

TRAPPED

By

Lota Dibua and Kizito Martins

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Preface

“Trapped” is an anthology of 7 flash stories with trapping situations, dilemmas and broken feelings.

“Trapped” is co-written by Lota Dibua and Kizito Martins, author of “Stories Not Told”

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Contact author at:

Kizorita@gmail.com

Instagram and twitter:

@Ogakizito

Facebook:

Lota Dibua

Art by Justin Main

Dedication

This work is dedicated to all the less fortunate ones living with trapping situations, dilemmas and broken feelings.

Chapter One:

Something about love.

There's something about love, I just cannot explain. I wish I understood it enough.

Mama used to tell us stories of papa, very lovely stories. She used to tell us of the gentleman she fell in love with and married. She told us lots of sweet stories, a side of papa we have never seen nor witnessed... a part of papa we have never had the opportunity to taste. As far as we can tell, papa's sweetness and angelic attitude existed only in mama's stories, and the papa we knew made those stories mama told us seem like fairytales, fairytales she wished could come to reality. The papa we knew was a monster, a selfish, heartless, abusive drunk. Papa was a deadbeat.

Papa had become notorious for his love for ogogoro, nothing could anger papa inasmuch as he had a bottle of ogogoro to wash his mouth and quench the fire igniting in him. Mama Ovie's joint was his only point of call. Papa was one of her many customers who were loyal to just her joint. Rumours had it that she uses juju to make her customers stick to her joint. One needed just a little taste of her ogogoro, and that was all it took to become a constant caller at her shop. Little wonder she had named it "Ogogoro till eternity"

Papa passed most of his nights in the street gutters than he did at home. There was a time he had caused a heavy traffic on the road one Monday, he had obviously passed the night on middle of the road and was still having his sound sleep when motorist had hit the road ready for work. The road safety officers had arrested papa for causing a senseless rush hour traffic, and after his release, papa had called at "ogogoro till eternity" before he staggered home in the dead of the night. Mama had gotten tired of throwing tantrums at papa because she knew it was a total waste of time, and when she had resorted in taking her fights to Mama Ovie, founder and general overseer of the "ogogoro till eternity" joint a few times, she got badly beaten by papa. The last time mama had confronted Mama Ovie at her shop, the result was broken legs for mama. Papa had used the mortar mama used for pounding yam to pound both her legs. "...make I see how you go take dey go cause trouble for my ogogoro joint after I dun break your legs!" Papa yelled as he pounded on mama legs while she laid helplessly on her back screaming and crying for help that came a little too late. Mama will go on to leap for the rest of her life with her walking stick for support.

Besides Ogogoro, Papa preferred to satisfy his sexual urges with the widows in the community.

How he wooed them and eventually got to penetrate between their legs remains a mystery. Papa was living the life, even though he wasn't wealthy, he had ogogoro and a lot of widows to call on when he needed to satisfy his desires. Papa was living like we didn't matter to him. We've learned to grow up fatherless even when our father was alive and going around disgracing the family daily. We got ridiculed constantly at school and at home when playing with our playmates, we learned to live with the endless ridicules, it had become our way of life.

We learned to live with so many things, ridicule was the least. We were rejected when it comes to mixing up with other families. We soon stopped going to church after the pastor won't stop using papa and some of his cohorts but especially papa as negative examples and scapegoats for his sermons. No Sunday sermon was complete without papa's name being mentioned. This had angered me one Sunday and I had charged at the pastor, dealt him a few blows to his face before some youths in the church intervened. Mama tried to force me to go ask for his forgiveness the next day, but when she got wind of my plan to cause another trouble at his house, she begged me to stay home and just let the issue slide.

