

## **PROLOGUE**

### **ULTRA-FATHOM OILRIG, THE NIGER-DELTA**

**Sometime in February 2007**

The weather was calm and the ocean was calm too. It was close to mid-night and everything was pitch dark. The moon which had been out earlier that night was now obscured from view by huge dark clouds. The speed of the wind had increased, but it didn't bother the men on the four speed boats which were each equipped with twin 150mph engines and were being skillfully navigated over the waves of the ocean which sometimes rose up to more than thirty feet high in the air.

Each boat carried five men each. Some of the riders wore stocking masks, while others had their masks fashioned out of pieces of cloths in the style of Ninjas that was made famous through the Hollywood Ninja movies of the late eighties and the early nineties. A few others were bare faced.

The men looked determined. Their grim expressions and the way they held their weapons said it all. They were heavily armed with machine guns, AK47 assault rifles and rocket propelled grenades. A few also had sheathed daggers fastened to their waists.

This was the most daring raid they had ever attempted. They wanted to send a message to the government. They wanted the government to know that no place

or oil installation in the region was beyond their reach. They needed to prove a point, and they were determined to do so. They wanted the government to take them more seriously. They also wanted the government to dread them.

Their destination was the Ultra-Fathom, a deep water offshore oil drilling rig which was way outside the country's shores, about a thousand kilometers from land. This particular oilrig was nesting on the edge of Nigeria's continental shelf.

It was owned by a consortium of oil companies with the largest share belonging to Unicorn Petroleum, a British and French company. Ultra-Fathom was operated by Unicorn Petroleum.

About two thousand metres to the Ultra-Fathom, masks were put on, weapons were locked and loaded, and every other thing was put in place in readiness for the attack. And a thousand metres from the oilrig, they started manoeuvring into various pre-agreed formations ready for the assault.

Three of the four boats broke off from the boat in front to take up positions that would enable them mount the huge floating oilrig from four different directions. A strategy which would enable them press home the advantage of a surprise attack.

Five hundred metres from the oilrig, a man on each boat picked-up a rocket propelled grenade in preparation as they waited for their leader to signal the beginning of the attack.

Sergeant Kunle Bamgbose, a thirty year old soldier of the Nigeria army stretched as he got up from the chair he'd been sitting. He was struggling to stay awake like he always did every time he was on night duty. The cold winds

sweeping the ocean at night, the muffled rumble of the ocean, and the call of the occasional seabird were powerful forces to contend with not to fall asleep.

He walked over to the edge of the mammoth sized floating oilrig to stretch his legs. He walked as close as he dared to the edge. He was afraid of heights, but he had kept that information to himself.

It never ceased to amaze him how huge the floating oilrig was. If he'd had the opportunity to get a university education, he would have definitely studied engineering, what type though he didn't know. He had never bothered to think about it.

As he unsuccessfully tried to stifle a yawn, he thought he heard the sound of an engine quite distinct from that of the powerful generators running on natural gas which powered the oilrig. He listened harder, but he couldn't hear anything. The sound had simply disappeared as suddenly as it had come.

Probably the wind had blown the sound in another direction, he thought. He had learnt a lot about winds and sounds since he was posted to the Ultra-Fathom about three months ago. He had found out sounds were subject to the direction the wind was blowing to or from.

He heard the sound again when the wind carrying it blew in his direction. But before he could make-up his mind on what it was, or whether to call it in to the captain in-charge of the security team stationed at the oilrig, he saw a little light flying very quickly through the darkness straight in his direction.

He had very little time to decide if it was something dangerous before the little light landed behind him with a loud bang, followed by a bright flash. Something hot, he later found out to be shrapnel hit him in the back, just as a

powerful force threw him up into the air, and over the side of the seven storey high oilrig. He quickly realized he was falling, going down head first towards the ever moving waters of the ocean which was dark, mysterious and uninviting in the night light.

The masked men fired rocket propelled grenades across the oilrig taking care not to hit any highly inflammable substance. It was a calculated risk they'd been willing to take to ensure they destabilized any defensive forces in place because they were at a great disadvantage on their speed boats against whoever was at the top of the oilrig which was about seven storeys high from the water.

While the oilrig was thrown into chaos, masked men mounted it from different directions in attack. They used the emergency steel ladders constructed onto the sides of the huge steel structure. It took them less than a minute to reach one of the middle floors where the living quarters on the oilrig were located.

They kicked the doors in and charged into the rooms one after the other. They grabbed every white skin they could find, dragged them to the edge of the floor and pushed them over it.

The men screamed in fear and surprise as they fell towards the ocean. As the men landed one after the other with huge splashes, they were fished out of the ocean and tied up by the militants waiting in the boats.

The soldiers who had already run to the top of the oilrig to find out what was happening had to run back down when they realized the danger was beneath them. As they ran down to stop the attackers, they ran into an ambush that had been laid for them.

The militants had a gunman waiting behind each of the four metal stairs which ran through all five levels of the oilrig. The soldiers were cut down with bullets as they ran down from the upper floors. They didn't even get a chance to fire a shot to defend themselves.

