

# **THE SECOND ATTEMPT**

**Olusola Oso**



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## **DEDICATION**

For my parents  
Pa S.A. Oso and Mrs E.O. Oso  
For all their love and support  
Over the decades



# CHAPTER ONE



## *Reflections*

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**I**T was on a Thursday evening. Aduke entered her room noiselessly. Her son, Olusegun, was deep in sleep on a bed. She was quite surprised that he was still asleep, having been sleeping for the past three hours or thereabouts. She thought he had developed a fever.

She closed the door gently. She drew closer to her son, and sat on the edge of the bed. She placed her right palm on his forehead. His temperature was normal. A film of sweat was formed on his forehead. She dabbed at it with the hem of her grey wrapper. She gazed at Olusegun. Her first and only child-at least for now.

Past events flushed her mind. She reflected on her marriage with Olusegun's father, Salako. It had been a successful marriage. She cast her mind back to the wedding which took place ten years ago. It all seemed like yesterday. The wedding ceremony was well-attended. Family members, friends, well-wishers, and gate-crashers were all present. Food and drinks were in abundance at the wedding reception. Everyone who was present had a good time. The couple received many wedding presents. The occasion would

ever be fresh in her memory. Ten months after the wedding, Aduke was delivered of a baby boy. Her late father named the child Olusegun, meaning “God has conquered.”

An incident happened two days after Olusegun's birth in a hospital that was located in the city of Ibadan, a popular, very large city in Nigeria. She would never forget it. The doctor, a tall, handsome man, with a thick moustache had given her an X-ray examination. He found out that something had gone wrong with her womb immediately after Olusegun's birth. In the medical parlance, the doctor said that she had an introverted uterus; that is, her uterus was positioned abnormally, pointing inward instead of pointing out.

The doctor then went to the heart of the matter. He said Aduke might never be able to carry any pregnancy successfully again, unless she was operated on. According to him, the operation was expensive, and not commonly done in Nigeria. It could only be successfully carried out in first-rate hospitals, due to the costly medical equipment and expertise it entailed. Aduke and her husband could not afford the operation. She was yet to recover from the fatigue of going into labour when the news was broken to Salako in her presence. She swallowed hard. Tears rolled down her cheeks. Her husband tried to console her, and was not pleased with the doctor for breaking the news to him in Aduke's presence. Olusegun's birth, however, was her major consolation. The baby cried with abandon in his cot. Salako paid the medical bills and thanked the doctor. Their journey from the hospital to Bare village,



Aduke looked at Olusegun who slept on the bed

where they resided began almost immediately.

One evening, barely a year after Olusegun's birth, Salako returned home from his farm and met his wife weeping profusely. His heart missed a beat at the sight of Aduke. He glanced at the baby, who was sleeping soundly on the bed. He looked at his wife. He dropped the basket of maize he was carrying. He sat beside her on the bed.

'Why are you crying?' asked Salako.

She wept the more, as if weeping was the answer to his question. Her eyes were bloodshot

'Tell me, Aduke,' he said, placing his left hand on her neck. 'Why are you weeping? What's the problem?'

She studied his facial expression. She could read his eagerness for a response. She knew her husband well enough. If there was something he particularly detested, it was being put on suspense.

'You know the reason already,' she said. 'The doctor said...I'll never...be pregnant again.' She sobbed.

He heaved a sigh of relief. His initial thought was that Aduke had received a tragic news. 'My dear, is that why you are weeping like this?' he said.

'Is that reason not enough?' she replied.

'No, no, no. You got the doctor's message completely wrong. What he said was that your womb is...introverted...'

'But that means I can never carry any pregnancy again.'

'No. That's not true. The doctor said that the defect can be corrected by an operation.'

At this point, reality dawned on Salako that he was merely consoling his wife, knowing really that he could not afford the expensive surgical operation.

She sobbed on, and said: 'My husband, you and I know that we cannot afford this operation. It is very costly, according to the doctor. So, am I to go to my grave having only one child? All the women in the neighbourhood have not less than four children. Mama Bola has four boys. Mama Akin has five children. Mama Sunday has six children. Mama Ibeji has five, and she is expecting a new baby...'

'Beware of envy, beware of envy,' Salako cut in, unimpressed by his wife's line of reasoning. 'Never worry, my darling,' he went on. 'Cheer up at all times. We must thank God. We have every cause to thank Him. One, our marriage is a success.'

She took a wrapper on the bed, and mopped her face with it.

'Another reason why we must thank God,' continued Salako, 'is for our child, Olusegun.' He caressed the baby on both cheeks. 'You gave birth to him safely. We heard the mother's voice. We heard the baby's voice. Also, I want you to know something. When there's life, there's hope. My late father used to tell me that as long as I'm alive, I must never lose hope. God has plans for everybody. Great plans. He will never abandon us.' He coughed. He went on: 'Let's focus on this child. Who knows? He can become a great man in future. A doctor. A lawyer. An accountant. An engineer. Or even a university professor. We only need to guide him on the right path. If it's the will of God for us to have more children, we surely will.'



She thanked him for his words of encouragement. She plucked up courage. She prayed often.

Aduke and Salako took a great care of Olusegun. They, however, avoided pampering him. Pampered children become spoilt, Salako would say.

Olusegun grew up rapidly. At the age of three, he started an infant school, popularly called *jeleosinmi* (let the house have peace) in Bare village. At five, he was enrolled at St John's Primary School, Bare. The school was acclaimed the best primary school out of the three public primary schools in the village. It was established many years back by the European missionaries, who came to Nigeria not only to introduce christianity but also to spread western education among the Nigerian citizens. It was built alongside St John's Catholic Church.

St John's Primary School teachers were famous for their diligence and discipline. They taught the pupils very well, and instilled discipline in them. Little wonder, some of the pupils of the school secured admission into good high schools and colleges in the city of Ibadan on the completion of their primary school education.

Olusegun never toyed with his books since he became a pupil of St John's Primary School. By 7.30 in the morning, his mother would have bathed him and dressed him up for school. He would take his breakfast, which was usually hot pap and *akara*. He would trek to school, which was not far from home.

He always came first in his class. At the end of every academic session, the school authorities of St John's Primary

School normally organised a Prize-Giving Day during which pupils who had excelled in their academic work in the course of the year were given prizes. Olusegun often won prizes on such occasions. As would be expected, his parents were glad over the honour their promising child was bestowing on them.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *A Happy Family*

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**A** DUKE snapped back to the present. It was getting dark. She tapped Olusegun gently on the shoulder. 'Olusegun...Olusegun...wake up!' she said.

He stirred awake. He yawned. His eyes were heavy. 'Mummy,' he said, not shifting from his position on the bed, 'I never knew I would sleep away. I only wanted to have a short rest before doing my homework.'

'That's sleep for you,' she said. She clapped her hands in order to kill a mosquito which buzzed around. She opened her palms to confirm whether she hit her target or not. She shook her head for narrowly missing it. 'Sleep catches you at its own will,' she said. 'And you can't cheat nature, can you?' She beamed at her beloved son, and continued: 'You must have enjoyed the sleep. You slept for three hours. At a point, I thought you've developed a fever. I have to wake you up. It's not good to sleep to the night. I do tell you this often.'

'You tell me often,' he admitted. 'But you haven't told me the reason.'

He collected himself. He sat on the bed, placing the pillow between his back and the wall in order to cushion the effect of the stony wall. He yawned again.

'The reason is simple,' she said. 'We do sleep at night, you know. So, why sleeping to the night? You can have a siesta. That's normal.'

'Has Daddy come?' he asked.

'No,' she responded. 'Trust your father. He enjoys farming the way a fish enjoys swimming.' She glanced at the wall clock. 'But he's a bit late today. He supposed to have come home by now.'

'I want to discuss something with him.'

'What do you want to discuss with him?' she asked.

'The common entrance form into the Junior Secondary School is out,' he said. 'The headmaster made the announcement during the morning assembly.' Slowly, he added: 'I will like to obtain the form.'

Surprise registered on Aduke's face. 'But you are still in primary five,' she said.

'That's true,' he said. 'The headmaster said the forms are for primary six pupils. But any primary five pupil who is sure of success can obtain the form and write the exam.'

The door opened. Salako entered. He wore his usual farming clothes—a brown shirt and a black pair of trousers. A cutlass was tucked under his armpit. Sweat covered him profusely. He looked worn out.

'You're the true son of your father,' Aduke said, standing up from the bed to welcome her husband. 'We just talked about you.'

They greeted him warmly.

'You're welcome Daddy,' Olusegun said. He prostrated himself.

'Olusegun, my beloved son,' Salako said. He drew Olusegun closer to himself. 'The child of greatness. The child of struggles. The child of promises. The apple of my eyes.'

Olusegun smiled. He glanced at her mother. She returned the smile. Salako moved to his wife. He kissed her chastely. 'My darling wife,' he said.

'How was farm today?' she asked.

'Very fine,' he responded.

'I doubt that. You didn't bring anything home.'

'Everyday is not Christmas. Or have you forgotten?' He shifted his gaze to Olusegun, and asked: 'How was school today?'

'School was fine,' Olusegun said. He fetched his father a cup of water. This was his usual practice of welcoming his father from the farm. Salako gulped it down with relish. He gave Olusegun the cup which had been emptied of its content.

'You stayed longer than usual in the farm today,' Aduke remarked.

'Yes,' Salako said. 'I couldn't help it. I told you in the morning that I had a lot of work to do in the farm today. I cleared the weedy plot of maize. I planted a congo of melon seeds. I made some ridges. A great deal of work,' he stressed. 'But it wasn't all work and no play. Baba Lolu kept my company, at a point in time. We roasted cobs of maize, and chatted away.'

Salako yanked his brown shirt off. It was covered with

sweat. He mopped his face with the shirt, and threw it on the bed. He tucked the cutlass in a corner of the room. He yawned.

Olusegun remembered the common entrance form. He eagerly wanted to inform his father about it. He checked himself, as he remembered his father's habits. After a hectic day on the farm, Salako would have a bath. He would take lunch or dinner, depending on his time of arriving home. He would then have a short rest. It was after then that any serious talk could have a place in his ears. Olusegun stood up. 'Let me fetch you a pail of water from the well, so that you can have a bath,' he said to Salako.