We learned to fend for ourselves, but mama fish business wasn't booming like before, she had lost a lot of customers. My kid sister and I had to swing into action; she hawked mama's smoked fish round the community while I did any odd job I saw around. We worked very hard to survive on our own. This is why I had grown up to despise papa. He was a burden to us, a liability, he was our curse. Papa brought nothing but shame, sometimes I wish mama had bore us for a decent man. It was very difficult to believe papa was once decent. What had transformed papa to this miscreant he had become was another question mama cannot answer, just like Fejiro, my kid sister had once asked her why she didn't report papa to the police after he had broken both her legs. Amongst the trio of us, mama was the only one who still had hope in papa. She still believed that he could change, and whenever she raised the intention for us to pray for papa to change during our usual daily morning devotion, we would keep quiet and allow her pray alone. How possible is it that a wolf could become a lamb? My kid sister and I was no fan of papa, especially after the incident that had left mama with broken legs, and the other which hand left mama hospitalised for weeks after he had hit her head with his ogogoro bottle because she had emptied his bottle of ogogoro and filled it with water. Personally, I had sworn never to let papa maltreat mama or my kid sister anymore, this was why when papa was stamping heavily on mama after she had accused him of raping Fejiro the previous night, I didn't think twice before I thrust one of the kitchen knives deep through the back of his neck.

One thrust to end many years of domestic abuse and tyranny was worth enough to gamble for a life time running away from the police. I was half way through the door when I heard my sister's scream; I ran back to see mama lying on papa and both their bodies soaked in their blood. "My love... my loooove" was mama's last words as the life in her faded away. I could not believe that mama had given up her own life just to accompany papa, did she like him that much, what about us? She did not think we were worth more than him? I gave up my conscience for the love of my sister and mother. I murdered my own father because I loved my sister, and mama had committed suicide because she loved papa.

There's something about love, I just cannot explain. I wish I understood it enough.

Chapter Two:

They always left.

They always left.

They will stay for awhile, just to make a fool of me and my feelings, but eventually they take their leave without remorse. They never turned back, to see my heart shattering in a million pieces. They always left, like an *Ogbanje*. Maybe I'm cursed.

First it was Sandra; she took me by storm. I thought what we had was real, very strong like a diamond, nothing can break it... that was why when she left, it took me five years before I decided to give love another chance. I met Sonia, and then Sofia, both weren't different from Sandra. They were very much alike, very loving, very beautiful too, yet so cunning. They left.

Mama wasn't making my "wife hunt" easier for me either, *"if you no see better woman marry for that Abuja, come home. Come stay for Warri and give me just one week, only one week, I go find better and fine Urhobo girl make you marry"*. She often boasted in our phone conversations. As if that wasn't enough, before she ended her calls, she will say *"if she no sabi cook my favourite owoh and starch, no carry am come house o"*.

I met Eva at a church seminar. I didn't take it serious at first, but it eventually looked like it would work. She was intelligent and amusing, so much of a talker for her quiet looks. She had a killer smile that often reminded me of how lucky I was to have her. We got engaged, she was the first. I was starting to believe this wasn't another nightmare. I got a call a week to our wedding; Eva was involved in an auto crash.

She left.

Sandra, Sonia, Sofia and Eva.

They always left.

Chapter Three:

Needle's eye.

I did not care about the river looking red like Jesus had turned it to wine, nor did I bother about the weight of the heavy bag I was carrying on my head, nor stop to think and ponder about the consequences of my actions. All I cared about was; running far away, very far, as far as I can from my shadow. Whatever it takes to keep me few meters away from my past and closer to the life I had always dreamed of, I will do. I'm stuck between my past and my dreams.

Every dawn, I struggle to stay alive till dusk, and every dusk, I struggle to survive the evils lurking in the dark till dawn. Life in the slums is never easy for anyone, and especially not when you're an orphan. Technically, I don't know if I could be tagged an orphan when I never had the privilege of ever knowing my family. I just woke up one day in the streets and I have been trying every day since that day, to see the next day however possible.

The little I knew about myself was whatever I was told by Monster. Monster is the general in command of the Makoko slum. Half drunk and sober that day, he told me how he had seen the girl who had dropped me by the riverside. He was taking a poop on one side along the river as he watched her keenly deliberating amidst herself whether to throw me in the river or leave me by the side till I probably die of starvation. According to him, she left me by the bank of the river after she had sighted him staring at her. He chased at her with the intention to make her take me back and care for me, but she had disappeared into the slum.

