.

The nearest policeman raised one arm up as they finally slowed down. He had a machine gun in his right hand. His two colleagues were at the other side of the road talking to the driver of a lorry parked. The lorry was loaded with goods under a tarpaulin cover.

They held their breaths and waited. The policeman looked into the car, flashed a torchlight at the things in the back of the car,

‘wetin all these things be?’ he asked in pidgin English accented by Hausa.

‘These are our things’ Jabbar answered evenly.

‘Where una dey carry am go?’

‘We are taking them to our people in Kafanchan’ Jabbar answered again

‘Come down and open the boot’ the policeman said

Joe passed some squeezed notes into his left arm from his right arm. He put his left arm with the Naira notes outside the window of the car and the policeman snatched the money quickly. Only a very observant person would have seen the speed the policeman used to collect the money. This act of bribery was prevalent in the Nigerian police force. They took bribe easily and as such they usually allowed criminals to go free just because of a few Naira. The Nigerian government had a long way to go in the cleaning of the police system.

‘Oya make una dey go’ the policeman said with obvious satisfaction.

Joe drove the car off and they all heaved a sigh of relief. They did not want to start running from the law at this early stage of their journey.

The lights of Kafanchan were sighted and within a few minutes, they were entering the heart of town. The time was four-thirty. They went into the first filling station they saw, parked their car and went to sleep.

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A knock on the glass of the car brought James out of the dream world into reality. He yawned and stretched out his arms, lightly knocking Joe on the jaw. Joe woke up with a start, looked up at his brother then smiled with recognition. He woke Jabbar up in front of him while his brother did the same to David.

‘My God! The time is nine o’clock’ Jabbar silently creamed ‘we have got to get moving before time moves against us’

‘Where do we take our bath?’ David asked

‘Water from one of our drums can bath us for five days. We can take a bath in the bush on the outskirts of town’ Jabbar concluded.

They ate from a nearby restaurant, bought extra food, which they kept in a cooler they had bought before and then moved off.

Kafanchan was not a big town, but it was a bubbling one. David thought of the fun he would have liked to have with any one of the girls he saw around. They were mostly dressed in kaftans and long dresses with matching head ties.

On the outskirts of the town, near a rocky ledge, they swerved the car into the bush. The big car cleared a new path in the bush. They stopped the car about a hundred yards from

the road. No one would notice them from the road. They all got down and started bathing.

The water was cool on Jabbar's skin.

'As we go further north, we won't be able to bathe with cold water in the mornings again'

'Why did you say that' asked David, he was clearing soapsuds from his eyes.

'Because, as you know, the Harmattan winds blow from the north at this time of the year. The farther north we go the more of this Harmattan winds we meet. The afternoon heat will be very high anyway' Jabbar ended.

David stared at him in dismay.

'You do not seem to like my explanation, but I know all I say is true' Jabbar explained pitifully to David.

'Yea' was all David said and went back to his bath.

They finished bathing, dressed up, ate an additional meal, and then continued their journey. The big Discovery shot out the bush like a mad cow. An oncoming vehicle containing a young couple and their two kids, had to apply their brakes otherwise there would have been a collision and the other car would have suffered more damages than the Discovery. David, who was now driving, knew his mistake, but did not wait to say sorry. He just faced the other side and downed the accelerator pedal. The big car shot forwards towards the next town.

David drove the car until they got to a large junction. He took the direction of Kaduna. The journey to Kaduna was almost uneventful until they came to a village about fifty kilometers from Kaduna town.

Just ahead of the big Land Rover, two buses were parked. Jabbar looked at the busses, they were the Mercedes Benz *Marco polo* type. These buses were very large and very comfortable. On their sleek bodies were written the names of

the companies that owned them. One bore '*CHISCO*' the other bore '*FG ONYEWE*'.

Around the buses, were milling armed men with some very young boys between the ages twelve to fourteen among them. They were armed with different types of automatic weapons and they looked rough and mean. The buses were being robbed.

On sighting the Land Rover, a group of them raised their hands to stop the motion of the jeep. Joe was the person driving. He slowed down the big car just a little.

'Grind forward!' Jabbar shouted between clenched teeth 'grind through them!'

As if by magic, David stepped on the accelerator and the car shot forward like a big animal in a charge. Simultaneously, Joe and James lay on their seats. The big Land Rover shot into the center of the armed robbers. Before they knew what was happening, the car was on them. Most of their attention had been on the two buses being robbed, so they were slow in responding to the Land Rover. This cost them some casualties. The jeep ran into about five of them who didn't leave the road in time. They were killed instantly on impact with the metal bumper of the jeep.

The Land Rover was already hundreds of yards away before the first shot was fired from the robbers. Nothing hit the jeep. They were already out of range. David screeched the car after about a kilometer from the robbery.

'Why did you stop!' asked Jabbar

'We have to go back to the robbers' he answered in a kind of monotone. His eyes looking far away 'the robbers would vent their anger on those innocent victims because of our act' he finished.

'Okay we go, and we go in armed. We give them fire for fire' Jabbar conceded, knowing that there was no way he was going to convince Joe to move forward

They brought out their guns. Joe held a pistol because he was the driver and would be driving during action. Jabbar had one submachine carbine and the other boys handled the weapons they had used for their robbery. As they drove back they were ready. All the windows were wound down, so that visibility would not be limited. They were moving very fast.

The scene of the robbery before them and this time Jabbar was able ascertain the number of the robbers. As the car came towards the criminals, they did not recognize the car as the one that just killed some of their numbers. It seemed to them that this was another car.

Someone raised his arm to indicate the car to stop, but this time the person was not standing in the road as the other had done before. Joe slowed down a little then noticed a small log of wood had been placed across the road. Small cars would not be able to cross the log but Joe knew that the Discovery would be able to. He accelerated the car. The acceleration seemed like a silent go ahead to start shooting because a burst of gunfire emanated from the car as they sped forward. Joe applied his brakes hard while turning the steering wheel and pulling up the hand brake. The car made a one hundred and eighty degree turn. The moment the car finished making the turn, and facing the opposite direction, every one started shooting at the same time.

Joe, dropping his pistol now so that he could drive well, put the car in reverse while his colleagues kept haranguing the criminals with repeated gunfire. The car hit the log and bumped over. The robbers were returning fire at them too, but gradually they got out of range without a scratch. Joe sopped the car with another screech and put the car in forward gear. The big car lurched forward. This time, the boys were going in for the kill. As they came forward again, they started shooting, but this time the robbers did not wait for them to come close, they ran into the bush.

Joe pulled the car to a stop beside one of the buses. As soon as Jabbar opened the door to get down, a battered old 504 Peugeot car shot out from the bush and sped off in the direction from which Jabbar and his crew were originally coming from. The driver hit the brakes hard when he saw the log. He didn't brake fast enough, so he hit the log and the car somersaulted twice and fell into the bush.

The remaining criminals were stopped by their own innovation.

Jabbar came down along with his colleagues. He looked around at the dead bodies lying around. Their car had killed some including the gang leader. Their first burst of gunfire had decimated their number. The remaining few could not carry out their operation any more. So they ran only to meet their death in a log they had kept.

'Is anyone hurt?'; Jabbar asked in a loud voice. There were passengers milling about the buses.

A babble of voices started to answer his question. He raised his hand

'Silence! Only one person should speak for all. I cannot hear all of you at the same time'

They then deliberated together for a moment, then choose one ruby faced Ibo man as a spokesman. He came forward with a scared expression on his face. Even though Jabbar had saved them, they could still not trust them. In his thick Ibo accent he started recounting his story.

'We were traveling from Enugu to Sokoto. Everything was okay until we got to this place...'

'Was anybody killed?' Jabbar interrupted him.

'No sir,' the man answered hesitantly 'They only robbed our money'. You are very lucky Jabbar said to himself but outwardly he said,

'Now you can all collect your money back and leave this place' Jabbar turned to enter the Land Rover as he said this.

The robbers had put their money together in a very large bag so all they had to do was get down to the distribution of money back. Jabbar knew that unless someone tried to lie about his amount, there would be no problem during sharing. ‘Sir can you people please be our escort until we get to Sokoto?’

Jabbar turned to face a fat man, who turned out to be the driver of the first bus

‘We can pay you people,’ he continued without waiting for Jabbar to answer. ‘The roads are filled with robbers. We don’t know you people but we are ready to trust you as our escort’ he added.

‘Our pay would be twenty thousand Naira’ Jabbar said flatly before sitting inside the car.

‘Is this per bus, or for the two buses?’ asked the driver.

‘For the two buses’ Jabbar said then closed the door of the Land rover ‘twenty minutes and we are ready to leave. You are lucky that we are going the same way if not we would not have had the time to do the job’.

Fifteen minutes later, the buses were ready and the journey commenced. The Land Rover was leading the two giant buses. The bus drivers did not stop over in Kaduna for refreshments as they had originally planned. After their ordeal, the drivers and passengers were in a hurry to get to their destinations.

From Kaduna they went to Funtua, then to Gasau, Gandi, and then finally Sokoto. During the journey Jabbar, thought about how much luck had a part to play in the fact that they faced those criminals down, because Jabbar and his crew were not trained personnel. They just used their initiative and the fact that the criminals were not expecting any form of attack. They were lucky because any one of them or all of them could have been hit during the fight.

Jabbar began to have faith that this journey was going to come out fine after all.

They were paid their money. Then they continued their journey. Before leaving Sokoto, they replenished their groceries so that they would not have need for anything on the way. Their next stop was Kaddi, near the Nigeria-Niger border. The vehicle was still in good condition as they sped towards their next destination.

CHAPTER THREE

The cold weather was had come, but they weren't feeling the cold, because the temperature controller inside the Land Rover Discovery was warming them. They got to Kaddi and decided to take a little rest so that they could plan on how to cross the border unnoticed with their vehicle. They were supposed to go through the border patrol checkpoint, which was about twenty kilometers from where they parked their car.

Some two hours later still saw Jabbar and his crew thinking of ways to cross the border to Birminkani in Niger. There was always the great possibility of being stopped if they took the main road. Since darkness had fallen, they had an added advantage. They could crash through the border patrol on the Nigerian side, but before they crossed the few yards of no man's land, the border patrol on the Niger side would have been alerted, so it was out of the question to risk a bashing.

'We have quite some distance to cover if we take the road' Jabbar began 'so I suggest we take the road as far as the check point, then we veer into the bush and later reappear again on the other side of the boundary.' Jabbar added. He suddenly realized the answer to their dilemma was simple

'I think that what we do is to go through the check point and bribe our way through these customs guys.' David said.

'These guys are not easy to bribe, they are different from the police boys' Joe said

‘Then I think that my plan should be the one we should use.’
Jabbar finalized.

‘Alright’ Joe said.

He put the car in gear and headed down the road towards the checkpoint. Many small villages slept calmly this night. Jabbar and his mates passed these calmly sleeping small villages. Lantern light showed from some of their windows. Just about two hundred yards from the checkpoint, Joe veered the car into the bush and put off the headlights of the car. The big car crashed and brushed its way inside the bush making the detour that would take them into Niger. The terrain was relatively flat because geographically, they were gradually coming into the desert region.

They made the detour almost without any hitch except small continuous bumps. Down to their left, along the road about four kilometers away, they passed the Niger border patrol. After moving on for sometime, Joe swerved the car unto the road and sped away into the night. The road led straight to Birminkani. They had successfully crossed the border. They had been lucky again that they were not caught, because there were soldiers and mobile police men guarding the borders.

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Dawn was just breaking as they entered the little dusty town of Birminkani. People were just waking up. The environment looked just that of Kaddi and Sokoto. The people were dressed like the Hausas, and even a majority of them were Hausas and they spoke the Hausa language. Jabbar felt a kind of mild elation at how far they had traveled and the kind of luck they had encountered so far on their journey. Motorists were blaring their horns while early

morning hawkers were trying to sell their wares in loud voices. Jabbar looked around and smiled.

‘Let’s stop for some fresh food’ he offered.

‘I think that would be a good offer’ said James

‘I am tired of driving. Need a rest and good food.’ Put in Joe, while trying to stretch his neck.

‘I can see a filling station up there, I think that would be the best place to rest a little’

Joe took the jeep into the filling station to fill the tank with petrol, and then he parked at a corner. Exchanging greetings with some of the sales people in the filling station, the four young men decided to take a walk around the area in search of a good place to eat.

They found a canteen not far from the filling station. The canteen was catering to early customers and they seemed to the young men to have a wide variety of food. Inside the canteen was a little bit dark. The tables were clean but old. There were about four long tables with two long benches on opposite sides. One table was empty, the one to the far left corner. They went to seat down, two to a side.

‘Wetin e be say I want?’ asked a freshly scrubbed Hausa man. His kaftan was old and worn, but neat.

‘Wetin you get?’ Jabbar spoke out for all

‘Bread I dey, tea idey....’

‘Give us bread, eggs, and tea’ James interrupted the man

‘Okay’.

The man went about getting their orders. They sat and waited patiently. Traffic had begun to thicken outside. Jabbar used this time to take stock of all they were going to do later on. Jabbar thought, they had to take the shortest route through Niger. By their maps he knew they would have to go to Madaoua due northeast, then take another route to Tamaske. From Tamaske to Agades. From Agades a direct highway route to Admer in Algeria. The Saharan desert

would start on the long plain from Agades to Admer. He knew they weren't going to pass through the thickly inhabited places. His maps told him so.

The arrival of their orders interrupted his train of thought.

'This one na five hundred francs I go cost' the Hausa man said in his thickly accented and poorly constructed English. He set down the large tray containing their orders. He stood still watching Jabbar and friends.

'He needs his money' David said to Jabbar while picking up a slice of white bread from a plate on the tray. Jabbar put his hands in his breast pocket and drew out a wad of Niger francs. Pulling out one five hundred franc note, he paid the Hausa man who promptly left their tableside for another. They had changed some of their Naira for francs in Sokoto.

They finished their meal quickly and then went back to their vehicle for a small nap. Jabbar wanted them to get to Agades by the morrow. This meant that they had to move as fast as possible.

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The desert began to surround them. Apart from some small villages along their route, they were only aware of the empty landscape. Sparse vegetation grew like dried weed. They had passed the Sudan savannah region and were entering what would later turn into complete desert land.

They had passed Tamaske about two hours before and were heading due east to Agades. The time was five thirty in the evening. Jabbar was currently driving. He had been driving for almost four hours now and was already exhausted. He wanted to drive some more before handing over to another person. Very few motorists passed them. The terrain was almost bleak. Outside the temperature was

rapidly coming down as it normally does in the semi-desert and desert regions. By nightfall, it would be very cold outside.

The young men inside the Land Rover Discovery were not feeling the temperature changes outside the car, because inside the car, the temperature was regulated by a hot and cold air conditioner.

‘If we get to Agades I think we should take a day off to rest’ James said breaking the silence that had reigned in the car for almost one hour.

No one answered him. Music was coming out coolly from the surround sound system.

‘Don’t you all think so?’ he asked.

After a short silence, David spoke

‘James, cool it off and go to sleep’.

There was no mention about stopping anywhere for a brief respite by anyone again.

The town of Agades hove into view at about seven in the morning. Jabbar was sleeping. David and Joe were having an argument concerning the differences between Indian girls and Arab girls. The argument centered on which race of girls were the most beautiful. Neither of them had met any girl from both races before, but they kept on arguing with mild vehemence.

Taking the steering wheel was Joe. Joe enjoyed driving. He loved the feel of a good machine being controlled. He had driven the longest time since the journey started.