'Thank you, my son,' said Salako.

Olusegun left the spacious room. Most of the rooms in Bare village were spacious and well-ventilated. The villagers had sufficient tracts of land to build their mud and brick houses. There were two identifiable categories of people in the village: the villagers of reasonable income and those of low income. The villagers of reasonable income mostly lived in brick houses, while those in the low income bracket lived in mud houses. The Salakos fell into the former category. Salako could easily be described as an averagely successful farmer. He mastered the profession by following his late father to his farm while growing up. Unlike his siblings who loathed farming, Salako developed a great deal of interest in farming right from childhood. On settling down in Bare village, he acquired a plot of land to farm. He presently had three plots of land with which he grew maize, yam, vegetables, and other farm produce.

'What meal have you prepared, my darling wife?' Salako

asked.

'Your favourite meal. Pounded yam and *osiki* soup,' she answered.

He whistled with joy. 'My favourite food indeed,' he said. 'And my father's too. He was so fond of it that he once joked that he could eat poisoned pounded yam and *osiki* soup, provided it is delicious. He said he would then take an antidote after eating the poisoned food. Isn't that strange?'

They both laughed. They talked for a while. Soon after, Olusegun came to announce that the water was ready. Salako stood up and went to the bathroom.

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It was not until eight at night when Olusegun was able to discuss with his father. They had eaten their delicious supper. Salako had also taken a short rest to refresh himself. Olusegun entered Salako's room after knocking at the door. He met Salako lying on the bed and picking his teeth. Olusegun was a bit nervous. 'Olusegun,' Salako welcomed him. 'Have you come to chat with me?'

'Hem...ehm,' Olusegun stammered. 'Not really, Daddy I...I want to discuss something with you.'

'What's that?'

'The common entrance form is out.'

'Into Junior Secondary School?'

'Yes Daddy'

'I'm aware. My friend, Baba Lolu mentioned it today in the farm that his son, Lolu, who is now in primary six is writing the examination. Do you know Lolu?'

'Yes Daddy. He's short and dark in complexion. He's a member of the school's football team. He plays in the midfield. Everybody in the school knows him.'

'You're correct. Baba Lolu is never tired of talking about his son's football skills. He wants him to become a professional footballer, plying his trade in Europe. He want him to be sending pounds sterling and euros to him like Sunday Oliseh or Mutiu Adegboye or Stephen Keshi.' Salako smiled.

Silence prevailed between father and son.

'But you're still in primary five,' Salako broke the silence.

'Yes Daddy,' Olusegun said. 'On the assembly ground this morning, our headmaster, Mr Abdullaih said that any primary five pupil can also register for the exam as long as one is sure of oneself. He told us about a pupil who wrote the exam in primary five, and who is now in Ibadan Grammar School.'

'Mr Abdullaih said one must be sure of oneself?'

'Yes Daddy.'

'And are you sure of yourself?'

'I'm very sure of myself. The headmaster called me to his office this morning. He encouraged me to obtain the form. He said he's sure I can do very well in the examination, even at a year earlier than usual. He has known me over the years.'

'Mr Abdullaih summoned you to his office?'

'Yes.'



'And encouraged you to obtain the form?'

'Yes dad.'

Smile lit up Salako's face. 'That's really interesting,' he said.

'I'll give you the money.'

'You mean it!' Olusegun exclaimed. His spirit was buoyed up. He drew closer to Salako and gripped him by the right hand.

'I mean it,' Salako said. 'You're big in my eyes. And priceless. Getting the form for you is a small thing. A very small thing.'

'I'm very grateful sir,' he said, prostrating himself.

Aduke entered Salako's room, almost immediately. 'Who shouted now?' she asked.

Olusegun said he was the one. He hugged Aduke. 'Daddy has agreed to pay for the common entrance form. Please, thank him.'

'Thank you, my darling husband,' she said.

'Let's thank God,' Salako said.

'How great it will be for my son to be in a college in Ibadan city,' she said. 'At the boarding school. Coming to Bare only during the long holidays. Oh, I'll feel on top of the world.'

'He'll be there,' Salako said. 'All he needs to do is to work hard. Admission into a good college in Ibadan is competitive.'

'I trust my son,' Aduke said. 'He's very hardworking and quite ambitious.'

'I trust him too. He should not relent in his studies; that's just it.'

Olusegun promised to put in his best. He slept soundly that



## CHAPTER THREE



### *Preparation for the Exam*

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**O**LUSEGUN buckled down to his studies as soon as he obtained the common entrance form. He worked hard. To aid his preparation, Salako bought some essential textbooks for him. His dream was to secure admission to Government College Ibadan (GCI). GCI was among the most prestigious colleges in Ibadan, and even in Nigeria in the 1990s. It prided itself in admitting the best pupils around. It made no provision for mediocre pupils.

St John's Primary School's headmaster, Mr Abdullahi, a tall, lanky man, assisted Olusegun in filling in the form. He urged him to select GCI as his first choice of college. Mr Abdullahi knew how academically excellent and morally disciplined GCI was.

On the day the form was filled in, he advised Olusegun at length. He had summoned him to his spacious, neat office. The office was painted in cream colour. Files and two giant trophies were placed on the office shelves. 'Your parents have done their part by paying for this examination,' he said. 'The ball is now in your

court. To state the fact, you're one of the best pupils in this school. Since I became the headmaster of this school five years ago, no pupil has ever gained admission to GCI. It is competitive, no doubt. But where there's a will, there's a way. Keep that in mind. You can break that record. I shall say no more for now,'he concluded.

Olusegun thanked Mr Abdullaih for his advice. He began reading intensively. It got to a point that his father told him not to overwork himself. It was on a Saturday evening. Salako had just returned from the farm. He was surprised to meet his son reading. He had left him reading when leaving for the farm in the morning. On his return , Olusegun still bent double over his books.

'Olusegun!' Salako called in an angry tone. 'You're still reading!'

'Yes Daddy,'Olusegun said, and prostrated himself. He motioned to assist Salako in carrying a sack which Salako balanced on his right shoulder. 'You must be tired,' he said.

Salako said curtly: 'You read too much, Olusegun. Too much for my liking. If you continue like this, you may break down.'

Olusegun dropped his eyes. He felt his father was terribly annoyed. He felt bad.

'I love hardwork,' Salako went on. 'But I hate overworking. Too much of anything is bad.'

'I'm sorry dad,' Olusegun said, in a barely audible voice.

Salako smiled, much to Olusegun's relief. 'You think I'm annoyed with you?' he said. 'Not at all. You've lost weight while



The Headmaster advised Olusegun in his office

preparing for the common entrance examination. Take it cool. Life is simple. What God wants to be will surely be. Don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting that you should relax, or be lazy. Far from it. What I'm saying is that you don't have to overdo things. Eat well. Sleep well. Rest well. Work hard. And play too. All work and no play...'

'Make Jack a dull boy,' Olusegun completed the proverb. He thanked his father. He promised to heed his advice.

Salako dropped the sack on the floor, and sat on a chair. 'I harvested some cobs of maize today,' he said. He loosened the sack, and emptied its contents on the floor.

'The cobs of maize are big,' Olusegun observed. He salivated over the thought of eating maize soon.

'Yes, big indeed. You know we're in the rainy season. That must have made the cobs of maize to be big. Tell your mum to cook some of the maize now and keep some that will be cooked with beans tomorrow.'

'Okay sir.'

xxx

Olusegun had a friend named Wale. Their houses were a stone's throw from each other. They played together in the neighbourhood. They attended the same school. They even looked alike. They were both broad-faced, chocolate in complexion, and of roughly the same heights. Their major contrast was their academic abilities. While Olusegun was exceptionally brilliant, Wale was

only an average student. He often brought arithmetic sums for Olusegun to solve for him at home.

Olusegun really loved Wale. It was Wale who gave him the nickname, "Professor" on the very day his class teacher told the pupils the meaning of the word. Wale said that Olusegun would likely grow up to become a university professor. The nickname became popular with Olusegun's schoolmates. Wale's mother and Aduke were also good friends.



## CHAPTER FOUR



### *Excellent Examination Result*

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**T**IME and tide wait for no man. The day of the common entrance examination came. Olusegun wrote the examination at a college in the city of Ibadan. The primary six pupils of St John's Primary School wrote the examination at the same centre.

The day which followed the examination day was a Saturday. It was not until Monday that Mr Abdullaih was able to see Olusegun. As soon as the morning assembly was over, he called Olusegun to his office.

'Good morning sir,' Olusegun bowed low to Mr Abdullaih on entering the headmaster's office. The pupils normally bowed low to salute their teachers in the school. Prostration was not permitted in the school because the contact with the bare floor during prostration stained the pupils' school uniforms.

Mr Abdullaih was glad to see him. 'Oh, Olusegun Salako,' he said. 'How are you?'

'I'm fine sir,' Olusegun replied.

'How are your parents?'

'They're doing fine sir.'

'You can have your seat.'

Olusegun sat down on the chair placed in front of Mr Abdullaih's seat. He felt a bit nervous. He had entered the office several times in the past. But that was the second time he would be asked to sit down. The first time was when Mr Abdullaih assisted him to fill in the common entrance examination form.

A male pupil entered the office. This steadied Olusegun's nerves. The pupil greeted Mr Abdullaih, and rested his eyes on Olusegun as if he was seeing him for the first time.

'Tunde Coker,' Mr Abdullaih addressed the boy. He knew the names of majority of the pupils. 'Can I help you?'

'I...excuse me sir,' Tunde Coker said, 'I come to collect chalk. We don't have any chalk again in the class.'

'What class are you?'

'Primary four sir.'

'I've told you pupils not to answer questions in phrases. Answer in sentences.'

'I'm in primary four sir.'

'Better. Are you the class captain?'

'Yes sir.'

'Who is your class teacher?'

'Mr Salawu... Oh sorry, my class teacher is Mr Salawu.'

