

## **PROLOGUE**

### **JOS, PLATEAU STATE**

It was a humid Sunday morning in the central Nigerian city of Jos. The weather was warm but not too sunny. Far in the horizon, the sun was screened off by semi-thick and weirdly shaped cumulus clouds. To an imaginative mind, the clouds were shaped in the likeness of every mentally conceivable beings and objects.

On a quiet dusty road, a car several decades old was parked near an area covered with trees and small bushes. The paintwork of the car was faded in many places with the affected areas comprising of different levels of lighter shades. The areas around the fenders and chassis also showed signs of rust.

Isa sat in the driver's seat of the 1980s Toyota saloon car listening to the birds which had built nests on the nearby trees as they chirped happily and hopped from one branch to the other, oblivious of the quietness of the road below them and the car which was parked nearby.

The car had been stolen over a week ago from an unsuspecting taxi driver as he made his way home late in the night. They had then spent the last six days preparing the car for today. They had deprived a fellow believer of his possession

and for that Isa had his regrets. But it should be as Allah had planned. It was Allah's will, he had decided weeks ago.

He believed every good Muslim is supposed to play a part in the fight against the agents of the Great Satan: the West and their allies. The use of this taxi driver's car was his own contribution to the fight against the devil and its agents of immorality which is being spread all over the country through western education. His car would be used for a good cause and Allah shall certainly reward him for it.

He gripped the steering wheel hard. His palms were sweating and little beads of sweat had formed on his forehead. Focused, he brushed the sweat away with the back of his hand. He continually ruminated on the teachings of The Teacher to stop his mind from running into distractions that might derail him from his goal which was scoring a point for Islam and a small victory towards the complete Islamization of the Northern region of Nigeria.

He wondered what Ahmadu, his friend and fellow member of the Islamic People's Liberation, The IPL was doing at that moment. He too was presently somewhere else in a religiously divided city preparing to give his life for the faith too. They had been living together, training together, learning together and sleeping together in the same room for almost a year.

It hadn't occurred to him before, but now that it did, he wondered why he and his friend were chosen to carry out twin attacks at the same time on two different targets. Well, he decided after a minute, The Teacher knew best. It was his responsibility to decide who did what, when, where and how.

The foremost thing on his mind was the job at hand. There was also the teacher's promise and assurance that he and his friend were going to meet in a

beautiful garden in heaven where they will have their choice of seventy-seven virgins and live in eternal bliss. That was what he was looking forward to.

It had been so quiet that the sudden ringing of his phone made him jump and sent his heartbeat racing. He picked up the phone and remembered it was the alarm he had set. His heart rate slowly began to decelerate. The ringing meant it was five minutes to the time when he is to attack his target.

He got the car's engine running and slowly headed towards his target. He was not supposed to have his phone with him because The Teacher had warned them never to take any personal property with them when they had a mission. To justify his disobedience, he had told himself he needed it to time his attack to perfection.

One of the reasons the great teacher had banned the taking of phones to an attack location was firstly: the temptation to call family members which is banned for a week before an attack because it might make them change their minds and, secondly: the chances of them leaving evidence behind was very high.

He had broken both of those rules because firstly, he had brought his phone. And secondly, even though he was yet to call his family that day, he wasn't going to call them to say goodbye. He had already drafted a text message as best as he could and sent it the day before.

In the letter, he had apologised to his mother and sister telling them they weren't going to see him on earth anymore. He told them he'd gone to buy them all a place in heaven where they would all meet again. His mother and sister couldn't read but he was sure they would get someone to read it for them and if not, then it wouldn't really matter.

His target was located in a street which was a Close. When he got to the junction from which the street branched off he turned into it. In front of him, in the distance he could see the steeple of the church rising towards the sky like a beacon as it reflected the light from the sun which had managed to sneak out from behind the clouds.

He'd been calm up to that point but now, emotions he couldn't explain surged out of nowhere taking him by surprise. Suddenly feeling unwell, he parked the car by the side of the road as he struggled within himself. He tried to pray for strength for the last time as he'd been taught but he couldn't concentrate no matter how hard he tried.

The Teacher had told them about such emotions. He told them they would come up when it was time for them to do what was right, to sacrifice themselves for Allah. He told them they would have to fight their emotions like warriors are expected to do.

Just as suddenly as the emotions had come-up he also began to shiver as the fear of dying crept into the inner labyrinths of his mind. He had been cocksure of himself since the day before when he'd been told he was going to carry out the attack. He had thought it was going to be easy. But now, minutes before he was going to die and take others along with him he found it almost impossible.

He was now sweating profusely and his hands had become clammy. He looked at the time on his phone. It was two minutes to the time. Two minutes to him at that point felt like two seconds as he waited in the car that had suddenly become very uncomfortable. He felt like he was suffocating. He manually wound down the glass of the 80s saloon car to allow for more air circulation.

Everywhere around him he could see the worshippers as they made their way to the church some hundred and twenty metres away. Some were arriving with their families in their own cars. Others were arriving on taxis while some others were arriving on commercial motorcycles. Some had whole families balanced on a single motorcycle. But most were arriving on foot. Whole families on foot, everyone with their Bibles: children, teenagers and adults.

For a moment he felt like changing his mind and turning the car around. But he fought hard within himself not to. He knew if he did, there would be a backlash from the teacher and the IPL. Even if he managed to escape and they couldn't get him, they could still get to his family because he wouldn't be able to run away with them.

But most importantly, the money they promised him they would give to his mother if he carried out the attack wouldn't get to her. He had to do this, he decided. Since he couldn't help his mother and sister in another way he had to do this to provide for them. It was also an opportunity to do the will of Allah. He decided it was a win-win situation.

Now determined, he looked at the time again, the time was right. He started the engine and took a deep breath. He engaged the gear to drive and drove towards the gates of the church in the distance. As he approached the church he quickly changed the gear levels of the manual transmission every ten metres until he reached the maximum speed the car could reach at that distance. He had changed the gears almost mechanically without any thought like he was a robot programmed to execute a command.

People jumped out of the way, while a few tried to get away from the area sensing what was about to happen, but most of them were too late. He was going to

take them with him and he knew it. One brave soul tried to shut the gates to prevent him from entering into the church compound, but he crashed into it at the same moment he pressed the switch by the side of the steering to detonate the bomb. The last thing he felt was a bright, burning flash engulfing him.

# 1

## **F.C.T, ABUJA**

The entrance into the Nigerian Presidential Villa in Abuja named Aso Rock was a beehive of activity the next Monday morning. The Villa got its name from the four hundred metre high monolith outcrop around which the Presidential complex, the Nigerian National Assembly and the Nigerian Supreme Court are all located.

The National Executive Council was scheduled to hold an emergency meeting at 9:00 a.m. that morning. The council comprised of the ministers, the vice-president, the secretary to the federal government and was chaired by the president. The reason for the emergency meeting was common knowledge because everyone had seen the carnage the two suicide bomb attacks had wrecked on two churches the day before.

Over eighty people were dead and almost a hundred and fifty wounded, with over half of those critically. It was a new high record for the Islamic Peoples Liberation terrorist group which had claimed responsibility. The group had so far

carried out over fifty attacks some of which were drive by shootings, small attacks like when they attacked a village over night and then small-scale suicide bombings.

The suicide bombings were the ones which had gotten everyone reeling because it was alien to Nigerian culture. It was once believed that Nigerians loved living too much to end their lives in such a way, but not anymore.

The conference room where the National Executive Council met was a wide circular room with a high inverted dome-like shaped ceiling which was accommodated by the dome on the roof of the building. The furniture made of the best wood was constructed in line with the shape of the room itself.