Agades was a beautiful town situated on the edge of the Saharan desert with a lot of date palm. Most of the people on the streets were predominantly Muslims. Their dressing consisted mainly of turbans and kaftans. The women were dressed with *hijabs*; clothes covering their heads and faces. Tall minarets and spires dotted the skies, because of the

profusion of mosques in the town. Hawkers present were shouting in loud voices advertising their wares.

Inside the car, the young men were a bit happy, but they knew that their journey still had a long way to go. They replenished some of their depleted stocks before they undertook the next leg of a journey that already consisted of many legs. By five in the evening, as the sun had begun to set, they started again. This time David was the driver. The gyrocompass inside the car gave their heading as northwest.

The route they were taking would take them through sparsely populated regions. The *Air* mountain ranges of Niger were on their right side. The desert had already begun. They had full drums of both water and petrol. From his maps, Jabber knew that they would now be going for a long way before they came to any town or village with a filling station where they could refuel.

CHAPTER FOUR

On the evening of the next day, they were close to the Niger-Algerian border. The road was deserted up ahead. Joe was at the wheel. Just as they were coming down a hill, they saw about sixty men dressed in green T-shirts and black jeans trousers. One raised his hands up indicating for them to stop. If Joe had tried to drive through them, that would have been the last act that he would have made on earth because the men stopping them were not robbers, but were armed guerillas. A Liberation Army formed by Ahmed Buhari Mohammed.

Ahmed was formerly the chairman of the People's Development Party formed some years before in Algeria. The party consisted mainly of hard-bitten, war toughened Algerians who wanted power out the present party's hand. They had before used peaceful means to their ends until the Algerian government banned them from making public speeches and from taking an active part in politics. All these Jabbar found out later on.

The consequence of the ban on them was for them to go into self-exile and to terrorize the government by any means that they could think of. Their base was somewhere in the desert a very long way off from Admer. They usually came to Admer and other border towns when they were receiving supplies, which came from Europe via Niger.

They were utterly ruthless and unscrupulous in their ways. Any government official that ends up in their hands would wish himself a dead man.

Joe slowed down the car and parked just as was indicated to him by the one of the guerillas. Every body in the car was tensed up. Ahmed Buhari came forward to them.

He was a heavily bearded man. His face had an easy joviality, which if he weren't a terrorist would have made him a very good family man. Physical he was heavily built, weighing about ninety kilograms. He had piercing, and intelligent eyes that seemed to always ask the question why?

He looked at the young men's faces then looked down at the car plate number, which Jabbar and his colleagues had not even cared to change, Noting that they came from Nigeria and that they would be speaking only English.

'Four young men in a jeep heading for where?' He said in his heavily accented English, stressing the 'r' like most true Arabs did when speaking English.

No one spoke in the car.

'I ask again for where are you going?' He asked again, smiling. The smile was just a grimace it didn't touch his eyes.

'Italy' Jabbar answered

'Italy?' Ahmed Buhari asked in surprise.

'Italy' Jabbar answer again.

Ahmed Buhari turned to some of his men, speaking to them in Arabic and ending with the word Italy. They all laughed loud and hard. Ahmed turned to them again

'Get out of the car. All of you'

They all got out. Just inside the small desert bushes near Jabbar could see about ten military jeeps parked one after the other. They were painted black with light green stripes.

‘You seem like terrorists more than any other thing in the world to me. How can you say you’re going to Italy and you are going by land? You could have gone by air’ Ahmed asked still surprised and not sure of what to do about these people.

‘It is the truth about the matter’ Jabbar put in ‘in Nigeria there is no way they could have let us go to Italy. We didn’t have enough money for passports, papers and transport. He finished.

Ahmed Buhari looked at him then asked ‘what is your name my young friend?’

‘Jabbar, Jabbar Bello’.

He smiled widely. This time his smile reaching his eyes

‘You boys are going to stay with us for sometime before you commence on your journey. I think we need your services for just a little time.’ He finished then turned to his fellow guerillas and started telling them of his decision in Arabic and Portuguese.

‘What do we do now?’ Jabbar asked his friends ‘I think we wait and see what use they have of us’ David said.

‘I think so too’ James said echoing Joe’s thought.

Ahmed Buhari came back to them and told them to get moving. They were going to follow the convoy of ten military jeeps and four trucks to where they were going. They had not noticed the four trucks before. Jabbar speculated that the goods in the trucks were what these men came to collect. Jabbar and his friends did not even think of escaping, they could not do so and they knew it. The prospect of new adventure was stimulating, after a very long and uneventful journey.

By the jeeps gyrocompass, they were traveling due west. By the map, Jabbar realized that they had by-passed many of the border towns and they were not heading towards Admer, but away from it. The road they were passing was

dusty and rarely used; they had since deviated from the main Agades-Admer highway.

With the coming of dusk, they headed due west to the guerilla head quarters located in Ohariet.

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Ohariet was a small western Algerian town that seemed to be suspended in time. It was located between two hills one on the eastern side of the town, the other on the western side. The town presented a picture of what most big towns may have looked like about fifty years ago in the nineteen fifties.

Buildings dotted the town like old crones refusing to go to their graves. Somewhat modern looking bungalows were situated here and there. There was a road running from the beginning of the town to the end of the town. The town was a linear settlement. A few cars moved about but the most predominant mode of transportation were the two wheelers and three wheelers. Bicycles and motorcycles were everywhere.

The inhabitants were dressed mainly in long multi coloured kaftans and long caps. The town was the headquarters of the guerilla soldiers, but to a first timer, the town looked as simple and as normal as any other dusty North Africa town.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon of the next day when the long convoy entered into the dusty town. The sun was almost overhead and blazingly hot. But inside the land rover was cooled down by the air conditioner inside.

The convoy didn't stop in the town but went on through the town until they came to a small branch in the road to the right, which took them through a dusty road to the

foot of the hill on the eastern side of the town. At the foot of the hill there was a small road leading gradually upwards to a settlement that can hardly be seen unless to an eye already accustomed to the terrain. From the town, the settlement cannot be seen. From the settlement, all things happening in the town can be seen without binoculars.

The big jeep came to a stop behind one other smaller military jeep. Jabbar got down so that he could have a good look at the whole terrain. To his eyes the settlement had very few plants. Most present were the semi-desert plants. Jabbar looked around the settlement; there were many flats around. At one of the settlement towards the far north end, there stood a big building, which he observed was the store. Trucks were already backing up the building so that they could be off loaded. The whole place had a military kind of air around it.

‘Jabbar my friend come over with your friends so that you can be shown to your quarters. I pray you can tell us later the reason why you want to go to Italy with a land rover jeep’ Jabbar was jolted out of his train of thoughts by Ahmed Buhari’s deep voice.

‘Come on gents’ Jabbar called to his friends. They started moving in a single behind Ahmed Buhari. After a few hundred yards, they came to a flat.

‘This is your flat, you can drive your car into the garage’

He turned to go then as if remembering to add something to what he had already said, ‘don’t even think of escaping. If you do, you will be dead men before you even know it’ he turned on his heels and headed off.

‘Who does he think he is? Eh. If I were left alone with him, I would tear him apart like tissue paper’ David said in anger, his handsome face in a tight frown.

‘He would beat you any day in a fight David. Just don’t be foolish that’s it’ Jabbar said in an attempt to placate David.

They were all standing of the front of the flat.

‘Joe go and get the car please’ Jabbar said.

‘Okay’ he said simply and left.

After Joe left to bring their car over to the house, a young girl of about eighteen years old was seen coming up the gravel driveway up to their house. She had a bundle in her arms. When she came very close they saw that the bundle contained a broom and a duster.

‘My name is Hajaratu and I am the regular cleaner for this house’ she said in heavily accented English. She put a key into the front lock of the house and went in. Jabbar noticed that the color of the house was white which was surprising.

What Jabbar did not know yet was that the house was where they kept government officials which the guerillas frequently took as hostages. Ahmed Buhari wasn’t a brutal man in the extreme sense of the word. He was a very humane person, but he was also ruthless when it comes to keeping order. A hostage should not try to escape or he would face dire punishment. He was a politician forced to use the force of arms to get his own ends. He had many supporters in the capital city of Algiers on the coast and in many other cities, towns and villages around Algeria.

The house was a two-bedroom affair the parlor was decorated with a fine Persian rug on with four leather cushions rested. There was the faint aroma of Arabian perfume in the air. The walls of the interior was painted pink, even the bathroom had pink tiles, which were spotlessly clean. The whole place had a sumptuous air.

Jabbar was in the bathroom when the sound of the Land Rover came to him. He quickly finished up and went into the parlor. He was wearing a large towel, which he had seen, in the bathroom. James and David had put on the

television set in the parlor and were trying to get a station that spoke English. A video compact disc player was below the TV set and an audio system was also presented complete with a digital amplifier. There were about two hundred CDs on a large CD rack. The discs contained both movies and audio.

‘You look fresh I think I will go and have my bath too’ David said while standing up obviously going to fulfill the need. Joe came in at the same time.

‘Please let’s go and pack our things into the house, I am really tired’ he said with an exasperated sigh.

‘Why don’t you go and take your bath and relax while we do the unpacking eh?’ Jabbar suggested in sympathy with his friend

‘Okay I accept’ Joe said ‘please where is the way to the bathroom?’ he added

‘Simple. Make two left turns then four right ones then you would come to it’ Jabbar joked. James laughed and got up to lead the way for those of them doing the unpacking. In three hours dusk came. They were all seated watching a movie. The girl Hajaratu brought them some spaghetti and real white wine and some cans of beer. They were relaxing well, all except Jabbar, he knew that any moment from now a message would come to them from Ahmed Buhari. He was both eager and apprehensive of the reason why they had been kidnapped. Or have they been kidnapped? He asked himself. Maybe, his love adventure was making him stay. Their guns were still with them, their money, their car and all their property. Maybe he was the one that actually wanted to stay.

Some one knocked on the front door and entered without waiting for an answer to come in. Jabbar got up immediately and sprang like a flash to intercept whoever came into the house. He moved so fast that he had his hands at the throat of the young armed guerilla that entered the

house. The young man could not lift his gun because one of Jabbar's arms was at his windpipe and the other was at his scrotum, while his right leg pinned the armed guerilla. He was immobilized and could only show shock and surprise. 'Ahmed want you' he breathed heavily ah-med want you' 'Ahmed needs me?' Jabbar asked releasing his hold on the young man. 'Brothers I am coming let me talk to the boss' 'Allow me follow you' David suggested 'It's okay I think I can take care of myself' Jabbar said smiling.

The time was almost seven P.M as Jabbar walked towards his interview with the rebel leader Ahmed Buhari Mohamed. Darkness had already come. Light came from most of the apartments. Music also came one or two. Jabbar followed the guard behind closely past the mess into a guarded building. Two guards on the either sides of the door saluted Jabbar and the young man. The young man stopped at the door and motioned for Jabbar to go in. Jabbar opened the heavy oak door and went inside the room.

The room was brightly lit with about four long fluorescent lights. Behind a great mahogany desk filled with a lot of papers and ink blots, sat the terror of all pro-government Algerians. He wore horn rimmed reading glasses.

Without waiting to be told to sit down, Jabbar took the seat at the other side of the desk facing Ahmed Buhari. The terrorist put his chin on his hands and stared at the young man in expectation.

'What do you want from us?' Jabbar asked without preamble. He was trying to hide his apprehension.

'I think I should be asking you how you people got all the way from Nigeria to Algeria' he said in his thick accent, a mixture of French and Arabic accents 'and your reason for making such a journey'

‘As I have told you before, we were planning to go to Italy via land routes. If we had the money for adequate papers and flight tickets, we would have followed that way which is easier. Our reason for going to Italy is to look for work so that can make some money’.

‘Have you finished?’ Ahmed asked.

‘Yes I have’

‘How about making some money before leaving Algeria for Italy. Maybe the money you make here would help you settle down in Italy before you get the type of work you would like’ Ahmed suggested

‘How do you mean?’ Jabbar asked, eyebrows rising and heart beginning to beat with interest.

‘I knew you would be interested’ Ahmed laughed

‘Was I so transparent?’

‘I guess so’

‘What do you want me to do earn such money and how much is it going to be?’ Jabbar asked, impatient to know what was in Ahmed’s mind.

‘All I want you to do’ he stalled, clearing his throat and shifting a few papers ‘is for you guys to carry out a series of bombings for us. In the city of Algiers and the whole of Algeria as a whole, you people are not known by the government secret police so you can go into any city you like and do what you want without fear of recognition or capture. He paused for the effects of his words to sink into Jabbar.

‘I know you may find it somewhat hard to reconcile the bombings with some of your moral principles because human lives may be lost and some of them may be innocent’ he waited for Jabbar to speak.

After a little thought Jabbar rose up to leave. Ahmed had a look of surprise on his face, his mouth moved as if to speak.

‘I will have to talk to the others, our answer will get to you’ Jabbar quietly said then left Ahmed still sitting

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‘So how much did he say they were going to pay?’ David was asking Jabbar after Jabbar told them of Ahmed Buhari’s offer.

‘The matter is not the money yet because the amount is going to be much indeed. The thing now is whether you people are going to do the job or not. I am in for the job’ Jabbar said

‘If you are in then what makes you think we won’t follow you’ James put in ‘we are in with you to the end bro’

‘Okay I will meet Ahmed tomorrow first thing so that the terms of payment can be fully understood and acknowledged. Now I suggest we all go to sleep’. Jabbar ended moving in the direction of the room that David had chosen for them, leaving the other room to the brothers James and Joe.

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Morning came quickly, the rest rejuvenated Jabbar very much. He was in a good frame of mind. He even whistled to himself while in the tiled bathroom. If the money was large enough, they may not even have to go to Italy after all they may just go back to Nigeria and try to enjoy their lives. He thought.

He didn’t think about the dangers they would pass through to accomplish their mission. After dressing up, he

went to the sitting room where his friends were having their breakfast accompanied with music from the sound system; he took his breakfast quickly and left for Ahmed's office. As he opened the door to leave the house, he saw the same young man that was sent to bring him the night before. The man kept his distance despite the gun he was carrying. Together they covered the short distance to Ahmed Buhari office.

The setting of the office was the same, it seemed to Jabbar that Ahmed had not moved from the table since the last time he saw him. Everything looked the same.

'Sit down gentleman'

Ahmed offered, he seemed to be in a cheery mood that morning.

'We have finally decided to carry out the mission provided the payment is good'

Jabbar paused. 'How much are you paying us?' he demanded.

Ahmed gave out a hard laugh and said

'You people are very queer type of people or should I say that you are unique type of people. You started a journey to Italy, then end up in another business.' He became serious again as he saw that Jabbar was not joining in his humor.

'I offer you people fifty thousand American dollars to carry out just five bombings' he held on. Jabbar waited. 'We would build the bombs, make all the necessary arrangements all you have to do is to deliver the bombs we will do the detonation' he finished.

'We do the job for one-twenty' Jabbar silently said

'One-twenty!' Ahmed screamed 'do you know that amount is preposterous?' he asked in alarm.

'We are risking our necks in delivering the bombs and I believe that we need to be paid well' Jabbar relaxed deeper in his chair knowing that he had the North African pirate by the gonads.

‘We do the job for one hundred thousand and no more’ Jabbar helped seeing that Ahmed was not talking.