'Okay. Pick a few pieces of chalk from the carton there,' Mr Abdullaih said, pointing in a direction of the office. 'Tell Mr Salawu to see me during the break time so that I can give him a carton of



chalk for your class use.'

'Okay sir,' Tunde Coker said. He picked a fistful of chalk, stole a quick glance at Olusegun, and walked briskly out of the office. By this time, Olusegun had recovered his composure. Mr Abdullaih said: 'You might have guessed the reason for calling you. How was the Friday examination?'

'I found the examination easy sir,' Olusegun said brimming with confidence. 'Most especially the Arithmetic and Basic Science, my best subjects.'

'Really?'

'Yes sir. I put in my best.'

'You're sure of gaining admission to GCI?'

'By the special grace of God sir. I'm very sure of success.'

Mr Abdullaih shifted his gaze from Olusegun to a colourful calendar which was hung on the wall. 'In a month's time or so, the results will be released,' he said.

Olusegun did not say anything.

'You can go,' Mr Abdullaih rounded off. 'I wish you the best of luck.'

'Thank you sir.'

xxx

The common entrance examination results were released barely a month after the examination. Mr Abdullaih was at the Oyo State Ministry of Education, Ibadan on a Monday morning to collect the results of St John's Primary School pupils. He set off

early. He arrived at the Secretariat by 9 a.m.

He was direct to an office where he would collect the results. The office was stuffy and crowded. The ceiling fan was rolling, but it had little effect on the heat in the office. Several headmasters and headmistresses were in the office to receive the results of their various primary schools. Mr Abdullaih collected a broad sheet which contained the results of St John's Primary School pupils.

In his quick survey of the result, Mr Abdullaih was impressed by the pupils' general performance. The pupils' names were arranged in the order of their performance in the examination. His eyes widened with excitement as he saw Olusegun Salako's name on top of the list. He read the comments written on Olusegun's result. He made the average score of 83 percent His result was the best at St John's Primary School and the ninth best in Oyo State. He was offered a provisional admission to the highly rated GCI. Many other pupils also did wonderfully well, and were placed in several high schools and colleges in Ibadan.

On getting back to the school, Mr Abdullaih broke the news to the teachers. They were impressed by the pupils' results. The following morning, Mr Abdullaih excitedly made the announcement on the assembly ground, after the completion of the singing of the school anthem, the national anthem, and the reciting of the national pledge. 'The common entrance examination results have been released,' he announced.

There was a commotion on the assembly ground. The school's time-keeper got hold of the bell, and rang it vigorously. Orderliness was temporarily restored. Mr Abdullaih continued: 'I'm

pleased to inform you that the general performance was impressive. The pupils did wonderfully well.'

'Eh...eh...eh!' the pupils shouted excitedly. The primary six pupils were the loudest.

A commotion again.

The ringing of the bell.

Silence.

'Give the primary six pupils a round of applause,' Mr Abdullaih said.

The pupils clapped.

'Yes,' Mr Abdullaih said. 'We're proud of them. One pupil did so well in the examination. He scored an average score of 83 percent. He has been offered an admission to one of the best colleges in Nigeria today, Government College Ibadan. To crown it all, his result was the ninth best in Oyo State.'

A round of applause.

Silence.

Olusegun was yet to receive the news of his excellent performance in the common entrance examination. He became tense. 'Could it be me?' he said inwardly.

'You want to know the pupil?' Mr Abdullaih said.

'Y..e...e...e...e...s,' the pupils chorused.

'He is Olusegun Salako, primary five.'

Olusegun's heart missed a beat.

'Olusegun Salako, please come forward,' Mr Abdullaih said.

Olusegun moved forward to face the assembly.

'The Professor...Segun Segun...Segestic...*Efiko*...

Bookworm,' the pupils hailed Olusegun, who was very excited and glad.

'This boy has really done us proud,' Mr Abdullaih said. 'St John Primary School's popularity has increased. Oh, I'm so glad...'

Spontaneously, the pupils broke into the school anthem:

*I'm so glad*

*I belong to St John,*

*I belong to St John,*

*I belong to a great school,*

*I'm so glad*

*I belong to St John*

*I belong to St John*

*I belong to a great school.'*

Mr Abdullaih smiled warmly, and waved them to silence.

'Thank you, my pupils,' he said. 'You're all wonderful boys and girls. As I was saying, we are proud of him, and all the primary six pupils.'

The praising continued for a while. Olusegun was so flattered that at a point, he felt his head would burst like a deflated balloon. Not long after, Mr Abdullaih dismissed the assembly. Some of Olusegun's friends clustered around him, and congratulated him on his success.

When the news of Olusegun's success got to his parents, they were excited. Aduke danced about the compound, swaying her buttocks. Salako had expected his son to pass the examination. But

he did not expect such an outstanding performance .

Walls have ears. In no time, the news of Olusegun's performance in the examination had spread throughout Bare village. Salako's friends came to congratulate him the following evening on his son's success.

'We must celebrate Olusegun's success,' one of Salako's friends said. He was a tall, balding man, with a remarkably big nose. His discoloured left hand showed that he had a skin condition. He had a high sense of humour. Whenever he visited Salako, Olusegun would hang around to enjoy their conversation. 'Many pupils failed the exam,' the man continued. 'Your son wrote it a year earlier than usual, and still passed with flying colours. This calls for a celebration.'

'Yes oh,' another friend said. 'Baba Segun must wet our throats today. By fire, by force.'

Salako ordered for a keg of palmwine from a local palmwine tapper. He sent Aduke to buy bushmeat at the market. He spent the evening with his friends.

Wale also came to congratulate his bosom friend on his success. 'Congratulations,' Wale said.

'Thank you, my good friend,' Olusegun said.

'So you will soon leave for the city and leave me alone in the village.'

'Such is life. Twenty children cannot play together for twenty years, so goes a Yoruba proverb. But don't worry. We shall see during the long holidays.'

'But that's not every day, is it?'

'Don't worry. If you pass your exams very well, you could join me in GCI in the next academic session.'

Wale reflected on this. 'That's true,' he said. 'If I pass well, I may be admitted to GCI.'

'Yes, of course.'

They played together till evening before Wale went home.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *The Accident*

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**T**WO weeks after the release of the common entrance examination results, Olusegun received a letter inviting him for an interview at GCI. The interview was fixed for the end of the month. He got the letter through Mr Abdullaih. All the successful primary six pupils also got their letters inviting them for interviews to be held in the various schools which offered them provisional admissions.

Mr Abdullaih was surprised that the interview was another hurdle Olusegun must cross before he could become a bona fide student of GCI. He knew that the conducting of interviews for pupils was normal. He did it in his own time, several years ago. But he had thought that Olusegun's outstanding would have waived the interview for him. This was not to be so. It was clearly stated in the letter that the interview was compulsory for every placed pupil.

One of the school's teachers, Mr Agomo was asked to coach Olusegun and some other pupils for the interview. Mr Agomo was a short, thickset man, who hailed from the eastern part of Nigeria

where he grew up. He attended a teachers' training college in Ibadan. Upon the successful completion of the programme, he got a job with the Oyo State Ministry of Education, and has taught in various primary schools across the state. He was posted to St John's Primary School, Bare as a primary school teacher barely a year ago. His popularity rating with the pupils was quite low, as a result of his eagerness to inflict corporal punishment on any pupil who committed one offence or the other. He coached Olusegun and the other pupils he was asked to train well. Some other teachers were assigned the responsibility of coaching the other placed pupils. They all benefitted from the coaching.

Mr Abdullaih asked Olusegun's class teacher, Mr Edet to take him to GCI on the interview day. Olusegun woke up early enough on the day. He prayed for a few minutes. He took his bath. He took bread and fried egg as breakfast. His father gave him some money for transportation and refreshments. As earlier arranged, he walked to Mr Edet's house, which was roughly ten minutes' walk from Salako's house.

Mr Edet was already awaiting Olusegun's arrival in his living room. 'You're welcome, 'he said, as Olusegun greeted him. 'How was the night?'

'Fine sir,'Olusegun answered. He surveyed the living room. It contained a radio set, a few chairs and a reading table.

A pretty girl came to the living room. She was Olusegun's age mate. She wore a neat skirt and blouse. Her hair was plaited in a popular Yoruba hairstyle, *koroba*.



'Good!' Mr Edet said excitedly to Ngozi. 'This is the brilliant pupil I told you about.'

'You mean the one who got the best result at St John's Primary School in the last common entrance examination?' Ngozi said.

'Yes, you're correct,' Mr Edet said. 'Olusegun Salako, the talk of the village.'

'That's great,' Ngozi said, gazing at Olusegun in admiration.

'Congrats,' she said, shaking hands with Olusegun.

'Thanks,' Olusegun said.

'Take a proper care of the house,' Mr Edet said to Ngozi. 'You must keep Junior and Henry busy. No playing around.'

Mr Edet was a widower. His wife died of breast cancer a few years ago. Her untimely death added a shade of responsibilities on Ngozi's young shoulders. She took a good care of her two younger brothers whenever Mr Edet was not at home.

'Yes Daddy,' she said. 'When will you be back?'

'Latest by 4 p.m,' Mr Edet said. 'All things being equal.'

'Bye bye,' Ngozi waved at Olusegun.

'Bye bye,' Olusegun waved back.

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Olusegun and Mr Edet took a commercial bus from Bare village to Alomaja. From there, they took a taxi to Ring Road, a noiseless, affluent area in Ibadan. On getting down from the taxi, they were greeted by the serenity of the place. Olusegun knew without being told that the area was occupied by the well-to-do. He

wished that his parents resided in such an attractive area. However, he consoled himself that when he grew up, he would live in such an area.

Olusegun and Mr Edet stood at Ring Road bus stop. They waited for the bus that would convey them to Apata, where GCI was located. Mr Edet looked at his left hand. 'Oh my God!' he said.

'What happened sir?' Olusegun asked.

'I forgot my wrist watch on the table. We are not sure of the time now.'

He asked of the time from a young man passing by. The young man wore a white T-shirt, a pair of black jeans, and a pair of tennis shoes.

'I beg your pardon?' the young man said.