When the militants had collected everyone with a pale skin they could find on that floor, they ran to the edge and dived into the ocean which had become frothy from the boats speeding all over it. They were helped back up onto the boats by their comrades.

When every one of them had been taken in, the boats turned and sped off towards the mainland leaving raging fires and death on the oilrig behind them.

# 1

## **BRUSSELS, BELGIUM**

President Hassan Jibrin sat up on his bed at the first sound of the phone ringing at his bed side. He slowly reached for the switch of the bedside lamp and turned it on. Next, he reached for the case which contained his glasses. It was lying next to the lamp. He opened it, took out his glasses and put it on. He went through these motions slowly and mechanically as if the phone wasn't still ringing.

His wife who lay next to him knew he never picked up phones at the first ring. So, she simply reached for one of the spare pillows, turned away from him and sandwiched her head between two pillows. His aids and ministers who also had access to his private numbers knew his apathy to picking phone calls at the first ring.

The room was in the Presidential Suites of the Sheraton Hotels and Towers in Brussels. The President had travelled to Belgium to attend the African and European Heads of Government Summit. The room was equipped with everything a human could possibly want or need. A night was fifty thousand U.S dollars and

the president had been there for three days already with two more to go on his five day working visit to Europe.

Before he travelled out of Nigeria, the president had told Nigerians in a broadcast which was carried by national television and radio stations that he was going to build and strengthen economic ties with other countries. His other aim was to encourage Nigerian expatriates and businessmen living in Europe to come back home to help build the economy after the past many years of military rule. But most Nigerians didn't buy that line though. His reputation and rumors about him played a great part in that.

The president was suspected of having ties with criminals, white collared dishonest industrialists and corrupt politicians who brought him to power through a rigged election. It was also rumored he was using overpriced contracts as rewards, while also turning a blind eye to most of their criminal activities.

When the phone rang for the second time he picked it up. "What is it?" he asked in the hoarse voice of someone who had just woken up. He listened for a moment and his expressions quickly changed from surprise, to confusion and then to anger. "I will see you later at the briefing during breakfast. Tell the commander of the Joint Task Force for the Niger-Delta to be ready to brief me on the situation... I also want the National Security Adviser, the Minister for National Security and the Joint Chiefs of Staff all ready for a conference call. Good!" he concluded and hung-up.

President Jibrin sat up on the bed as he rubbed his eyes. He no longer felt comfortable on the bed. He got up and began to slowly pace back and forth in front of the bed. After a couple of minutes, he decided to leave the room, because the

king sized bedroom had suddenly become too small. He opened the door and stepped out into a larger room which was tastefully furnished.

Three State Security Service men in their black suits were in the room. Two were sitting down while the third was standing. He was probably trying to keep himself from falling asleep. The men sitting down immediately stood up at the sight of the president and saluted. He ignored them.

After only a few seconds in this much bigger room, it also became too small. He felt caged. He felt like his rage and thoughts were being restrained. He would have loved to go into the balcony, or even the corridor. But his ego wouldn't let him. It wouldn't look well for the president of the most populous black nation in the world to be seen pacing outside the presidential suite of a five star hotel in his pajamas – moreover the Northern hemisphere was in the grip of winter, so the weather was too cold to go out.

What was he going to tell the foreign investors he was scheduled to meet later that day? He thought. His speech had been written to assure them that the country's security forces were winning the war against the Niger-Delta militants and that the country was investment safe and friendly. Why the hell was this attack taking place on this morning? It was like someone had planned this all along to embarrass him on purpose.

President Jibrin didn't go to sleep anymore that night, and neither did any of his ministers or advisers because they all got to know somehow that he was very upset. Word had travelled fast within the executive circles in less than thirty minutes.

And judging by the president's temperamental disposition, which they were all familiar with, they knew the president would be furious his foreign trip had



suddenly turned into a disaster. They were troubled because they knew the president was going to lay the blame on someone who would most likely lose their job.

# 2

Brussels was freezing cold the next morning even though it hadn't snowed that morning. Having come from a warm and humid tropical and savannah climate, most members of the two hundred and fifty strong Nigerian delegation were freezing.

They were all wrapped up in several layers of clothing, and were copiously consuming cups after cups of hot beverages as they tried to cope with the cold. Some of them found it impossible to leave their hotel rooms which were scattered all over the city.

Everyone President Jibrin had asked to see that were in Brussels were all gathered at a conference hall which had to be hurriedly arranged for by Chief Ayo Fadugba, the president's special adviser on political matters. It was nothing the president would have fancied, but it was the best he could come-up with at such short notice. The president had asked for a place to meet the people concerned an hour before he was scheduled to meet potential foreign investors.

The conference room was a large rectangular room which had a rectangular table running down almost the whole length of it except for five feet of space

behind each chair at both ends when they are fully pulled out. The stylishly designed black table was made from oak. Matching black chairs lined the table on every side.

The floor was tiled in shiny, elaborately designed cream tiles. The transparent glass walls ran down the entire room on one side giving a view of the road below which was twenty storeys down, and the other high rise buildings along the road.