"... you know, a few other times too I saved your life too" Monster continued his narration; he was smiling a little as he spoke while looking above my head. He couldn't hold my stare. This Monster, who we all knew as a hardened man, had mysteriously transformed into a softy in front of me. Tears had gathered in his eyes. He was struggling to hold them back while occasionally wiping his runny nose with the back of his right hand, and taking a lengthy pause between each of his statements to conceal the croakiness in his voice. Your mum did not even wrap you in a cloth. She just dropped you there, he said, pointing at the exact spot. You were naked and crying loud as if you knew what she was doing. Monster narrated in his thick pidgin which had strongly been influenced by his Urhobo dialect.

Monster had a similar story. His mum had abandoned him with his dad and eloped with another guy. His father tried catering for him but soon neglected him to cater for his thirst for beer and alcohol. Monster too, abandoned his father and took to the streets after he won't stop maltreating and extorting him of his little earnings from the meagre jobs he did so he could afford a meal or two daily. There were rumours that Monster had murdered his own father because no one ever saw or heard from him after one day when they both had a heavy fight. His father had come search for Monster in the street and wanted to extort him as usual, but little

Monster wouldn't let him have his way.

Monster continued his narration; *I Kun go carry you after I no fit catch am. Na plantain leaf I Kun tay wrap you. As I day waka go do my normal duties, I see one girl for road. I carry you give am, Kun warn her say make she take care of you well or I go drive she and her family comot our land. The yeye girl no hear word. One day I see you for where she dun abandon you for under one table for market. That time you dun reach like two years. You wear one tear tear pant, I Kun pull am wear you one of my small boxers. Every time I see you dey run pass with that boxers, I go dey remember the first day when I pick you for that river. I think say you no go fit survive but you dun big finish and you still dey alive. One day sef you fit still become general of this our land like me because our two story just resemble.*

Ironically, a man I hated so much for his cruelty and demeaning nature, had been my saviour and fairy godfather a couple of time that I didn't even know of. But unlike the dreams Monster had of me becoming the general of Makoko, I wanted more. I was a big dreamer, little wonder none of my mates could fit in with me. I was a one man squad. My biggest dream was to leave the slum and find a better life somewhere anywhere inasmuch it was not another slum. This was why I didn't hesitate to take the chance when the opportunity presented itself in a gold platter.

Monster had developed a soft spot for me. He had begun seeing me as his prodigy; he brought me on the inside to learn how the slum was being run. He had a gang which took care of his brothel management, another managed the collection of levies for market space from the traders, another came in handy when the national elections came around. Whichever party bid the highest for that election, they made sure every inhabitant of the slum registered and voted whether lawfully or not. Now, I was beginning to understand all that was going on in the slum, no wonder Monster with all the money he had earned from the slum still wouldn't leave. The slum was an industry of its own. The pattern at which Monster ran the slum, he could be one of the greatest presidents Nigeria never had.

Monster had started a new business, and he needed people whom he could trust. In his words, he needed people who were like family to him. I was enlisted with the notorious invincible trio, Thunder, Scorpion and Dragon. The Invincible trio had very rich curriculum vitae in committing crimes. Their name sparked terror in the neighbouring towns. Monster had gotten a contract to package and push illicit drugs from the slums to other parts of the country. He had sold the idea to one chief who was a top government politician and had been given all that we needed to start business. Everything was in place, the funds, the drugs, the carriers, the managers, and the factory, all of it. This looked lucrative to me, but there would be no going back once I get in completely, no going back, no dream of leaving the slum behind. The one and only dream I had nursed for about sixteen years of my entire existence. I was not ready to trade my dream, my freedom nor future. I didn't want to be like Monster and other high ranking officers in the slum, raise and nurse a family in the slum. I didn't want my kids to see this dark side of the world. I wanted a better life for them, a better dream for them. I didn't want them to sleep with an eye

open, or have to hide at a corner and look at the road ahead if any of the people they had offended was lurking around. I wanted them to feel safe.