'Please what says your time?' Mr Edet repeated the question.

The young man smiled. 'The wrist watch in my hand is merely for decoration,' he said. 'It's not working. It's only for posing. Ladies admire smartly-dressed guys, you know.'

Olusegun and Mr Edet were amused. Mr Edet wanted to ask the young man another question, but he changed his mind. He asked of the time again from another passer-by, a lady this time around. It was 9.10 a.m.

'We still have 50 minutes,' Mr Edet said. 'The interview commences by 10 a.m.'

A bus came along. The bus driver applied the brakes, while the bus conductor alighted from the bus and shouted: 'Apata, Apata, Apata. Two more people to go. Only two more people.'

Mr Edet, Olusegun, and a couple of other people hopped

into the bus. To their dismay, they were among the first five passengers in the bus.

'Those bus conductors tell lies freely,' one of the passengers remarked.

From the onset, the driver was reckless in his driving. He drove roughly, and on top speed, as if he was in a hurry to get to his destination. He overtook other vehicles at will. The passengers complained about his driving.

'*Oga* driver, take it easy,' one female passenger said.

'This speed is too much. Are we going beyond Ibadan?' another passenger said.

'If you're ready to die, I'm not ready oh,' said another passenger.

'When you're tired of shouting, you'll keep quiet,' the driver said.

'Why did we enter this bus, for God's sake?' Mr Edet said.

'Is this man drunk?' another passenger said.

'It's you that is drunk,' the driver said, not looking back, fumbling with the steering.

'It's your father and mother that are drunk', the passenger retorted.

For the first time in the course of the driving, the driver looked back, and shouted at the passenger: 'My father and mother? Are you crazy?'

In the process of doing that, he lost his concentration. The bus swerved off the road and hit an electric pole by the roadside. The bus somersaulted and landed in a gutter.



**Casualties were rushed to the hospital**

Another motor accident!

Passers-by promptly came to the rescue of the victims. The driver died on the spot, as the electric pole had a direct impact on him. Many of the victims were unconscious. They all sustained varying degrees of serious injuries. Blood stained the seat of the bus. In no time, the accident spot had become crowded. A few Good Samaritans volunteered their cars to convey the casualties to the nearest hospital. The victims were pulled from the wreckage, in their different states of unconsciousness. They were rushed to a hospital.

A pressman arrived at the accident scene. He was actually heading for a meeting. The crowd aroused his journalistic instinct. He parked his official car, and joined the crowd. He was with a portable camera and a tape recorder. He promptly took a few photographs of the scene. He approached a man for an interview. The man was on the fringe of the crowd. He put on the tape recorder, and drew it close to the man's face.

'I'm Mr Johnson Idowu from *Daily Star* newspaper,' he introduced himself to the man. He showed the man his identity card. The man frowned his face and asked: 'What can I do for you?'

As an experienced journalist, Mr Idowu was used to such a cold reception from people he wanted to interview. He smiled at the man and said: 'Sir, did you witness the accident? I want to know what led to it.'

'I'm yet to see a set of people as heartless as you pressmen,' the man said bluntly, after a pause. 'People are dying, and your own concern is...'

'No sir,' Mr Idowu cut in. 'Sorry to interrupt you, but I need to correct you without any delay. Contrary to what you said, we pressmen are not heartless. Many of us are very kind. But we're always concerned with the facts and details of incidents. We believe that these facts and details will be useful to the society.'

'Useful to the society in what ways?' asked the man.

'I will need to know all that happened here,' continued Mr Idowu. 'How the accident took place, the casualties, and some other important questions. I'll then take the information to my office and develop a report of the incident. The news will be out latest tomorrow morning in *Daily Star*, so that the relatives of these casualties can get to know of the accident. The family members and relations of the casualties will get to know of the accident. And act promptly.'

The man relaxed. Mr Idowu's explanation reassured him. He gave Mr Idowu as much information as he knew on the accident.

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The casualties were taken to Okeowo Hospital, Apata, Ibadan. It was a private hospital owned by a medical doctor, Dr Jide Okeowo. Dr Okeowo had worked with the federal government in two federal medical centres, before establishing his private clinic. The late driver was taken to the mortuary of the hospital. The other casualties were admitted to the hospital ward. Mr Edet broke his arm while Olusegun seriously injured his legs. They were given beds in the ward. The casualties groaned in pain. Two Good

Samaritans deposited money for the treatment of the casualties.  
Treatment commenced on them in earnest.



## CHAPTER SIX



### *What Has Happened to Olusegun?*

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**B**ACK in Bare village, Olusegun's parents were pensive. It was 6 p.m. Olusegun and Mr Edet were yet to return from GCI. Salako did not go to farm on the day. He rested. Ngozi had come earlier to ask if Olusegun had returned home, as her father, Mr Edet was yet to be back at home. When she came for the first time, she seemed composed. However, she looked visibly worried when she came for the second time, around 5.30 p.m. Mr Edet's neighbour, Mama Sayo came with her. They all stood in front of Salako's house.

'Is GCI far like that?' Mama Sayo asked.

'It's in Apata,' Salako said. 'It's not very far.'

'Daddy said he will be back latest by 4 p.m.,' Ngozi said. 'It's already some minutes before 6 p.m.'

'I hope no tragedy has befallen my son,' Aduke said.

'They'll be back safely,' Salako said. He was the only man among the four people. He needed to behave like a man. Deep within him, he was anxious.



Not long after, two men drew closer to them. Their faces were not familiar, as they relocated to Bare village a couple of months ago. One was short, while the other was a tall man. The short man carried a black polythene bag. The smartness of their dressing showed they were likely coming from the city. They spoke aloud as they walked.

'Motor accident!' said Tall Man. 'That's one of the things that scare me most in the world.'

'And me too,' said Short Man. 'Just look at the number of casualties. Blood was everywhere. *Sheih!* I doubt if I'll be able to sleep tonight.'

'We villagers envy the beauty of the city. See the irony of life. No rest of mind in the city. Here in the village, we have peace of mind.'

'You can say that again. The accident was terrible.'

'Very terrible.'

By this time, they had drawn closer to Salako and others.

'Come, my two friends,' Salako called them. He held Tall Man's left hand rather jerkily. 'What did you say happen in the city today?' he asked.

'A terrible accident,' said Short Man. 'A commercial bus hit an electric pole. The driver died on the spot. Other passengers survived. They've been rushed to the hospital.'

'Where did the accident happen?' Salako asked.

'Very close to Apata,' Short Man replied.

'*Mo ku o!*' Aduke screamed, rolling on the floor. 'I'm dead oh! My son went to Apata.'

Ngozi burst into tears. 'My daddy...my daddy,' she sobbed. Mama Sayo held her closely.

'Take it easy,' Salako said, helping Aduke to her feet. 'Relax. What gives you the impression that they were involved in the accident?'

'But you heard him,' Aduke said, sobbing. 'The accident took place in Apata. And GCI is in Apata.' She rolled again on the floor.

Salako asked the men the name of the hospital which the casualties were taken to. They informed him. The men were familiar with Apata, having lived there for a few years. He appealed to one of the men to escort him there. Short Man volunteered. He gave the polythene bag in his possession to Tall Man. 'Explain everything to Alhaji,' he said. 'I should be back tonight. If it gets too late, I'll pass the night at Kola's house and come back tomorrow morning.'

'Okay,' Tall Man said.

Mama Sayo said that she would follow them on one condition. She would quickly go to inform her husband at home, and would join them shortly. Ngozi would have loved to follow Salako and Aduke to Apata, but she had to take care of her siblings. Salako advised Aduke to stay at home, but she bluntly refused. 'I must know my son's fate,' she said.

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Okeowo Hospital was a big, popular hospital in Apata. Short Man

located it effortlessly. An ambulance and two cars were parked in the hospital premises. Salako exchanged greetings with a nurse, who was at the entrance of the hospital when Salako and others arrived. She was on her way home, having completed her duty for the day.

'Please nurse,' Salako said, 'do you know where the casualties are? I mean the casualties of the motor accident which took place just by the Mobil filling station today.' He tried in vain to mask his anxiety.

'A few hours ago?' said the nurse.

'Yes nurse,' said Short Man.

'Are you relatives of one of them?' asked the nurse.

'Yes nurse,' said Salako. 'Two of them actually. But we want to confirm first.'

The nurse knew how anxious she would be if she were in their shoes. She answered them promptly: 'They are receiving treatment in the ward at the first floor.'

They climbed the staircase with growing apprehension. They reached the door of the hospital ward. A medical doctor attended to them. He said that only two people could be allowed in at a time, in accordance with the hospital's rules and regulations. Olusegun's parents entered the hospital ward, while Mama Sayo and Short Man waited for them by the entrance. Mama Sayo and Short Man joined a few other people sitting on the long chairs which were placed by the entrance of the first floor of the hospital.

In the hospital ward, a doctor stayed by a patient, and treated him or her. Olusegun's parents looked anxiously for their son.

Aduke noticed that a boy of Olusegun's height and shape lay on the bed in a corner of the ward. He was naked but for a pair of tennis shorts. His legs were heavily bandaged. They moved to the corner. The doctor treating the boy was bent double over him, examining his legs. He looked up. He wore a pair of medicated glasses. Olusegun's parents surveyed the boy.

'Olusegun! Olusegun!' Aduke exclaimed. She made to grip the barely conscious boy. The doctor resisted her move.

'Take it easy, woman,' the doctor said firmly.

Salako was also greatly relieved. Aduke's fear was allayed. She had feared all the while that her son was dead. She looked heavenwards, and said: 'I thank you Lord. My Lord, you're so good. You're great. You're super.'

One of the male doctors, who had observed the scene, said to a female doctor closest to him. 'She's so happy.'

'What do you expect?' said the female doctor. 'Mothers are wonderful. When you consider the pains of giving birth, she has every cause to be glad.'

Mr Edet was also spotted not long after. His arm was bandaged, and his jaw was plastered. His eyes were closed. His mouth was open in order to aid proper breathing. His breathing was laboured. The doctor treating him placed a stethoscope on his chest.