On both ends of the transparent wall, folds of cream white curtains were gathered on their railings. The curtains could be slid along the curtain rail to provide shading and protection from the light outside.

Several paintings of famous painters hung on the cream white wall. The room in all was one bright cream-white spectacle which was a sharp but tasteful contrast to the black conference table and chairs.

The cream-white monitors in front of all the chairs were custom-made to also blend into the room like everything else. The monitors were already on in readiness for the conference call meeting which was about to take place. There were anxious faces waiting on the screens.

The Joint Chiefs of staff of the military were present via the internet, as were the commander of the Joint Taskforce in the Niger-Delta region, the National Security Adviser and the Attorney-General of the federation. Several of them were still conversing with aids to put finishing touches to their presentations for the president.

A minute past 8:00 a.m. the president burst into the room in quick, impatient strides. He was flanked by his aides who were running after him as they tried to

keep up with him. He was clearly still angry. But he was so angry that he skipped protocol and immediately demanded of everyone, how and why did the attack take place?

Everyone was completely taken by surprise at the suddenness of the question that they were speechless. They continued to stare at him and at each other not sure of what to say. Everyone assumed he wasn't speaking to them, but to someone else.

"I want answers now and I want them quick," President Jibrin roared angrily. "Because thanks to every one of you. I'll either embarrass myself by going forward with the meeting with those potential foreign investors, or save face by cowardly calling it off even though I've been planning this meeting for years."

"Major-General Lai Riku," President Jibrin said facing the screen in front of him. "Please, explain why your Joint Taskforce Force didn't stop the attack?"

"Mr. President," the Major-General began boldly. "We didn't have any advanced warning sir."

"How can you say that?" the President screamed in disbelief.

"That's the truth Mr. President. If we had warning we would have stopped the attack," the Major-General replied.

"And who is supposed to have warned you?" President Jibrin asked.

"The Department of State Services."

"You mean the SSS?" The State Security Service or just The SSS was the more common name of the Nigerian domestic intelligence agency. They are also

responsible for the protection of the President and the State Governors with their families.

“Yes sir.”

“You mean to tell me that even though you are on ground, you didn’t deem it fit to have your own intelligence capability?”

“Mr. President, that was not included in my orders,” Major-General Riku replied without batting an eyelid. “My orders are to provide security for all oil installations and stop the militancy.”

“In which you have no doubt failed woefully,” President Jibrin barked.

Major-General Riku didn’t say anything, but his face had become a mask which showed no emotion.

“He’s right sir,” the Secretary to the Federal Government, Ike Chukwuma said jumping in to defuse the tension. “Intelligence gathering is not the responsibility of the armed forces.”

“So whose job is it?” President Jibrin asked again like he hadn’t already been told the answer to that question.

“The state security service just like he told you sir. And they are under the purview of the National Security Adviser.”

“What have you got to say for yourself?” President Jibrin demanded as he turned to face his National Security Adviser, Haruna Dahiru.

The National Security Adviser, Haruna Dahiru was a fat man with a big belly. He was a former Inspector-General of Police. “Mr. President, I don’t have

any excuse to give. But, I need you to know that the creeks in the Niger-Delta are a jungle where the SSS has very little footing.”

“Well, make them have a footing!” President Jibrin barked.

The National Security Adviser simply nodded and said, “Yes sir.”

President Jibrin was expecting a confrontation, so he would have someone to vent his anger and frustration upon. But the calm reply of the National Security Adviser sucked the wind out of his sail. He was speechless for a while as he contemplated his next action and what to say. Everyone in the room and those connected via the internet silently watched him as they waited.

“Since everyone is playing hide and seek with taking responsibility,” he eventually began in a calmer voice, “How are we going to fix the situation?”

“A state of emergency should be declared in the region,” the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Rear-Admiral Anthony Ajayi suggested and everyone turned to face him in surprise. “Yes, the place is a jungle, especially the creeks,” he said in his defense. “It’s a place where the police whose constitutional right it is to provide internal security are out of their depth. They don’t even have a meaningful presence there.”

“That’s the fault of the Inspector-Generals that have run the police force over the years,” the army chief, Lieutenant-General Olajuwon Akinfemi said dryly.

The National Security Adviser ignored the snide remark. “Mr. President if we are to stop the militancy and the theft of crude oil, then order has to be restored so that development can take place. That would prevent more youths from joining the militant groups. If not, there’s nothing the Khaki boys can do to stop the violence and chaos which will no doubt increase and get out of hand.”

“Despite that eloquent speech with no substance,” Major-General Riku, the commander of the Joint Taskforce began, “the Niger-Delta is a region under control. It’s just a few groups that are still causing trouble. We will take care of them. It’s only a matter of time.”

“You know, I’m seriously thinking of declaring a state of emergency,” President Jibrin said.

”Mr. President you are angry,” Ayo Fadugba said. “Just take some time to think things through”.

The president sighed and took a deep breath. “This meeting is adjourned for now,” he said and then turned and left the room.

His aides quickly got up and followed him.