The whole room was painted in the country's national colours of green and white. There were enough seats around the conference table to accommodate every member of the council. For every plush high backed office chair was a microphone stand to help the occupants speak without having to raise their voices.

The place reserved for the president was the highest point and behind his seat on both sides were two large Nigerian flags. High above the chair was a large ornate Nigeria Coat of Arms made of metal.

The expression on everyone's face was sombre as they entered the conference room. The greetings were mostly muted and reduced to mostly nods and handshakes as everyone took their places in the conference room.

The Vice President, Umaru Ali came in minutes before 9:00 a.m. closely followed by his aid-de-camp who carried his briefcase. He shook the hands of those closest to him and took his seat just to the right of the president's chair.

Everyone was aware the president was saddened by the attacks. And he had



demanded answers from everyone he believed had failed in their duty to prevent it. The word had also gone around that the president was ready to take extreme measures against the terrorists because his patience had finally ran out. But no one had any idea what he was going to do next which added to the tension.

At 9:00 a.m. on the dot, President Osamudiawe Justin came in wearing a suit. The president was different from all of his predecessors who all favoured their ethnic group's traditional attires. He was a big fan of suits and ties, a habit from his lawyer days. But for political reasons he took great pains to wear the traditional attires of all the major ethnic groups from time to time.

The president was flanked on the right by his right hand man, the Secretary to the Federal Government of Nigeria: retired Major-General Abdullahi Usman, a northerner and a Muslim. He was fondly called, The General by his friends and close associates. It was rumoured the secretary to the federal government was the only man who had the president's ears because the president trusted him. So he was treated with great respect nationwide.

There were also rumours Major-General Abdullahi Usman was the main power house in the capital and not the president himself who was from a minority ethnic group in the south of the country. But the retired General had always debunked such claims whenever any bold journalist had tried to bait him. He had always stated he was an appointee of the president who could be sacked at any time unlike the president who was popularly elected by Nigerians.

The president walked to his seat but he didn't sit down and everyone stood up. At a signal from the president, the national anthem was played and they all quietly stood at attention but the Secretary to the Federal Government mouthed the words in low tones with his eyes shut. When it ended they all said the National

Pledge together.

As a multi-religious country with two major religions, opening prayers were said by both a Christian and a Muslim. Everybody sat down following the lead of the president, and as set in law by the president, who was a former high profile human rights activist and lawyer, the minutes of the last meeting was read out by the secretary of the National Council a position held by the Minister for Information, Mrs. Judith Dangogo. Everyone listened attentively as she read it out.

The president, Justin Osamudiawe had been the first and only popularly elected president of the country since it's sixty something plus years of existence. The people had said enough was enough and had trooped out en masse to vote out the former corrupt incumbent president out of office daring the thugs of the very powerful ruling party that wanted to rig the elections as it usually did.

President Justin had been voted in on his campaign promise of waging an all out war on corruption if elected. Corruption was drowning the country and every sector of the economy was suffering from its tight grip and the people decided they've had enough of it and couldn't take any more. His was a new face to politics and a breath of fresh air to the stink of corruption that was pervasive in all the sectors of the Nigerian government and the economy.

The president was well known for his abhorrence of corruption and also for getting problems solved. During his days as an activist and a lawyer, he had taken several government agencies and government officials to court and had won despite the bias of the Judiciary.

He had also been the victim of several assassination attempts one of which almost claimed his life. He spent almost a year in Europe recovering from the

injuries he suffered from that attack. So he was well known and respected by Nigerians.

When he announced he would be running for the presidency all the small political parties had come falling over themselves to make him their candidate. He had picked a party and then an influential vice presidential candidate, Umaru Ali - who was formerly a member of the then ruling party - was picked from the Northern region of the country to win the votes of the people from the region.

The political war that ensued in the elections was one between a David and a Goliath. The then incumbent president was from the largest political party which had held power for ten straight years and had the power to control everything because they controlled both houses of the National Assembly. So it had been business as usual for the ruling party and the country with the same people continually rigging and winning elections repeatedly while they robbed the nation blind.

But this time, the David triumphed with the support of the masses which had had enough of the ruling party. They pushed him through with their votes and some with their lives as they tried to protect their votes from hired thugs and corrupt electoral officials.

The advent of Middle-Eastern style of terrorism came into the country after President Justin had won the presidential election with a landslide. On the day of his inauguration there were several terrorist bomb attacks at different locations of the country's capital city. Those were the first, and as they say the rest is history.

For the first time in the country's history, a president had tried to rule the country conscientiously with the welfare of the people being his major focus. He

had achieved much in every sector of the national economy and the states of the country with corruption being at its lowest since the foundation of the country as a sovereign nation.

But everything he had achieved had been overshadowed by the senseless killings by the new shadowy extremist group which called itself the Islamic People's Liberation, the IPL, whose ultimate aim is to create an Islamic Caliphate in the Northern region of the country.

It had been rumoured that some politicians were behind the attacks but there was no evidence to prove it and no one had been incriminated yet. Some even blamed the powerful and dreaded Al-Qaeda from the Middle-East as the sponsor of the Nigerian based terrorists. All there was were theories and nothing more.

After the reading of the minutes from the last meeting which included an agreement for a special security committee to come up with a new strategy on how to combat the IPL, the president turned to face Vice President Umaru Ali who was once an Artillery Sergeant in the Nigerian army before he ventured into politics beginning as a councilor in his state.

“So, what has the special security committee come up with as the present offensive is not working?” he asked.

“Mr. President. We in the committee came up with the idea that we should negotiate with the people behind these attacks.”

The president removed his glasses as if to better see his vice president. “If we are to negotiate, with whom do we negotiate?”

“We will have to find someone, but we can't do that until you give your

approval sir,” the vice president replied.

The president didn't reply but it was clear to everyone he didn't think much of the idea. “Bring in the military chiefs,” the president said to his aide-de-camp who nodded and headed for the door.

Everyone waited for the military chiefs to come in. They entered the conference room led by the Chief of Defence Staff, the navy chief, Rear-Admiral Mike Okon. They went straight to the seats reserved for them and sat down. The President wasted no time before turning to them.

“And what does the Military Chiefs suggest?” he asked. “A committee has suggested we try to negotiate with the terrorists?”

“Sir, we believe the best thing to do is to simply increase the funding of the military so we can get better weapons to combat the terrorists,” the naval chief said.

“Increased funding you say?” the vice president ventured in a tone laced with sarcasm. “The budget of the military had been increased twice in the past two years with nothing to show for it.”

It was well known that the vice president and the military chiefs had a relationship that could best be described as very unfriendly. The vice president had on several occasions had open disagreements with them simply because his former boss when he was in the army was the present army chief.

He had repeatedly told every one of his close friends who cared to listen, that part of the reason he left the army many years ago was because of the way the Major-General who was then a captain had treated him.

“Yes, and we need more,” the army chief, Major-General Tunde Balogun spoke out, having decided to confront his former student himself. “The terrorists are getting increasingly sophisticated with their weapons and techniques. If we are to stop them, then yes, we need increased funding.”

“I still say, we should try to negotiate with them, before the situation gets much worse,” the vice president maintained.

“And thereby absolve them of all the innocent lives they’d already taken right?” Rear Admiral Okon asked in an angry tone.

Marching the vocal range and tone of the naval chief the vice president charged back. “Yes, we should be ready to compromise, before we lose more innocent lives unnecessarily.”

Every other person in the room quietly watched the drama as the words flew back and forth between both sides as they tried to convince everyone and especially the president that their position was the right course of action to take.