Aduke went out to break the good news to Mama Sayo and Short Man. They were happy. While Aduke stayed briefly outside, Mama Sayo entered the ward, purposely to confirm the state Mr

Edet was. This would enable her to give Mr Edet's family concrete information when she returned to the village.

Not long after, Short Man said he wanted to return to the village. Mama Sayo decided to leave with him. Aduke thanked them for their great concern.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *The Admission at Okeowo Hospital*

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**M**R Edet and Olusegun were admitted to the hospital. Their relatives visited them regularly. Olusegun's parents usually brought food. But Olusegun hardly touched the fruits, and even the food. His appetite had become poor.

Mr Edet's relatives also came to the hospital on Saturdays. Most of the time, it was Ngozi, and Mr Edet's younger sister, Auntie Carol who brought him food, clothes and other necessary items. Auntie Carol stayed in Challenge area in Ibadan. She was still a spinster. She lived alone in a self-contained apartment. As earlier arranged, Ngozi would go to Auntie Carol's apartment in Challenge area on Saturdays, and the two of them would go to Okeowo Hospital. Whenever they came to the hospital, Ngozi hardly stayed by her father's hospital bed. She would sit on a chair placed beside Olusegun's hospital bed.

At first, Olusegun's response to treatment was not quite encouraging. He could hardly talk. He only motioned his head. Whenever his parents visited him, his eyes would be wide open. He

would stare at them. He would neither speak, nor make any attempt to speak.

'Olusegun,' Aduke said one day, during one of the visits. 'Can you see me?'

The eyes were open

Silence.

'I said can you see me?' she repeated.

Olusegun remained motionless.

'God! My son is now deaf and dumb,' she sobbed. 'Oh, my son...'

'Keep quiet,' Salako snapped. 'My son is not deaf and dumb. He'll still talk. It's a matter of time.'

Salako was proved right. Not long after, Olusegun regained his power of speech, and became conscious. He smiled and also laughed occasionally. He was happy to see his parents again. However, his heavily bandaged legs gave his parents an additional cause of worry. He could hardly unaided. Whenever he needed to use the toilet or take his bath, he used crutches.

Salako had a discussion with Olusegun's doctor exactly ten days after Olusegun's admission to the hospital.

'Our doctor, may I know your name?' Salako asked.

'I'm sorry not to have told you since,' the doctor said. 'I'm Doctor Laore.'

'Doctor Laore,' Salako said. 'That's a beautiful name.'

'Thank you.'

'I really appreciate all your efforts on my son. Only God can reward you adequately.'

'You're welcome.'

'One thing bothers me about this boy,' Salako said, pointing at Olusegun's legs. 'His legs.'

Doctor Laore smiled. 'He had bruises which are healing out,' he said. 'He also had a dislocation in his left leg. That will take some time to heal out. Two weeks at least. Just relax. All will be well. It's only a matter of time.'

'You mean there is no problem?'

'No cause for alarm. When he's discharged, he'll walk out of this hospital with his two legs without any problem, by God's grace. Just pay your hospital bills, and be full of prayers.'

Olusegun's parents thanked Doctor Laore.

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Ngozi was happy to hear that Olusegun could now speak well. Her father too was responding well to treatment. The next time she and Auntie Carol came to the hospital, she sat on the chair beside Olusegun's hospital bed. He was asleep. She did not want to disturb him. She started to pray for his legs to heal fast.

Olusegun coughed. His eyes opened. They were bloodshot. He strained his eyes to catch a glimpse of the person sitting on the chair beside the bed. He recognized her after some efforts.

'Ngozi,' he said.

'Yes, Olusegun,' Ngozi said. 'I'm the one.'

He beamed at her. He was happy that his age-mate had come to keep his company. He cleared his face with his palm. He





Ngozi sat beside Olusegun on the hospital bed

raised his body from sleeping position. He motioned himself, straining his face in pain. He sat on the bed. 'You have come to visit your dad?' he said.

'Yes,' she replied. 'I've been coming regularly. This is the first time you're strong enough to talk to me.'

'Thanks for the visit,' he said.

Silence prevailed between them.

'I'm sorry for all I caused to your dad,' he broke the silence.

'Never mind,' she said. 'That's how God wants it to happen. What will be will be.' She paused. She greeted a nurse who passed by. The nurse's beauty and the smartness of her uniform fascinated her. 'At the end, you missed the interview,' she said.

'I missed it,' Olusegun said, shaking his head sadly. 'That's the most painful side of it all. There's no way I can be admitted to GCI this year again.'

'You never can tell.'

'That's the situation, Ngozi. I've missed the interview already. The interview is compulsory. This is my second week at the hospital. The new academic session is around the corner.'

Nobody spoke for a while.

'Don't be unduly disturbed about that,' she advised.

'Thank you,' he said.

She gazed at his legs. They were not as heavily bandaged as the first week of his admission in the hospital. He correctly read her thought.

'The pain in the legs has reduced,' he said. 'According to the doctor, when the accident happened, I went down on my two legs.'

That caused the dislocation. I thank God I'm much relieved now.'

Doctor Laore materialised. Ngozi greeted him, kneeling down. 'Fine girl,' said Doctor Laore. 'Are you his classmate?'

The question took her unawares. 'Not really sir,' she said. 'I'm Mr Edet's daughter.'

'I see.'

Doctor Laore checked Olusegun's temperature. 'You need a complete bed rest,' he said. 'You see, every part of our body is connected in one way or the other. This mouth is connected to the legs. By using the mouth, you're indirectly using the legs.'

Olusegun and Ngozi were surprised by the piece of information.

'Don't worry,' Doctor Laore said. 'You'll know all these when you get to higher levels of education. Do any of you want to become a medical doctor?'

'I want to become a doctor,' Olusegun said promptly.

'I don't want to become a doctor,' Ngozi said. 'I can't stand the sight of blood. I want to become a banker.'

Doctor Laore smiled. 'The girl who loves money,' he said.

They all laughed heartily.

'Olusegun,' Doctor Laore said, 'I'll be back in two hours' time.'

'Alright sir,' Olusegun said.

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Mr Abdullaih had been away from the village for a week. He

went for the annual Headmasters and Headmistresses' Conference in Kaduna State in the northern part of Nigeria. Incidentally, he travelled to Kaduna State on the day Olusegun and Mr Edet got involved in the motor accident.

He was sad when he heard of what happened to Olusegun and Mr Edet. A day after his arrival at the village, he visited them at the hospital. They were happy to see him. He stayed long enough. As parting words, he advised Olusegun to cheer up. He gave him a parcel.

No sooner had Mr Abdullaih left the hospital than Olusegun opened the parcel. It contained a new T-shirt, two story books and some money. He was excited. He started to read one of the story books, *The Broken Pot and Other Stories*.

Olusegun got discharged from the hospital three weeks after he was admitted. He had regained his health. Mr Edet was discharged a few days earlier. He too was now healthy and strong. Ngozi came to say goodbye to Oluseun on the day her father was discharged. She smiled at him, and said: 'I wish you a quick recovery.'

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *The Discharged*

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**O**LUSEGUN'S joy knew no bounds on the day he was to be discharged from the hospital. Doctor Laore had informed his parents in their previous visit that he would be discharged on that day. He had longed to leave the hospital. The nurses and doctors were marvellous. The hospital environment was attractive. But he was bored. He longed to set his eyes on Bare village, and his friends and schoolmates again. Absence, they say, makes the heart grow fonder.

'Olusegun,' Aduke said, 'we're going home today.'

'I've been told by Doctor Laore,' Olusegun said. He had packed his things in a roomy bag. He could not wait to leave the hospital. He observed a basket of oranges his father had placed on the floor.

'Who is this basket of oranges for?' Olusegun asked his mother.

'For your doctor,' Aduke replied. 'The man is really kind. We got them from Bare.'

Doctor Laore entered the ward. He wore a spotless white coat and a pair of white gloves. He moved to Olusegun. They all exchanged greetings.

Doctor Laore smiled at Olusegun. 'He'll be discharged today,' he informed Aduke and Salako.

'Yes doctor,' Salako said happily. 'We're most grateful for all your help. If not for you, who knows what could have happened to him? We shall forever be grateful.'

'Don't mention,' Doctor Laore said. 'It's my duty to treat my patients.'

Aduke gave him the basket of oranges. 'This is to show our appreciation for all you've done.'

'A whole basket of oranges,' Doctor Laore said.

'A basket of oranges is very small, compared with saving a boy's life,' Salako said.

'Thank you very much,' said Doctor Laore. 'My kids will love this. They like oranges.'

A man came to deliver a message to the doctor. The man stooped as he walked. He cut a figure of a messenger in the hospital. 'Take this to my office,' Doctor Laore said to the man, pointing at the basket of oranges. 'And tell Nurse Tade to come with the discharge notebook immediately.'

The stooping man carried the basket of oranges on his shoulder. He left the ward.

'Which birth position does Olusegun take in the family?' Doctor Laore asked.

'He's our first child,' Salako said.

'I see,' said Doctor Laore.

They chatted for a short while. Nurse Tade came with the discharge notebook. Doctor Laore took it from her. He gave it to Salako, who signed that his son was to be discharged from the hospital on that day, 5<sup>th</sup> of July, 1992. Doctor Laore also signed to confirm the discharge. The nurse retrieved the book and left.

Doctor Laore glanced at the wall-clock in the ward. 'My attention is needed at the operating theatre now,' he said. 'Olusegun must rest well, and eat well. He must train his legs by exercising his body regularly. That's very essential. Try to cheer him up. No room for brooding. The devil is dead.'

'Thank you doctor,' Olusegun's parents chorused.

Doctor Laore patted Olusegun at the shoulders, and said: 'Such is life, 'Segun. Bye for now. Good luck to you, as you march on and struggle through life.'

'Thank you sir,' Olusegun said.

Salako carried the bag for his son. They bade farewell to the people around and left the hospital.

## CHAPTER NINE

### *A Touching Story*

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**W**HEN Olusegun and his parents got back home, friends and well-wishers came to greet them. They all sat on the floor in the spacious, barely furnished sitting room. They chatted at length with Olusegun. Many of them had one piece of advice or another to give the family. The most memorable of all was Baba Ijose's advice.

