

Satan roams the world

CHAPTER 23

It was after nine before the crowd dispersed; one pesky reporter knocked on the apartment door for another thirty minutes. Finally, Tom was able to sneak some food over to the church. Abidemi was hiding behind the false wall. She didn't know that Victor had been in the church and that he'd fallen down the church steps. All she knew was to hide when she heard people or commotion. "You, did good little girl," was all the explanation that Tom gave.

While she ate the akara and pap Tom took Cain over to the kennel. A patrol car with two of Ayoola officers pulled up out front; one of them got out and got into The V V music truck and then both vehicles pulled away. At least they didn't have a search warrant — yet.

Tom came back into the church with a small bottle of pineapple juice. "Here you go young lady."

Abidemi was on the tip of her toes peeking out one of the windows. "How many people and automobiles are in this village?"

"Lagos has a population of over twenty million. I have no idea of how many vehicles, but it is a lot."

Abidemi turned away from the window walked over to Tom and took the plastic bottle of Pineapple juice. "Thank you."

There was an uncomfortable silence as Abidemi drank the juice and ate another akara roll. She sensed that Tom was in some sort of trouble! The secret wall in the storage room, plus the big cage behind the apartment where Cain could stand guard. It felt like when rebels raided her village. Maybe Pastor Tom was wanted and knew that fear?

Tom forcibly told Abidemi to stay away from the windows and then started to pace down the center aisle. Abidemi knew to follow Tom's instructions. She climbed up on one of the chairs in the back row, crossed her hands on her lap and bowed her head.

31 When Tom did an about face at the front row a morning sun ray
32 was peeking thru a side window and shone on Abidemi. The options
33 were limited for this ghost of an innocent child. Getting her to a school
34 in the United States wasn't one of the options. *Maybe Mr. Onukwulu*
35 *could drop this girl at the fueling station when he makes his fuel*
36 *deliveries? Maybe Idogbe could drop her off when he goes up to work*
37 *on the strawberry farm? Maybe Beth would know what to do?*

38 From midway up the aisle Tom asked, "Are you okay?"

39 Abidemi lifted her head. "Yes, I'm okay. I was asking Jesus to
40 protect you and for Cain to heal up good and for my Mum to be safe in
41 our village when I'm gone."

42 Tom's throat tightened, he could only get out two words. "That's
43 nice." He hurried past Abidemi and went out the front doors. He picked
44 up the red bucket and mop and put them inside the kennel. Back in
45 the apartment he fed Cain and then sent a one line text to Beth: Are
46 the buyers aware that it is a 1963 SPLIT WINDOW CORVETTE?

47 Beth had just dozed off when she heard the phone trilling. She
48 reached for her phone on the nightstand and then fumbled for her
49 reading glasses. Years ago when they traveled to Mexico they had
50 made an action plan. If either ever relayed or spoke the three words
51 SPLIT WINDOW CORVETTE, danger was lurking. The three words were
52 code that meant to get help or make contact with caution.

53 Tom's pursuit to get out of Africa was spinning out of control. He
54 wasn't aware that a picture of him in boxer shorts and Jacob with a
55 towel wrapped around his tiny waist was being circulated on the
56 internet. A girl sleeping on a mattress in the back of Glory and Praise
57 church would be like a millstone around his neck.

58 Someone or something was suppressing the gunfight and killings at
59 Zangam Village; this helped protect Tom from more scrutiny. That
60 entity understood the fragility of reporting religious atrocities in a
61 country equally divided by Christians and Muslims. Since Nigeria's
62 independence, the country had suffered from many ethno-religious
63 conflicts and was always on the verge of war.

64 Tom grabbed the new laptop, Cain's water bowl and a stack of
65 Nigerian Tribune newspapers. He yelled the command, "Heel." Cain
66 followed him out of the apartment and back to the church.

67 * * *

68 Approximately seven thousand miles due west and across the
69 Atlantic Ocean Beth took items from a wall safe. Five troy ounces of
70 gold, a two caret diamond, and five thousand dollars cash from a wall
71 safe. She put those items along with her rosary inside the special bag
72 Dan gave to her. Graphene not only blocks cell phone signal, it blocks
73 airport x-ray scanners. Gold and diamonds are fair bounty to exchange
74 with cartels, kidnappers, rouge law enforcement and/or corrupt
75 politicians worldwide.

76 There was only one person she dared to ask for a ride to the
77 airport. Hank had been her best friend ever since first grade. He was
78 the first boy that she kissed in fifth grade. Hank was the one that no
79 woman could tame. The one that never married was rugged and more
80 fit, than any super-hero. Hank was always there to defend any of his
81 friends — no matter the battle — no matter the odds.