“With all due respect Mr. President,” the air force chief, Air Vice-Marshal Mustapha Katshima said speaking for the first time, “We cannot negotiate with terrorists. Give us the fire power and we will take care of them.”

“I believe you sir. But I’m still considering my options,” President Justin replied. “Where’s the Boss of the State Security Service? I want to know what our intelligence people are doing.” The State Security Service also known as the Department of State Services is the primary domestic intelligence agency in Nigeria and also responsible for the protection of the President and State Governors with their families.

“Sir, the SSS report to the National Security Adviser and he isn’t here,” the Minister of State for Security, Ifeanyi Chukwudi said with a low cough. “But I am privy to some of the things they do.”

“And what are the boys doing? Why was there no intelligence warning us of the terrorist attacks?” the president queried.

“Sir, the SSS... or the boys as you say,” he began with a short laugh trying to inject a light note but nobody bought it, “are doing all they can. You see sir... they have never been faced with such a challenge before and... it’s all happening too fast for them to cope.”

“So what you’re telling me now is, they are all just a bunch of men in men-in-black suits and glasses without any intelligence capability?” President Justin asked harshly.

“I won’t put it like that sir because we do have intelligence capabilities which I admit is not enough,” the Minister of State for Security said “But we are about to start a training programme for them in conjunction with the American CIA.”

“And when will they be ready to do anything useful?”

“I don’t know sir,” the minister said feeling ashamed as everyone’s gaze was focused on him. He felt like disappearing at that moment from not only the meeting but also from the building.

“Well, apparently we have nothing to gain from the SSS. They are only useful as guards for now,” the president said as he turned away from the minister. “Does anyone else have anything to offer other than what we currently have on the

table?” he asked surveying everyone in the room. But no one spoke up.

“So, we’re powerless to stop terrorists from our own country?” the president began with a rhetorical question. “They’ve steadily grown in strength under all of our noses. We’ve tried force and it hasn’t worked, our intelligence boys are handicapped, and so we are blind and powerless against them.

“They are trying to destroy this nation by splitting it along religious and ethnic lines; and if we don’t do something about it quickly they may well succeed in doing so and we will go the way of Afghanistan, Sudan and even Somalia. God forbid,” he swore. “That won’t happen under my watch. I won’t let it.

“And so, in light of this situation and the absence of a viable and effective alternative, I have agreed to a plan put forward by the Secretary to the Federal Government, Abdullahi Usman which he will now tell everyone about.”

The Secretary to the Federal Government put on his glasses, cleared his throat before he pulled himself closer to the microphone. While he was going through all these motions everyone was staring at him and you could feel the anxiety laden atmosphere.

“What I suggested to the President is for the federal government to form a special counterterrorism taskforce for the sole purpose of dealing with terrorism and other closely related crimes,” he began. “They will be a quick and highly mobile force that will investigate, track and hit terrorist cells hard wherever they are hiding in the country. The taskforce will consist of members of all the armed forces and other security agencies for versatility.” He could see the Chief of Defence Staff grinning; obviously he believed the taskforce will be under their purview. “But will be outside the control of the different armed forces.” The grin



vanished. “They will be independent but shall be supported by the armed forces and other security agencies when necessary and whenever they require assistance. This taskforce will only report to the office of the president and to no one else. I repeat, to no one else but the president.”

“But Mr. President,” the air force chief began to protest. “You can’t just go over our heads to form such a group outside our control.”

“I agree with him there too Mr. President,” The Chief of Defence Staff said.

“While I have my issues with the armed forces, I agree with them on this issue. I do have a problem with this plan especially because they will only answer to you,” the vice president said.

President Justin sat quietly through all the show of disapproval as they all gave their reasons for not siding with it.

“Is there anyone else with a view to express?” he asked when they all finished. No one said anything as everyone with something to say had already done so. “Alright,” he began, “I’ll like you all to know that before now I’ve taken into consideration all of the sensible points you’ve all presented. But we were all here when these problems started, weren’t we? I have listened to all of your suggestions for the past year and a half. I have increased the budget of the military and yet they are yet to repay the faith and confidence I had in them. They are completely powerless against the terrorists. Yet they still tell me to increase their budget. The thing that bothers me the most is: how do the terrorists always manage to outwit the military every time?”

Everyone was silent.

“As for those that have been saying we should negotiate with the terrorists, I’ve heard you,” the president continued. “But, I’ve been asking for more than a year for someone credible from their ranks to negotiate with but you’ve never been able to point us in the right direction. Well, I’ve had enough of it. I’m doing things my way this time, this way.

“And for any of you, who may want to question my actions. Know this: I am the Commander-In-Chief of the armed forces and they all answer to me. And I’m also the president in case any of you had forgotten.” He paused. “This is a done deal. Everyone should go and put their houses and ministries in order before I start firing and reshuffling. This meeting is closed,” he announced with a note of finality.

With that he got up and left the conference room flanked by his aide-de-camp and the secretary to the federal government as he left the room. Everyone was too surprised and speechless to think or to do anything for moments after the president had left the room. He had gone on to do as he wished and no one was going to stop him.

It was clear to them he’d already made up his mind even before he came to the meeting. He had gone on to threaten anyone that dared to stand in his way. And yes, he was the president he could do whatever he wished as long as it was within his powers to do so.

Everyone was so shocked, it took them a while to be able to speak above whispers like they were afraid he would overhear them and immediately fire them. The vice president was the only one with a smile on his face as he left the room.

Everyone knew the secretary to the Federal Government must have put the

president to it. They hated him as much as they feared him because they knew one word from him to the president could cost them their jobs.

# 2

## **NYANYA, NASARAWA STATE**

The three storey building was built on a large expanse of land outside the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria, Abuja. The compound grounds around the building were dark and quiet.

It was an out of town hotel, in the suburb of Nyanya in the neighbouring state of Nasarawa into which Abuja had gradually spread into making it almost a part of the capital city. The cost and price of everything had also crept up to the level of that of Abuja but without the comforts and developments of the capital city.

The Diamond hotel was anything but a five-star hotel, but it was still good and offered a wide range of room types from presidential suites to normal priced rooms. It was a place frequented by those who didn't want to be seen meeting or being with people they don't want people to know they are associated with.

The hotel's management had come to value such patronage and went out of their way to make sure their patrons and clients' quest for somewhere discrete and

private for their discussions and secret pleasures are well catered for. So the entrance to the hotel had dim lights that made it difficult to identify people at night. There were also secret exit ways which are offered to their most wealthy customers.

A tall light-skinned man with a small beard and an unmistakable confident smug on his face who looked like he was in his early forties drove a hired SUV to the hotel. He stopped the SUV briefly at the steel gates as he waited for it to be opened. When the gates were thrown open, he drove into the dimly lit hotel compound.

The man was of Middle-Eastern origins. He was well versed in several languages including English, Spanish and French courtesy of training he received from the American Central Intelligence Agency but he had since gone rogue.

He had left his imprint on several conflicts around the world: in Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Philippines, Somalia and Sudan where he had organized resistance along Islamic lines against authorities, even though he was not religious. Islam was simply a cover for his work and nothing more.

He was simply in every cause for the money. He was a mercenary, a gun runner, a bomb maker and a military strategist for hire. His curriculum vitae was very expansive and his expertise was sort after in conflict zones all over the world. He was known simply as: The Arab as no one knew his true identity because he had changed his identity so many times. He was on the wanted list of the CIA, Mossad and MI6.

He parked the car in the car park and came out. He stopped to look at his wristwatch; the time was 9:00 p.m. He slowly and confidently made his way into

the lobby which was dimly lit. The lobby was also deserted too except for the receptionist who nodded in his direction in greeting as he approached.