Baba Ijose was easily the richest man in the village. He had three houses in Bare village and two in the city of Ibadan. He had the largest farm in the village. He was the first man to own a car in the village. His long stay there was as a result of his emotional ties with village. However, most of the villagers respected him more for his wisdom and high sense of humour than for his wealth.

He raised his right hand up after others had spoken. This action reminded Olusegun of how he and his classmates always did in school whenever they wanted to answer questions asked by their teachers.

'Baba, you don't need to raise up your hand,' one fat woman



said. 'You're free to talk.'

'My daughter,' Baba Ijose began, 'I'm like the tortoise. I do my things formally. When the tortoise wants to steal your yams in your farm, he'll first ask you to give him some yams from the farm. It is when you refuse to give him that he'll use his tricks to rob you of your yams. You get the message?'

The fat woman nodded. Some people in the sitting room laughed.

Baba Ijose brought out a handkerchief from the pocket of the pair of brown trousers he wore. He mopped his face of the film of sweat on his forehead. 'I decide to speak last,' he continued, 'because kolanuts thrive best in the mouth of the elders, so goes a Yoruba proverb. Also, in a drumming competition, the performance of the last drummer is the freshest in the ears of the panel of judges. So much for proverbs. Proverbs are useful but excess of them results in confusion.'

'Excess of anything is bad,' one man said.

'God bless you, my son,' Baba Ijose said. 'My speech will be directed to Olusegun and his parents. We all gathered here because of them. I want them to listen carefully. I'll describe this world as a place where everybody comes, plays his part, and leaves. Life is full of ups and downs. It is riddles and hopes, as a friend of mine in Abeokuta would say. At a point in time, success would smile at one to such an extent that one would feel that one could touch the sky. When I say one could touch the sky, I mean almost everything would be possible. At a point in life also, a person would experience so much failure that one would be forced to wonder why, in the first



Baba Ijose narrated his life story

place, one has come to this world. That's life for you, my brothers and sisters.

'This world is not ours. It belongs to our creator who is in heaven. Whatever condition you may find yourself, have it in mind that it comes from God Almighty. That's the way He wants it. By so doing, nothing in this world will take you by surprise again.' He paused. He was impressed by the absolute silence in the sitting room. The silence was a clear indication of the fact that the listeners were listening to him with rapt attention.

'Baba Segun,' he continued, 'you may think that this present condition of yours is one of the worst in the world. Since you married ten years ago or thereabouts, you can boast of only a child. And the child has lost his chance of going to Government College this year. And so on.'

Baba Ijose shook his head. He sneezed. He coughed. 'When you hear my story,' he continued, 'you'll congratulate me on being alive today. I was a clever pupil in my school days. Unfortunately, I dropped out of school because my father could not afford my school fees of twenty shillings. I still remember the school fees. Twenty Shillings. I had no mother. In fact, I never set my eyes on her. I was told she died of birth complications a few weeks after giving birth to me.

'I shed tears when I dropped out of school. Hot tears. Imagine one of the hottest brains in the school abandoning his education because of money. I resigned to my fate. I started to help my father on his farm. That's what followed. Go to school or come to farm. That was the slogan in those days.'

He paused again. 'I got married at the age of twenty-five,' he continued. 'By the time I was thirty- five, I was already blessed with five children. Then the rough sides of life descended on me heavily. Two of the children died in their sleep. The remaining three were killed by a storm which took place many years ago.'

The listeners groaned. The emotional ones among them were already in tears.

'My wife was heart-broken,' continued Baba Ijose. 'I too was shaken. But I took the heavy blows as a man. The poor woman soon developed hypertension. She died three months after. Those were heavy blows, I must confess. But I didn't commit suicide. I didn't kill myself. I fought on. After all, life is war.'

He coughed again. 'Sorry for my coughing and coughing,' he said.' But don't blame me. My yams have just been harvested. I eat too much roasted yam and pounded yam these days.'

The listeners laughed.

'I took another wife,' Baba Ijose went on. 'That one was barren. She was never pregnant for one day. I did everything possible to open her womb. All my efforts were fruitless. Her barrenness made me to marry another wife. Her name was Arike. Arike was a witch. This, I never knew. She tried to kill me, but I proved too stubborn for her. But before she left me, she succeeded in paralyzing my left leg.'

'Heeeoh!' the listeners groaned again.

'I called my God,' Baba Ijose went on.'He answered me. I became normal again after a few months of paralysis. At forty, I took a new wife. The wife gave birth to four children. I'm happy to

inform you that the wife and the four children are alive today, hale and hearty. Happier still, the four children are now successful in life. One is a lawyer, one is a chartered accountant, one is an architect and the last one is a pharmacist.'

'Heeeeeehh!' the listeners shouted in ecstasy. Olusegun, who had listened to Baba Ijose's story with rapt attention, smiled heartily.

Baba Ijose beamed a fatherly smile at them. He allowed the commotion to die down, and then continued: 'Allow me to round off. It's good to begin well, but it's better to end well. Today, Baba Ijose is the proud owner of five houses, two cars, and the biggest farm in Bare village and its environs. Baba Segun, I want you to take courage, like I did in my trying period.'

He stood up. 'Words, words and words can never fill up a basket,' he said. 'A few words are enough for the wise. I stop here.'

He pulled a thick wad of twenty naira notes out of his pocket. He counted the sum of five hundred naira from the wad, and gave Salako the money. 'Take. This is my little gift for Olusegun for surviving the terrible accident.'

Salako and Aduke thanked him greatly. The visitors were entertained with boiled plantain and stew.



## CHAPTER TEN



### *The Gifted Children's Examination*

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**O**LUSEGUN lay on the bed one chilly Saturday night. It was bedtime. He had closed his eyes for the past two hours. He was unable to sleep. He opened his eyes wide. He reflected on his life, especially his education. Mr Abdullaih had explained to GCI's school principal how Olusegun unavoidably missed the interview organised for prospective students of GCI. The school principal, after expressing his sympathy, said he could not help Olusegun's situation. According to him, the interview was compulsory. Olusegun had lost the opportunity of securing admission to GCI for the year.

Schools resumed the following Monday. Mr Abdullaih advised Olusegun to resume at St John's Primary School for his primary six. By so doing, he would write the entrance examination again and possibly secure admission to GCI in the next academic session. Mr Abdullaih told him not to forget that every disappointment is a blessing.

'I'll take his advice,' Olusegun said aloud. 'The coming common entrance exam will be *the second attempt* for me.'

He took the rewriting of the examination as a challenge. By so doing, he resolved, he would work towards getting the best result in Oyo State.

XXX

When Olusegun resumed at St John's Primary School, his friends and classmates were pleased to see him again hale and hearty. They clustered around him. Some of his friends asked him to tell them about his stay at the hospital. He gave them the gist of how humane the doctors and nurses were to him throughout his stay at Okeowo Hospital. A friend of his, Ajayi, made them laugh. He said he would also love to be involved in a car accident so that he too would be admitted to a hospital and be treated by beautiful nurses and kind doctors.

The teachers were glad to see Mr Edet and Olusegun again in the school. Mr Edet shared his hospital admission experience with his fellow teachers.

On the first day of resumption, the pupils cleaned the school premises. All the classrooms were swept. The chairs and tables were washed the following day. The hefty boys were asked to clear the school's big farm. The girls and female teachers decorated the classrooms. It was a hectic week for the pupils and the teachers, who supervised the pupils' activities.

Normal school work commenced the following week.

Olusegun buckled down to his studies. He was studious and hardworking as ever. He prayed often too. When the term ended, he came first overall throughout primary six.

XXX

The second term began after a month of holiday. One morning, Mr Abdullaih called Olusegun to his office. Olusegun was filled with suspense when he was informed that Mr Abdullaih would like to see him.

'I have a good news for you, Olusegun,' Mr Abdullaih said, as soon as he had returned Olusegun's greeting. 'Have your seat.'

Olusegun sat down. He was eager to hear what Mr Abdullaih wanted to tell him.

'A good news indeed,' Mr Abdullaih stressed. 'I called it a good news because I know that you can do it.'

Mr Abdullaih rummaged through a file on his table, and brought out a letter. He skimmed through it and said: 'I recently received this from the Federal Ministry of Education.'

Olusegun was pop-eyed. Mr Abdullaih noticed this and went on: 'The Federal Ministry of Education is organising a special examination for gifted primary six pupils nationwide. The exam is tagged "The Gifted Children Examination." And look, the Federal Government is damn serious about this competition. This is the maiden edition. They intend to sponsor the overall best five pupils overseas for their high school and university education.' Olusegun listened attentively.



'All registered primary schools in Nigeria,' Mr Abdullaih continued, 'have been asked to submit the names of their best brains. You will represent our school. All the members of staff have met and agreed on that. The exam won't be easy. The Ministry wants to select the hottest brains around. It will be a very competitive exam, considering the number of primary schools in this country. I need not over-emphasise this point.'

Mr Abdullaih paused. 'At the same time,' he went on, 'you don't have to be scared. Where there's a will, there's a way. Just study very hard for the prestigious award.'

'I'll do my best sir,' Olusegun said confidently.

Mr Abdullaih glanced at the letter. 'The exam takes place in three months' time in Lagos State,' he said. 'You have enough time to prepare for it. Can you get me two passport photographs of yours?'

'Yes sir,' Olusegun said.

'Good. Bring them to my office tomorrow morning.'

'Yes sir.'

'Extra coaching classes will be organised for you purposely for the competition. I'll see to that. You can go.'

'Thank you sir.'

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Olusegun studied harder than before. He read intensively. He believed that the Gifted Children Examination was a great, heaven-sent opportunity which he must grab.

As earlier promised, special coaching classes were arranged for him in the school. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, he

stayed behind for two hours after school for the coaching. Two of the teachers were given the task of coaching him. They taught him very well.