‘You know we could take some of your friends as hostages while we force the rest of you to do the job Jabbar’ Ahmed said ‘we have many easy ways of making you do the job’

‘Those boys are not my brothers and if you want your job done nice and cool, please stop threatening me and pay us one hundred grand. I have nothing to loose by dying now brothers, I think it may be a welcome thing to see how death feels in reality’ Jabbar ended.

There was silence in the room. A fly buzzed around the table as if hoping for food to materialize out of the bare tabletop. Shifting some papers from right to left, Ahmed sadly conceded.

‘Okay take a hundred, I would have offered you eighty, but something tells me you will refuse it so I am in for a hundred.’

He got up. A sign for Jabbar to leave,

‘I would summon you for the details because your job is to start tomorrow and finish in five days time. A day for a bomb, the first part of your money would be given to you in cash and it will be fifty thousand. After the detonation, you get the other half and then you can move. Please do not try to make any funny move or you will be dead before you know it. Goodbye’ Ahmed finished and sat back in his chair, Jabbar left.

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‘Making these type of bombs is quite easy. All you have to do is to get these small pieces of plastic material together. Embed the mixture with this small transceiver.

When detonated, the transmitter sends the “go” message to the transceiver with then sends another signal into the surrounding molecules. The signal causes the molecules of the plastic to vibrate to a certain frequency. When the vibrating molecules exceed a certain threshold, they explode. This mechanism is simple but a bomb of this type as big as a football, can make an incredible blast’

Jacob-David explained. He was a big Irishman working for the terrorists as their bomb technician. Jabbar was taken to him so that he could get a good look at the type of arsenal they would be taking for their mission. His meeting with Ahmed Buhari went very well and there was fifty thousand dollars in a small bag in his room. He had been briefed on how they were going to get to their destinations. Maps were given to them and mobilization fees too were given to them. Now Jabbar was learning some things about the bombs he was going to plant. Their journey to Algiers would start the very next day and it was going to be by land.

They were going to start their journey from Ohariet to Arak to Ain Salah and so on until they got to Algiers on the coast up north. They would be using the land rover. They would also be unaccompanied because if they had terrorist company, they would easily be located and stopped. The plate number of the land rover had been changed. The Nigeria one was kept inside the boot.

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The sun was coming down relentlessly hard, high up cumulus-nimbus clouds stood still like hard stones in the sky. Jabbar was at the wheel with Joe by his side, a large map

spread across his knees. Their heading was Arak. Jabbar floored the accelerator of the big car making the car bolt like a wounded animal. They had joined the trans Saharan motor route at Tamanrasset.

In the boot of the Land Rover was a large *Ecolak* travelers box with five bombs. They were the size of a small laptop computer and they looked very much like a laptop computer. Jacob-David had ingeniously built the bombs so that they look like laptops. His ingenuity was intended to make the bombs seem harmless, not even looking like bombs at all. He succeeded.

They planned to get to the coast in two days time. The fifty thousand dollars was left in the house at the camp. Jabbar was taking Ahmed on trust. Ahmed had sworn with the holy *Koran* facing the *Quiblah* in Mecca that he could be trusted

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They got to the coast in less than Forty-eight hours. The journey was uneventful, nothing but a series of towns and cities with nothing to remember about them. Jabbar's mind was focused on the task ahead.

Algiers by night was a wonderful sight to see. There were many lights dazzling the eyes of those seeing the city for the first time. Even those people who reside in the city sometimes catch their breath as they see for the umpteenth time the serene and bountiful beauty of this coastal city. Owned by the Arabs but colonized by the French.

Following the address given to them by Ahmed, Jabbar took his friends to a hotel called the *Flamingo*. A

Frenchman owned the *Flamingo*. The place used to be a rambling, run down hotel, but after the Frenchman's insistent hard work, the place became a place known for beauty, good rooms and excellent food.

Going up to the doorman, Jabbar asked in English

'Where can I see the eagle?'

The doorman looked at him with suspicion. *'Were can I see the eagle?'* Jabbar asked again. This time the man was sure Jabbar wasn't a spy.

'Eagles dare where none dare' the doorman answered back with a smile. His English was filled with a thick accent, which Jabbar could not place but which was familiar.

'Did you see my brother?' the man asked. Pieces fitted into place. The accent was that of Ahmed. The face too had shade of Ahmed except for the absence of beards. He also had the same hard eyes.

'Yes I met him and he said you are the man who is going to assist us'

'Come on let's go and find you people adequate accommodation' the man said *'I am Idris'* he added. Jabbar made quick introductions of himself and the others and they followed Idris.

'We'll take your car please' Idris suggested *'we're, going to another part of town. I believe you know that you are not supposed to be seen together'*. They all entered the land rover and under Idris' direction, they went to a hotel at the other part of town called *Lefreontelle*. Idris did not ask them how came to be working for his brother, Ahmed. He knew that in this line of business, foreign manpower may some times be used and he came to appreciate the sense in using men that were not from Algeria.

Lefreontelle was located very close to the coast. The front of the hotel faced the ocean. The air was heavily scented with salt spray. As they got out of the car, Jabbar

could not see the ocean but he could hear and feel it. They all went in. At the lobby, they were registered into a suite.

When they were out of earshot of the receptionist, Jabbar asked Idris in suspicion

‘Don’t you think it would be too obvious that four young men living a suite would be suspicious?’

Idris laughed and replied ‘this hotel is our base, Rashid at the desk may not know your mission, but he knows you work for our good’.

A door was opened and they entered into a luxuriously spacious and tastefully furnished suite that contained two rooms. The place had TVs in every room connected to a satellite dish. There was an audio system, a bathroom to every room.

‘This place is good’ David smilingly commented while testing his buttocks on, the Chippendale couch. ‘I like this place he smiled.

‘I will see you later, maybe in the morning so that we can discuss your next move’ Idris went out and closed the door behind him. He had to go and make all the necessary contacts. He didn’t really know what these young men’s mission was, but he knew it had to be done quickly. The less people knew of their presence, the less the risk of their running into government secret agents. He had to move quickly. With these things and others on his mind he moved into the night.

Meanwhile, Jabbar and his friends were bedding down for the night. Their work had to be carried out in five days or less but not more. They needed strength and vitality and sleeping was the one way they knew for now would help them.

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He was smoking his fourth cigarette of the night. This work was boring, he thought. Nothing seemed to be happening. He had been watching this hotel for a week now. Nothing was happening. His family life was almost breaking him down, his wife was having a baby very soon, and his work was very tasking and boring. The night was very cold.

As he threw the stub away, he saw a Land Rover stop in front of the hotel and five people dropped out. There wasn't anything unusual in this, people came and went, and there was nothing unusual in that. He was about to turn away when he recognized someone. This was Idris- his description had been given to him at the agency's last briefing.

As a secret agent, Hasim was given all the details of terrorist movements in the city. He wasn't a lazy man in any sense of the word. He knew Idris was the brother to the guerilla leader Ahmed Buhari. For him to come along with these four men into the hotel meant that what was rumored around may actually be about to happen.

Rumors went on that an attack was to be carried out in the capital city. If these were the men to carry out such a mission, then he knew he had to move fast. Excitement was already building up in him. He had the feeling that something was about to happen. He brought out his cell phone and dialed a number; the call was put through immediately.

'This is inspector Hasim of the...'

'Inspector Hasim, do you have information of any use?' a voice asked almost in anger interrupting Hasim. They were speaking French.

'Yes I have information of much interest.'

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Morning came and the young men got ready, and called for room service, which came almost immediately. They were ready and waiting for Idris. They were in the sitting room around nine O'clock when a knock sounded on the door.

'Come in' James said

A boy of about fourteen years came into the suite. He wore a 'T' shirt and black jeans on boots. He had a bandana tied around his head. He looked like an ordinary teenager.

'What's up?' Jabbar asked the boy.

The boy spoke in slightly accented English.

'Some one is watching you people in this hotel. The secret service has been alerted of your presence and I believe they would be on your trail in a very short time. You have to do what you have to in a very short time' he finished.

'What about Idris?' Jabbar asked

'He sent me to you people' the boy said.

'He sent me to give you this' it was a package that contained a map and directions to the areas where the bombs would be placed. A small note followed. It simply read,

"Take care. These are the locations. Government agents are seriously monitoring me. Finish your job and clear out. Idris"

'Go well' Jabbar said behind the boy as he closed the door behind him.

'What do we do now?' Joe asked with wide eyes 'we've got to change our plans now since we have less time to carry out the job'

'Let's sit down and plan brothers'

Jabbar said coolly trying to cool his friends. They all sat down.

‘There are five bombs and there are four of us.’ He paused ‘I want these bombs to be planted today. It may seem preposterous to rush this job, but I think the only way to win this game is to rush the game. The authorities do not know the nature of the job we are going to carry out and they do not know the mechanism of how the job would be carried out. I and David would carry two of the bombs to the government house....’ He paused and looked around him.

Joe and James looked at him in surprise, ‘what’s the problem?’ Joe asked

‘I hope this room isn’t bugged’ Jabbar said

‘I don’t think so’ David said in reply to Jabbar’s question ‘because Idris said this hotel was their own and the young lad who came here spoke as if the place were his father’s house’ Jabbar visibly relaxed.

‘Okay as I was saying, David and I would carry two bombs to the government house. We know we will be asked questions and may even be stopped. I believe there should be some flower hedges around the place. If there were, one of the bombs would be dropped into a flower hedge. We will then take the other one to the congress hall, mill around with the cleaning staff and forget another bomb some where around the building. Any part of the building would do. Ahmed did not give any specifications as to where the bombs would be placed’

He looked at the two brothers

‘Try to locate the Hilton hotel and forget one of the bombs there. The other one should be dropped at the named secretariat by any means you choose’ he paused for effect ‘David and I would take the other bomb and pick you two up at the hotel then drop the last one as we leave town at the door stop of the Independent peoples Party’s nest’ he finished.

They were all silent. ‘This sounds easy but it would be one hell of a job, but as long as we are not accosted by the law we can carry it out. We have approximately about four hours before any government agent will stop us and ask for papers and other documents we do not have. Lets *make hay while the sun shines*’. Jabbar dropped the map he had been holding all the while he was talking.

David let out a sigh.

‘When do we pick Joe and James?’ he asked

‘We pick them at twelve noon we have only about two hours to do the job. Just two hours only’ Jabbar answered and stood up taking one of the maps and they all filed out of the room.

David and Jabbar took the Land Rover while Joe and James took taxis. With their laptop-looking bombs, they were just like ordinary young businessmen. They were also dressed as such in long sleeved shirts and plain trousers. They parted at about ten-fifteen.

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Placement of the bomb at the government house to Jabbar wasn’t as hard as he had predicted it would be. He even commented to a highly nervous David that the job was actually easy. There were a lot of flower hedges. They were shooed out of the premises. They left with a smile. The fact that they spoke English even made the guards shoo them out faster.

The congress house was even easier; David went into a toilet and dumped the bomb inside the ceiling, which was quite near to him. His bulk made it easier.

They drove to the *Lefreontelle*. Joe was in the lobby waiting but James was absent. They waited in the *Lefreontelle’s* bar sipping drinks, which didn’t taste sweet.

Jabbar was constantly staring at his watch. Thoughts raced through his head.

If James were caught it would mean that their escape would be made extremely difficult if not impossible. Joe said he planted his own bomb with little problems, Jabbar turned and said to the young men beside him

‘If James doesn’t come by twelve on the dot, we would go and find him even if it meant to shoot our way into wherever he is or they are keeping him’

David and Joe nodded.

Twelve o’clock. Jabbar stood up. ‘Let’s go’ David stood up and squared his shoulders ‘yeah, let’s go’ he said with a sigh. James stood up too and they started to exit the restaurant. Just as they got to the door, James bumped into them and he asked not too kindly

‘Where the hell were you guys?’ I’ve been looking for you for over five minutes now. I saw the land rover and thought you’ve been caught Joe said with a smile and hugged his kid brother.

‘Let’s get going, no time for jollying around’ Jabbar said and led the way.

They left town immediately. The time was ten minutes past twelve.

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Two days later they were in Ohariet. The return journey was much slower. They were more relaxed and Jabbar also had time to admire and comment on the landscape. They arrived by six pm

The guerillas saw the land rover before it even came close to the camp. There was a lot of gun shooting and cheering as the four young men got out of the land rover. Ahmed came up to them.

‘Let’s go to my office’ he said and led the way. They got the office. Without waiting to sit down, Jabbar asked.

‘We’ve done, so are you paying us?’

Ahmed smiled and said

‘You won’t even sit down before you get up tight or is that how you do in Nigeria?’ he queried.

Jabbar let out a tentative smile then sat down. The other young men stood silent around the back of Jabbar their leader.

‘We tracked the bombs via satellite and we know that you’ve made the plant.’ He paused and his face squeezed in enquiry

‘Why the rush in the job?’ he asked puzzlement all over his face.

‘Government secret agents started suspecting us’ Jabbar answer matter-of-factly.

‘That means detonation would be now’ Ahmed said. He picked up a phone on the desk

‘Call me Jacob. Tell him to bring along the detonator’. He dropped the receiver.

After about five minutes, Jacob-Davids the scientist was ushered in. he came along with a laptop computer and a small box. Two other men came in with him. One was Ahmed’s assistant. The small office was quiet except for the noises of arrangement of the detonator.

All was set. Pin codes were put into the computer and on the laptop screen there were five dots on a map showing the location of the five bombs. Ahmed carefully put a key into the small box and turned it. On the laptop computer screen, a message appeared. ‘Press enter five times’

Ahmed took in a deep breath then pressed the ‘enter’ key five times slowly. As he pressed, all the dots on the screen disappeared.

‘May god be praised’ he said. The other men shouted in unison and soon from outside there was cheering and wild celebrating outside. A radio set was brought in and turned. There was nothing on air yet. All was silent again inside the small office. There was tension. All of a sudden the voice of a reporter came out of the radio

This is breaking news Algeria National Radio there has been some bombings in the capital city, and’ the voice of the reporter was drowned by an excited shout that erupted inside the office. Everybody started shaking everyone else.

Jabbar could not understand why these men were so joyfully celebrating over the death of many innocents. But it was none of his business; he had finished his job. He looked at the still smiling face of Ahmed Buhari and said,

‘We will be leaving in the morning and I would please want our score to be settled now’.

‘Don’t worry’ Ahmed said still smiling ‘you’ve done well and you will be paid now. You have to leave the country immediately because the authorities may link the bombings to the four of you and also to me. You will also be tracked for information about a man to betray; that is I. Even as young as you are, I seem to know a lot about your basic makeup. A unit of my men will escort you people to the Algerian-Mali border from there I pray you should go back home immediately for your own sakes. You have money now. I believe you wanted to go Italy for money making. Now that you have that money I advice you go back home’, he finished.

He put his hands under his desk and pulled out a small bag, which he pushed to Jabbar.

‘We’ll go home’ Jabbar said more himself than to Ahmed. He got up, thanked Ahmed shook his hands, picked up the bag of money and turned to leave.

‘Jabbar’

‘Yes?’

‘Don’t betray us’ it was more of a plea than a threat.

‘By dusk tomorrow, we will not even remember the name of this place.’

CHAPTER FIVE

The sun was shining down hot and hard. He found the glare almost blinding but he could not do anything but stare straight ahead through the glare at nothing in particular. He was a little bit upset. He was upset because of peculiar trends in the society around him. The society seemed stifling to him. He previously thought the problem was himself or his poverty. Now he thought differently. A little wealth had made him see the truth.