“I am here to meet John Smith,” he told the burly receptionist who had the physique of a UFC fighter. He was more than a receptionist as he also had the added responsibility of maintaining the peace in the reception area and of handling any potential trouble maker.

“Yes. They are expecting you. Room thirty, third floor,” the receptionist told him.

The Arab smiled his thanks. Even his smile was threatening. If the receptionist had not seen all sorts of people during his days at the hotel he might have been scared. He went on with his business and didn't look as the tall Arab made his way to the stairs leaving the lift. But he knew what direction the Arab was headed without having to look; maybe he didn't want to run into anybody, he thought.

The tall Arab mounted the stairs two at a time effortlessly as he made his way to the floor above. At the top of the stairs he turned onto the next flight of stairs leading to the third floor and again took them on two at a time. At the top of that set of stairs he opened a door opposite and walked into a corridor which was as dimly lit as everywhere else in the hotel.

Walking down the corridor he looked at the doors on each side as he followed the numbers in ascending order. In the distance he could see a man standing guard in front of a door he immediately realized was the one he was looking for. On getting to the door, he stopped. The guard looked menacing but he was not bothered in anyway. If he needed to he could disable him with little effort.

“Who are you?” the guard who towered above him by inches asked.

“I have a meeting with John Smith in room thirty, or isn’t this room thirty?” he asked casually.

“Go in, they’re waiting,” the guard said giving way. John Smith was the code word.

He opened the door and stepped into the dark room where he could only make out the silhouetted outlines of three people sitting on settees in front of a lighted background. He couldn’t see their faces. They liked it that way calling it their insurance policy. But he had done his home work and he knew who they were. But he liked the arrangement as it was, of pretending he didn’t know them just like they wanted it to be.

He knew one was the serving vice president, the other was the chairman of the largest political party in the country, the main rival of the party in power and the man who had contacted him on their behalf was the third man, a serving Senator, also from the largest political party. He knew there were others from almost every ethnic group in the country, joined together by their hunger for power on the platform of a political party, but these were the faces. And they don’t get any bigger than this.

“You’re late,” one of them said.

“Traffic,” he replied casually.

“Sit down,” the voice said again.

He obliged without any words. They were the bosses because they were the ones with the money and he worked for them - for now.

“I must confess your methods are effective,” the voice continued. “If you continue like this at this tempo, the entire country will soon be in chaos.”

“As I told you before, I’m worth every penny I charge,” The Arab said.

“I agree,” the voice said again.

An awkward silence followed during which The Arab waited for them to speak but no one said anything. It was odd because he felt like they were checking him out or something. He wasn’t comfortable with it and so, he spoke up.

“Okay, I know I’m good, and you like my work,” he began. “But I’m sure you didn’t ask me to come see you so you can tell me I have been doing a great job?”

“Sure we didn’t,” another voice replied. The Arab saw the person in the middle sit up. “I called you here to find out how you intend to proceed on the next phase and also to inform you about some new developments,” the voice came from the person in the middle.

The Arab relaxed back into the chair and said, “I’m all ears.”

“The president is planning to set-up a special counterterrorism taskforce,” the voice began. “And since they aren’t going to report to any of the incompetent military chiefs we may find it hard to know what they know or what leads they are pursuing. This will make it difficult for us to warn you as our agents in the military may become useless.”

“Can’t you get someone inside this so called taskforce?”

“The men have not been picked yet but they will mostly be from the



military. The problem here is that the president or whoever he picks to head the taskforce will be the one responsible for picking the men.”

“Well, you let me know how that turns out,” The Arab said. “But I need you to get a person inside at least until I’m able to deliver my masterstroke.”

“You’ll have to get used to working without any help from us because the possibility of that happening is very slim,” the voice went on. “We can only hope they pick someone who we know or have been using before now.”

“Then we will have to renegotiate the whole contract again,” The Arab said, “because we negotiated on the basis that you’ll provide me with Intel on what and where the army is looking.”

“Forget about that,” the third voice broke in for the first time. “Money is not a problem. What we need is a continuation of the terror sweeping the country. I want it to continue. I want this country to become almost ungovernable from now until the general elections come around again to make any sort of development difficult. Is that clear?”

“If you say money isn’t a problem then we are clear sir,” The Arab said with a satisfied grin.

“Good!” said the second voice. “Now you can tell us what your plans are.”

“Well, I have plans to hit one or maybe two of the iconic landmarks in the capital.”

“Which ones exactly do you have in mind?” the first voice came on.

“The National Mosque, the National Christian Centre, the National

Assembly, the Central Bank and maybe the Presidential Villa,” All five landmarks were in the capital city.

“Good. Very good!” the third voice said. “That will definitely get the kind of response and backlash from the people against the government that we want.”

The Arab smiled. “I’m glad you like it.”

“What we want is total chaos,” came back the first voice. “We need you to make the country ungovernable. Use whatever means you need to use, but warn us before the time so we can find a way to call off whatever appointments we may have in that area.”

“I shall alert you the day before as usual,” The Arab said. “But now we have to talk money.”

“What do you have in mind?” the first voice asked.

“Two hundred percent increase. If we are to get the desired effect that you want without your help,” The Arab explained.

“As long as you meet our expectations, don’t worry about the money. It shall be sent through the usual channels,” the second voice said.

The Arab sat up and said, “That’s very nice to hear sir. And In the absence of any other thing, can I take my leave now? My boys will be wondering what is keeping me this long.”

With a slight wave of his right hand the second voice said, “You’re dismissed.”

The Arab got up and headed for the door without looking back. As soon as

he shut the door behind him, the three men turned to face each other.

“What do you think?” the first voice asked the others.

“I believe we are progressing well with our destabilisation agenda,” the second voice said.

“I agree,” the third voice chipped in. “Because Nigerians are getting tired already. If we can sustain the tempo and even increase it, the people will have no choice but to vote for anybody who will come up promising to restore order in the country.”

“For me as the chairman of the former ruling party and the largest party in this country, I want power back in the next elections. Our interests have suffered too much and too many of our people are in jail, while others are facing corruption charges,” the second voice said. “I just want things to go back to as they were before that political novice came from nowhere to sweep us off,” he told the man with the third voice.

“And don’t forget the charges that are hanging over you and your son which as part of our agreement I have been keeping a lid on,” the third voice came on almost with a sneer.

“More reasons why I need things to go back to how they were before,” The second voice said almost grumpily. Must he go on and mention that, he thought angrily.

“That’s why if we can successfully sustain the pressure of making the country ungovernable. We can both have what we want,” the third voice said. “You’ll have power back in the hands of your party, and I shall be president. We

are together in this.”

“You know, I wonder why you simply can’t wait and be the vice president again after the next elections and then become the president in six years time?” the first voice asked.

“Well, for one, I can’t wait. I want power now; two, the vision of the party and their obsession with due process isn’t my style.”

“You see, we have a great deal in common,” the second voice said with a forced chuckle. “Due process is not really our style in our party. Where’s the fun or the money in that?” he said breaking into an unnatural laughter.

“Now you see why we need each other,” the third voice said joining in the laughter.

When the unnatural laughter died a natural death, the third speaker spoke in a very serious tone. “I hope we can continue to trust each other. You help me, I help you. And I hope when we see this thing to conclusion I won’t have any reason to doubt you’ll deliver on your own part of the deal. As I can deliver on what I promised that your case shall never see the light of day.”

“Don’t worry about that. I have given my word,” the second voice managed to say despite his anger.

