

A Child's Trust

CHAPTER 24

From half a block away and under his breath Tom mumbled, "What the hell," when he noticed that the red bucket and mop had been moved. One more obstacle to deal with! Getting out of Africa was turning into one major issue after another. Tom couldn't even remember what day of the week it was! Not even an army of saints could help.

Idogbe also noticed the bucket and mop had been moved. "Looks like your under aged worker is already cleaning the church." Idogbe pulled his truck keys from his pocket.

"I'm not paying him! So he's not my under aged worker or slave or whatever you are trying to imply." Tom's voice was firm.

"I know that. I'm just fooling with you." The rusty old truck door squawked. Idogbe turned and looked at Tom. "Jacob is really going to miss you. You're the first adult that treated him as though he was just like anyone else. Teaching him how to play chess, how to handle guard dogs and giving him a job is going to crush that poor child when you leave. He trusts you a hundred percent."

"Yeah, I guess." Tom replied while casting his eyes toward the church steps.

Blue smoke rolled out from under the old truck as Idogbe pushed in on the clutch pedal. "I'll go talk to Ayoola. The constable should have an address for Tanny." Idogbe waved his hand out the driver side window, he trusted Tom.

Tom yanked open the church doors. The red bucket and mop were leaning against the stage at the front. *Jacob where are you?* Tom thought as he rushed into the closet. The bedding was neatly folded on the mattress; he slid the hidden wall panel open. No Jacob! Tom exited out the side door and scanned the backfield. Yelling for a deaf child was a useless act, yet Tom did. "Jacob where are you?"

32 Cain heard the yelling and came out the dog door and barked. Tom
33 ran back up the alley and used his shoulder on the apartment door!
34 Abidemi looked up and over the chess board. Jacob was pointing at the
35 laptop screen. It was now double jeopardy for Tom. A young girl, plus
36 Jacob along with a mattress and a secret hiding place in the church. *I*
37 *give up!* Tom yelled in silence while his eyes casted upward.

38 Jacob came from around the green table and wrapped his arms
39 around Tom's thigh and hugged. Tom rubbed Jacob's head and then
40 looked toward Abidemi. "I should make lunch for you two."

41 There was jotting on paper, pointing at the laptop and Tom cupping
42 Abidemi's hand as she was learning to move chessmen. Along with
43 making lunch Tom constantly checked his phone and kept looking out
44 the door peep hole.

45 Jacob was acting as grown up as he could, coordinating the chess
46 game on the laptop screen with the chess board and pieces. He didn't
47 like it when Tom would cup his hand over Abidemi's hand to move a
48 chess piece. Was it Tom's affection toward someone else evading their
49 special bond or was it something else?

50 The tuna sandwich, chips and vanilla ice cream was Jacob's
51 favorite lunch at Tom's. Abidemi giggled as they squeezed chocolate
52 sauce on top of each other's frozen dessert. This was the best lunch
53 he'd ever had at the green table — it must have been Abidemi that
54 made his heart patter and be filled with joy.

55 It was past two when Tom's phone vibrated. "I talked with Ayoola.
56 He has an address for Tanny. But he wants to talk to you first."

57 "Talk to me, why?" Tom opened the apartment door and walked
58 outside.

59 "Have you been reading the newspaper about the Bitcoin
60 operation that Victor Vee and the Brit twins were running out of Oyins
61 Holiday Inn?"

62 "Yeah, but I thought that was being investigated by the State
63 Security Service. Why would a locale constable get involved?"

64 "The SSS is like the FBI and CIA in your country. They have
65 jurisdiction over anybody or anything. I think Constable Ayoola wants