At the corridor, Ayo Fadugba caught up with him matching his strides in time. He stayed silent knowing the president was angry. He simply offered the president his silent support which he believed would show he felt the presidents’ pain.

When they got to the private lift which served the Presidential Suite, one of the SSS guards rushed forward and slid the electronic key-card in his possession into the electronic key slot and quickly typed in a seven digit code on a touch-screen interface to activate the lift. A second later the doors of the lift slid open.

The president and Ayo Fadugba flanked by four SSS men rode-up in the lift to the Presidential Suite. The door slid opened with a soft sound to allow them into a short corridor which was guarded by two SSS men who stood up as they stepped into the corridor. The four SSS guards joined their colleagues at the corridor.

At the opposite end of the corridor was another door which led into the presidential suite itself. When the president and Ayo Fadugba got to within three feet of the door it slid open to let them into the suite.

“Where is my wife?” the President asked the first lady’s female aide-de-camp who’s an army captain.

“She’s inside sir.”

“Doing what?”

“I don’t know sir,” she replied.

The president walked to a chair and sat down, while Ayo Fadugba took a seat opposite him.

“How could this happen at this time?” he asked in frustration after a short time speaking to no one in particular.

“I don’t know Mr. President,” Ayo Fadugba said leaning forward. “But it happened and there’s nothing we can do about it now. What we need to do is to think of how best to salvage the situation.”

“And what do you suggest?” President Jibrin asked staring at his political adviser.

“A more forceful approach, but not a state of emergency,” he said as he pushed his glasses up his nose.

“And how am I supposed to save face before everyone at home and abroad?” President Jibrin asked in a tone that showed he needed more than that.

“We’ll just have to ride the storm.”



“And how do you suggest we do that?”

“We’ll play down the incident saying it’s a one-off attack from a terrorist group that is on the decline in the face of your government’s pressure. And as for those at home...”

“Forget about them they don’t count,” President Jibrin cut-in with a knowing look like he’d just received a revelation. “They are like flies. They can only buzz... but can’t sting or bite.”

“They may not be dangerous themselves, but they have the potential of unknowingly carrying seeds that could cause trouble - just like real flies,” Ayo Fadugba countered

“Forget about them. I’m only concerned about how I’ll be able to leave the meeting and the press conference after with my head still held up high.”

“Don’t worry, I’m working on it.”

“You do just that, while I work on the heads that needs to be sacrificed as scapegoats.”

“But Mr. President,” Ayo Fadugba protested.

“Don’t worry. Just do your part and I’ll do mine,” President Jibrin said. “It’s long been overdue anyway. A few people need to be thrown to the sharks every now and then to keep them satisfied.”

“Will you please let me know those you’d be throwing to the sharks when you’ve made up your mind?” the political adviser asked in exasperation.

“I’ll let you know,” President Jibrin said in a bored tone. “Are you happy now?”

Before he could reply, the first lady stepped into room flashily dressed and covered in heavy make-up. His words were caught up in his throat as all the president's attention had swiftly tuned to the first lady putting an end to the discussion.

# 3

## LONDON, U.K

In a quiet and wintry suburban street in Tottenham, North-London, snow covered everything in sight. It covered the beautiful detached houses lining both sides of the road, the sidewalks, the ornamental trees and the perfectly manicured lawns and hedges. The snow on the road had been cleared earlier in the day, but three hours later it had again been covered by a small layer of snow.

A Range-Rover SUV parked in the garage in front of one of the houses had had the snow cleared from around it earlier that morning. But the cleared space was quickly filling up with snow again. The soft and powerful vocal sounds of the Rock band, Coldplay could be heard filtering through tiny spaces from within the house. The sound hung like a sort of force-field around the house.

The sitting room of the house was neatly arranged and nothing seemed out of place. It was furnished with modern furniture and décor. Modern paintings and pictures of familiar landmarks in Europe, Africa, the Middle-East and the Far-East hung around the sitting room giving it an international feel.

On a shelf were several pictures which were mostly of people in different military uniforms and battle gears. The pictures seemed to span over a decade because one of the faces which was present on every single one had gradually aged in the pictures.

The most prominent picture of all was a portrait photograph of a man in his late thirties wearing the military uniform of the British Special Forces, the Special Air Service – the SAS for short. The face was dark complexioned with a hardened, yet somewhat soft expressions. The eyes looked happy while the hint of a smile could be seen around the lips. He could be described as handsome in a rugged sort of way.

Several military medals for bravery were neatly arranged next to the picture. Next to the medals on the other side was a photograph of the same young man with a woman with whom he bore a strong resemblance. She had short hair which was barely two inches long, and was wearing big dangling earrings. She barely reached up to his shoulders. The woman looked a little older, but one would have to look closely to spot the age difference. Both were smiling happily into the camera.

A tall and dark-complexioned man came out of the master bedroom of the house wearing a sweater, a pair of denim trousers and a pair of timberland boots. He walked down the corridor carrying several things. In one hand, he held a pair of thick woollen leather gloves and on the other a matching woollen leather Jacket. A black leather backpack hung from his right shoulder by one strap.