After Monster had gathered us by the riverside to pay us for a successful first day of business, I asked to have a little chit chat with him. I told him of my plans. He did not buy my idea, he saw me like an asset, a weapon that could come in handy. He wasn't willing to let me off his hook. He had me exactly where he needed and I too, had him exactly where I wanted. I freed my right arm a little to allow the dagger slid down my sleeve to my palm. As Monster went on issuing threat upon threats, I swiftly made a quick slash from up to down across his face, and then hit his head with a rock by the river. There was no going back now; my journey away from the slum had just begun. I took a last look at Monster's body drowning with blood by the river as I assure myself that I had done taken a right decision. The deed has been done. I scrambled through the shrubs and bush for my bag where I had packaged a little belongings, money and illicit drugs I could sell to generate capital in my quest to start a new.

I started on my way leaving it all behind, the slum, my past. There was no friend or family to say goodbye to. I had always been a lone soldier. The only family I had come to know was the man drowning in his blood but I cared less.

I did not care about the river looking red like Jesus had turned it to wine, nor did I bother about the weight of the heavy bag I was carrying on my head, nor stop to think and ponder about the consequences of my actions. All I cared about was; running far away, very far, as far as I can from my shadow. Whatever it takes to keep me few meters away from my past and closer to the life I had always dreamed of, I will do. I'm stuck between my past and my dreams.

Chapter Four:

Blind.

I am dead but my heart is still beating.

I have been standing here... standing very stiff, motionless, like a statue in the middle of my bedroom, directly under the ceiling fan whose seasonal squeaks is the only sound that can be heard in my small one bedroom flat. I was like one who had seen a ghost... actually, I was looking at one.

Thick balls of sweat raised down my body as though I was a water fountain. My head was spinning, my nose was runny, and my legs were begging me to sit for a while, but I just couldn't move because the ghost I was looking at, was boldly staring back... as if that was not enough, it was making mockery of me, mockery of my last 5 years... 5 years that gave my life a sudden twist, a very miserable one.

I remembered my dad's last words to me; "... just go away, you've cause me enough pain. I will forget I ever had a son once you close that door behind you" he said angrily with his head bowed, eyes closed, and tears rolling down his bulgy cheeks while his right index finger was pointing at the door as he spoke.

I had just rushed into the hospital after I got a text message that my mum had been hospitalized. I was panting from the little race I'd ran from my car passed the hospital's main entrance, down the hall, taking swift double left turns before arriving at "Room 22". My decision to quit school and take care of my pregnant girlfriend had not gone down well with both my parents. Mum begged amidst tears that I shouldn't quit school; "...continue schooling, you can still take care of them while schooling" she said. But dad, dad's thought was different. He wanted to just pay Shade's family some amount of money for whatever inconveniences my busy weapon of mass destruction must have caused, and promise to send more money monthly for the baby's upkeep. He didn't want anything to do with his illegitimate grandson. Papa is a catholic knight and a politician; he is one who will go any length so far his good reputation which he is so proud to talk about wherever and whenever, is intact. But I felt the right thing to do was to own up to my responsibilities. I wanted Shade to fully move in with me, I wanted to marry her... after all; I was going to become a father... the father of her son, a baby we both made. I wanted to be a good father, but I could barely be a good child. Now see where my good father wannabe attitude has got me. Immediately I got in, my eyes caught one of the nurses covering my mum's lifeless body with a white sheet whilst my dad and uncle Elo were holding down my twin sisters as they wailed throwing their hands and legs in protest.