66 to be in the loop and to make a name for himself. You know how he
67 runs his neighborhood with an iron fist. Nothing gets by him!”
68 “So what are you telling me?” Tom walked in circles.
69 “I’m telling you that maybe Tanny was involved. She worked at the
70 Holiday Inn until your niece showed up.”
71 “I’ve been trying to get a hold of Tina. Her phone goes directly to
72 voice mail. I hope that she didn’t get involved in that Bitcoin scam.
73 The news reporters say that the Nigerian government goes hard on
74 anybody involved in downgrading Nigeria’s tourist reputation.”
75 “Yeah they do! Idogbe paused and thought about his reporting and
76 helping to spy on Tom. Maybe that was why Constable Ayoola was so
77 insistent to talk to Tom? “Pastor it might be best that you hang low or
78 get out of town for a few weeks.”
79 “Maybe your right? Do you think I could work at your Mom’s farm
80 for a few days? I picked strawberries when I was a kid.”
81 “You know my Mum always needs extra help on the farm. I’ll let
82 her know your coming. I’ll text the address to you.”
83 Finally, Tom might have a place where to leave Abidemi. The
84 strawberry farm wasn’t that far from the Abuja. Since Cain and Able
85 had recently gone thru quarantine at the Abuja International Airport
86 getting Cain on a plane back to that states shouldn’t be a problem. He
87 could slip away in the middle of the night from the farm.
88 When Tom went back inside the apartment he picked up the
89 yellow pad and paper and communicated with Jacob that nobody, not
90 his mom or dad, not even Ekon could know about Abidemi staying in
91 the church. In the short time being with Abidemi, Jacob had never
92 experienced what he was feeling. Call it puppy love or a crush — it was
93 an emotion that a child will never forget. Jacob pretended the red
94 bucket was a shield and the mop was a sword on his way home. He
95 was the knight in shining armor. His gushing joy was going to be hard
96 to keep silent. He had to see Abidemi again — no matter what.
97 Tom matter-of-factly explained to Abidemi that they needed to
98 drop Cain off at the airport and then they would go pick strawberries
99 for a few days. Abidemi had never been to an airport before or on a

100 strawberry farm. She warily asked Tom when she'd start school.

101 Without thinking, Tom replied, "In the fall."

102 Renting a vehicle that a large dog crate would fit into wasn't a
103 problem but getting it dropped off at the church in the morning was.
104 Tom switched from preacher mode to deal maker mode. If a full sized
105 SUV could be delivered to the church before Sunday morning there
106 would be a hundred dollar tip for the driver.

107 A good night sleep was in order. Finally, some help was coming
108 from above. Within the week Abidemi would be at a safe place and
109 he'd be on his way back home to Texas.

110 Just after midnight Tom was awoken by a light knock on the door.
111 He didn't bother to look thru the peep hole because it was higher up
112 the door than Abidemi was tall. He groggily opened the door and
113 thought he must be still dreaming.

114 "Tom, I got here as fast as I could. After you texted spilt window
115 corvette I packed and..." Beth didn't have time to finish her sentence.
116 Tom grabbed her by the arm and pulled her into the apartment!

117 "Beth, I didn't mean for you to come to Africa. I thought you'd
118 contact me thru your friend Dan."

119 "That's how I got here so fast, on Dan's chartered jet. He filled me
120 in about the Bitcoin-ponzi-scam and some files on your laptop. Tom
121 sometimes you embellish and that gets you into trouble. I know in
122 your heart that you are a good man! I'll do anything to help."

123 Tom realized that help had just come from the sky above. "Beth, I
124 love you so much, I'm so sorry for hurting you while I've been over
125 here."

126 "Tom let's not dwell in the past. I forgive you. I love you."

127 Tom pulled Beth against him. The bond of marriage of two
128 becoming one often gets reinforced during the bad times. "I love you
129 Elizabeth. I always have and forever will."

130 "Tom, can we talk in the morning? I'm exhausted from the flight."
131 Beth locked hands with Tom and pulled him toward the bed. She let
132 her clothes drop on the floor. Tom hadn't realized how much he

133 missed Beth's scent, smooth skin, touch and her lips. The passion was
134 long overdue — it helped to unwind and comfort them both.

135 Tom was still sleeping when Beth heard the apartment door open.
136 She squinted and made out the silhouette of two children in the
137 doorway; the morning sun was behind them. Without warning
138 something charged from between the small bodies. Cain landed on the
139 bed and almost knocked the wind out of Beth and started licking her
140 bare arm and shoulder.