The journey to Nigeria back from Algeria had been uneventful. Jabbar and his friends were familiar with the terrain. They got to Nigeria in good time. Sold the land Rover in Kano city for a pittance split the money from the terrorists four ways and got back to Makurdi. On getting home, the young men realized that they could not fit anymore into the normal life style of the city, so they decided to go to Lagos.

Lagos was a bigger city to settle in and spend their money. When they got settled in Lagos, they got each other's addresses just in case they had any reason to regroup again, their journey had made them older, wiser and almost like brothers. The way they now regarded each other can only be seen in the eyes of those who have fought battles and survived together.

Jabbar's house was located in the Bariga section of Lagos state on the Lagos mainland. The house was actually a

flat in a building containing six flats. His' was located on the first floor. From his balcony he could view activities occurring in the streets below. People were moving every direction and shouts came from many throats.

The election period had just past, and things seemed to be reverting back to normal. He had been present in one of the voting areas and what he witnessed was on his mind now.

The society is bad he thought. How could an armed man come and carry away the ballot box. Nobody could do anything about it. The gunman came on a motorcycle, shot into the air, every body scattered, and then he picked the box, jumped on his motorcycle and zoomed off. It was almost incredible. Jabbar had heard of such before, but he had never witnessed it before in his life. When the incident occurred, Jabbar wished he had a gun at that particular moment. He knew that he would have thought the young man never to take part in election malpractices. He would have sent the rogue to hell instantly. But he also knew that he would have been in serious trouble with the law.

Jabbar tried to reconcile what was being said on TV about democracy and what he had witnessed. The society was bad he said again to himself. If these same politician who spoke of equal rights and opportunity in a free democratic government go against the rules by political violence and election rigging, then the system should be purged clean. Because of that election rigging that he witnessed, Jabbar decided to follow news in general and he found out that almost every top politician in the country has in one way or the other taken part in election malpractice.

Jabbar didn't really have much to worry about when it came to general comforts. He had a nice well furnished apartment and a Mercedes Benz 'E'-class convertible to boot. He had picked the car on second hand from someone he knew. He had access to nice girls who were very willing and

even generous to a fault. But some thing about the environment was failing to make him happy. He had been following the election campaign of many candidates. He had even heard and read many manifestoes. But something was still disturbing him. He was restless; he knew he had to talk this out with his friends.

Later that evening, jabber put a phone call through to David, James and Joe and told them to meet at his place. He also hinted to them that he had a plan, which he thought they might buy. A seed was sown.

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Jabber was watching CNN in his sitting room when the doorbell rang. He switched on his closed circuit TV with a remote control. All he saw outside the door were Joe and James. He switched off the CCTV.

‘Come in’ he said the door had been opened electronically.

They all exchanged happy greetings. It had been long since they last saw themselves jabber even commented on how more matured the other men looked. They couldn’t be called boys anymore. They were in every way men, though young, but still men in every sense of the word. They sat down.

After a few other pleasantries and some soft drinks, Jabber started.

‘Fellows, I don’t understand how I feel about the way this country is run. Look about you there are a lot of people looting and stealing from government coffers. No one tries to stop them’ he paused ‘no one seems to take any interest or should I say that those who do the looting are the very ones that should take interest in the matter.’ He looked around. Joe

nodded his head slightly but altered no word. Jabber continued.

‘I know this may sound absurd, but I think we should do something to shake the rich and powerful in this nation. After all we helped Ahmed Buhari plant bombs in his own country when we did not even understand the nature of his cause’ his eye was now very bright as he explained this point.

‘The major advantage we have is that we are totally unknown. We could even make some more money for ourselves. Although this basically is not about money but about making the corrupt rich and powerful scarred for once in their miserable lives’ he paused. There was a knock on the door. He took a look at the CCTV. David came in.

‘fella’s how are ya’ll doin’?’ he waved then put his large bulk in a nearby seat. He had begun to put on a little fat. Jabber began his preposition again for the benefit of David.

‘You can’t just wake up and say you want to deal with a group of people just like that. You wouldn’t even know where to begin’ David protested vehemently.

Jabber smiled ‘I know what I am saying. If this purge can be carried out. Then I believe things like looting and embezzlement would reduce or even stop’ he argued.

‘Jabber what do you want? What have you got in your system? Do you know that even trying to carry out a single bombing in Nigeria.....’ He paused as if a word had caught him. ‘Bombing.... hmm’ he became silent. Jabber smiled again.

‘We have the money to finance this operation. All we need to do is to send a message to Jacob David’s in Algeria and tell him to come and work for us. Even if he can’t come, he could introduce us to any his associates. If we blow up a few big chaps, then threaten some others or black mail them, we could get quite a packet while at the same time we would be serving the masses’ he finished.

David asked ‘what if the masses don’t appreciate what you are doing for them they may turn on you, you know’

‘All I need now is for you guys to go home and think the whole thing further. If by the time we meet in five days time you all consent, then we would start all the arrangements including a bunker for protection’.

‘A bunker?’ James asked in surprise ‘I always knew you were a little bit crazy’ he said.

‘Don’t worry until five days time.’ Jabber concluded the meeting.

Five minutes and they were drinking together like friends again. Behind each smile and laugh they knew that in five days time they would make a decision.

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Jabbar was driving to the venue of an occasion that was being organized by one of his female acquaintances. The place was posh and it had cost quite a fortune to hire. The cost was nothing to the young woman whose father happened to be the chairman of Lagos Island Local Government area.

Jabber had the top of his Mercedes convertible down. The weather was a bit cool. By his wristwatch the time was not yet six pm and the party had been scheduled for nine pm until dawn. He still had time, so he decided to drive around the city. He wanted to go to the slum areas. There was a desire in him to see how the poor were staking out their meager lives. He took a main expressway to the Ajegunle area of Lagos state.

The streets were narrow and the gutters filthy. The stench from the gutters got to him through the open roof of the car. As he drove slowly, he tried to compare and contrast

this environment with many other reserved areas he had been to in the city. Poverty could be smelt in the air. It could almost be touched like some physical quantity. People gazed up at the slow moving flashy car in amazement. It seemed they were not accustomed to these types of cars in the district. Jabber's resolve to carry out his mission was immediately given extra strength when he thought that, the only way these people and many others like them could live a fairly decent life was if a drastic measure was taken against the very people who put them in the level they are.

The rich politicians had all the filling stations and big businesses he thought. When they increase fuel prices, the taxi drivers and bus drivers increase their fares and the poor people who do not have their own cars face the whip of high transportation costs, there by making the rich man richer. This is all done at the expense of the common man, who is usually very poor. The common man casts his votes at the election but his votes do not count at all he is just a stooge whom the greedy politician and ruthless businessman use for their own selfish end.

The farmer plants yams which he harvests and sells to the rich man for a pittance so that he can keep body and soul together. The rich man, who has a lot of money, pays very little for his food, so he has a lot more for other extravagancies at the expense of his fellow man. There was no middle class in the society because the middle class was pushed to the limits of the poorer class. The gap between the rich and the poor was immense.

A man buys a Mercedes 'M' class SUV for his girl friend, the money not from his pocket, but from a "little" embezzlement he carried out in his office. These were the things Jabbar thought about as he left the slum area and drove towards the party. He knew he was going to do something. Even if his friends were not in with him he would

move on. But he knew he would fare better with his friends to back him up. He was going to try his best to convince them.

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In the party Jabber could do nothing but look carefully at the young people around him. He smiled inwardly as he thought of how some of them were going to lose their rich parents and how others would be too scared to practice corruption and other evil practices. He almost laughed when he thought of the fear that would grip the nation as a whole. He knew what he was about to do bordered on terrorism, but he did not care. As long as there was ample evidence that anyone had done a wrong to the people for financial gains, that person would be dealt with.

He sobered up when he thought of how his own life would be endangered if he were caught or found out. The thought of torture and death was not a pleasant one. He promised himself he would do everything possible to protect himself from being caught.

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They were gathered again for the final decision on what was to be done about the corrupt rich and the corrupt politicians. The gathering was still at Jabber's home. Even skeptical David was present. The air was a little tense.

'Please outline your plan again' James said

'I have already told you all I have to say it is whether you are in or not' Jabber said tightly.

‘We are not in a fight jabber, the thing is that we want to really know the reason why we would just spend our money carrying out bombings on people’ Joe interceded,

Their discussion continued on this line for almost an hour before David got up and left. Joe and James left almost immediately afterwards. Jabber was left alone to ponder what he had to do alone. He didn’t want to go back on his plan. The idea was almost an obsession now. After much brain racking, he decided to carry out his job alone; after all, the age-old adage says *he who travels alone travels furthest*. He forgot the one also said that *two good heads are better than one*. Morning came and jabber went to the airport. He boarded a flight for Sokoto. All about him in the airplane were the cream of society. The flight was uneventful even though it was very first flight in all airplane. Their landing was smooth.

That afternoon, he hired an old jeep and started the long journey by land to Ohariet.

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The journey to Ohariet was extremely boring the car had no sound system, it wasn’t fast enough and he was alone.

It took Jabbar three days of hard driving to get to Ohariet. By the time he got there he was extremely exhausted. He didn’t pause in the town but went up into the camp.

Driving up hill for about three hundred feet, bullets shot whined across his windscreen and he ground to a stop and waited. A dusty military jeep drove out of the bush from his left side. Jabbar raised his hands up so that the guerillas could see that he wasn’t totting a weapon. The jeep contained four young men. They were armed with AK-47 jungle rifles and they looked very mean and ready for action.

‘I am looking for Ahmed Buhari’ Jabbar said. The men looked at him dumbly. They didn’t talk.

‘Ahmed Buhari’ Jabbar said again ‘I’m looking for him’. One of the men said something to the other in Arabic. The other motioned him forward. Jabbar was told to drive with an armed guerilla beside him in the passenger seat, holding a rifle to his ribs. The other jeep drove slowly beside and so they went to the camp.

When they got to the camp, Jabbar was ushered quickly into Ahmed Buhari’s office. The whole place had not changed. To Jabbar, it seemed the camp was suspended in time since he left the buildings, the vegetation, even the guerillas, all looked as they had been since he saw them last about six months before.

Ahmed looked up from a dispatch he was writing.

‘Ah! Jabbar my friend, It is you again’ he smiled. ‘What brings you here again, I thought you said you would not remember this place again?’ he was truly delighted at seeing Jabbar. Jabbar smiled back at him.

‘I am here to secure the help of one of the people who work for you...’ and so he unfolded his plans to Ahmed. He just gave him a briefing, but not intimate details. Ahmed understood. Jacob-David was sent for.

Jacob said he couldn’t come to Nigeria for any reason but he could make a call to one of his acquaintances from Germany. The man he was talking about was a black man, but also a citizen of Germany. Jacob gave Jabbar a phone number; the number of the man and his name was Adams smith. Jabbar told Jacob that he would set up an immediate correspondence with Adams immediately he got to Nigeria.

Adams smith, Jacob said, was an expert on bombs he had been trained by Jacob himself so could be relied on. The meeting was not a long one and Jabbar left for Nigeria the next day. He didn’t travel alone on his way back, because he

picked up a couple of people hitch hiking. The people he picked proved a quarrelsome and trouble some lot, but they were fun to have on a very long journey.

Jabbar dropped them in Agades in Niger, and then proceeded on his way to Sokoto where he returned the jeep to its owner who was really furious. Jabbar paid the man well. This seemed to pacify him. Jabbar took a flight to Lagos after a week away from home. He was finally back and also ready for war.

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He hated Africa, but he was an African not by birth, but by being a black man. From what he had seen and heard, Africa was a hot and very humid place filled with a lot of people who were sometimes stupid but who almost always had money to pay for their services. This last was the only reason he had decided to come to Nigeria to meet a man name Jabbar whom he was to assist to build bombs.

Jacob-David had assured him that all would be well if everything was done in secret and the pay would be good. When Jacob-David said go, he really meant go. Adams smith's flight from Germany had been good.

He was a little bit surprised when he got to the Murtarla Mohamed international airport Lagos. He didn't expect to see anything like it in Africa. His first shock was seeing Nigeria for the first time. His second shock came when he saw the person whom he was going to work with. The young man was just barely into his twenties. He looked too young to be owner of the voice that had been discussing issues with him on the phone. He tried to hide his surprise but he didn't seem to do it perfectly. He wondered what this young man wanted to do with bombs. He decided to be prudent because in his line of business questions were not

usually asked. The job was done and every body moves away. Too many questions usually resulted in serious consequences.

‘I am Jabbar’ Jabbar said extending arm for a shake. He was also smiling.

‘You look too young to be whom I am coming to work for. I am sorry for saying it, but I am really surprised, let’s say am shocked’ Adams smith, bomb expert and physicist said.

‘I understand’ Jabbar said ‘and welcome to Nigeria’ he helped Adams with his bag and walked him out of the waiting lounge to the car park where they entered Jabbar’s convertible and headed for Jabber’s house. Jabbar was highly elated.

Jabbar did not discuss anything pertaining to work that night. He let his visitor sleep well. Morning came and it was time for work. Both of them were sitting in Jabbar’s living room, they started.

‘Mr. Adams, I am going to pay you twenty thousand American dollars.’ Jabbar started ‘all I want you to do is to create a handbook on how to make bombs, wire them and plant them for maximum damage. The handbook should be done in two weeks and all the materials to be used for making the bombs should be things that are easily procured from any African market or shop. The items should be inexpensive and they should be materials that can be handled under normal conditions of temperature and pressure. The handbook should state clearly and concisely how to use radio transmitters to trigger off the bombs, and as I said before the handbook should be completed in two weeks time. Half of the money would be given to you now, the other half when the first bomb has been successfully detonated. You don’t have to involve yourself in the production of bombs. Just write on how to produce them. Do you think you can do this

for me?’ Jabbar finished out of breath, he looked at Adams handsome face.

Adams let out a long sigh.

‘I can do the job for you. When do I start?’ he asked

‘Now’ Jabbar said ‘I have a personal computer in my room, I will bring it out for you. I may even take it into your room so that you can work in private. When all is done, store every thing in the hard disk of the computer. I will create a password system for the file’ Jabbar went to a built in wall safe. He put in the numbers and the lock slid open. He counted out ten thousand dollars, which he gave to Adams smith. This was money that he had saved from FOREX business that he had been carrying out since he came back from Algeria. He had quite a little packet at the bank too. Not much but a good packet.

‘Let’s get moving’ Jabbar said.

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While the job of compiling the handbook was being carried out, Jabbar went about his life as normally as can be done under the circumstances. He was a little bit under tension. The thought of the magnitude of the job he was about to carry out and it almost took his breath away. His appetite for food and drink was almost zero.

Some of the money he got from Algeria, he invested in an electronics franchise and FOREX Internet trading, which was yielding substantial profit. Apart from that, he had no other smaller sources of income. The money he had given to Adams smith had depleted his resources greatly, but he knew he still had a little to carry on his job.

Twelve days later, the handbook was completed. Jabbar made a copy from his desk jet 920c printer. He spiral-bound the handbook and locked the file in the computer

containing the handbook only a password could give one access to the files. Adams Smith was now free to enjoy Nigeria. After making a tour with Jabbar around all the nice places in Lagos, he commented that after all Africa wasn't bad at all, he confessed that it was the ideas that some Nigerians give to them over seas that made them think Nigeria was not a good place to visit. He returned a few days later.