82 * * *

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85 Cain slipped between the doors first and went directly to Abidemi
86 still sitting in the back row. She did a quick exam of his shoulder and
87 half of ear. "Maybe I can take you for a walk," Abidemi spoke out loud.

88 "Probably not today," Tom answered while setting the laptop and
89 newspapers on the chair next to her. "Here's his water bowl. You two
90 will have to play our hide and seek game until I get back."

91 "Oh... Okay." All of her life Abidemi had been an outcast or left out.
92 After her mom had been raped, Zangam Village was the only place
93 Abena found refuge at. "Girls can't learn on computers."

94 "Why not?" Tom set the water bowl on the floor.

95 Abidemi went on to explain about Mohammed Yusuf, the leader of
96 a fundamentalist Islamist sect known as Boko Haram. How he tried to
97 impose strict Islamic law in the Muslim dominated northern section of

98 Nigeria. Girls were only to be allowed a rudimentary education and
99 computer learning was forbidden. Things went awry after the Nigerian
100 police executed Yusuf in public view outside the police headquarters in
101 Maiduguri. Tom now had a better understanding why the Glory and
102 Praise board members were pulling out of Nigeria.

103 "Can you read the newspaper?" Tom held out some copies of the
104 Nigerian Tribune.

105 Abidemi gripped the unread copies. "I can read to you like I do for
106 Abena my mum."

107 "Sure go ahead." Tom replied.

108 "Crypt-toe bust at local Hol-a-day Inn." Abidemi carefully sounded
109 out the headline.

110 "What?" Tom snatched back the two day old newspaper. The photo
111 under the headline was of the State Security Service (SSS) of Nigeria
112 moving a Bitcoin ATM out of Oyins Holiday Inn. The name Tanny
113 Chukwuemeka popped out in the article as did the Brit twins. Tanny
114 was the first friend he'd made after landing in Lagos. They hadn't
115 talked since Tina moved in with Victor Vee. "I need to go check on
116 someone." Tom handed the newspaper back to Abidemi."

117 "Okay Papa Tom." Abidemi watched Tom dart out of the church
118 and then heard the door lock.

119 Tom weaved and dodged the street vendors and buyers. He halted
120 about a half a block from Oyins Holiday Inn. There was yellow crime
121 scene tape over the entrance and a yellow **NO VACANCY** sign was
122 blinking. The black SUV's with dark tinted windows looked like FBI.
123 They weren't — they were unmarked SSS vehicles. Tom remembered
124 Dan's warning about the State Security Service mission to clean up
125 fraud, scams and crypto. Ever since the Prince of Nigerian email scam;
126 Nigeria's reputation and tourism had taken at least a billion dollar hit.

127 Tom scrolled thru his contact list; he had a number for Tanny. He
128 put his thumb on the **CALL** icon. "Hello, can I speak to Tanny?"

129 "My mommy is not home." A child's voice came thru the phone.

130 "Okay... When will she be back?" Tom asked.

131 "I don't know. I get my sister." Then an older sounding child got on
132 the phone. Tom was able to ascertain that Tanny had been taken by
133 men in uniform that had lime green and yellow badges with an Owl in
134 the center.

135 After Tom hung up he deleted Tanny's contact information from his
136 phone. He recalled the warning from Dan that all hell would break
137 loose once he uncovered any type of internet fraud coming from inside
138 Nigeria. Tom then remembered that Tanny was raising three children
139 without a father. Victor Vee had been her live in boy friend until Tina
140 put an end to that relationship. *Tanny had talked about opening a day*
141 *care. Maybe I could pay her to take care of Abidemi? I know she's out*
142 *of work.*

143 Tom tried to retrieve Tanny's contact information but it was gone.
144 He called Idogbe who was in Plateau state helping on his mother's
145 strawberry farm. Idogbe said that he'd do some asking around when
146 he was back in Lagos. Idogbe also said that Victor Vee was a well
147 known musician in the neighborhood and it should be easy to find out
148 the apartment complex he'd been living at with Tanny.

149 Tom didn't have time to wait for Idogbe to do his sleuth work! It
150 was only a matter of time until Abidemi would be seen or he'd served
151 with a search warrant. He flagged down a keke driver.

152 The hospital was as crowded as that night when Ekon was there
153 with a broken arm. Tom was fifth in line, which gave him time to work
154 up a story.

155 "Can I help you sir?" The receptionist asked.

156 "Yes, one of my church member's was admitted here this
157 afternoon. I came by to pray with him."

158 "What your parishioner's name?"

159 "I'm not sure about his real name. But, his stage name is Victor
160 Vee."