That was five years ago, after my mum had passed away suffering from a sudden rise in her blood pressure, followed by a severe heart failure. Dad was not mincing words when he said "...go away..." there were security guards in place with strict instructions to restrain me from

attending mum's funeral. Unlike the prodigal son, even when things went rough, rugged and sour, I never went back home to my father. It was not even an option, dad was not one to go back on his words and I was not one to swallow my pride. Dad will not miss me much, I was a good for nothing... a good riddance, besides, he still had the twins, but I have nobody. My little rebellion had made me lose the only friend I ever had, my sweet mum. My twin sisters had always been my father's beloved. They are everything I am not; innocent, good, religious, obedient and saintly. They did everything papa told them to do and exactly as he told them to, and I hated them for it. This was why I didn't even trust the tears they shed when dad asked me to leave his house and never return, and when they pleaded with me to go ask for papa's mercy, I was bent on doing exactly the opposite because I hated to feel like I was acting according to papa's script.

Now, it's all becoming clearer. I can decipher the writings on the wall...why did it take this long before I realized I'd been a *comfam maga*? Chike was my only friend from campus that kept in close touch with me since after I dropped out. He never stopped to remind me of how much he owes me for the three years I allowed him squat with me, taking care of his feeding and all... and whenever I try to wave off his overly grateful attitude, he will put up a protest pleading that I allow him show as much gratitude as he can. Chike was my confidant and wise king Solomon. He had a way of coming up with an optimal solution to problems that seemed like an Everest to climb. This was why I trusted Chike's judgment when he said to drop out of school in order to take care of my new small family was the best decision. All these years I've been assuring myself that I did the right thing... now, I feel miserable and hopeless like a used sanitary pad. This ghost I'm staring at is a brown envelope containing a note from Shade with a typical doctor's handwriting begging for my forgiveness as she narrates how Chike had got her pregnant before he shoved her in my way, a paternity and pregnancy test results confirming her claim and a wedding card of her and Chike.

I forgive them though, but next Saturday I will commit murder. For now...

I am dead but my heart is still beating.

Chapter Five:

Broken

Broken!

I'll tell you my story, of how I was broken.

May, 2013

"Dust to dust, ash to..." the reverend father's voice could be heard. Mother earth graciously received the remains of Father enclosed in a casket.

Mum, heart wrenched into many fragments, tears endlessly flowing, a spade in hand with sand on it, performed her last duties to her husband.

No! I'm not here to tell you of how father's burial went. Or how folks were laden with emotions, sympathy or false empathy, as the case might be. I won't tell you of how devastated mum was. How she wanted to journey with father to the great beyond as she apparently had nothing left to live for (hey! what about me?).

August, 2016.

I'll tell you of how I was broken. Broken by a man called step dad, dad. I'll tell you of how I lost it to him.

I was barely 13. He would come into my room, come close to me and would touch me at bizarre places, my chest, my thigh, my buttocks. He'd make me suck on his scrotum. He'd bite my nipples. He would finally insert his penis into my buttocks. I didn't commit sin, did I? No. Sunday school teacher said it was a sin to fornicate with the opposite sex. He wasn't of the opposite sex.

It would become a routine. Him sucking on my nipples, me on his scrotum, and then the penetration. It really hurt. It would make me cry. Mum needed to know about it, I felt. I wanted to tell her about it but it was obvious she wouldn't believe me. She would simply debunk it as delusion of a mourning child. I still haven't gotten over the loss of my father, she would say.

June, 2016.

I won't tell you of how, three years later, Uncle Sammy came into the picture. Uncle Sammy, remember him? Mum's client, the one that presented the fat envelope at father's burial. I won't tell you the story of how uncle Sammy rendered mum so much help. Of how he offered to pay my school fees when business was bad for mum and the funds were simply not there. Do I need to tell you of how Uncle Sammy's status changed? Of how he became my step dad or dad, as mum forced me to call him?

September, 2016.

He would come into my room too. But this time, a knife laid beside me. I fearfully threatened to cut myself if he touched me. A scuffle would ensue between us and it would result in me tearing my arm, usually my left.

At mum's notice, he lied. He would tell her of I was involved in a street fight. He would cook up stories about my recent misdemeanours. I wouldn't be able to defend myself.

I was broken.

Days later, I would find myself leaving home, on a journey to St. Thomas college where I'd become a boarder.

November, 2016.

With my heads bowed, eyes facing my paper, hand clutching my pen, I'll tell you my story.