The man with the third voice stood and they shook hands.

“When we need to meet again I shall contact you,” the second speaker said still masking his anger.

“Please do so,” the third speaker said before going to the door. He opened it

and was gone.

“Are you going to really keep your promise,” the first voice began, “because he clearly just threatened you?”

“When that time comes we’ll know,” The second voice said coldly. “For now our interests are intertwined at making the country ungovernable so we have to play along. But when we succeed other factors may come up. So I can’t really say for now. There are other powerful players in the game he doesn’t know about. But there’s one thing I’m sure of, I hate his guts.”

“My problem with him is he’s too ambitious. Such people are unpredictable and dangerous,” the first voice warned.

“I know his type. They think they’re smart but they are actually very stupid. First rule of politics: Don’t try to blackmail those who are more experienced than you are. But let’s forget about him for now and go to the other reason we came here,” the second speaker said picking up the receiver of the telephone by the side of the chair he was sitting. “Send up the girls,” he said into it.

# 3

## LONDON, U.K

It was a warm summer morning in London and Chukwuemeka Adeyinka was in a good mood as he drove down the Seven Sisters road, in the North London Borough of Tottenham in his Range Rover sport SUV. The car's stereo was pumping out the cool sounds of the soft rock band, The Fray. He had a feeling it was going to be a great day. He didn't know how or why, but he felt it.

Getting to Finsbury, he continued down the road until when he got to the junction where the A1201 Highway cut through the road. With Finsbury Park in sight on the other half of the road named the A503 he turned to the right into A1201 seeing a green light.

He continued down the road for about a thousand metres before he turned into the quiet Forest Road which was its usual quiet self. Forest Road was lined on both sides by small businesses and a few homes.

After a minute, he turned into a fairly wide compound in which was a four storey building. He parked the SUV on one of the several parking spots allocated

to his Private Security Company. The perks of free parking spots added to his love for the location which was in a very expensive neighbourhood. It was also one of the reasons he was paying through his nose in instalments to acquire the top floor which his company occupied.

Getting out of the car, he hung his back pack by one hand on his right shoulder. After locking the car with the remote controlled key holder, he strode towards the building. He walked to the rhythm of the drums his mind was playing for him as he remembered his days at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst where he had trained to become an army officer and also at the Special Air Service base at Hereford one of the bases of the Special Forces in Britain where he had been sent to be trained in counter-insurgency when he joined the SAS.

But he had since retired from the British military after a few disagreements with his superiors after the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. He now lived in the suburb of Bruce Grove in Tottenham, North London which was north of where his private security company was located.

He was tall, a six-footer and athletic with well trained lean muscles. He looked almost ordinary in his black pair of trousers and white short sleeved shirt. But if people looked closely enough they'd see his well developed forearms and well toned face which was a result of a strict well defined exercise plan. And his confident military stride was impossible not to notice.

But despite his imposing appearance, he was a cheerful man with an easy smile. He easily got along with others and could sometimes be a joker. To him life was too short to be too serious on anything except it had to do with criminals and terrorists for whom he had a strong dislike because to him they often preyed on the weak and defenceless.

His name Chukwuemeka Adeyinka never ceased to amaze and strike the curiosity of almost every Nigerian who had heard the name. He had gotten tired of explaining to people that his father was a Yoruba Muslim from the South-Western part of Nigeria who married an Igbo Christian woman from the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. His paternal grandmother was from the Hausa ethnic group from the Northern Nigerian state of Kano. So he was of a mixed sort with links to every part of Nigeria. He was proud of it and he called himself a true Nigerian even though he had spent most of his life in the UK.

The name Chukwuemeka, or Emeka for short stuck with him because his mother called him that and his father didn't have any choice but to join his mother in calling him that. But whenever his father called him Adeyinka his Yoruba name which they shared when he was little he knew he was in trouble.

He walked unhurriedly to the four-storey building where his private security company, Pegasus Security was located. The company provided both armed and unarmed guards for companies both in the UK and also in some troubled spots; though for personal reasons he had rejected every contract offer from Iraq or Afghanistan.

Another source of income for Pegasus Security was the provision of protection for money being moved between financial institutions in the UK. They were also private investigators for hire.

He greeted the doorman who also sold newspapers and magazines at the front of the building. He picked up *The Investigator* which was his favourite and began reading it immediately as he headed for the stairs on his way to the top floor.

The building's lift system was ancient and he had a sort of love/hate



relationship with it because it had broken down with him inside it more times than he appreciated, so he avoided it altogether when he could.

On the front page were the photographs from the scenes of two separate terrorist suicide bomb attacks carried out two days before in Nigeria. The situation was getting worse every day, he thought bitterly. The country was on uncharted waters. Terrorist attacks and especially suicide bomb attacks were new to the country and the country was finding itself being outmanoeuvred in its fight against terrorism.

He had found out counterterrorism had never been a core training exercise for the Nigerian military and now they were found wanting as usual, he thought. If you fail to prepare for something, when it comes knocking you will certainly be found wanting. By nature, many developing countries' militaries do not plan or look to the future, and the Nigerian military was no exception.

There had been the generally held belief that suicide bombing attacks will never reach the shores of the country because of another popularly held belief that, Nigerians loved living too much and are too scared to die. Hence, Nigerian military commanders had not listened to him years ago when as a security consultant and investigator to an oil company in the Niger-Delta region of the country he had suggested they make counterterrorism training a must for the army and every other security forces in the country

But they didn't listen, and when his job was done after he had exposed some Nigeria military officers' involvement in the corruption in the Niger-Delta; some of them had ensured the oil company terminated his contract. But he hadn't been worried about it because he hadn't planned to hang around in the country when he finished his job anyway. Now it was too late for them to meet the threat. If you

don't plan to win; then you are definitely planning to fail. It was a pity, but his ancestral country had planned to fail. He shook his head.

The flight of forty steps he had to climb on his way to the top floor didn't bother him in anyway because he took it as a form of exercise whenever he was reading or thinking. When he's not doing either of those he would be running up or down the stairs.

He had consistently refused to move from the top floor to another building or to other floors on the same building when there had been vacancies when other businesses had moved out because he had developed a special attachment to the top floor.

But his major reason for preferring the top floor was strictly for its security advantages. On the top floor, they had a view that overlooked Forest road on which there were mostly shorter buildings. No one could approach the building without being spotted.

He had a camera mounted on top of the building which covered the entrance into the building and the whole road in front of it for almost fifty metres because of its high position. There was also another right in front of the door which led into the top floor.

He pushed open the automated security door at the sound of a beep which indicated it had been opened electronically from inside. The door was opened for everyone by a security guard from his or her position just behind the door to the side with two monitors that displayed pictures from the two cameras. The guard had to confirm the identity of whoever wanted to enter into the offices of the security company before he opened the door.

Emeka stepped inside the hall-like premises of Pegasus Security still looking at the newspaper. He only looked up with a soft smile to acknowledge the greetings of Ann and Gabriel, both Scots, and went back to reading the newspaper. Gabriel was the guard on duty and Ann seemed to have come to speak with him. Ann had been in the Royal Navy, while Gabriel had been in the Royal Air Force.

All the personnel of Pegasus Security were all former military men and women except for a few administrators and ex-police men. All had retired for one reason or the other. Their reasons ranged from accidents, post-traumatic stress disorders, or those that were looking for another way out to live and could no longer handle the violence and senseless killings anymore especially those who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Some were honorably discharged while a few others weren't. Emeka took them all in but first they had to agree to undergo a psychological examination from a psychologist to ensure they were fit to work for him. And if need be, they were to undergo treatment and rehabilitation with the same psychologist.