He effortlessly descended down the stairs like an athlete in his prime. He was someone who took great pride in keeping fit even before he joined the British Army - and still after leaving it.

When he stepped off the stairs, he dropped the backpack, the jacket and the gloves on the closest sofa in the sitting room before heading for the kitchen where he went through the early wintry morning motions of preparing a hot cup of tea, some slices of bacon and eggs from the fridge, with several slices of bread.

Whenever anyone complained about his diet he often reminded them he was a big and very active guy. He was six foot plus with lean well trained muscles. And true to his words he's a very active guy. He kept a strict exercise routine.

His name was Chukwuemeka Adeyinka, an Englishman of Nigerian birth. But he was usually called just Emeka, the shortened form of his first name by his close friends. His full names always aroused the curiosity of every Nigerian, or people who were familiar with the country because it was a combination of the two out of the three predominant ethnic groups in the country. It was almost like bearing a Chinese and Japanese name together.

His mother was an Igbo from the South-Eastern region of the country, while his father who was a Yoruba was from the South-Western part of the country. His father, Mr. Adeyinka was mixed too, because his own mother was a Muslim from the Northern part of the country. This complex mix gave Emeka a link to all parts of the country.

He did three tours in Iraq and two in Afghanistan before he retired. And now, he runs his own private security company made-up of ex-military men like himself. His main customers were banks, private businesses, government offices and anyone else anywhere in the world that was willing to hire - except for Iraq and Afghanistan due to personal reasons.

He usually went out with the men at the beginning, but as the business grew and expanded he had to stay back to run things even though he hated it. He loved

being in the field and not behind a desk. He loved the adrenaline rush that came with fright, flight and fight. The plus side to his love for adrenaline rush was that he hated bullies whom he grew up detesting on the streets of London. The military provided the perfect environment and opportunity for him to stand up to bigger bullies.

He quickly ate his breakfast on his feet, a habit he picked up in the military, which he hadn't been able to drop. It was only in restaurants, or when he was visiting friends that he was mindful as a way of courtesy to sit and eat slowly. The other place where he couldn't do that was at his mother's place, she simply won't let him.

After gulping down his breakfast, he washed the dishes and returned everything to their rightful place. He was that neat a freak, as they say. He liked everything to always be in their rightful place. During his tours abroad, he made sure a house help took care of the house which he bought some two years before he left the military, while he was still living in the barracks.

When the offer for the house came, it was too tempting not to jump on it. This was the area where he grew up, and where his childhood home still was. He had lived there with his mother before he moved into the barracks. The house was a mere twenty-five minute walk away. His mother still lived there.

When he finished cleaning and arranging the kitchen, he locked the door behind him. He made the sitting room his last point of call. When he finished with it, he put on his jacket and gloves, switched off the sound system with the remote control and grabbed his backpack from the sofa before heading for the door. Carrying a backpack was another habit he had picked up in the military. It suited him and his needs so much that he'd never for once considered dropping it.

He put off the heating system, engaged the security system before he opened the door. He stepped out of the house and locked the door. He felt the frosty bite of the cold winter air the moment he stepped outside. He quickly covered the last five feet to his car. He pressed the remote button to disengage the security system locking the car while he was still on the way.

He entered into the car and quickly got the engine running followed by the heater to warm up the cold air within the confines of the car. Everything felt cold to his touch and he wanted to lose that feeling quickly. The seconds it took the air to warm-up felt like a never ending wait. To occupy his mind he turned on the radio before he engaged the gear level to drive. He slowly backed out from the front of the house onto the road.

His daily short journey to his office from the Bruce Grove area of North-London was always smooth because he makes most of the journey on the A1201 Highway before turning to the A1201 Highway. It was from the A1201 that the quiet Forest road branched off. Forest road was occupied by small businesses and apartment buildings.

When he turned into Forest road, he drove for a few hundred metres before he turned into a compound which contained a four storey building. He stopped his car on one of the four parking spots allocated to Pegasus Security Company which was one of the reasons he loved the place. It was very much unlike most other places in London where you have to pay for parking spots in addition to heavy taxes for driving into the city.

Though, Emeka for one loved the London underground because it was the cheapest, easiest and fastest way to get around the city. Add the bus service to that,

and everything worked just fine for him. But he loved driving himself just for that feeling of freedom especially on cold mornings like this.

He quickly gathered his things together and got out of the car. He hung his backpack on his right shoulder and locked the car as he stepped away from it. He walked with quick long strides towards the building which was surrounded by snow as he tried to escape the frigid weather.

It had been warm inside his car because of the heater. But now that he was outside, the change of temperature was terrible. It was like the weather had gotten colder. He knew that wasn't likely, and was probably because he just stepped out of the very warm enclosed space of the car, and his body was trying to readjust. Readjusting or not, he increased his pace and quickly covered the ten or so yards to the door of the building.

When he entered the building he subconsciously breathed a sigh of relief. He rubbed his gloved hands together as he mentally psyched himself in readiness to get warm on his way up the stairs to the top floor which was occupied by Pegasus Security Company.