Jabbar started the building of his first bomb, it wasn't a difficult job as he had assumed initially. He went to the market to obtain some of the items he needed including two small transistor radios. Melting and mixing some very ordinary nitrogenous compounds together and putting the final mixture into a mixture of plasticine, cement, and sulphur, and potassium salts made the bomb. One radio was used as a detonator and the other a transmitting trigger. The two radios would be set at a certain frequency on which if one were tuned (the transmitter) to the frequency, the other (the receiver, i.e. detonator) emits a high pitched sound inaudible to human ears, the high pitched sound sets the molecules of the bomb into vibration can act from a maximum distance of about a kilometer.

Jabbar completed the first bomb in no time it was the size of a small football. He wasted no time in trying it out for effects. He put in a traveling bag.

Jabbar drove with the bag into the Mushin area of Lagos. It was afternoon. There were white clouds scurrying in the sky as if for a race. There was a slight breeze coming in, as if it were going to rain any minute. The top of the convertible was up. He drove until he got to the Congress Party building. The building was the secretariat of this political party. Jabbar didn't have any particular grudge against them; they were like all the other political parties that promised the people much, but gave nothing to them. He

wanted to try the potency of his bomb and to create a little stir in an otherwise peaceful environment. One bombing would make a good start to his campaign

The building was a four-storey affair painted white. There were very few cars parked outside Jabbar noticed, meaning that people were not many inside. He parked along side a *Pajero* SUV. When he got out of his car with his bag, he looked longingly at the SUV and said to himself that when next he had money, he would buy such a car. He was very confident of himself as he walked towards the entrance. He was almost elated, like a man who knew he could never be caught or suspected of a deed. He wasn't going to claim responsibility for the bombing. That would put him in great risk he thought.

He entered the building like a ghost and went upstairs to the second floor. He found a toilet, entered and put the bomb inside the bowl of the W.C. he left the building a few minutes later with an empty bag. Although there seemed to be some people around, no one seemed to notice the handsome young man in blue denim jeans trousers and red "t"-shirt come in and go. They were used to people coming and going.

Jabbar drove a few blocks away and parked his car. He looked back at the building, then without a thought to the lives involved, his only thought on callous politicians, he put on the small converted radio with him. The radio had already been preset, so there was no use in trying to set again. There was a very big flash from the middle of the building, then a big bang, then a lot of smoke and dust. When the smoke cleared, Jabbar looked at where the building had been. He could not believe his eyes. Where a four-storey building once stood, only a huge pile of debris remained. He was almost shocked by the power of the bomb. Only part of the ground floor of the building still stood erect.

Jabbar kicked the engine to life and drove off towards home leaving every body around the bomb scene in near hysteria. People were running helter-skelter. In no time, the police were on the scene. Jabbar was by that time, halfway home.

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Business hadn't been good these days he thought. The only thing that kept him rolling was what he got from the government, through salaries and embezzlement here and there. His wife needed a new car. The last one he bought was a Mercedes, now she said she needed an SUV. Women could be really tough when they wanted to get something he thought.

Mr. Taiye Bolaji was a director in the Lagos state ministry of information; he was also a ruthlessly corrupt official in the ministry too. Every body knew him or has heard of him, but no one could do anything to him. He was almost untouchable because he was married to the younger sister of the vice president of the nation. He used this position to perpetrate all types of misdemeanors. He was bald and pot-bellied, the trade mark of most big shots.

He entered his Jaguar super saloon, his baby. He loved the car; the car gave him comfort and assurance. It was an expensive car and he treated it as such.

'Take me to the office' he said in his guttural voice to his driver in front.

'Okay sir' the driver said.

The drive started. Taiye's cell phone rang not long after the car started.

'Hello?' he said. A voice came down the line a voice he had never heard before, a voice full of misgivings.

‘Hi Taiye. I want to be brief. Go back to your house. Remember the bomb blast in Mushin? Every T.V and paper carried the news. The same would happen to all your cars one by one. All you have to do is to take one million Naira to...’

‘Who do you think you are? Who do you think you are talking to? I’ll...’ the line was broken.

Taiye was breathing quickly and heavily. How could some one have got his private number? Who was this fellow wanting a million Naira? He decided to drive home.

‘Take me home’ he said to the driver, who expertly turned the car home wards. They did not notice a car behind them about two hundred yards away. The car was a Mercedes “E” class convertible.

Just as Mr. Taiye’s car was entering his compound, a burst of fire followed. The sound of the explosion was deafening. Another blast, a second car. Both of the cars were in the Honda latest series and they were worth more than five million Naira.

Taiye’s phone rang again. This time he was ready to talk. Already his residence had turned into a hell house. Smoke filled everywhere, his children were screaming. He put the cell phone to his ear.

‘Don’t attempt to call the police, if you do, then your other cars would follow and even your house too with it’s inhabitant’s’ the voice said.

Taiye could not believe what was happening to him. It all seemed like a movie to him.

‘What do you want?’ Taiye asked in a voice full of abject surrender.

‘Arrange one million Naira to the third mainland bridge now. Drop the money at the beginning of the bridge. Put the money in a sack. When the money is dropped, get away fast.

Go home immediately, if you don't, something else would blow off" Jabbar finished.

'I don't have million Naira in the house now' Taiye lied

'Do it or something blows' Jabbar said harshly

'Okay I'll do it' Taiye gave in.

Thirty minutes later the money was dropped and the big Jaguar super zoomed off. As the car got out of sight, a Mercedes Benz convertible that was parked a few yards behind with Jabbar fiddling with the engine, the bonnet open, drove near the bag. Jabbar picked the bag and zoomed off. Mr. Taiye reported the case to the police. Mr. Taiye Bolaji went home a sad man. Jabbar closed the day one million Naira richer. He was happy that he had made a rich man cry. He also knew that Taiye Bolaji was going to recoup all his losses by embezzlement and fraud. He promised himself that next time he was going to paralyze his victim with poverty even after payment of his ransom.

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The doorbell rang. Jabbar checked his T.V all seemed well, He knew his visitors. He had been creating a lot of bombs all by himself. One of his rooms was set aside as a laboratory and workshop. Adams Smith was already back home in Germany. Life seemed to be moving very well.

They all filed into the sitting room the three of them. They looked older and more mature now. Jabbar ushered them to seats then offered them soft drinks.

'Jabbar let me say I like the way the first job was carried out' David said matter-of-factly while sipping coke.

'What are you talking about' Jabbar asked a little bit nonchalantly.

'You know what he meant Jabbar; we know you carried out that bombing. Our opinion only lies with us so you don't

have to worry at all. After all we can't prove you really carried out the job' James said.

There was a short silence. Jabbar spoke.

'Gentlemen, I asked you guys to join me in carrying out a series of attacks. You all refused to answer me and now you are here talking I don't know what. Please gents I want to know the reason you are here' Jabbar said in his most business-like tone. He tried unsuccessfully to feign nonchalance. It seemed Joe saw through him.

Giving him his most handsome smile, Joe said 'Jabbar, we want to simply join your outfit. Just like in the old days'

Jabbar was quiet. Only the music from the sound system could be heard in the sitting room.

'You don't know what it takes; you think it is just going outside and blowing up people? No it's not that. It takes a lot more than that' he paused for effect

'It takes conviction and dedication. The corrupt rich people and the politicians take the vast wealth of this nation as their rights only. If it weren't for their attitude, nothing would have made us stoop so low as to rob a bank so that we could travel to another country to look for jobs, when in Nigeria we can get all we want' Jabbar ended. All was silent again

'Jabbar I think we understand and appreciate all you say. For instance, the stir that your first job caused was amazing. The nation was berserks with anxiety and fear. Nothing like that had ever before occurred in the history of the country. Jabbar to be frank with you, we appreciate your conviction and we're ready to go along with you all the way' David said with sincerity.

Jabbar was silent for sometime, and then stood up.

'I would really like to have you guys for partners'. He paused 'you know what?'

David asked 'what?'

‘You guys should come over tomorrow so that we can make arrangements for the third attack’ Jabbar said

‘Third attack?’ Jabbar answered

‘I thought you have made only one so far’

‘You should know I don’t waste time at all’ Jabbar boasted lightly.

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Nigeria had never before felt the force of terrorism. Never before had there been a force of any kind opposed to corruption and indiscipline. If there were, then a single man would not be embezzling funds meant for the betterment of the electric power source of the nation.

Jabbar and his friends were undertaking a great risk in even trying to attack a system that has been around long before they were born. The one major advantage they had was their anonymity. They were not known to any law enforcement agency or the Nigeria secret service. Jabbar speculated that to survive, they had to remain underground. Jabbar told his friends in their next meeting, ‘we’re *visionaries* and we will make sure we hold on to our vision’. The four young men took a vow of secrecy and enduring discipline.

‘We’re going to get rich doing this. But we should use most of our money for alleviating the poor’. Jabbar said.

So it was agreed that they should move their base to somewhere more secluded and that they would recruit others. The recruitment would be done through the Internet so that individual identities would not be betrayed. The residence they chose as their base was at the Ikotun area of Lagos State. The place was an outskirts location. It was very quiet and secluded.

Jabbar bought the house at great expense. It was a duplex with two sitting rooms and six bedrooms, an underground parking lot and a twelve-foot high wall as fence. The house was an ideal setting for a base. Two weeks later, at great expense and hard work the place was ready. Fitted with an Internet mast, close circuit T.V cameras, radio antennas for transmitting and receiving. Satellite dishes coupled with lots of tracking and jamming equipment. A voice scrambler was also installed. Two small jeeps were bought. They were painted black.

The sitting room upstairs was used as the workshop for producing bombs. From the outside the house looked innocent, just like that of any big shot. Inside was different. By the time they finished setting up their base, they were all broke.

‘We have to carry out a mission. There is no money at all for us’ Jabbar complained to the rest as they sat in the downstairs sitting room of the base. Each one still kept his own residence, but this base was their common residence.

‘Remember what you told us Jabbar. You said that the money we get from the operations should be used on the poor, now how come we suddenly need money and for what?’ James asked.

Jabbar was silent.

‘He’s right’ David said ‘you made your comment as if this set up was for our private money making’

‘Okay. I am sorry, I was wrong’ Jabbar apologized. ‘Okay what do we do now?’ he asked earnestly.

‘We wait’ Joe said.

CHAPTER SIX

A man went to buy petrol in a filling station. There was a very long queue. It got to his turn. Someone else wanted to take his turn but he refused, there was a squabble, a gun was drawn out, a bang, smoke, and a man writing on the ground. The other people buying petrol immediately rushed the other man from all sides. He died immediately. Police came in. there was a fight between the police and the fuel buyers. A lot of casualties, the filling station burnt down.

All these happened on a sunny day two months after Jabbar set up his base. The price of fuel was high, and it was also scarce. The result was high transportation cost which the masses suffered. The scarcity was caused not by inadequate supply of petrol to the filling stations, but by hoarding carried out by the owners of the filling stations. It was a general problem this. The price of petroleum products suddenly got up. Jabbar and his crew speculated on how to stop this trend.

‘How could this be happening in a country that exports crude oil to other parts of the world?’ Jabbar asked angrily ‘the big shots are doing it again’ James said in his cool way.

‘Jabbar we have to do something about this. I believe we should shake a little ground eh?’ David joked.

They were in the “Base’s” downstairs sitting room. Cool music was coming out from speakers not easily visible. Cool air was also coming from wall-mounted air conditioners. Soft drinks were placed in front of them as they discussed.

‘We attack by Friday’ Jabbar decided all of a sudden, getting up.

‘How do we attack?’ his friends chorused

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It was silent inside the car. In fact, it was very silent to Jabbar who was used to music, no matter how low the volume. There was no light on inside the Jeep Cherokee. It was also warm inside. Jabbar waited.

A few minutes later, David walked up to the car from the surrounding darkness.

‘I’ve set it’ he said and they drove off.

Jabbar had divided himself and his friends into two groups. Jabbar and David, James and Joe. Ten filling stations were to be attacked by bombs. Jabbar and David were to set five bombs in five of them while James and Joe the other five.

The bombs didn’t need any particular placement. They were just to be thrown into the area from anywhere. It was simple enough. The sales people were not expecting anything of the kind so they did not notice anything wrong, Jabbar thought. He was right. The placement was easy enough.

Half an hour after setting the last bomb, Jabbar and David were in the base where the others were waiting.

‘It went smoothly for us ‘ James said

‘We too’ David echoed.

They were in one of the upstairs bedroom that was used as the main control room. A row of panels surrounded them. Computer monitors and a lot of buttons and switches were also present.

‘We hit by twelve tonight. I’ll start the detonation, then any of you can continue as you like’ Jabbar said looking at his wristwatch. The time was ten minutes to twelve.

Twelve struck. Jabbar depressed a switch, and the others followed in quick succession. Unseen by them, a series of terrible explosions lighted the sky. The flames from one particular filling station could be seen for over ten miles. A few minutes later, Jabbar turned on a small colored TV set, there was nothing on the news yet. Maybe tomorrow, he thought. He switched the set off.

‘Let’s go to bed’ he said getting up to follow his word. David followed him out.

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Everywhere was agog with the news of the explosions; every radio station and TV station saw it as a chance to make all the noise they could. Rumors started going around that the price of petrol caused the sabotage of the filling stations. Some people even went ahead to say that the Niger Delta militants had done the bombings. The Federal Government said that they were going to fish out the perpetrators of the crime. By three pm, the price of a liter of petrol and other petroleum products came back to normal. Even those filling stations that were known for selling at very exorbitant prices brought down their prices to normal.

Jabbar and his friends toasted to their success.

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The sudden trend in the city of Lagos was beginning to make a certain impact on him. Sitting on his desk, a mahogany table that had been made in the early nineties, he stared at some pieces of paper in front of him that contained

the names of places that have been sabotaged by bombs in the last few weeks, he tried to find a solution to the puzzle.

Chike Kalu was the modern day secret service agent who could be smelt from over a mile away. They were usually instruments of the government and they did a lot of crooked things that most times did not see the light of day. Black suit with dark spectacles were the standard trademark. Sitting behind his desk he stared straight at the door of his office. His office was one of the many that were situated in the Aso Rock villa in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria. Messages had been getting to him from some of the field agents in Lagos state. He was disturbed because he had a certain premonition that something yet was about to erupt.

He would have liked to tell his superiors, but he felt they were not going to listen to him, because he had no evidence to back his theory that more of the bombings were going to occur. He had nothing at all. All he had was a theory; the theory of a terrorists group at work.

After some thought, he got up, stretched, and yawned. He was big, about six feet three inches tall. He was in his mid-thirties, unmarried, balding, and ugly. His face was like a terra-cotta figure. Because of his bulk, he was called “the bull”. Even his superiors had a general sense of respect for him. He was very good at his job. He moved to the door, paused a little to stare at the pieces of paper at his desk. He decided immediately to carry out investigation on the issue all by himself. He decided that he was going to Lagos. ‘I shall know’ he said silently to himself before closing the door to his office.

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Meanwhile Jabbar and his friends were trying to recruit suitable young men into their outfit. The recruitment

program was done via the Internet. It went like this; Jabber created a website. The website dealt in simple advertisements of certain goods. When the site is accessed, and explored for some time, a page appears that tells the browser to put in personal data. When the data has been put in, at the other end of the line, jabber and his associates automatically gets the signal that they have a prospective comrade.

If from the person's data, they are satisfied with the person, they start a chat with the person. All people they wanted were to be under the age of twenty-five years old. The objective of the chat was to get know the person well. If Jabber is satisfied he asks.