141 Tom rolled over. "Oh, by the way Beth, meet Abidemi."

142 When Jacob came into the apartment he retrieved the chess board
143 and pieces from the cupboard. Casually he started setting up the game
144 on the green table. Beth wrapped a blanket around her chest and hips
145 and straight squatted to pick up her clothes.

146 A petite hand picked up her bra and held it out. "Pastor Tom talks
147 about you all the time."

148 "Well then young lady, we need to have a talk." Beth took the bra
149 and her other clothes. Wrapped in the blanket she scurried across the
150 apartment into the bathroom.

151 Wrapped in the bed sheet Tom followed across the apartment into
152 the bathroom. Beth let the blanket drop and started getting dressed as
153 fast as she could. From behind Tom put his hands on her shoulders
154 and twisted her around than lifted her head and passionately kissed
155 her.

156 She enjoyed the forceful move Tom was making but couldn't help
157 but laugh. "I feel like I'm back at high school party playing seven
158 minutes in heaven."

159 "Oh, it won't take seven minutes," Tom whispered into Beth's ear.

160 "I'll just have to take a rain check on that offer." Beth buttoned up
161 her blouse, pulled on her slacks and slipped out of the bathroom. She
162 walked over to Jacob and tapped him on the shoulder; then signed.
163 'Would you like me to make breakfast?'

164 Jacob moved his head up and down and smiled. He remembered
165 Beth from her first visit and their hand conversations.

166 "What did you say to Jacob?" Abidemi asked in astonishment.

167 "I asked if he wanted some breakfast." Beth replied with a smile.
168 "Can I help?" Abidemi shot a heart piercing smile back and slid off
169 the chair toward Beth.

170 At that exact moment Tom sensed an unbreakable girl to woman
171 love. He knew that binding child's love all too well. He sat down across
172 from Jacob and made a chess move. He then motioned tilting his wrist
173 and rotating his hand in front of his mouth. Jacob moved his head up
174 and down affirming yes and then made a chess move.

175 "Could one of you cooks make us men a hot chocolate and a
176 coffee?" Tom kept his eyes focused on the chess board; hoping not to
177 be checkmated in less than ten moves.

178 This was the first time in her life that Abidemi had eaten breakfast
179 with a boy let alone a man. It was usually just her Mum and herself.
180 Sometimes Abena, her mother didn't eat. It was vital that her only
181 child not go to school on an empty stomach. It was Abena's daily
182 prayer that Abidemi somehow get an education beyond secondary
183 school — God willing.

184 Abidemi helped Beth make pancakes, eggs and chop fruit. She
185 made the coffee and hot chocolate and appointed herself the official
186 server. Jacob didn't need to be appointed the official chess teacher —
187 he was that good — he was gifted.

188 After breakfast Abidemi cleared the table and stated to wash the
189 plates at the sink. Jacob jumped up from the table to help. Tom drank
190 the last of his coffee and then spoke, "Beth and I are going over to the
191 church to talk. You two stay inside the apartment."

192 Beth signed the instructions to Jacob and he moved his head up
193 and down. He'd hide with Abidemi in the bathroom if anyone came
194 looking. He was now the self appointed protector!

195 The first thing that Beth noticed was the mattress on the floor in
196 the closet. The blankets were neatly folded and the teddy bear was
197 propped up by the pillow.

198 Tom paced down and then came back from the front of the church.
199 He just let it all out. "I think Abidemi's mother was killed by some
200 rebels!"