The story of a broken soul, a soul that lived and still lives inside of me, a young boarder.

Chapter Six:

Fear

The last time the moon stood in front of the sun, the king of Ozu died.

The screams of the gong interrupted the sleep of the whole Ozu villagers as the town crier made sure everyone got the message as he covered the nooks and crannies of Ozu. Everyone was to stay indoors; there would be no activity in the markets, streams and farms. Only the fathers and the first sons whom had grown beards and hairs in their pubic regions were expected to gather at the village square, there would be a meeting... the chief priest, the chiefs and the king will be in attendance, all the women and children were warned to stay indoors for security reasons.

A big trouble is coming.

The chief priest had consulted with the gods and they had made it known to him that in two days time, the moon will stand in front of the sun.

The last time the moon stood in front of the sun, the king of Ozu died.

Chapter Seven:

No lifeline.

Mama don't worry, I'll be back next year.

I said, trying to fight back my tears...

Mama cried and wailed like one who was possessed. The only time I'd seen mama cry this way, was five years ago when four able bodied men had brought papa's lifeless body home. Papa was stung by a snake while he was at the farm. We did not just cry because we'd loved papa dearly, we cried even more because papa's death spelt doom for us. Papa was our sole bread winner, with him gone; mama had to swing into action, just so we can have our daily bread. Still, poverty had refused to acknowledge mama's efforts, hence my drastic decision to go search for a land flowing with milk, honey, money, food and anything that could take us few meters and even miles away from poverty.

That was exactly twelve months ago before I came to Abuja, the land where every stranger on the road is a king. I'd no one in Abuja, no relative and not even a friend. Didn't they say poverty has no friends because it stench so badly? Two months I lived in street, slept in abandoned buses at night and work for my daily meal by carrying wares for both traders and their customers to wherever they wanted around the market. This was how I met Uche. Uche was a driver and had come pick up the wares his oga madam had paid for earlier in the day. After loading the trunk of the car with the wares, Uche had invited me to pay a visit to the house where he worked. "*work no dey now oo, but you be fine boy... my oga go like you*" Uche had said smiling, while I stood a little confused watching the rear of the car as it crawled from the congested market into the main road while my head was still battling to decipher whatever Uche's statement meant.

As if the devil had opened my file and has sworn to make life hell for me, the bus stop where I'd more than enough abandoned buses for my shelter, was demolished... and the market where I worked as wares' carrier, was relocated as they both didn't fit the Abuja city master plan no thanks to the policies of the new FCT minister. I'd no more cards to play and it seemed my type of hustle and the kind of big dreams I had, were miles apart. There was no way I was going to "make it" if I continued the path I was treading, either I change my dreams or go search for Uche... after all, "I'm a fine boy and his oga will like me".

"I hope you're ready for this, because once I take you to my oga there's no turning back". Those were Uche's words, that moment, I knew whatever it was I was getting into was going to be serious, but what do I care... wasn't the hardship I'd suffered serious enough to drive one crazy? My mind was made; I was completely in for whatever it was.

Uche's oga turned out to be an old Alhaji, a very wealthy one. I heard he is an ex minister, he had

to be because I'd no better explanations to fit the kind of mansion he lived in and the fleet of luxury cars that his garage couldn't accommodate, I can bet that not even juju can make one this wealthy, only a Nigerian politician who had embezzled public funds half of his time in service can afford this sort of luxury. Alhaji is a gay! He preferred young boys for his sexual pleasure. Although he had three wives, they were just a mask to shield his true cravings. Well, I wanted money... a lot of money, and yes, I was ready to sell my soul for a good asking price. It turned out I was going to sell more than my soul.