'How do you like to earn ten thousand Naira?'

'Yes I would' the answer usually came 'what am I to do?'

'All you have to do is put your full data including your bank account number on a separate page after the one you are on now. After that, the money will be put in your account immediately. After all that, you are now part of a group called the "*Visionaries*" all the information about how we do it is there for you to browse through. If you finally consent to joining us, you press okay or click the "yes" box on your right on the upper part of your monitor'. If answer is yes Jabber continues 'we will be communicating to you and you to us on regular basis. There is nothing special about us. We are just like you, "*visionaries*". Welcome and good day'

One hundred percent of the time the answer was yes. In a week, jabber had gotten over a hundred Visionaries from all over the country. It seemed the youths of Nigeria wanted to purge the tide of corruption. Some did not even accept money. Some, who were wealthy, even suggested sending in some money for the group. Jabber was happy at the outcome of the recruitment program. Right from the start, he knew that his plan was going to work.

None of the Visionaries knew the base except jabber, David, James and Joe. They were the pioneers of a movement like none ever in Nigeria. If anything went wrong, they would not be traced at all.

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Chike Kalu took the seven pm Abuja Lagos flight. Chanchangi, one of the top Nigerian transport gurus, owned the airplane. The flight was short and comfortable. By ten pm, he had already reported at the Lagos office, taken a bath and resting, while planning on his next move.

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Five days later, jabber was holding a chat with one of his crew. The boys name was Adamu, he was a son of the Minister of Sports and he was also part of the crew. He knew what he was meddling with.

‘You are going to take a UPS package that is arriving your home to the Minister of Finances home. The package is to be left anywhere in the house. Anywhere at all’ Jabber typed, facing his computer.

He was confident in his dealings because he knew that he could never be traced via the Internet. The young man with whom he was communicating could not inform the police, because he was in sympathy with the “*Visionaries*” at a cost. He had been threatened that if he did not co-operate well, he would be killed by a bomb attack. The young man was extremely scared of Jabbar, whom he communicated

with but did not know at all. Jabbar was careful not to push his threats too far so as not to push the young man to the edge.

Jabbar closed his file and let the screen saver of the computer come on as he stood up to go out of the office. He felt a little bit light hearted this evening. Maybe it was because his first job in the capital city of Abuja was about to go off. He gave a little woeful smile as he reflected on the stir that would take place at the Ministers' hill in the capital territory.

Adamu could be trusted on this particular job, because if any body were to open the package, all that would be seen inside would be a medium sized radio cassette player. The interior of the radio set was almost taken over by an expertly wired bomb, using the radio's circuit as a wireless receiver for the trigger. The job was impressive. You could enjoy the radio set without noticing anything concerning its lethal properties.

Jabbar met David as he was coming down the staircase leading from the first floor to the ground floor.

'Care for a little outing?' jabbar asked David

'What about the Adamu job, I thought you wanted to personally pull the trigger?' David asked.

'The egg won't be set until midnight. I want to detonate at about one O'clock' jabbar replied

'I believe we have a lot of time to do all we want before then. I've not partied for quite some time now and I think I need a girl to cool off my temperature a little bit'

'Alright let's move' David said leading the way out to the car park.

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Just as Jabbar and David were driving in a black jeep Cherokee away from the “base”, Chike Kalu in a 505 Peugeot Saloon car was just rounding the next bend ahead. When Chike Kalu passed the “base”, he turned a little sideways to look at the huge mansion. What won’t people do for security reasons? He thought, as he saw the huge fence and heavy wrought iron gates.

He was on his way to a police station, just one in the series of the many he had been visiting since his arrival from Abuja. He was looking for information about all the bombings. He seemed to be bloodthirsty as he gathered information.

Meanwhile Jabbar and David got settled in a nightclub not too far away from the Base. Time was an important factor they were watching for, because if they were late to detonate, the package might be returned to Adamu, since the return address would be his own.

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The package came to Adamu by seven pm. The phone in his room had rung twice before he picked it up.

‘Whose there?’ he didn’t even bother to say hello.

‘Am coming down’ he answered and dropped the phone. He was shivering. There was a little sweat on his upper lip. He wiped it away with the back of his hand.

He was really scared. He knew instinctively that the package held something wrong. He just felt it. He could easily have gone to the police and reported everything he knew. But there was one snag and that was the fact that he didn’t actually know anything about the people he was dealing with. He tried to remember how he got himself entangled with them. It all seemed so far away but in actual fact it was only a few days ago...

.....He was with his girl friend Hadiza at a browsing center. If he had known he later told himself, he would have browsed at home. As he started browsing, Hadiza said she wanted to go to the bathroom. He didn't object, he continued browsing.

After searching for likely sites, he settled for one WWW.Co. It was supposed to be a website dealing with the advertising of goods in general. He browsed through and all of a sudden he saw a page telling him to put in his personal data. He did this without much thought of anything amiss. He wasn't even obtuse to the offer of ten thousand Naira even though the money was chicken change where he was concerned.

After going through everything the *visionaries* had to say, he clicked no. That was his mistake. Immediately, a message came to him saying that if he even thought about saying anything to the law, he would be immediately hunted down and shot. His family won't be spared their share of his punishment. By nature he was a spoiled child and loved his parents and two brothers very much. Even if he were to report to the police, they would find it almost impossible to trace these people he thought. The best thing to do was to shut up. Hadiza came back.

'You look disturbed Adamu or is it my absence? I am sorry okay' she said almost sincerely in an attempt to disguise the guilt she was feeling for playing a fast one on him. She had been in the toilet having sex with one of Adamu's friends who happened to be in the cyber café with them but whom Adamu had not noticed. Her attempt failed, but he didn't notice. He just told her that they should leave immediately.

A few days later, he was contacted again with the job of delivering this package waiting for him downstairs. He came out of his semi-trance and went downstairs. He was doing this for his family he tried to assure himself.

He took the package to his room. The package was a little bit big, though not big enough to warrant a second glance from any body. He had a great urge to open it, but he was afraid that it might be a letter bomb, which would blow up on opening. After a few minutes of indecision, curiosity won the day. He opened the package slowly with caution and held his breath.

Inside the package was a small radio cassette player. He almost laughed with relief. A small note dropped down, he picked it up. It read, “We know you would open the package. But it’s all right as you can see it’s only a radio. Take the radio to the house before eight O’clock. Drop it anywhere and then leave”. Nothing more. Adamu felt a kind of relief at finding that it was only a radio set he was going to drop at the house. He looked at his wristwatch; the time was a quarter to eight. He had to move.

Entering the Minister of finance’s home was a simple endeavor since he was a family friend. The guards only took a cursory glance at the radio he held but said nothing: he went in to see the family. An hour later he was leaving the compound in a Mercedes convertible with the minister’s last son as the driver, they were on their way to see some friends. Adamu hid the radio cassette player in a corner of a shelf in the boy’s quarters of the mansion. As he left the house he was in such high spirits that he forgot what initially made him come into the house.

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It was a few minutes past one in the morning when it happened. Everywhere was dead silent on Minister’s hill Abuja, a place where the extremely rich in the capital city resided. Only security men and guards were awake. There was a bright burst of flame, which lighted up the early

morning sky, immediately followed by an earth shattering sound.

Adamu jumped up from his bed, instantly he was wide-awake. He knew what had happened without even been told. He rushed downstairs and out of the house with only his pajamas on. The Minister of Finance's house was about a hundred yards in from of his own home. When he got to the gate of his house, there were a lot of people milling about. He looked aft opposite his home.

Where once stood a magnificent mansion housing about fifty people, there stood only rubbles. Even the fourteen-foot fence was reduced so that at the highest places still standing, you couldn't have measured four feet. Adamu just went back up his room and fell on the bed weeping.

That night in Lagos security agent Chike Kalu was called back immediately to the capital city. He took the four o'clock flight.

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In the base Jabbar smiled to his friends.

'This time the government would be hot on us'

'Yes' Joe answered silently.

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The whole of the presidential villa was in turmoil. The bombing of the minister's house had caused an extraordinary stir. Heads would roll if answers were not given correctly.

All senior security agents held an ad hoc meeting. SS Agent Chike Kalu was among them. Inwardly he smiled at their general stupidity. Why hadn't any of them been able to get a whiff of what was going on until the trouble got very close to their doorstep? He thought to himself,

‘Good day gentlemen’ this was the director of the secret service speaking. He was a man called Nnamdi Okoro. Heavily built and dark in complexion, he was his own boss and answerable only to the president. He looked around the table at all the senior security agents. Some had to stand up because there weren’t enough seats for all of them.

There was a murmur of greeting in answer to his “good day”

‘Last night as the majority of you know’, he started on the point without any preamble. ‘There was a bombing that occurred in the Ministers’ hill. The Minister for Finance and his family while sleeping were blown to pieces last night. This attack is too close to the presidency. The perpetrators of this crime should be brought to boot or else many things won’t be right’ he paused.

‘I want everybody here to go back to their subordinates and give the order for an all out attack on those responsible for this crime...’ Two hours later, the meeting broke up and all the agents left the office to go on their ways.

The orders were for them to search for a group or groups of people responsible for the bombing. Even the underworld was to be put into the search too. On the surface, everything went on normal but underground, a movement was taking place. The movement was a thorough search.

Jabbar had anticipated this move.

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In the base, Jabbar and his friends were sitting downstairs discussing. The topic of their discussion was the silence that seemed to be coming from the government.

‘I never expected them to be silent about this’. Jabbar said with a worried frown.

‘Yea,’ David put in ‘even the media didn’t say much about the job’

‘Oh come on, don’t tell me you don’t know that the secret service is now hot on our trail. I know it’ James said with a smile. He was enjoying himself very much. For him, things had been going very fine. There was money to spend, though not extravagantly. There were also a lot of people who were happy and benefiting from all their actions. This last above all was the thing that made him happy.

‘You’re right James’ Jabbar said, his small frown disappearing from his face. ‘I want us to stay low for sometime so that heat can blow off a bit’

‘Jabbar we cannot be traced. Why cool down? I say we hit another target.’ David suggested

‘Yea David is right, if we hit again now, the secret service, would be no better on information about us’. Joe put in. He was standing at the other end of the room from them and sipping a cup of orange juice. He looked cute in a jeans overall and Timberland boots.

‘We move in two days time’. Jabbar said, then relaxed to think.

Knocking off a few key men in government was one way to fight the system and Jabbar believed that all was going to turn out fine. In Nigeria, as he had come to know, there were too many people involved in the overall corruption of the country. It seemed to him that all facets of life in Nigeria have been tainted with this bad spirit of corruption.

To wash away even a small part of the general corruption, some so called untouchable people were going to be knocked off. Not just paralyzing them financially, but by totally eliminating them. In other words, killing them. It was a form of revolution. If these “untouchables” were killed, then the rest would be afraid of doing what the

“untouchables” used to do. Jabbar decided to make a list of these “untouchables”.

Fighting corruption as a whole, by bombings that were almost aimless wasn't going to be part of his move anymore. He was going to fight corruption by hitting specific people.

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Agent Chike Kalu took as a personal attack on him the bombing of the Minister's house. The bombing took him by surprise. Questions went through his head as he left the Ad hoc meeting by all senior security agents.

The main question being, how did the attackers ever get the bomb into the house in the first place? Was any of the guards part of the conspiracy? The answer to the second question was not so easily answerable because all the guards, the Minister and his family had all perished in the explosion. Who brought the bomb into the house and how was it detonated? And what was the nature of the bomb? These were questions that seemed unanswerable at the moment. He decided to go to his office.

Meanwhile a few hours later about ten AM, Jabbar was in his own office too polishing his list of top ten men in the country. The top ten men he felt were in charge of the country, part of the list contained the names of two former presidents of the country and some other power moguls whose names were linked with extreme wealth.

Jabbar knew that knocking off even one of these men was going to be an almost impossible job. The only thing that gave him an iota of hope was the fact that he and his group were against the corrupt, he had not been able to achieve his initial aim of giving most of the proceeds of his attacks to the

poor. The chief reason being that his proceeds were not much and such an action would have drawn the eyes of the law to themselves.

Jabbar figured that a lot of money and information would be needed to achieve even a small part of his mission. To get his money he would go on a rampage on the wealthy people. Blackmail and threats would be his instruments. He picked up his cell phone and started calling together his friends. Two hours later, the four young men were in the main control room of the mansion. Jabbar had already laid out his plans to them and they had all agreed to it without argument.

‘How do we set about getting fifty million Naira for all the equipment you just mentioned and how do you figure we would even get anybody to produce what we need?’ David asked pragmatically. Jabbar had told them that fifty Million Naira would be needed for the kind of equipment that would be needed to penetrate the defenses of their targets. He answered the question smoothly.

‘We get it from the rich’

David settled back his big bulk with an almost inaudible sigh

James asked calmly ‘when do we start?’

‘Now’ Jabbar answered

‘Now?’ even the cool James was surprised

‘Yea, now’ Jabbar said ‘we move to Ajao estate this evening. There is one Mr. Adeniran or to be more exact Dr Adeniran, the Vice Chancellor of the Lagos state university. We will pay him a visit, not in person anyway’ Jabbar explained

‘When did you tag him?’ Joe’s asked, a slight frown creasing his forehead.

‘I did my home work some time ago’ he paused, ‘James go to the lab and brings us six bombs. I think they’ll be needed where we’re going’

Half an hour later they were on their way to Ajao estate in a black Jeep Cherokee, in the boot behind them, were five bombs. James could not find six one, so they took five it was almost midday

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At about two P.M, the black Jeep Cherokee passed slowly in front of a rather large and high fenced bungalow. The tiled roof of the bungalow could barely be seen from the top the fence. As the car passed the house, an object the size of a transistor radio was thrown towards the house from the passenger side of the car.

No one notice anything. Some children were playing ball some hundreds of yards away. The area had the relative silence of reserved residential areas.

The jeep drove up to the next corner, and then made a “u” turn going back in the direction from which it had originally come. As it passed the house again, another one of those objects were thrown again, but this time, in an upward arc that sent the object flying into the compound. This part of the compound was the back where there was less risk of the object being found out. Throwing objects into people’s compounds was a very risky thing, but there was no risk because Jabbar knew from parties that he had attended at the residence before that that part of the house was secluded and uninhabited. The car drove away to about two hundred meters from the house then stopped.

Jabbar picked up his cell phone, pressed some numbers then waited.

Meanwhile inside the house Professor Adeniran was having his afternoon meal, *egusi* soup with *garri*. The meal

tasted exceptionally good today. The reason being that the launching, which he organized a week ago, had turned out well. Five hundred million Naira wasn't chicken change. If all goes well, he thought, he would have about half of that money to himself.

He looked at his last child sitting in front of him watching T.V and smiled. 'You won't have to worry about your future son' he said almost to himself. The teenager did not hear him. His phone rang. He took it out and put it to his ear.

'Hello?' Professor Adeniran said

'Please listen carefully sir' Jabbar said coolly while emphasizing the "Sir". Professor Adeniran wanted to bellow out threats, but something in the voice made him pause. He waited. 'Professor Adeniran, we do not want to hurt you, your family or your property. All we want is for you to give us the sum of ten million Naira...'

'Ten million Naira! Who do you think you are in the first place? You must be mad, you must be...' he was ranting in anger his *egusi* soup almost choking him. The fact that these were the terrorists that had been carrying out bomb attacks did not sink into his intellectual brain in time.