Olusegun wrote the Gifted Children Examination at a college in Ikeja, Lagos State. Lagos State was the commercial nerve centre of Nigeria. A car was chartered to convey him to the examination venue. As the car moved around the city of Lagos, and got to the ever busy Lagos-Ibadan expressway, Olusegun looked on and on. That was his first time of coming to Lagos. He had heard a lot about Lagos State; the most popular and the busiest state in Nigeria. He was amazed by the crowded nature of Lagos. It was all hustle and bustle.

A month after the writing of the examination, the results were released. Mr Abdullaih travelled to the Federal Ministry of Education in Lagos to check the result. Some other headmasters and headmistresses also came for the result. The list of the five successful pupils had been pasted. That was what mattered. The list was arranged in the order of the pupils' performance in the highly rated examination. Mr Abdullaih could hardly believe his eyes when he saw the name, Olusegun Salako as the third name on the list of the pupils who were to benefit from the federal government scholarship. As a further proof, he checked the candidate's examination number. It tallied with Olusegun's. The candidate's school? St John's Primary School, Bare, Ibadan, Oyo State. He was elated.

The news spread through every nook and cranny of Bare village that Olusegun had performed a greater feat than the one of

the previous year. He had become the third best primary school pupil in Nigeria. He performed better than pupils in the highly rated primary schools across the country. As a result of this, he would travel overseas for his high school and University education on federal government scholarship.

Olusegun's parents could not contain their joy when they heard the news.

'God, I'll continue to worship you,' Salako said.

'My son is travelling abroad,' Aduke said. 'This is a miracle.'

'God never sleeps,' said Salako. 'It's people's impatience that makes us think that He sleeps.'

Olusegun was the happiest of the lot. He was too thrilled for words when he heard the news of his outstanding performance at the examination.

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Mr Abdullaih received an official letter from the Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria three weeks after the release of the Gifted Children Examination result. Olusegun and the four other successful pupils would be going to St. Benedict College, New York City, USA for their high school education. They would proceed to a University for a degree of their choice, provided they maintained their brilliant academic performance.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### *The Journey to the USA*

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**A**N announcement was made from the cockpit that the aeroplane would take off in five minutes' time. The passengers were to fasten their seat belts. A few air hostesses were in the aeroplane to render one assistance or the other to the passengers. An example of such assistance was the fastening and loosening of seat belts. Many of the passengers who were travelling by aeroplane for the first time usually had difficulties in this regard.

The five successful Nigerian pupils in the Gifted Children Examination sat beside one another in the aeroplane. They were three boys and two girls: Sunday Ojo, Uchenna Ogboru, Olusegun Salako, Bolanle Odunsi and Chinyere Okon. They were all smartly dressed. A government official, Mrs Akanbi, who was to accompany them to the USA sat in the middle of the pupils. Mrs Akanbi was charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the pupils settled down properly in their school in the USA. They all looked happy and radiant. They felt they could touch the sky.

Olusegun beamed with pride. He remembered his parents. The previous evening, his father had called him to his room and advised him at length. He and Aduke then took turns to pray for him. He also remembered his friends, Wale, Ngozi, Ajayi, Tola and others. 'In peace I left you all, in peace we shall meet again,' he said to himself.

He tried to imagine how life would be in the USA. The taking off of the aeroplane snapped him back to the present.

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St. Benedict College was situated in New York City, the commercial nerve centre of the USA. New York City, with its hustle and bustle and its variety of buildings, reminded Olusegun of Lagos.

Mrs Akanbi was up to the task given to her by the Federal Ministry of Education, where she worked. She was a vastly experienced educationalist. She ensured that the students were properly registered at St. Benedict College. Boarding facilities were available in the school. The students were to stay in the dormitory. An arrangement was also made on how the students would be spending their long holidays. She assisted the students in opening bank accounts. Federal Government of Nigeria would pay some money their annually as their pocket money. The school fees of the students all through their stay at the college were fully paid. She would also be coming at least once in a year to monitor the students' progress.



Olusegun and other successful pupils on their way to the USA

Olusegun and the fellow Nigerian students were amazed by the largeness and splendour of the school. The classrooms were all beautiful and well-decorated. Each of the classrooms had a central air-conditioner to keep the students cool and relaxed all the time. Refrigerators were also available. Students helped themselves to cold water and soft drinks in the refrigerator during the break time. Beautiful posters adorned the classrooms. Olusegun felt he had been transported into a new world.

The playing ground was spacious. There were courts for various games such as handball, tennis, badminton, volleyball and basketball. The students always had a great deal of fun while playing these games. Learning how to play them was a thrilling experience to the newly-admitted students.

Olusegun's first month at St Benedict College was remarkable. At first, he felt shy and uncomfortable in the midst of the white American students. The school was dominated by white American students. With time, he got over his shyness, and mixed freely with his classmates.

In the class, Olusegun was among the best students. He answered many questions with amazing intelligence. There was a time one of the subject teachers, Mr James Clinton asked the students a difficult question. Many of the students attempted to answer the question correctly. No success. Olusegun raised his right hand up for recognition. He answered the question correctly. Mr Clinton was visibly impressed. He shook his head in admiration. He asked the students to clap for Olusegun.

After six weeks of academic work, the students were tested

in English Language, Mathematics, Basic Science and General Knowledge. Olusegun scored the highest marks in Mathematics and Basic Science. The result was displayed on a board tucked in a corner of the classroom.

From the day the result was displayed, Olusegun commanded a great deal of respect from his classmates. His friends multiplied. Even the girls made friends with him. He maintained his humility. He never allowed his success to go into his head.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

### *Life at College and University*

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**A**T the end of the first term examination, Olusegun came first in his class. He won a book prize and a cash prize for this. His fellow Nigerian students, Sunday, Uchenna, Bolanle and Chinyere also did wonderfully well in their respective classes.

All the students of St Benedict College were excited as the holiday drew near. Inter-class competitions took place in various games in the school prior to the vacation day. The students had fun-filled time, especially when a junior class defeated a senior class in a football match. The boys majored in football and volleyball. The girls concentrated on basketball, tennis and badminton. The school's two Games Masters supervised these inter-class competitions.

'Oh! I love this school,' Bolanle said. 'It's not all work and no play here. There's variety.'

The students were very glad on the vacation day. Majority of the parents of the students came in their cars to take their children

home. However, Olusegun, Uchenna, Sunday, Chinyere and Bolanle were to spend their holiday in the school, as earlier arranged. They were moved from the school's dormitory to a building in the school, under the supervision of one Mr. John Alexander, who lived in the school's premises.

A sightseeing tour was organised for them. The aim was to familiarise them with the USA, and broaden their knowledge of the place. They visited five states in the USA: Boston, Houston Texas, Atlanta Georgia, Los Angeles and Washington DC, the capital of the USA. They were taken to several places of interest such as the museum, the zoological garden, the National Library, and many others. It was a fulfilling holiday for the young Nigerian students.

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Schools resumed after six weeks of break. Academic activities commenced on the first day of resumption. This was a surprising development to Olusegun. At St John Primary School, Bare, the first week of resumption was usually devoted to the cutting of the grasses, the washing and cleaning of the classrooms, and general sanitation. Academic activities would then resume in the following week.

The academic session soon ended. Olusegun came first overall, and proceeded to Grade 8 of the junior high school. He moved consistently on. A few of his equally brilliant classmates tried to beat him to the second place. They did not succeed. He never relented in his academic efforts. He maintained his first

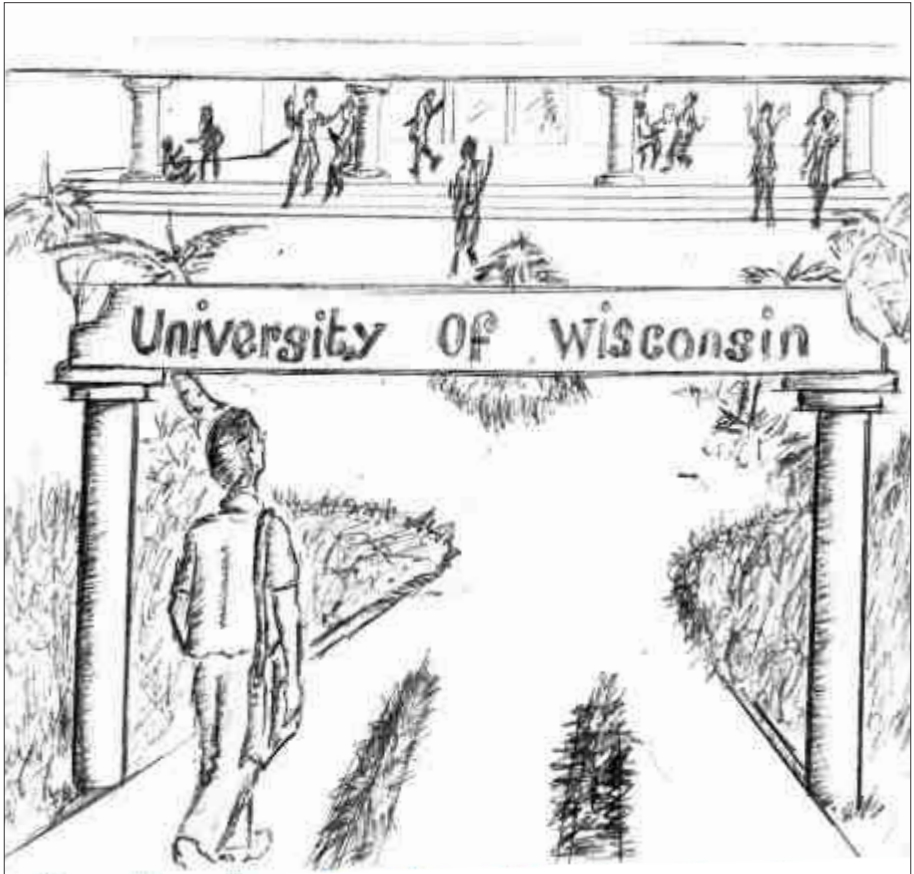
position throughout his stay in the school.

He often remembered his parents. He always wrote them letters, and they occasionally replied. All was well with them. They longed to see him again. But he knew their wish would only become a reality after his university education when he, hopefully, would have become a medical doctor. He wrote letters to Mr Abdullaih as well. He replied regularly, always stressing to him never to get carried away by the glamour of the USA.