The lift was working fine, but it had the uncanny habit of breaking down sometimes. And it had happened several times with him in it when he'd newly moved into the building. After the third time, he simply stopped using it. For him, it was a perfect excuse to either walk or run up and down the stairs.

Though he still begrudgingly rides it sometimes, when he really had to, especially when he was coming in with a client or friend, or seeing them off. But fortunately, those were usually not on mornings like this. He had been told by some friends the lift didn't like him, and he had gladly replied every single time the feeling was mutual.



When he was ready he ran up the stairs taking it two at a time. When he got to the top he was panting a little and feeling very warm at the same time. The cold feeling was nowhere to be found. Most people didn't understand the almost delightful pleasure with which he took the business of walking or running up and down the stairs. The people with businesses or apartments in the building had gotten used to him running up the stairs, but it was always a surprise to strangers. Emeka had come to see it as a form of exercise which he took very seriously.

Getting to the door leading into his security firm's premises the guard on duty pressed the open button for the automated door from inside. And the door opened with a beep. The guard had two monitors in front of him which displayed pictures from two cameras, one of which was at the top of the building overlooking the street and compound below; and the other one was just outside the door that led into the top floor.

Emeka pushed the door open and entered. He hurriedly shut the door and the cold behind him before he greeted Will, the guard on duty. Will responded cheerfully before asking him how wonderful he thought the weather was.

"The weather is terrible," Emeka replied. "It's like it's gotten colder."

"Actually it just did. They announced it on the radio."

"For real, I thought it was just me."

"No, no. It wasn't you," Wilfred assured him.

"I wouldn't say I'm glad though."

"Me neither sir."

"You should get yourself a hot cup of tea," Emeka told him.

Wilfred replied by raising a cup with its saucer from his desk where it had been hidden from Emeka's view by the raised edge of his desk. "All thanks to our new administrator."

"Good!" Emeka said with a smile. "I'll see you later."

Emeka made his way past shoulder high office cubicles into which he'd had the upper floor demarcated into. He replied to greetings and laughed to jokes about the weather as he went by. He was about to open his office when he saw the new administrator/secretary who started working for him just the day before.

"Hey, Good morning," he greeted her.

"Good morning sir."

"Aisha right?"

"Yes sir."

"How was your night?"

"It was fine sir."

"That's good. I hope you are blending in well with your new surroundings."

"Yes I am sir."

"That's good to know. I also think you should go easy on the sir stuff a bit. Just call me Emeka like everyone else. We're all one big family here."

"I'll try to remember that," she said with a smile.

“Good!” Emeka said as he put his key into the keyhole to his office. “And watch it with the rest of the staff, or they will turn you into their official cook and waitress,” he added with a smile.

“Don’t worry I won’t let that happen,” she replied with a smile as she continued on her way carrying a tray which contained teacups with saucers and a big jug of steaming tea.

Emeka chuckled to himself as he opened the door into his office. His office always awed him every time he stepped into it. The office was located at the back of the building with a couple of large windows which not only allowed-in a lot of light, but also gave him a beautiful view.

The windows may not be overlooking the Thames, London Bridge or anything close to that, or even have a view from a tall building in upper Manhattan, New York city or any other view, but it was okay for him and he loved every bit of it.

In the middle of the room was a huge black table made from Mahogany. He bought it the year before at an auction event held for the sale of the office and home furniture which used to belong to a former foreign diplomat. He had surprisingly gotten it at a cheap price.

To complement the table he had bought an expensive high-backed executive chair which gave him a psychological edge over anyone who would sit on the normal lower office chairs on the other side of the table.

To one side of the large office were a couple of file cabinets, on the other side was a vertical rack for coats, jackets, gloves, mittens and all other clothes

which are usually hung indoors. He dropped his bag on the table before he walked towards the clothes rack.

He took off his black leather jacket and hung it followed by his gloves. The chill immediately crept in. He rubbed his hands together briskly to ward off the cold. He went around the table and picked up the bag from it as he did so. He dropped it on the clean tiled floor next to the chair.

He wondered if something was wrong with the heating system in the building. When he turned to go out to find out, he saw Aisha standing in front of his transparent door. She was carrying a tray which contained a teacup with saucer and some muffins. He hurried forward to open the door for her.

She entered with a friendly smile. "Here's office service."

He smiled despite himself. "Thank you," he said as he collected the tray from her. "Any particular reason why it's cold in here?" he asked as he carried the tray to his table.

"Apart from the fact, that the weather is blistering cold today; yes sir. The Landlord said the heating system has a problem."

"I thought as much. When did he say it's going to get fixed?"

"He said sometime today if they can find the necessary parts."

"Well, I hope they get them real quick before we freeze to death in here," he said picking up the steamy tea cup with the saucer. He took a sip and nodded. "Thanks for the tea," he told her.

"You're welcome sir," she said going to the door. "I'll be in my office."

“Alright,” Emeka said as he went to sit on his chair. As soon as he sat down, he swivelled round to face the large windows behind his chair. He slowly sipped his tea and allowed his mind to roam free as he watched the still images of the other buildings that filled his view.