161 The receptionist pulled her hands back from the keyboard. She
162 looked over the top of her glasses. "You won't be able pray with V V.
163 he's up in the intensive care unit. Victor is still in a coma?"

164 Tom stepped back. "All he did was fall down a few steps."

165 The receptionist typed on the keyboard and then whispered, "The
166 accident report states that he hit the back of his head on concrete."
167 "That's odd to fall down stairs backward," Tom mumbled.
168 "The report says he tripped over a mop and bucket."
169 "Do you have his home address? I'd like to send flowers."
170 "I can't give out that information." The receptionist quickly jotted
171 something on a notepad. "I keep calling this number and only kids pick
172 up the phone. I think they are home all alone." She handed the piece
173 of paper to Tom. "Maybe you should go to the police?"
174 It was dark by time Tom got back to the church. He entered
175 through the alley door and let Cain run out into the back field.
176 "He really had to go," Abidemi said from the top step.
177 Tom took his eyes off Cain and looked back at Abidemi. "How did
178 you do?"
179 "I read all the news. Then I tried the computer, it needed a
180 password."
181 "Oh, I'm sorry about that." Tom looked back at Cain.
182 "Two yellow men knocked on the church door and then on that
183 door." Abidemi pointed up the side alley at the apartment.
184 "Who are yellow men? Tom asked.
185 "They are the Ivory takers. They are the reason so few elephants
186 are left in Africa. They also kill and then cut off Rhino horns." Abidemi
187 spoke matter of factually.
188 "You mean Chinese men?"
189 "Yes, like Mr. Chen. These yellow men looked like fishing men. Like
190 the bad sailors that steal fish out of our gulf. I saw them in National
191 Geographic magazine at school. They do it all over the world."
192 Tom was impressed. "You learned all that stuff at school?"
193 "Yes, our teacher studied political stuff and environment science at
194 college. That's what I want to learn at the University of Ibadan, after I
195 go to high school."
196 "Good for you. Did your teacher tell you that most Chinese people
197 are hard working good peasants controlled by a small communist
198 party? "

199 "I don't know what that word means. But Ms. Tina said Mr. Chen
200 belonged to a communist party. She also told us..."

201 Tom quit listening! Tina was the answer to where to drop off
202 Abidemi. "Stay out of site behind the church with Cain. I need to make
203 a phone call."

204 "Okay Papa Tom," Abidemi replied while walking toward the field.

205 Tom froze, this was the seco-nd time he thought he heard the
206 word 'Papa' — he was unsure how to react. Back inside the apartment
207 Tina's number went directly to voice mail. She was out of cell phone
208 coverage — the Dong Fang had left port three hours ago.

209 While Tom fed Cain, Abidemi looked around the apartment. She
210 noticed the black and white game board on the counter. "I know how
211 to play checkers. Can we play?"

212 "That board is for playing chess," Tom replied as he redialed Tina.

213 "Oh." Abidemi got up on her toes to look into the box of chess
214 pieces. She always wanted to learn this forbidden game.

215 "Tina, when you get this message I need you to call me. It is
216 important."

217 Abidemi dropped down off her toes and turned toward Tom. "Are
218 you calling Ms. Tina? She is the one that told us we could be models if
219 we wanted."

220 "What! What are you talking about?" Abidemi explained that when
221 Tina, Victor Vee and Mr. Chen came to her village they offered
222 scholarships to some girls with a chance to act in movies. Tina
223 bragged that she was a Hollywood scout and had friends in high
224 places. Tears filled Abidemi eyes when she talked about how her Mum
225 really didn't want her to leave the village. But, if her only child could
226 somehow get an education and maybe someday walk thru Zangam
227 village with her head held high — it would all be worth the risk.

228 Abidemi dozed off at the table. Tom carried her over to the bed
229 and laid her down. Cain jumped up on to the bed while Tom cleaned
230 up the dishes and then sat at the table to read the newspaper. **EBOLA**
231 **OUTBREAK NEAR CAEROON BORDER** was the Headline. The
232 Bitcoin scam had already run its news cycle.

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Idogbe drove overnight from the strawberry farm. He knew all about Tom’s plans to return to America. Maybe somehow he could fill in until Glory and Praise sent over a new preacher. It was more about guilt than divine intervention that caused Idogbe to remove the mini spy camera hidden above the dog door in the apartment.

On the prior Sunday, after preaching on the ninth commandment Idogbe took advantage of Tom’s travel up north. He did appreciate Ayoola original intent, to protect children from a preacher that had been exiled from his homeland. But all the false witnessing and rumors he’d heard didn’t add up. Granted he found internet reports about Tom and the Stolen Valor deception. But there was absolutely nothing about Tom being a child predator.