Just after two weeks of gracing Alhaji's bed, I'd earned enough money to send back home to mama. Mama had sent back messages thanking me for my gesture while iterating that I keep away from whatever is evil. My siblings were back in school and now doing fine, seemed like everything was going as planned... I guess selling my soul to the devil was a wise decision after all. Months into working with Alhaji as his pleasure boy, I'd become an instant millionaire, especially after his younger wife, Funke, had employed my services. I graced her bed too. She paid handsomely steadily so I could keep our sweet little secret to myself. I'd started sending money to mama and my immediate younger brother, they were building me a house, and I'd bought me two cars too and could afford more only that I needed a bigger garage. I was doing more than fine; I wished I had known long before now that being a pleasure boy was this lucrative.

It was just the first month of my second year working for Alhaji when Madam Rukky had called me one evening, she said Alhaji had instructed her to pay me off because he was planning on travelling out of the country... this time, without me, and he will be gone for long. I knew he hadn't found out about Funke and I... why the sudden break up? Too bad, I was looking forward to his continuous patronage. Well, my payoff was a handsome deal. I'd to use my left hand to cover my left eye so I could carefully count the eight zeros behind the one, six, nine on the cheque. I wasn't too surprise, Alhaji never had respect for money no matter what currency it was.

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I don't know what demon made me buy the dailies that morning, I wish I didn't.

"Top ex-minister contracts HIV/AIDS. Travels abroad for treatments -Family discloses". The headline read. I was eager to read the story, to pass my usual judgments at those politicians that'd embezzle national funds and would later assault sexually, girls young enough to be their daughters.

"Ex-minister, Alhaji Bako diagnosed with HIV....." "Could I have contracted the disease? Were the symptoms for supposed fever, actually for HIV/AIDS? A medical test ran the next day, confirmed my fears, I had not just contracted the virus, and I had cancer too... anal cancer. My world crumbled! My life ruined. I wish I had not taken any test; I should've just fallen sick and die slowly oblivious of the cause of my death. But now I know, of what use is this knowledge to me? When there's little I can do to save myself.

Mama words came back at me, like daggers. All I had were regrets and wishes for a second chance, but since they weren't horses, I couldn't ride them. I had to commence with the antiretroviral and chemo therapy. Slowly I was losing it all; friends, money, properties... I wasn't ready to look in the mirror and see myself in rags again; I wasn't ready to lose my family too. I planned a trip back home that year's Christmas. It was a grand homecoming, my coming always came with good tidings, like Santa, I had money, much money, very plenty money for everyone, mostly for my mum and siblings though, then whatever I can spare for those wicked shameless uncle who will do anything just to have a few more naira notes.

I'd left strict instructions on how my house was to look like upon completion, and made my immediate younger brother signatory to all my bank accounts. Everything was set; I was ready to die now... I knew my family won't go hungry any sooner if they managed properly all of the money I'd hoard for them stashed in different bank accounts, both the ones I stole and earned. Mama had had little suspicion, she bothered me with questions; *"... this one that you're dropping instructions like cow dunk so, are you going somewhere... How long will you stay? My son, hope everything is okay with work? You know you can talk to me if there's a problem abi... you know what they say about problems shared..."* I just brushed mama's questions aside telling her of how busy I would be in recent weeks handling too many projects at work, mama was not one to flog a dead horse, she'd left the issue once I had assure her that there was nothing to break a sweat over.

28th December 2016; I left home for Abuja. I was seated at the back seat of my Lincoln navigator L waving at my siblings and mama. It's always emotional when I'm leaving home. As the car engine kicked to life, memories started flooding in, memories of the first time I left home for Abuja not knowing what the future held for me, not knowing what my fate was or what would become of me, but this time was different, I knew. I knew that 7th January 2017, I will arrive home again at the back seat of this same SUV, but not seated nor smiling nor with lot of money for everyone, I knew that I would be home again, this time, lying lifeless in a wooden box, I hope it will be comfortable enough.

Mama don't worry, I'll be back next year.

I waved amidst tears, my final goodbye to my family. They were smiling as they waved, while those words kept floating in my head...

Mama don't worry, I'll be back next year.

About Author.

Lota Dibua is a civil engineering student of university of Nigeria, Nsukka and she loves the pen experience.

Kizito Martins is a writer, recording artist and is the author of "Stories Not Told"