201 “What do you mean you think?” Beth’s heart hardened.
202 “I was on a trip to the outreach school and some renegade soldiers
203 were slitting the throats of the mothers that were going to let their
204 daughters be foreign exchange students.”
205 “Do you know that for sure?” Beth hoped that this was one of
206 Tom’s embellished stories.
207 “I know for sure because I watched it thru the scope of the hunting
208 rifle Hank gifted to me.” Tom squeezed his eyes tight, hoping to
209 squeeze out that image.
210 “Was that the gift I brought over on my first visit?”
211 “Yes, and if wasn’t for Hank’s burst fire rifle I would have died that
212 day.” Tom unclenched his eyes. “Dan’s, graphene signal blocking bag
213 saved my butt, literally.”
214 “Is that why your hip is black and blue? I noticed last night.” Tina
215 sat in one of the folding chairs. This wasn’t going to be one of Tom’s
216 embellished stories. He started with the hyenas killing Able and made
217 it positive because it turned out to marksmanship practice for the next
218 morning. Tom closed his eyes again when he told about seeing a
219 woman with hazel eyes get her throat slit. He said that he did what he
220 had to do. That there was a gun battle and that the three round burst
221 fire rifle that Hank built was no match for the renegade rebels.
222 Beth knew that the woman with hazel eyes was most likely
223 Abidemi’s mother. Tom said that he wasn’t sure and that he was
224 praying that it wasn’t the case. Beth asked if all this happened the day
225 he called about a girl on her period. Tom then told her told how he
226 picked Abidemi up on the back road sitting on the flat tire where the
227 Hyenas attacked Cain the day before. That explained the missing half
228 ear Beth noticed when Cain jumped on the bed.
229 Tom just started to tell about Tina and Kenny Chen picking up the
230 motorhome when a full size jeep started honking at the parking lot
231 gate. Tom opened the front door. “My rental car is here.”
232 Beth followed Tom out of the church and halted at the top step.
233 She noticed the chalk outline and dried blood on the concrete. More
234 storytelling Tom had yet to share. While Tom was signing the rental

235 agreement papers she went back inside the apartment. Abidemi
236 looked up and over the chess pieces — Beth blocked out the genetics
237 odds of hazel eyes among Africans.

238 Tom busted thru the door with exuberance. “Good news, they
239 delivered my rental car early!” The reaction was muted, not what he’d
240 expected or hoped for.

241 Beth was standing behind Abidemi helping her with the next chess
242 move. Tom went back outside and folded down the rear seat in the
243 jeep. Then he called Idogbe. “Hey Idogbe, there’s been a change in
244 plans. I will probably make it up to the strawberry farm tonight. Can
245 you fill in for me tomorrow?”

246 “Sure, I’d be glad to! Is there anything specific you’d like me to
247 preach on?” Idogbe very much welcomed the opportunity.

248 “Why don’t you preach on the second commandment?”

249 “Which one?” Idogbe asked with less glee.

250 “The one that the Catholic’s tossed out.”

251 “Idogbe felt like he’d been setup. “Sure, I think I can come up with
252 something.”

253 “Oh, by the way my wife Beth is here. She might attend the
254 service. We’re still working out the details.”

255 “Maybe I’ll preach on kissing the pope’s ring. That’s a sure form of
256 idolatry.” Idogbe rebuked in a kidding way.

257 “Whatever you want. I always hear good reports when you fill in.”

258 “Thanks, I’m not a fire and brimstone preacher.”

259 “I know that.” Idogbe had a hard time figuring out Tom. A
260 protestant who believed in transubstantiation was something he’d
261 never ran across — at least in Africa.

262 Beth came out of the apartment. “Jacob wants to know if he can
263 take Abidemi to meet his Mum.” Tom and Beth had many rifts over
264 their twenty plus year marriage. Beth was always the more rational
265 one. Tom had learned to listen to her with an open mind — more often
266 than not she was right.

267 “Go ahead but be back in an hour. I’m going to gas up and get
268 some snacks.” Tom wasn’t concerned; a woman walking with children
269 in the neighborhood would not even turn an eye.

270 As Tom was loading one of the two dog crates into the back of the
271 jeep Beth went in and then came back out. She gave Tom half of the
272 cash and all the diamonds and gold that were in her graphene pouch.
273 Their embrace turned into a four way hug with Jacob and Abidemi
274 joining in. Cain was locked up in the kennel. He lay down and
275 whimpered, not because he wanted to go — Cain missed Able.

276 From behind the steering wheel Tom watched the three duck thru
277 the opening in the fence. Beth took Abidemi’s left hand and then Jacob
278 grabbed Beth’s right hand. They skipped ran and twirled across the
279 field. Jacob had a new best friend to introduce to his family — sadly
280 Abidemi most likely didn’t any family.