He walked straight to his office this time acknowledging greetings with a nod of his head as he continued to read the newspaper. He raised his head for a moment when he walked past the transparent walled office of Aisha. She was his secretary and the chief administrator of Pegasus Security. She was busy on the phone so she simply smiled and waved at him.

His office was at the extreme end of the floor adjacent to Aisha's which was just to the right of his. The position of his office gave him a complete view of the main hall-like floor which was arranged into office cubicles through his transparent door. The wall in front was also transparent but outsiders couldn't see into the office because to them it was just a mirror.

He opened the door of his office with a key he took from his pocket. He kept the key to his office himself for security reasons because of the importance of the documents he kept inside, though Aisha and John - also an ex-military man - both of whom were his right hand men responsible for the day to day running of the company also kept a key each, in case there was an urgent need for a document, or when it needed to be cleaned and he wasn't around.

He entered into the office and immediately went to sit on his imposing chair behind his huge oak table which formally belonged to a British High Commissioner somewhere in Asia. He had purchased it very cheaply at an auction which had come up at the time he was shopping for office furniture. The table had a way of intimidating almost everyone who enters the office and he loved it for that purpose especially when he had to deal with very important or stubborn clients.

He was in the process of going through some documents on his desk when Aisha knocked and pushed open the door. 'Can I come in?'

"If you want to," was his reply. It was a joke they shared.

She came in carrying a file which she dropped on the table. 'Those are the figures from last month's activities you asked for.'

"Thanks."

"A Major-General Abdullahi Usman called. He said you should call him immediately you come in. That it's very important and urgent."

"When did he call?" he asked. His curiosity and interest were aroused. The retired Major-General only called when he had a very important job to offer him. Emeka had turned him down several times in the past.

The Major-General had great influence on the politics of Nigeria. The Major-General formerly a Brigadier was one of those who assisted him when he worked some years back for an oil company operating in the Niger-Delta as a security consultant and private investigator when five of their expatriate staff were kidnapped.

The Major-General helped Emeka as he tried to uncover the intricacies of the militancy in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria where some militant groups in the region continuously tried to disrupt the extraction of crude oil which fed the country as a whole as they fought to get a better share of the oil wealth.

“Not too long ago. I’ll say, thirty minutes ago,” she replied looking at her wristwatch. “He said your line was out of reach. What happened to it?”

“I switched it off because I didn’t want to be disturbed.”

“By whom?” she asked like the very good interrogator she was.

“Sorry I’m not telling. It’s personal.”

“Really! Don’t tell me you are love shy at your age,” she teased.

“I’m still not telling,” he replied with a grin.

“Okay, keep it to yourself,” she said with a smile as she made her way to the door. She knew she’s going to find out eventually.

He also knew for certain, she was going to find out why, but he wasn’t bothered. He was concerned about the potentially trouble-loaded and adrenaline pumping job the General was going to offer him. He immediately dialed the General’s private number.

Major-General Usman was formally a soldier of the Federal Government of Nigeria under which he served for twenty-five distinguished and meritorious years. He retired some two years ago and immediately went into politics which had greatly favoured him.

He was the Secretary to the Federal Government of Nigeria, a very powerful position which is similar in many ways to that of the American Secretary of State. He was a man of honesty and a firm believer in justice. And that was one of the reasons Emeka greatly admired him.

“Hello Emeka,” he said in his loud and intimidating Hausa accented English. “I have a very important and somewhat classified job for you.”

“I guessed as much,” Emeka muttered without much enthusiasm. He had promised himself he was never going to have anything to do with the Nigerian military or government after his experience in the Niger-Delta. “What’s it this time sir?”

“Get to the Nigerian High Commission by 10:00 a.m. today and Major Charles Ikenna will give you a package that will tell you all you need to know. Can you do that?”

“Is he here in London?” Emeka asked, his tone betraying his curiosity.

“Yes he is. He flew in early this morning just for you. Can you make it?”

“Make it twelve and I’ll be there.”

“Okay I’ll let him know,” the Secretary to the Nigerian Federal Government said.

“Good. I’ll see him then.”

“Try not to turn us down this time hmm?”

“I’ll try sir,” Emeka found himself saluting. It was only the General and a few others who still had that sort of effect on him years after leaving the military. Probably it was because of the respect he had for him as the single man of honour in a position of authority he encountered in the whole of Nigeria when he worked there.

Aisha stepped into the office and said, “I take it you’ve called him.”

“Yeah, I have,” he replied wondering what job the General had for him this time that he had his Nigerian buddy, Charles travel all the way to the UK to meet him.

Aisha walked to the file cabinet at one end of the office and pulled out one of the metal drawers. She took out some files and pushed it back in. “So what does he want?”

“He told me I’ll find out at the Nigerian High Commission.”

“Oh!” she said as she went to stand in front of him with a couple of files in her hands with a pose that would rival that of any supermodel.

“Yes,” he said leaning back into the big office chair as he looked at her.

Aisha was tall and slim, about five-eight with brown skin. She had big brown eyes, high chick bones and a small round nose which complemented a small sweet mouth. She kept her hair low and in a style he remembered Toni Braxton made famous in the 90s.

Seeing her, one wouldn't think that under the beauty and deceiving frailty was a strong woman and an administrative genius. She was the controller of the wheel that ensured the smooth running of his security company.

Aisha was of Somali descent. Her parents were able to make it out of the turmoil which engulfed the country after the famous United States intervention in 1993. She was then a child of eight. Her parents had gotten asylum in the U.K and she had since become a citizen.

“You know you could have become a millionaire by now if you had gone into modeling?”

“I have heard that a million times before and nine hundred thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine times from you alone,” she told him with feigned exasperation.

“I simply can't help it,” he joked with a smile, “Just look at that pose. That will look fantastic on the cover of Vogue, Playboy or Ebony.”

“With me in a Bikini right?” she asked playing along.

“That will be awesome. You'd...”

“In your dreams,” she told him cutting him off and going to business immediately. “Your units at Barclays bank and Kensington Superstores needs to have their bonuses signed. And the guy in charge of the unit with Barclays bank would be coming down soon to run through some technicalities. When are you leaving for the Nigerian High Commission?”

“I gotta be there by twelve,” he replied knowing she had skillfully outwitted him again.



She sighed. “That means I’ll have to deal with him.”

“I’m so glad you’ve got my back,” he told her with a smile.

“You’re lucky too,” she pressed him

“I know.” he said holding out his hands to her. “So come to Papi.”

She ignored him. “That means it right about time I get a raise, isn’t it?” she asked.

“I’ll definitely look into that,” he said with forced seriousness. “Maybe a fifty percent reduction wouldn’t hurt.”

They both laughed.

“You are the worst boss anyone could ever have,” she said in between outbursts of laughter as she walked out of the office.

“Yeah, I’ve heard that a thousand times before,” he called after her.

# 4

Emeka decided to take the London Underground instead of his SUV or a taxi. The time was 11:25 a.m. when he left for the Nigerian High Commission. Leaving his office on foot he headed for Finsbury Park underground train station which was a twelve or fifteen minute walk away depending on how fast he walked.

He had always preferred the underground which ran without any traffic. He wouldn't have to listen to drivers trading insults; neither would he have to stop for any mechanical or electronic device, or human being telling him to stop.

For him, the underground had always been the ideal way of smartly navigating the city with the greatest ease. He loved everything about it. The feeling of meeting people one would never talk to, seating next to complete strangers, mothers, fathers, children and youths as everyone went their separate ways, urged on by their problems and dreams.