'Shut up and listen' Jabbar interrupted Professor Adeniran's tirade and he was shivering slightly. The effort to control himself was great. He was just thinking of blasting Professor Adeniran to pieces.

'There are two bombs in your house' Jabbar continued 'they can and would be detonated unless you comply with our demands. The first bomb would go off in ten seconds, but all we need is for you to take ten million Naira in a sack to your gate. Throw the money outside then get in. do not try to call the police or the consequence will be very drastic'. Assuming Mr. Adeniran had money at home was a gamble Jabbar was talking. It paid off well.

‘You’re stupid, you’re...’ Professor Adeniran did not finish the sentence. There was a loud bang followed by an explosion. The outside fence blew out including the gate. All that remained was a large gaping hole. He gave a gasp that was audible down the line to Jabbar.

‘You have just thirty seconds the second one goes off inside the house’.

The words were like a gunshot to Professor Adeniran’s brain. He rushed towards his room to arrange all the money he had in the house. Jabbar gambled that if the man did not get the money in forty-five seconds flat, then he would detonate the second bomb and then fade away, because the police would soon be on the site. He did not want to hurt this man; he just wanted to extort money from him. Jabbar already knew that the police were usually slow and that before they would organize themselves would take some while. His calculation proved well founded.

Thirty seconds later, Jabbar saw a hand throwing out two large sacks from the large gaping hole in the wall. Jabbar waited for five seconds then moved the car towards the hole. He stopped with a screech David jumped down and quickly picked up the bags, tossed them inside the car then jumped in. he had a mask on. The jeep zoomed off. Leaving behind a host of people who didn’t know what was going on.

Jabbar triggered the second bomb. The explosion that occurred did not do much damage to the house because the bomb had landed some meters away from the main house. The explosion only served to caused confusion amongst the on looker and the inhabitants of the house. By the time the police arrived, Jabbar and his friends were halfway to the “Base”. At the end of the day, they had counted seven million Naira in cash, far more than they had expected. Professor Adeniran had not given the complete amount.

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The report that professor Adeniran gave to the police almost sent them into hysterical. This was the first time they had met a man whose report of a crime they could not doubt. All the other bomb attacks were assumed by the police to be general sabotage or political differences among rival political factions.

Professor Adeniran was the vice chancellor of the Lagos state university, a very high personality in society. His claim of having lost about seven million Naira wasn't an empty one, the police sergeant in charge of the station thought. But why should a man keep that amount of money at home was surprising he asked himself though he kept his thought to himself.

Security agents inside the police force immediately relayed the information of this recent attack to the secret service. A few hours later, Chike Kalu was on his way to Lagos in a flight. He had gotten the news and was determined to act promptly. He got to Lagos some two hours later. Meanwhile police were combing the streets of Lagos for a black jeep Cherokee, the only description gotten from one of the children-playing ball near the scene of the recent attack. By nine A.M. the next morning, about forty-five jeep Cherokees were rounded. They were all black but with different shades. By night the police still had a failed project on their hands; they could not find the correct vehicle. All the suspects were left alone with the apologies. None of them were the ones the police were looking for. The particular jeep Cherokee the police were looking for was parked in an underground parking lot in the "Base".

Never in the history of crime fighting was the law as stupefied as it was at this time. They knew that a group of incendiaries were at work but they could not place their hands on them. News of what was happening wasn't getting to the press; the law did not want interference from the masses in their investigations.

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Just beside the great mansion was parked a black jeep Cherokee. The car was on the eastern gate of the mansion. The gate opened directly to a small road leading to a creek across which a small bridge crossed to the other side and joined a major expressway. The expressway was leading to the third mainland bridge across the Atlantic Ocean.

A week after their attack on professor Adeniran, they were unto another one. This particular job was more risky than the former one, because they had to be there in person like ordinary robbers.

The house they were about to enter was the Lagos home of a major businessman and former ambassador to the United States. He was also known for his unscrupulousness and willingness to tolerate kind of untoward action to gain his ends. He had just come back from the United States of America where he went to for some business. His coming back was announced some days before on the network news.

Jabbar decided to attack him because he knew the man would be loaded with raw cash. As a rule in Nigeria corrupt rich men did not like keeping all their cash in the banks because the government will be able to track their accounts. They preferred to keep it at home in large safes, overhead water tanks and many other places.

The attack to this house would not be easy, as he had already found out after making two reconnaissance trips. It was difficult but nor impossible. They would have to be armed because the house was big, covering a whole street, having about six different gates. The eastern gate was the least used.

Jabbar got out of the car; he was wearing black trousers and a black “T” shirt. His colleagues were dressed in the same way. Jabbar was holding a pump action rifle, while David and James were carrying submachine carbines, and Joe with a machine rifle. In addition to his guns, David carried a very heavy bag containing bombs they had produced. James was the one who had organized the arms for them.

James picked the lock on the gate. There was no guard around this particular gate because it was hardly ever used and the business mogul who had the house was a great patron of street hoodlums and armed robbers in the area. He paid monthly dues to the leaders of the top armed-robber gangs in the area so he was covered security-wise in the area. After all a robber would not want to steal from his robber friend. The mogul felt totally safe in his little world. Little did he know what was coming.

The gate swung open on well-oiled hinges. They went in, the interior of the mansion was well lit by floodlights hanging on tall poles. The general geography of the house was one that comprised of different flats, bungalows and two duplexes connected by passages. There was also a lot of vegetation inside the walls of the mansion. From where they came in, they could see the main building in the center of the mansion. It was about seventy meters from the eastern gate and about four houses away.

The mansion had a total of nine houses in all. The main building was surrounded by the others and connected to

them by closed passages. As they moved into the compound Jabbar whispered to the rest that they should all be confident because confidence and simplicity was the main weapon they were going to use. There were usually a number of people inside the premises; thugs, criminals, uncles, cousins and friends of the family in the house. So it was difficult to know who was who. Jabbar and friends went in carefully.

Jabbar took a bomb from David and threw it into the nearest flat from them. He detonated it. They were still near the eastern gate. Almost immediately, there was an ear splitting explosion. Where a nice flat once stood, was only a pile of rubbles with smoke coming out. Jabbar and crew were very lucky, because Jabbar had detonated the bomb too soon. They were covered with dust and debris from the explosion and the concussion left them almost deaf.

The whole mansion was thrown into immediate confusion. People started running in many different directions. Jabbar and his friends moved forward again, this time another bomb was thrown far into one other flat. More bedlam followed another explosion. A third, fourth and fifth explosion occurred before Jabbar and his friends started moving towards the main house. There was no one to challenge the entry they made into the building. Any who would have done so, in the space of a few minutes had either run or was in serious injury.

There was another explosion to the northern gate ‘Why did you do that?’ Jabbar asked David who had thrown the bomb, which he subsequently detonated.

‘The military were there. They needed to be checked’

‘Okay, ley’s move’ Jabbar answered.

Two minutes later, they were inside the main building searching for signs of a safe. Meanwhile, the former ambassador had been whisked to safety where he was calling the police. He wasn’t coherent enough on the phone due to

his agitation. This delayed the action of the police. This delay was the saving grace of Jabbar and his crew.

In the master bedroom of the main house, Jabbar saw the safe. The safe door was blown apart with a small pastique explosive. Inside the safe, money in many different currencies was stashed away with an abundance of jewelries. ‘Take money in Naira, Dollars and Pound sterling only. The jewels, we leave alone’. Jabbar ordered.

Five minutes later, they were on their way to the eastern gate after distributing a whole lot of bombs around the now almost empty mansion. Jabbar smiled at the way his plan had worked. He wondered at how an explosion could depopulate an environment in a short space of time. As they left, the mansion was empty save for some old people who only stared at their masked faces as they left.

They got to the jeep Cherokee just in time. Because as they were driving on the third mainland bridge, a row of ten police cars passed them in the opposite direction.

‘Rot in hell’ Jabbar said fiercely under his breath as he detonated the other bombs. The night sky was lit up far behind them as the remains of the mansion disappeared. By the time the police got to the scene, there were only rubbles, smoke and fire to be investigated.

Jabbar knew this was war. The law would do everything in their power to bring the *visionaries* to annihilation. He smiled to himself because he had a plan.

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Jabbar had been in the waiting area of the Murtarla international airport Lagos, for about two hours now.

Immediately after the last job, Jabbar and his crew realized forty million Naira in cash. The amount they got from dollars was one and a half million Dollars, while from

pound sterling, five hundred thousand. The amount was immense. After reckoning the amount of money at hand, Jabbar told his friends about his plan.

They were going to split up and go to different countries abroad. The money would be shared into two parts. The four of them would share one part, while the other part would be kept in an account that would be controlled by Jabbar. The account would be used by Jabbar to secure adequate equipment that would be needed to assassinate the people whose names were on Jabbar list. Jabbar increased the list from ten people to twenty-five. Jabbar hoped that by the time the majority of the people on the list were hit, Nigeria would be changed, even if for a while. After that, he would then retire.

It was therefore agreed that Jabbar would go to the United States. David to Britain, James and Joe to any place in Asia. They chose to go to Japan. The “Base” was shunt down and sold off. Jabbar made all the necessary arrangements for the special account’s money to be transferred to a New York Bank. He laundered the money through a professional money launderer.

Acquiring passports and visas wasn’t difficult considering the amount of money of their disposal. Before they finally parted some hours ago, Jabbar gave some words of advice to his friends. They would contact each other by e-mails. They were going to spend just one year to allow the soil they had farmed to fallow.

Jabbar was still wondering how one man could have so much liquid cash in one place at a time when there were many who would be forever grateful if just a minute fraction were given to them. The amount of money they got from the former ambassador’s house almost shocked him. Just for the fraction of a second, he almost decided to let go of his vision of a just Nigeria with less corruption and bribery. The

amount of the money almost tempted him to go abroad and live in luxury. The vision faded quickly when he remembered his own earlier times, the frustration of not having much. His heart hardened again and he looked forward to the end of his one-year holiday.

‘Flight 702 Scheduled for 9.00A.M.’ a voice called in the waiting lounge. Jabbar got up picked up his small handbag and moved towards customs and immigrations.

He was the last of his group to leave Nigeria.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Six months in United States gave him much joy and peace of mind. Jabbar, for the past six months had been living in a tenement flat on 125th street in New York City. On getting there, the novelty feeling lasted for quite sometime before he finally started getting the distinct idea that New York City and Lagos were just about the same thing, the only difference being that the later was larger and more developed. Both places had their own share of slums and backwater areas.

Immediately after settling down, Jabbar got himself an exact replica of the car he used to drive in Nigeria, a Mercedes Benz “E”-class convertible. Life was quite good. He made new friends and got into the lucrative business of selling second hand cars to west-African countries. Their distance away from each other didn’t close down his contact with David, James and Joe.

In the last phone call Jabbar made to his friends, he hinted about the job that they had to carry out in a very short while. Their response was a little bit non-committal. It was easy for them to rest on their laurels and enjoy the money they now had, Jabbar thought. But the problem was that his conscience would not permit him to take so callous an action. He decided to have a chat with all of them so that he can know what action to take. The fact that he was now having more than enough money to spend was not going to deter him from the original motive that assisted him in getting the money.

The only thing that could make him rest finally was to eliminate all those men whose names were on the list he held. If his friends were not going to assist him, then he would move alone.

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The chat that Jabbar wanted to have with his contemporaries was going to be held on the Internet. Previously, Jabbar had alerted all the others to the time for the chat.

‘Gentle men,’ Jabbar typed on his own keyboard ‘I do not have to remind you that we have a mission to accomplish before we finally retire. In our mother country Nigeria, a particular trend has been incumbent for decades. Nobody dares to even upset this unhealthy trend until we came to shake it. I believe that what we’ve started should be finished before we finally rest. Remember we’re visionaries with a vision to uphold. Anything deviating from this makes our actions, the actions of ordinary terrorists. All I want to know is whether any of you are still interested in our vision.’ Jabbar finished.

There was a pause on line. David typed in from West Minster in England ‘Jabbar, I understand that we have an arrangement and I am fully away of the need to have a follow up mission....’

The conversion followed this pattern and finally it was agreed that they should all converge in New York in six weeks time. Every person was told to come with his own idea of how the final mission to be carried put.

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Six weeks later, the joy of seeing his friends in physical again after what seemed to all of them to be six-years, but which in actual fact was six months, made all their eyes brim with tears. It was a Saturday and Jabbar had already prepared for their arrival. His small apartment was filled because he also invited most of his friends in the neighborhood to the small welcome party, that he organized in honor of his friends. There was much celebrating and drinking, which ended only when one of Jabbar's neighbors threatened to call the police if they did not keep their noise down. It was a great reunion. They were all looking well ph-usually.

Monday morning saw the *visionaries* in Jabbar's sitting room before seven A.M.

'I reckon that with the amount of money we have at hand, there shouldn't be any difficulty in carrying out our mission' Jabbar started without any preamble. Joe had not even seated.

'Yeah sure' David answered lazily in a drawl.

'I've got a suggestion of my own, but I would like to hear what you'll have to say' Jabbar finished. He leaned back on the chair and stretched his legs out. He became silent waiting for the others to make their own contribution of ideas.

'Three hours later, a decision was taken. Jabbar was to take a short journey to Florida to contact an engineer who dealt in the production of remote control models of aircrafts and other vehicles. Jabbar had heard about this man from one of his friends whose uncle was in the movie industry. His friend had told him that the engineer was the person who usually constructed scale models for most of the stunts that occurred in many movies.

The engineer was popular and locating him would not be a problem to Jabbar when he got to Palm Beach Florida.

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Sitting in the window seat of a great Boeing 747 in the commercial class wasn't what any constant air traveler would call a luxury, but it was in a way to Jabbar. As he looked at the clouds below him outside the window, he tried to reconcile his past with the present. How would his parents see him? Would they see him as a bad son, who not only went away, but who went away without telling them where? He closed his eyes to shut out the thought of his parents and home. You never know how a child is going to turn up in future, Jabbar told himself. Imagine what his former friends in Nigeria would think if they knew he was far away in the United States and on his way to see a top genius in a particular field of engineering. He felt a little bit elated at how far he had gotten in life. The landing instructions broke his chain of thought a minutes later, the plane touched down.

The airport in which the big jet landed was not spectacular in any way and he didn't waste any time in securing a taxi for himself. He gave the address he had gotten from a small firm of engineers who specialized in odd jobs.

The ride in the taxicab was not a long one. The taxi dropped him in front of a large brownstone building that seemed to have been built sometime in the late seventies. Jabbar straightened up then walked up to the building.

Inside, he met a receptionist sitting at a desk facing a computer monitor. 'Good morning Madam. I am looking for Mister Roberts' Jabbar said to her. She looked up from the screen and mumbled something under her breath.

'Pardon?' Jabbar asked

'Nothing' she answered 'do you have an appointment?' she asked

'No, but I have an offer to make to him' Jabbar answered curtly.

‘Wait please?’ she said while she picked up an intercom phone.

‘Mr. Roberts someone’s here to see you....’

Jabbar was let in to his presence after some minutes of questioning by the receptionist. The first thing Jabbar noticed when he entered the office was the profusion of scale models of different everyday objects and machines. The office was jam-packed with scale models.

‘Good morning man’ Roberts said to Jabbar who had almost forgotten his reason for coming into the office because of his attention on the models.

‘Good morning sir, I am sorry’ Jabbar said with a start.