Tom heard the rumble from Idogbe’s old work truck turning into the church parking lot. He pushed open the church doors, rushed across the parking lot and into the apartment. He rushed over to the bed. “We need to play our hide and be quiet game again.” Abidemi open her eyes and groggily watched Tom open the bathroom door and pull back the shower curtain.

Then Cain laid down in front of the bathroom door and growled at the knock on the door. Abidemi drew a deep breath and held her hand over her mouth. Hiding was one thing she was good at since the recent surprise attacks by the Boko Haram in her village. She heard Tom at the front door. “Good morning Idogbe. I thought you needed to work on the strawberry farm today.”

“I do, but we need to talk.” Idogbe voice crackled.

“I was just about to go pay the Pap and Akara vendor why don’t we talk over a cup of hot coffee?” Tom pulled the door closed and they walked out to Frontage Road. Abidemi took a deep breath and stepped out of the shower, her skeletal legs were shaking. All the hiding was imprinting childhood memories that could affect the rest of her life.

266 After Tom settled up the church's account he and Idogbe sat at a
267 small plastic table under a blue tarp awning. "The Texas style akara
268 have become a big hit at church."

269 "You mean the sugar glazed donuts" Idogbe frowned at Tom

270 "Well, your Mom's strawberries are a hit and healthy."

271 "Yeah, thanks for that, she appreciates the business." Idogbe's
272 frown turned to a sincere smile. "I don't understand why your
273 immediate need to leave. You are going to hurt a lot of people."
274 Idogbe blew steam across the top of the white Styrofoam cup.

275 "How so?" Tom sipped at the fresh brewed Kenya AA coffee, one
276 thing he'd miss about Africa.

277 "Just up and leave after you got so many things rolling. The
278 Onukwulu boys and I appreciate the odd jobs at the church. This
279 coffee vendor right here is going to hurt when the church closes. The
280 fundraisers, the meetings that you open the church for. All those
281 things build community. What about the chess team you talked about
282 and soccer field out back?"

283 "So what do you propose?" Tom took another drink of coffee.

284 "I think you should let me do the Sunday services and watch over
285 the church until they find another pastor."

286 "I doubt if headquarters would go for that. Especially being that
287 you're a deacon in the catholic faith."

288 >Your wife is catholic. Didn't she didn't help at your church in
289 Texas?"

290 "Not really. Early on we agreed not to talk politics or religion if we
291 wanted a strong and healthy marriage."

292 "So you must not know about the ecumenical movement and
293 empowerment of laity in the catholic church way back in the sixties."

294 "Oh, I have studied the Vatican 2 documents. In my opinion, all
295 that second council did was to usher in less respect for the Body and
296 Blood that the Son of God shed on the cross. That was the beginning
297 of modernism that destroyed tradition in your church."

298 "That's not true!" Idogbe was prepared with his rebuttal. "The
299 sixties was the time of 'Free love', 'If it feels good do it' and drugs.

300 Those world changing events were ushered in when the birth control
301 pill became legal. Those were things my church opposed then and still
302 do to this day.

303 Tom had a rebuttal also. "So when I attend mass with Beth, I
304 almost always observe that after the bread and wine is consecrated
305 many parishioners take the Eucharist then turn toward a crucifix and
306 make the sign of the cross."

307 "Yes, they do that out of respect!" Idogbe was quick to defend that
308 catholic practice.

309 Tom was an expert at heretical doctrine. "I don't see it that way.
310 After I receive the body and blood of our Savior, I don't make or take
311 onto myself any graven image! This, by the way is a sin against the
312 second commandment.

313 Idogbe was at loss for a rebuttal. That Tom believed in the real
314 presence had him taken aback. Transubstantiation was a word made
315 up in 1551AD and still not accepted by most any other Christian
316 denominations. This subject can get as heated as the real presence of
317 Satan roaming the world.

318 Tom took note of the time, now was not the time to debate
319 different faith beliefs or traditions. "I need to get back. I need to locate
320 Tanny and see if she is still interested in starting up a daycare."

321 "That's why I drove down here. You sounded distressed over the
322 phone." Idogbe gripped the white Styrofoam cup and stood. "You
323 might be right about the second commandment. The hard fact is; only
324 one third of Catholics believe in transubstantiation."

325 "That's a distressing statistic. Compounded with the fact I came to
326 a country that is only half Christian I keep wondering if I really can
327 make a difference here."

328 "Amen to that." Idogbe replied. Tom's discernment about making a
329 difference was similar to why he never went on to become a priest.

330 Tom picked up the pace; he always chided Beth that she belonged
331 to the church of the Nine Commandments. Now, that didn't matter —
332 since coming to Africa he'd broken the sixth and seventh
333 commandments and had yet to reconcile them with God.