There was also the fascination of meeting lots of people you know you will never meet again, and even if you do meet them you wouldn't recognize them. You might even get attracted to some at first sight, and immediately forget them as soon

as they are out of sight; or you might even think of them for days after.

Generally, he preferred the underground to any other means of transport in London. He loved the sight, the smells and especially the freedom of it all. He loved everything about the London Underground or the Tube as some people also called it.

When he got to the train station, he took the Piccadilly line from which he planned to switch to the Northern line at Leicester Square which will take him down to Charing Cross the closest station to the Nigerian High Commission. The ride as usual was smooth, but not as crowded as the morning rush hours.

His mind went back to the time after the London bombings in 2005 when the London Underground was attacked - as was a bus too. He was on duty in Iraq when it happened and he could still remember how shaken his mother was when he called her.

When he came home the week after, his mother had begged him not to use the underground, and to please her he stopped using it for some time. Back then, he could see the difference in the way people went about their business, as many Londoners temporarily stopped using the underground. But life had to go on just like the situation was decades before when the paramilitary arm of the Northern Irish Republicans, the IRA repeatedly bombed the trains in their fight to gain independence.

With time, like before Londoners forgot about the 2005 attacks, the trauma, the shock and all and went back to using it like the terrorist attacks never happened. The truth was that life had to go on.

They didn't forget about the attacks or the people who died in it. They were

forever in people's memory. But no one was going to abandon the most efficient means of moving around the city simply because several cowards decided to make a statement by attacking innocent civilians riding on it as they went about their morning activities. No one in his right senses was going to allow terrorists govern their lives, and Londoners never did.

During his time in Iraq he had seen how resolute and defiant people could be. Even as the terrorists attacked the people day after day with remotely detonated improvised explosive devices and suicide bomb attacks, he still saw the people go about their normal every day activities, defying the terrorists who were the true cowards for attacking unarmed civilians.

That was true bravery, like nothing he'd ever seen before, and a statement to show the terrorists that no matter what they did, they wouldn't cave in to their threats and twisted logic.

# 5

After switching trains at Leicester Square and taking another down to Charing Cross. Emeka alighted from the train and walked up to street level. From there he made his way on foot to the Nigerian High Commission which was right in the centre of London on Northumberland Avenue.

He got to the Nigerian High Commission at 11:55 a.m. Getting to the venue of a meeting before time was a personal principle he strongly observed. Years in the military had made it a habit and he had easily transferred it into his life as a business man.

He walked towards the High Commission which was part of an old Victorian styled building that stood right on the edge of the road with trees on one side. The road went around the building on every side. It was early summer, so the trees were still in full bloom.

It never ceased to amaze him how lax the security inside and around the High Commission is always is. There were no ubiquitous security men anywhere. He could see how easily he could slip into the building to do whatever he wanted

without any security personnel noticing him. He showed his ID card at the door and told the Nigerian military guards he had an appointment with Major Charles Ikenna.

One of them asked him to wait while he made a phone call to confirm the meeting before they let him through instructing him to take the stairs. He made his way into the High Commission and up the staircase which led to the second floor. He looked down at the beehive of activity going on the ground floor as he climbed up the stairs.

There was a pair of huge doors at the top of the stairs. He opened the door and stepped into a wide reception area which he was sure most visitors were kept away from. He stopped at the receptionist desk which was occupied by a big, beautiful woman who looked like she was in her forties. She had a big motherly smile that reminded him of his mother.

“Good afternoon,” she greeted him as he approached her desk. “What can I do for you please?”

“Good afternoon. I’m here for a meeting with Major Charles Ikenna.”

“Oh, he’s been expecting you. Please wait a moment while I inform him you are here,” she said picking up the receiver of a telephone on her desk.

Emeka smiled softly and said, “Ok.”

He waited while she made the call, and after a few seconds she hung up the phone.

“Please make yourself comfortable,” she said as she motioned to some plush sofas sitting at one end of reception area. “The Major will be down to meet you in

a moment.”

Emeka muttered his thanks and went to sit patiently. He used the opportunity to take in his surroundings. The arches, pillars and columns all clearly marked out the building as old and from the Victorian era.

The reception area was lightly, but tastefully furnished. The décor was mostly in the Nigerian national colours of green and white. He nodded his head at the level of maintenance of the place. Whoever was in charge was doing a good job.

Emeka only had to wait for a minute and a half before Major Charles Ikenna a six foot tall man burst through a door in quick, confident strides towards him.

The Major was a light skinned Igbo man from the South-Eastern region of Nigeria. He was handsome and even more so when he was in his army uniform. He had deep dark inquisitive eyes like that of a child's and a smile that was highly contagious.

Both of those attributes were some of the most deceiving camouflages Emeka had ever seen, because underneath all those innocence and harmlessness was a very efficient soldier. Charles was the one soldier from the country of his parents he could completely trust because he knew him and had worked and fought next to him.

“I'm very sorry for taking this long,” he apologised quickly as he made his way towards Emeka. “I was on the phone with my commanders back in Nigeria when the call came through that you were here.”

“No problem, no problem,” Emeka told him as they shook hands and then

embraced. “How have you been?”

“I have been fine. Hey, look at you.” Charles said with his infectious smile turning him into all innocence. You’re as fit as ever. You look like you’re still in the military.”

“You know I have to keep fit. My job requires it. You aren’t looking bad yourself. Come to think of it, you still look like you did five years ago.”

“Stop it,” Charles laughed.

“It’s the truth, really,” Emeka said as he laughed, “I see marriage hasn’t gotten you all fat.”

“Nah, I have to keep fit in order to remain sharp and efficient. In fact my wife sees to it that I eat healthy and we also go to the gym together.”

“That’s good my friend. How is she?”

“She’s fine. She sends her greetings. Come on,” he said as he led the way to the door from which he had stepped out. “So how’s London life?”

“London is fine, and Lagos?”

“Lagos was fine when I was there last. I’ve been transferred to Calabar, a lovely city in the Niger-Delta.”

“Yeah, it is a beautiful city. You remember I went there to see my grand-uncle’s family when I was last in Nigeria.”

“Yes I do,” Charles replied.

Opening the door, Charles led the way into a well lit corridor. After several



metres he pushed open a door and led the way inside. It was a sparsely furnished office which was lent to him for the duration of his stay in London.

The office was furnished with a light-weight wood and aluminum desk sprayed black, and three matching chairs. One of the chairs was on one side of the table backing a window and two on the other side.

“Please sit,” he motioned to a chair, “Can I get you a drink?”

Emeka sat down and said, “No I’m okay,”

“If you say so,” Charles said moving to the other side of the table.

“So what has the Nigerian Government got for me this time that they had you travelling all the way from Nigeria to meet me?”

“It’s classified,” Charles told him.

“I know,” Emeka said. “Because if it wasn’t they wouldn’t have sent you all the way here.”

“I don’t even know what it is they sent me to give to you,” Charles said punching the combinations into an electronic safe built into the wall to his left.

“Really?” Emeka asked in surprise.

“Yes. Everything’s in here,” Charles said retrieving a briefcase from the safe. He opened the case and brought out a file sealed in an envelope. He threw the file onto the desk in front of Emeka who picked it up.

Emeka looked around the desk as if searching for something before he tore off the top. He brought out the papers from inside the envelope and started reading

with interest.

“It says here that they need me to come to Nigeria.”

“I thought that was it,” Charles said with a quizzical expression in his eyes, “Is it related to the terrorist attacks in Northern Nigeria?”

“Yeah it is,” Emeka said as he quickly scanned through the paper in his hands. “In summary, they want me to come and form a taskforce to investigate, stop and also to reveal the masterminds behind the terrorist attacks.”