# 4

Emeka was still in his quiet reverie some ten minutes later when Aisha knocked on his door bringing him back to the present. He turned the chair around to see her pop her head through the door which she had opened a crack.

“There’s someone here to see you,” she announced.

“Who is it?” he asked meeting her gaze as he put the cup with the saucer down.

“He says he’s the representative of a consortium of oil companies operating in Nigeria,” Aisha replied with the words rolling out of her mouth.

“Okay, send him in. but,” he said beckoning to her to come closer, “get us a jug of this great tea from whence I knowest not how you came by it, with a teacup and saucer. Thanks.”

“Thine humble handmaid got it from the superstore down the road. And I shalt hastily do as thou hast commandest,” she replied with a smile.

“That was good, really good,” he said with a laugh as she closed the door.

She returned with a Caucasian man of average height who was wearing an expensive well tailored suit and had an expensive haircut. He looked to Emeka like he'd been in the cold longer than he should because he looked a little blue - with the tip of his nose the bluest. He came in carrying his coat in the fold of his left arm.

Emeka stood-up to greet him. He stretched his right hand to shake him and his guest took it with a firm businessman like grip. Emeka could also sense something else from the grip, something that he easily related to.

Looking at him now, Emeka could see it. He wondered why he hadn't seen it immediately. His guest was clearly ex-military. It was obvious in the way he carried himself. He could also see it in the exposed part of his body above his neck. It was just that good living had made less obvious.

Emeka collected his coat, shawl and gloves from him and helped him to hang it on the coat rack. He always treated customers and especially potential customers with courtesy. You never know what exciting business prospect they could be bringing to you.

"Please sit down," Emeka invited him as he went back to his chair. "How can we be of service to you?"

"My name is Jim Thompson and I work for Unicorn Petroleum," he said in a clear upper class accent when he had sat down. "I'm the Chief liaison official in our African operations for security and related things."

He was clearly one of those upper-class types that went into the military for family glory or personal ambition, or probably just to identify with it before moving on or maybe because it would look good on their CV.

“Okay,” Emeka said leaning a bit forward to show him he had all his attention. It was a simple psychological trick of encouraging people to talk.

Aisha knocked on the door at that moment before she pushed it open. She entered carrying a tray containing a jug of tea and a cup with saucer. She quickly poured some tea into one of the cups and handed it to Mr. Thompson who smiled his thanks gratefully.

“I heard you are having problems with your heating system?” he asked when Aisha had left the office.

“Yes, we are at this unfortunate time,” Emeka said in an apologetic tone. “The Landlord said he would get it fixed as soon as possible.”

“It’s not really that bad though,” Mr. Thompson said with a little shrug.

“I believe the reason for that has to do with the design... or the position of the building,” Emeka replied not really sure. But he knew the building was not usually as cold as other buildings. It’s like it has a way of softening the effects of cold weather.

“I see,” Mr. Thompson said in absentminded tone. Then in a business like tone he said “I don’t know if you’ve been paying attention to the news from Africa lately, particularly from Nigeria.”

“I can’t say I do, even though I hold a citizenship,” Emeka replied.

“Okay,” Mr. Thompson said waving it off as unimportant. “Recently, three days ago to be exact, there was a daring attack carried out by militants on one of our most secure oilrig, the Ultra-Fathom which is about a thousand kilometres from land and took two British, two Dutch and one Canadian expatriate hostage.”



“What did the militants use, a small ship?” Emeka asked in surprise. “I thought the militants use small speedboats?”

“Yes, according to eyewitnesses they used speedboats with double 150mph outboard motors, which is still awesome as it is,” Mr. Thompson said.

“That’s daring,” Emeka said despite himself.

“Yes, that was what I thought when I heard about it. It was a daring attack no doubt. We believe it was carried out to humiliate the president of Nigeria who at that time was in Brussels, Belgium for the African and European leaders’ summit soliciting for foreign investments. I also believed they carried out this particular attack to prove a point politically that no place is safe, or out of their reach in the Niger-Delta region.”

“So how can we help?” Emeka asked in his business voice.

“Right, the Nigerian Government is carrying out its own investigations and these things usually end with us paying a ransom.”

“But,” Emeka asked sensing a ‘but’ was coming.

“But,” Mr. Thompson continued. “We don’t believe it would be that straight forward this time around, because this has political connotations. Usually it is always about money, but the particular group we suspected carried out this attack doesn’t really need the money.”

“They don’t... need the money?” Emeka asked in confusion. “I don’t get it.”

“They are involved in crude oil theft popularly known in those areas as ‘Oil Bunkering’. With the help of course from corrupt government officials and some

corrupt members of the security forces who are supposed to stop it from happening in the first place.”

“So in essence, what you are saying is that this group did this for political reasons and not for the financial reward because they are already very rich.” Mr. Thompson nodded. “And you don’t trust the security forces because you believe some are corrupt. And so you fear for the lives of the hostages’ right?”