‘Sit down’ Roberts offered. He was a smiling faced man in his mid-forties who looked ready to play with sand at anytime if it were offered to him. He was a very jovial fellow who never lost time in finding fun in even the most trying of situations. He had eight fine children and he never lost time in telling his friends that if only his wife would grow younger by twenty years, he would have eight more. He was a millionaire who loved his work.

The fact that Jabbar could easily get to him was due to the fact that he did not really consider himself wealthy. He was a simple man through and through.

Jabbar sat down on a high backed chair facing Mr. Roberts. They both stared at each other Jabbar broke into a smile. Roberts smiled too.

‘I have a proposition’ Jabbar began. ‘I need a model plane. You can call it a drone if you like. One than can travel very fast, and that will have an on board video camera. I will also like it to posses a global positioning system, which would enable ground control from very long distances. It should also be able to carry small objects which it can also drop when necessary.’ Jabbar paused

‘I’ll pay the price’ he ended.

Roberts paused for some moment before he began ‘Young man, from your speech you seem to be a foreigner. You haven’t even introduced your self properly, and from what you have just asked of me, I should be a little bit piqued because what you demand my friend, is not a toy. I don’t know what it is for, but I dare say I could do the job for you’ he finished.

‘I am very sorry for my lack of manners sir’ Jabbar quickly apologized. ‘I am Muktar Bello from Cameroon in Africa’ he extended his arm, which Roberts took in his.

‘That’s the spirit young man’ Roberts said smiling a bit and say, ‘why do you need such a model? I know I should not be asking but I am curious.’

‘You know’ Jabbar explained’ I am from a very large polygamous family’ here he paused to see the effect of his words on Roberts. ‘We are very much into the oil business. I have some money which I feel can get me an expensive toy. In actual fact, the model airplane would be used to drop and pick up messages from my cousins and my family members in general. It is to be a surprise to them that I can locate them whenever I want to and wherever they are within the country’ Jabbar tried by all means to make his explanation plausible.

Mr. Roberts was silent for some moments’ then broke into a small smile.

‘I don’t believe your story but I am interested in doing the job’

‘How much sir?’ Jabbar asked.

Roberts did some small calculations then looked up ‘two hundred thousand dollars’

‘Okay I’ll pay you’ Jabbar quickly conceded.

Two hours later, he had finished giving Roberts all the specifications. Before leaving, he dropped one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in cash on the table in front of Roberts,

telling him that in one months time he will be back to pick up the small plane. Jabbar left to go back to New York City. The first phase was completed.

Roberts was surprised by the amount of liquid cash the young man had given him, but it was not his business to ask questions. He only did his job and he was paid for it. He did not care whether the money came from the devil, because from experience, he knew that too many questions usually resulted in trouble and most times death.

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Never in his life had Jabbar felt so excited. The small plane which Roberts created was already in it's casing on a container ship to Nigeria. Jabbar would be leaving for Nigeria in a week's time. The others would be going too but at different times. They would meet at the *Eko* meridian hotel in Lagos city.

The plane Jabbar had ordered was actually a scale model of the B2 stealth bomber. It was about a meter and a half in length. It was driven by two battery operated high power motors capable of many RPMs. Underneath the fuselage there was a tiny camera with a powerful zoom lens. Under each wing there was a kind of projection like a robotic arm, which could be used to secure objects of lightweight that could be released. These projections were motor controlled. The plane was remote controlled from a small laptop sized terminal that can be operated as far as four hundred kilometers away. The control terminal sees what the camera lens sees. The camera even had a night scope so that night forays can be done.

Jabbar was determined that the names of those on the list must be eliminated as soon as possible. He was assured

that his latest plane would make it possible at very little risk and cost to himself and his partners.

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The flight to Nigeria was quite smooth for Jabbar. The Murtarla Mohamed International Airport was the same to him. Six months had changed nothing in his eyes. He was a little bit elated that he was back home again. On entering a taxi bound for the *Ekò* hotel, he thought of how it would be for him to go and locate his family. The thought of his family gave him a slight pang of regret, but he quickly threw the thought away from his mind, there was business to be taken care of.

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Jabbar made the reunion with his friends quite soon after the taxi dropped. The model plane would be coming in a few days time and they all went about preparing for its arrival. Nigeria still looked the same as ever to Jabbar. Nothing had really changed during all the time he was abroad. Prices of goods were still high. The standard of living of the majority was still very low.

The group decided to shift the base of their affairs to the most unlikely region of Nigeria where they would not be found out, the middle belt region, precisely Gboko a small town in Benue state. An apartment was taken that had a very large football pitch behind it. The apartment was formerly part of the staff quarters of the school that owned the football pitch.

James was left behind to clear the model plane when it arrives at the Nigerian port. The others went along to Gboko to prepare their base. The new base wasn't as elaborate as the one that they formerly had. The new base was in actual fact just a place where they were going to live for the space of time it would take them to finished their mission.

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The plane was finally ready for a test run. It was nine P.M and the sky was clear. All was quiet. The darkness was like a light shroud around the four figures that surrounded the model of the B2 stealth bomber. Jabbar held the control terminal with the screen on. The camera was on. On the screen, the ground under the plane was showing.

'Is everything ready to go?' Joe asked silently. Jabbar sat on the grass and put the control down in front of him

'I think so' Jabbar answered, he was a bit anxious making his voice tremulous.

'Let's start kicking' he said and then pressed the control codes, when he finished entering them. He depressed the enter key. There was a low hum from the plane. Boldly painted on the fuselage of the plane in bold letters was *Doris*.

The pre-take off list immediately appeared on the left side of the screen. They were automatically ticked off by the on board computer system. After two minutes, the miniature jet plane started moving slowly across the field. It started gathering speed after twenty yards and then took off immediately.

Controlling the plane was easy enough as far as Jabbar was concerned. He had thought that it was going to be difficult.

The plane was already lost to the sight of those on the ground. There were no taillights or any form of nighttime identification. Jabbar was really impressed by the ingenuity of the man that built it. He found it almost too difficult to believe that something that small and battery operated could function so. It seemed to him like he was enacting a part in a particularly spectacular sci-fi movie.

Almost the entire monitor screen was covered by the view offered by the miniature camera under the plane. The other parts of the screen was shared by a global positioning systems map and some more data relating to the position of the plane. Jabbar, after about ten minutes of letting the plane fly, typed in the data required to make the plane travel to Abuja the capital territory. He increased speed. On the GPS map, a small white dot showed where Doris was located, while the camera's image had to adjust immediately, due to the abrupt change in speed.

The plane was beautifully made and with its extreme streamlining and powerful motors driven by very powerful nuclear batteries, it moved at an incredible speed of almost three hundred and twenty kilometers and at an altitude of ten thousand feet.

Jabbar fed in the location codes for a particular section of Abuja. Jabbar's heart swelled with joy as the dot finally got to the destination. The plane could not stop and hover in the air like around a helicopter, but it just went on circling around and around high up.

From the camera, Jabbar could see lights showing the location of various mansions below. He zoomed in the camera to the fullest. In a mansion below the airplane, Jabbar could see a guard urinating against one wall while at the other side of the same mansion; a young man was kissing a young girl.

The plane could see all these at night by the aid of the night vision lens built into the camera.

‘Let’s call Doris back in she had done enough for one night’
Jabbar said all of a sudden

‘Yeah man’ David answered tiredly.

Codes were typed in and Doris turned back on her way to the base.

CHAPTER EIGHT

‘We can’t all take the same escape route’ Joe argued ‘we’ll be caught even before we get anywhere’ he wasn’t in for the idea of all of them making their escape in one group. ‘Explain your reasons Joe’ Jabbar said, unmoved by Joe’s tirade ‘just give me one good reason why we shouldn’t move out together’.

‘Look’ Joe started ‘we may think that the Nigerian law may not get to us. But think very well there is also the possibility that we may be unlucky this time. If we go out differently, and any one is caught, the rest can move quickly to get him out. If all of us were picked in a group, then,’ he raised his hand in a sigh of exasperation ‘we’re finished’.

Jabbar’s chin was resting in his palms as he mulled Joe’s idea ever in his mind. Joe could be right, he thought. Something may go wrong after they finished their mission. If things happen to go bad, escaping would be a very difficult thing indeed. The dust that was going to be raised won’t be little at all. The country may even be in chaos.

‘We follow Joe’ Jabbar conceded. ‘Let’s discuss other parts of the job.’

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After much deliberation and argument the list of people to be assassinated by the visionaries was dropped to

fifteen. It was decided among the group, that it wasn't worth their effort to do anything to some of the people they had initially wanted to hit. Bombs were already created that would be carried by *Doris*. The bombs were quite small, so that the little airplane wouldn't have a hard time getting off the ground.

If it were possible, Jabbar thought, a particular place could be bombed more than one time so that maximum damage could be incurred to the target.

Two weeks after their first test of *Doris*, the mission was ready to carry on. Three bombs were assigned to each target. All the targets were already located. James had traveled to the capital territory to do the locating. All fifteen residences were marked and plotted on the GPS. Everything seemed to be going on fine except for one of the targets. Target four.

The man who owned the house was a former president of Nigeria. During his reign, he embezzled so much of the Nigeria crude oil funds, that he was reputed to be one of the richest men on earth. His house was so big that getting him would mean that a total of ten bombs would be used, because it was rumored that his home had an underground area. These little problems and many more Jabbar and his crew had to solve by themselves.

'We start hitting tomorrow. We hit until all the tyrants are down. The hit may commence for two straight weeks. After then, we relax a bit then move out' Jabbar stated flatly.

'I think we should all go and have our rest so that we can be refreshed when we start the shelling' David said jokingly.

'Look gentlemen,' Jabbar put in a more serious tone of voice 'what we want to do will cause a very serious uproar. Nigeria may even accuse another country for perpetrating the action. Don't joke with the extent of the damage we are about to cause. Have your sleep and tomorrow we start'

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By his watch, the time was 8pm. There wasn't another person in the field apart from them. Doris was already streaking across the hard earth like greased lightning. She took off without a bump. After some minutes she was lost to sight.

'Let's go inside' Jabbar commanded. They all filed into the house.

'According to the computer, she should be on target one in forty minutes' Jabbar said silently, the air was heavy between them. The actual execution of the job brought a feeling gloom on all of them.

'Yea' Joe answered glumly. They waited.

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Meanwhile, high up at an attitude of eleven thousand feet, Doris was doing her own part of the job. She slid through air like a hot knife cuts through butter. The on-board computer of *Doris* had already fixed the point at which the small bomb would be dropped.

Down below the minister's hill hove into the viewfinder of the camera on board Doris, immediately, Jabbar and his crew were looking at the area far below *Doris*. Jabbar used the cursor control to bring the plane to an altitude of six thousand feet. Two minutes later, a red light on the control terminal came on.

'We're on target' Jabbar said with hardly suppressed excitement.

‘Lets hit them Jabbar’ Joe said with a small crooked smile ‘it is time’

Jabbar dropped the altitude until *Doris* was just about a thousand feet from the ground. She was still about seven kilometers from their first target. The plane was still moving at its maximum speed of over three hundred kilometers an hour. As she speed past the target, Jabbar pressed the release button on the control terminal. The small bomb was dropped. Immediately, the plane started gaining altitude again. When it had attained ten thousand feet, Jabbar decided to turn the plane around so that he could have a look at the target’s recent state. *Doris* turned gallantly and dropped altitude again to one thousand feet. As *Doris* passed, Jabbar could see that one wing out of the two that made up the house of one of the most powerful and corrupt men in Nigeria was in ruins. *Doris* came back to pick up another bomb. The second wing was to be destroyed so that all that would remain of a once magnificent mansion would be rubbles. *Doris* was a machine to be used at night only.

‘I hope he is at home’ Jabbar said with a sigh ‘Next time we hit in the middle of the night so that we know we won’t miss the owners at all’

‘I really pity the innocent ones that would be caught up in this’ David said with a little frown.

‘They didn’t cry when they eat corrupt money. Did they?’ Jabbar asked him

‘You’re right. In a way they aren’t innocent at all lets say that they are collateral damage’ David reasoned.

‘Let’s prepared to meet *Doris*’ Jabbar finally said.

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The bombings continued far into the week. In six days time the bombings were completed. The amount of the

people who had died in the raid was incalculable. The country was going haywire. A lot of people were talking of there being another civil war in the making. The president in his speech to the nation assured everyone that there was really nothing to fear and that the perpetrators of the crime would be fished out. Many corrupt rich people evacuated themselves and their families out of the country. The visionaries had succeeded in their mission though they may have cut but a small part of the corrupt, many still remained that would come to take the others place. But for now, they assumed, a lot of people would sooner realize that all those who were killed were those that contributed immensely the strangulation, oppression, violation and disrespect of the civil rights of Nigeria.

PROLOGUE

The *visionaries* laid low after the bombings. They were hardly seen outside at all. After one week Jabbar told James and Joe to go back to Japan while the following day, David took off for Britain.

Jabbar waited for their phone calls. Soon after the third day of their departure, James called in to say that himself and Joe were okay. Some hours later, David called to say that he was safe.

Jabbar picked up his little bag and left the building behind. The day before, he had destroyed *Doris* with a two and a half pound hammer and burnt the pieces.

He hired a Mercedes Benz “E” class from a dealer and drove to the Federal Housing Estate where he used to stay with his parents. He drove in and went to his former home. He stopped in front of the house. The house seemed like it had not been lived in for sometime. He got out of the car and walked to the front door, as he raised his hands to knock, he heard a voice behind him say

‘They have packed out’ Jabbar turned to see who it was, standing near his rented car was a boy of about fifteen years old whom he vaguely remembered.

‘When did they move? And to where?’

‘They left about six months ago and they didn’t say where they were packing to’ why are you looking for them? The boy said, Jabbar looked up into the sun for a moment then said ‘They were my family’

He walked to the car then drove to the clubhouse. The place was as noisy as ever. Filled with laughing and screaming children all enjoying themselves. He got out of the car and moved into the clubhouse. He went to sit on the edge of the swimming pool staring at the bathing and swimming figures. He recognized most of them, but they did not recognize him.

After about five minutes he got up to go. As he stood up, someone called out from somewhere near the middle of the pool.

‘Jabbar! Jabbar!!’

He turned to stare into the face of someone who had captivated him a long time ago. Linda rushed out of the pool and came to stand in front of him. She couldn’t talk; she just stood there staring at him, dripping water from her body and hair. ‘How’re you doing Linda?’ Jabbar asked a bit warmly ‘Fine, I am fine’ she muttered silently.

‘ I can see you’re doing fine Linda’. He paused, she gave no answer ‘I have a journey to undertake. Goodbye.’ He started to walk away. She called his name again. He stopped close to the Mercedes.

‘Yeah Linda?’

Jabbar, I really missed you. When I heard you were no longer here, it was like the world had come to an end’ she continued ‘I know I did you wrong by leaving you long ago, but now I am matured. I want us to continue where we stopped’. Jabbar looked at her with pity.

‘Linda, we do not have much in common again. I do not live here. I live in the United States of America now and I will be going back today. Infact, my flight is scheduled for nine PM tonight. You’re a nice girl and you’ll find some one your match, okay?’

He got into the Mercedes and drove off in a cloud of dust. Linda stood there for some time with tears in her eyes. After a while, she went back to the pool.

Jabbar smiled to himself as he was flown from the Makurdi airport to the Abuja international airport.

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Twenty hours later, he was in his flat in New York City. He called the other *visionaries* via videophone. The message he gave them was “*a vision once sustained becomes a reality*”.

The *visionaries* had succeeded.

THE END

ALI OSENJI