With a pained expression on his face and a disappointed voice Charles said, “It seems the president no longer trusts the Nigerian Army and other security forces to stop the attacks. They want an outsider with no ties to any of the security forces and agencies.”

“Seems so, but I’m a Nigerian,” Emeka complained not buying the outsider tag from his friend.

“Yes, you are of course, but not one that has eaten Nigerian food all his life,” Charles told him with a smile. “A half-Nigerian I’d say, who can’t live in the country,” he added.

“Yeah, whatever makes your day,” Emeka said with a smile. “See they have to realise that for me to accept this job I’m going to have some conditions without which I’m not working.”

“You have to call the General and give him your terms and conditions.”

“Yeah sure I’ll,” Emeka said sitting up. “Do you have a secure phone line I can use?”

“Yes,” Charles replied picking up the receiver of the telephone on the desk. “This one is free courtesy of the Nigerian government.”

Emeka sat up and began typing the number of the secure line of the retired Major-General which Charles had handed to him. When he finished he pressed the call button.

After two rings, the Major-General’s voice came on the line. “Hello!”

The phone had somewhat changed the vocal range of the General and he was sure it had done the same to his too. “Hello sir?”

“Who’s speaking? Please identify yourself,” he barked in a tone mixed with both courtesy and command.

“This is Emeka Adeyinka,” he replied quickly in military fashion. “Am I speaking with retired Major-General Usman, the Secretary to the Federal Government of Nigeria?”

“Definitely,” he replied quickly. He wasn’t a man who wasted time.

Emeka went straight to business too. “I’ve got the package you sent me. What’s it about?”

“It’s as the file states,” came back the voice on the line in a matter of fact way. “In simple language, we need you to come back and help us deal with the Islamic terrorists in the North of the country.”

“I really don’t know about that sir,” he said as he smiled at Charles sitting opposite him. They both knew he was playing hard to get. “Because after my business in the Niger-Delta the last time I ended up in a lot of mess, and besides I

have a business to run here.”

“Have you been reading or listening to the foreign news from Nigeria lately?” the voice of the General came back. “We make the news for all the wrong reasons now with suicide bomb attacks on churches and against every perceivable target. See we need you.”

“That brings me to one of the questions bugging me?” he continued, playing the General, “Why me?”

“The president needs someone he can trust, an expert and someone not in any way related to country’s security forces which he fears has been compromised. And the only person I could think of was you.”

“Okay, my conditions are, I get to pick my own team, special weapons, a couple of transport helicopters and a jet to move easily around the country,” he paused. “Those are for starters; I’ll draw you a more comprehensive list and mail them to you in about an hour’s time.”

“Okay, get it to me and I’ll let the president know,” the General said with a sigh.

“Another thing sir,” Emeka said.

“Yes?”

“I trust you sir but I don’t trust the government so I’ll need some assurances.”

“I see your point. What sort are we talking about?”

“First, I’ll need a written assurance signed by the president himself.”

The General seemed to run it over in his mind for a moment. “Okay, anything else?”

“I also want to speak with him personally and hear him tell me he really needs me to do what I’ll have to do to stop this.”

This time the General wasn’t too keen on the idea. “Why?” he asked after a couple of seconds.

“Because sometimes unorthodox methods may have to be employed, so I want him to look into my eyes and tell me he’s got my back sir.”

After another couple of seconds the General said. “I see your point. That can be arranged.”

“I’ll be expecting the written assurance and contractual agreement today or tomorrow so my lawyers can go through it.”

“I’ll see to it immediately.”

“Thank you sir,” Emeka said.

“I shall call you later in the day to let you know what the president says. Keep your phone close.”

“I’ll sir.”

“How soon can you get here if we find common ground?” the General pressed.

“A week cause I’ll need to take care of some things here first.”

“Okay I’ll get back to you,” the General said and hung up.

Emeka turned to look at Charles who was smiling as he shook his head.

“What?” he asked wondering why Charles was smiling at him.

“Why did you have to play hard to get when we both know you’re going to accept the job anyway?”

“Oh, that’s the reason you were smiling at me like that,” he replied with a slight wave of his hand.

“You and I both know they wouldn’t have sent me all the way here without being prepared to do whatever it takes to get you.”

“It’s not as easy as that,” Emeka replied. “I have really hung-up my boots for good, even though I long for my Special Forces days again. I have to think of my business and especially my mum.”

“I know, but we both know you want to go, you could still have cut all the bullshit,” Charles pressed with a smile.

“It’s called the art of negotiations boy. You play hard to get, to easily get what you want. It also gives me joy to know I’m so wanted.”

“You’re crazy you know that don’t you?” Charles told him with a laugh.

“Really? Tell me something I don’t already know,” he said laughing too.

“You are the only person I know off that makes jokes before undertaking a dangerous mission.”

“After all the hard work and training and stuff, you go in to do your very best and hope luck is on your side, and you come back alive. So why not just be

happy?”

“You are truly amazing,” Charles confessed.

“I know,” he replied with a tongue in cheek smile.

“I presume I’ll be part of your team.”

“Of course, what would I do without my favourite Nigerian sidekick in my quest for justice in the Nigerian Jungle,” Emeka replied with a smile, “That’s if the government agrees to my terms though.”

“Let’s hope so, and let’s also hope you’ll be the one to stop this new terror sweeping the country.”

Standing Emeka said, “Let’s hope so. I’m sure you’ll still be around for now?”

“Yes, I believe so, but it’s up to the General to tell me if I’ll have to chaperon you back to Nigeria or leave you here to your own youthful exuberances,” Charles replied with a smile.

“Very funny,” Emeka said with a laugh.

In a serious tone Charles said, “I really hope you take up this assignment Emeka, because you may be the only real hope we have.”

“I pray so, but you and I know this isn’t going to be easy.” Emeka’s mind quickly ran through all the potential difficulties that might come up, the near death situations, the gunfights, the suicide bomb attacks and others.

“I know.”

“But in the meantime chaperon, please draw up a unit of about forty to fifty honest,” he stressed the word honest, “Efficient and highly trained men and women from the Air force, Navy and Army and even the police force if you can find any who will temporarily serve in this taskforce.”

“What about those who were with us years ago in the Niger-Delta?”

“Include the ones you know I can work with, but I’ll need people who are multi-talented and experts in their fields. People who can fly aircrafts, bomb disposal experts, sharpshooters and snipers etc as well as fight when the need arises. The complete package, you know what I mean?”

Charles nodded in understanding. “Yes. I’ll keep myself busy with that.”

“And make sure your enquiries are done discreetly, you know why.”

“Yes sure,” Charles nodded. He clearly understood why he must be discreet. They wouldn’t want people to try to influence the selection process for their selfish purposes. The Nigerian security forces had been accused of having spies in their ranks who tipped off the terrorists about their every move. They wouldn’t want that to be the case for the taskforce.

“Thanks chaperon, I knew I could depend on you.”

“Enough with the chaperon stuff, come on,” Charles pleaded knowing Emeka wouldn’t let it go easily.

“Okay, chaperon. Oops! I’m sorry, it slipped out of my mouth,” he apologized when Charles gave him a stare. “I’ve got to get back to the office, to take care of things.”



“Okay,” Charles said getting up.

Emeka stretched his right hand to his friend. “It’s really nice seeing you again.”

“The feeling is mutual,’ Charles said as they shook hands. “Let me walk you to the gate.”

“Thanks. You’re really acting this chaperon thing out,” Emeka said. “Come on. What’s with the stare? I meant it in a good and friendly way.”