“Yes, that’s about it.” Mr. Thompson said, “So we need outside help and that’s you. We need you to come down to Nigeria to lead our private investigation to find the hostages.”

Emeka sighed and leaned back in his chair. “Well, that’s a surprise.”

“The pay is very good, and I’m sure it will be worth your time,” Mr. Thompson said in an encouraging tone.

“I’m very sure it would be,” Emeka said. “What I’m worried about is not that, but that I’ll be putting myself in harm’s way again. And I promised someone I wouldn’t do that again.”

“We read your resume and it’s quite impressive. The Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan and a host of other small skirmishes here and there. You look like you can take care of yourself,” Mr. Thompson said in a confident tone. “I’m familiar with your type.”

“Really?” Emeka asked taken aback by his last sentence.

“Yes. I know a rare military gem when I see one.”

“I noticed you were once one too when you stepped into my office,” Emeka replied.

“You have great perceptive powers,” he said with a knowing smile.

“You can say that,” Emeka replied humbly.

“Royal Navy, SBS, Falklands War and the first Gulf War,” he replied. “And so, I know what I’m talking about. Your record as a Military Police officer, plus the fact, that you’re originally from the country and would easily blend in makes you our ideal candidate for this job.”

There was a moment of awkward silence before Emeka spoke. “Can I have a couple of days to think about it?”

“Yes sure, but just until tomorrow because time is running out for the hostages,” Mr. Thompson said standing. “This is my card. I’ll be expecting your call, and if not, then we’ll move on to our next option.”

“Thanks.” Emeka said standing too. “I’ll let you know quickly what I’ve decided.”

“This tastes great,” Mr. Thompson said after tasting the tea. “It has just the right amount of milk and sugar.”

“So I thought.” Emeka muttered almost absentmindedly because his mind had drifted off.

Mr. Thompson downed the whole cup in one go after he’d judged it was safe to do so from his first sip. He walked to the coat rack and retrieved his coat first which he put on, and then his shawl, followed by his gloves. He took his time as he put them on one after the other.

“Thanks for the tea, and I hope to hear from you quickly,” he said as he walked to the door.

“I’ll let you know soon enough,” Emeka said beating him to the door with quick long strides. He held the door open for Mr. Thompson to go out and immediately followed behind him.

Aisha stepped out of her office at that moment carrying a folder of files. She met them at the door of her office which was just immediately before Emeka’s office.

“You make wonderful tea,” Mr. Thompson told her.

“Thank you sir,” she said beaming like a little girl.

“How did you know I like my tea with milk and sugar?”

“Sir... I just guessed you would,” she replied. And in her head thought, “Who doesn’t?”

“Well I enjoyed it,” he told her.

She simply smiled in reply this time, and stood by the way side for them to pass before she went into Emeka’s office to drop the files on his desk.

Emeka saw Mr. Thompson to the door before he returned to his office where he met Aisha waiting in front of his door. To him, she looked like what a cross between Tyra Banks and Janet Jackson would. She was only a few inches shorter than Tyra, but the looks were similarly stunning.

He could still remember the day she had come for her interview. From first look, he hadn’t really been able to read much into her persona or character. She looked unassuming and almost ordinary professionally. It was when she opened her mouth to speak the administrative genius in her came out. She had spoken so

convincingly and passionately about herself and her love for her job that he'd had no choice but to employ her.

"You did great, making our guest comfortable," Emeka told her when he got close enough for her to hear him.

"Thank you sir," she said showing her set of nice dentition.

"So how can I help you?" he asked as he stopped in front of her, even though she had given way for him to pass.

"The files on your desk need your signature," she told him.

"I'll get to them right away," he said going past her to open the door of his office with his mind quickly going back to Mr. Thompson and the Niger-Delta.

He entered his office and sat down on his chair. Contrary to what he'd told her, he didn't attend to the files right away. But he turned his chair around to face the wide windows behind.

The prospect of getting his adrenaline pumping again, tracking and hunting down criminals, and even fighting for his life against enemies who would want to take his life sounded like a treat. The constant planning and the game of continuously trying to outwit the enemy sounded very interesting and tempting.

As the minutes ticked by, he discovered he was getting more and more attuned to the idea, despite the trouble it was likely to cause him because he would be breaking a promise.

Deep within him he knew he wanted this adventure. His soul had been starved of it for so long ever since he retired from the British Army and the SAS as a Major. Though, he was made a Colonel a day after he had submitted his

retirement papers. He still doesn't know if it was a ploy to make him remain in the military.

He had decided to resign after a particular incident which forced him to question the way the second war in Iraq was being run by the politicians; and also because of his mother. But since then he had missed the drills, the thrills and the adventures. He truly had.

He really wanted to take the job. But he knew if he was going to take it, he would first have to convince his mother this was something he really needed to do. He would have to somehow reassure her, there was no chance of her losing him, even though he knew there were no guarantees on the job.

He knew he needed to come up with plausible and reassuring reasons to give both his mother and Marie his girlfriend. He decided he had the whole day to figure them out. With that thought in mind he turned his chair around, picked up a pen, and slowly began signing the documents one after the other after he had scanned through them.