Olusegun completed his education at St. Benedict College on a brilliant note. His high school grade point average was excellent. In addition, he attained perfect scores in the Scholarship Aptitude Test (SAT) 1 and 11. Four American Universities offered him admission to study Medicine and Surgery: Emory University, Atlanta; University of Wisconsin; Bard College, New York City; and East Tennessee State University, Tennessee.

He prayed fervently for God's direction on which of the offers to take. Financial consideration was out of the question, since he was on Federal Government of Nigeria scholarship. Three days after he did the prayer, he dreamt of entering the gate of the University of Wisconsin. He settled for the university. He secured admission into the University of Wisconsin at exactly sixteen years of age.

Sunday, Uchenna, Bolanle, and Chinyere also secured admission into various universities in the USA. Sunday got admitted to study Law. Uchenna was admitted to study Computer Engineering. Bolanle secured an admission to study Mass Communication, and Chinyere was admitted to study Accounting.



Olusegun gained Admission to the University of Wisconsin

The University of Wisconsin was located in Wisconsin, a state located in the North-Central part of the USA. Better known as "America's Dairyland", Wisconsin was one of the leading producers of dairy, particularly cheese in the USA. Olusegun really loved everything about the university and the state.

Olusegun maintained his academic excellence all through his stay at the university. He enjoyed the course of study he was pursuing, and he had little or no problem. He remained focused. He resisted the temptation of going into any relationship with any female student. At twenty-two years of age, he qualified as a medical doctor.

During the convocation ceremony, Olusegun won fantastic awards and prizes. He was the overall best graduating student in Medicine and Surgery in his set.

He did his compulsory one year residency at the University of Wisconsin Teaching Hospital.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN



### *The Great Letter*

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**I**T was a cool morning. Olusegun had just taken a bath. A brown towel covered his nakedness. He heard the ringing of the doorbell in his abode in Wisconsin. It was a three-bedroom flat. Promptly, he put on a designer T-shirt and a pair of jeans trousers. He opened the door. It was a postman who had rung the doorbell. The postman was a tall man, aged roughly forty. He had a scar on his forehead. His uniform was spotless and well-ironed. He carried a roomy, red bag which contained several letters he was to distribute to various people in the neighbourhood.

'Good morning,' he greeted Olusegun.

'Morning,' Olusegun returned.

'Are you Dr Olusegun Salako?'

'Yes sir.'

'You have a letter.'

The postman rummaged through the red bag, and brought out a white envelope. Olusegun's name and address were boldly typed on the envelope. The postman asked him to acknowledge the

receipt of the letter by signing on a notebook. Olusegun did that, and the postman left.

Olusegun skimmed through the addressee of the letter. It was from the Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria. He eagerly opened the envelope and brought out its content. He read the letter while standing. The content of the letter was brief and to the point. First and foremost, the Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria congratulated him on the successful completion of his university education, and commended him for passing out in flying colours. The Federal Ministry of Education always received annual progress reports on Olusegun and the four other Nigerian students from their various universities. Olusegun was also congratulated on the successful completion of his residency programme.

The letter ended on a happy note. A job was already reserved for Doctor Olusegun Salako at the Federal Medical Centre, Ikoyi, Lagos State. He would settle down in Ikoyi when he returned to Nigeria. His flight ticket had already been paid for. He was expected back in the country in exactly fourteen days' time. He should report at the Nigerian Embassy of the USA for travelling clearances. Two representatives from the Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria would await his arrival at Murtala Muhammed Airport, Lagos.

'Once again, congratulations Doctor Olusegun Salako,' the letter ended.

Olusegun was elated. He read the letter again. He carefully kept the letter. He dressed up, and left the flat.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### *The Return to Nigeria*

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**O**LUSEGUN worked very hard during the one year he spent at the University of Wisconsin Teaching Hospital. In addition, he was humble and mannerly. His colleagues admired him both for his diligence and for his good manners. Hence, when he informed them that he was leaving for good, they were touched. They did everything to make him stay. The hospital management board had already offered him employment. He reminded them that he was sponsored to the USA by the Federal Government of Nigeria. His service was needed back home.

A send-off was organised for him. Group photographs were taken, after the wining and dining.

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The aeroplane of the Nigerian Airways, Boeing 747 touched down at Murtala Muhammed Airport, Ikeja, Lagos after several hours of flight. The passengers heaved sighs of relief for the safe



trip from the USA to Nigeria. They unfastened their seat belts and disembarked from the aeroplane.

Among the passengers was Olusegun. He looked smart in his black suit and a tie to match. He remembered twelve years ago when he was at the same airport, leaving for the USA. Changes had occurred to the Olusegun of then and Olusegun of now. The Olusegun of twelve years ago was a boy, and a primary school certificate holder. The present Olusegun was a medical doctor and a man. Yes, he was now a man.

Smile lit up his face. He looked around. He noticed that the airport was still attractive and busy. It was eleven in the morning. Olusegun was very hungry. After getting his luggage, he moved to the lounge of the airport. He bought snacks and a chilled canned coke. As he was eating, he observed the entrance of a man and a lady into the lounge. The man held a photograph. The man scanned the faces of the people at the lounge. He and the lady approached him.

'Are you Dr Olusegun Salako?' the man asked Olusegun.

'Yes, I am,' Olusegun replied.

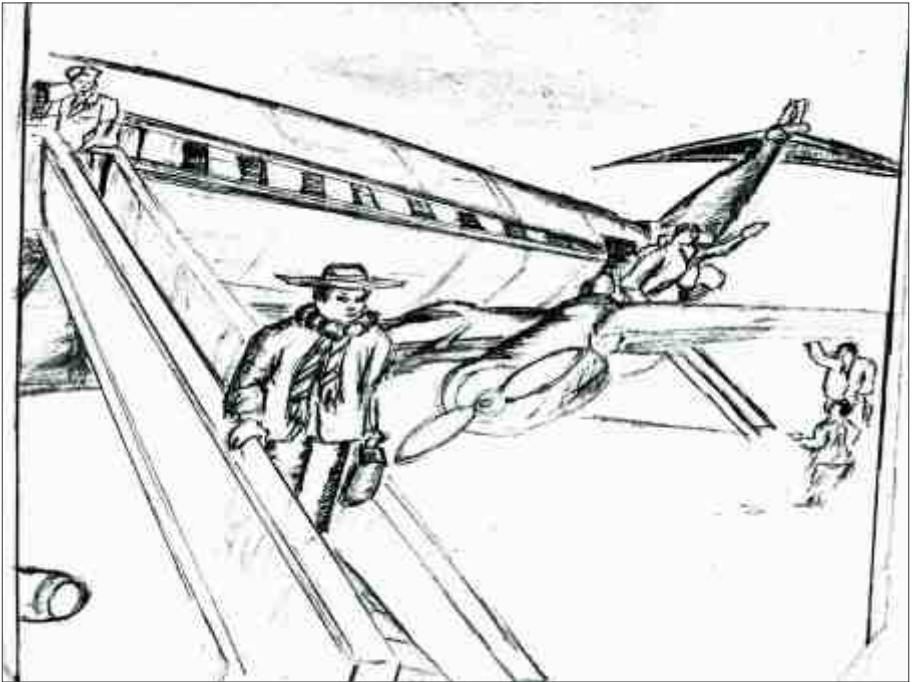
'Good,' said the man. 'I'm Mr Daniel, and she's Miss Toyin Fatusi.'

The man and the lady introduced themselves to Olusegun as representatives from the Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria.

'You arrived in the nick of time,' the lady said, flashing a smile at Olusegun.

That's true,' Olusegun said.

'How's America?' she asked.



Olusegun returned to Nigeria after studying in the USA

'America is great,' Olusegun responded. 'It's a place to visit in one's lifetime. But north, south, east, or west, home is the best.'

Mr Daniel got down to business. 'Did you receive a letter from the Federal Ministry of Education?' he asked Olusegun.

'Yes,' Olusegun replied. 'It's in my luggage.'

Olusegun opened his luggage and produced the letter. Mr Daniel skimmed through it.

'Good,' Mr Daniel said. 'We'll take you now to the duplex that has been allocated for you at the Government Reserved Area in Ikoyi. You'll also get your official car of a brand new Peugeot 504 saloon too with a chauffeur. Lastly, you're to take up an appointment at the Federal Medical Centre, Ikoyi as a medical doctor.'

'Waoh!' Olusegun exclaimed. 'That's fantastic. A duplex, a brand new car, a chauffeur and a very good job.'

Mr Daniel rounded off: 'You also need to report at the Federal Ministry of Education. The Federal Government of Nigeria is organising a reception in your honour. Same things were done for your colleagues who travelled to the USA with you on Federal Government scholarship. They've completed their academic programmes.'

'Really?' Olusegun said.

'Yes,' Miss Fatusi said.

They all moved to where Mr Daniel's car was packed. They entered the car and headed for Ikoyi. Mr Daniel drove the car.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### *The Marriage*

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**A**FTER spending a week at his duplex at Ikoyi, Olusegun informed his chauffeur, Mr Ayoade, that he wanted to visit his parents at Bare village. They were not yet aware that he had returned to Nigeria. Meanwhile, he had converted his savings which he brought from the USA from dollar to naira. Everything totalled about one million two hundred thousand naira.

The journey to Bare village was scheduled for the next day, which was a Saturday. They were to travel in his official car of Peugeot 504 saloon.

Olusegun and Mr Ayoade set off for Bare village very early in the morning. The setting off early was to avoid the hold-ups which normally occurred along the Lagos-Ibadan expressway, especially on weekends. They arrived in Ibadan by 9 a.m. Olusegun directed the chauffeur, who drove down to the village. He still remembered vividly the route to the village. There had been minimal changes in the village since he travelled to the USA. A few buildings and shops had sprung up. The population of the villagers

had increased significantly..

They were greeted by the curious faces of the villagers who wondered who could be cruising in the brand new car. The villagers later got to know that it was Olusegun, the apple of their eyes. He was born in the village. He grew up there. He had his primary school education there. Whatever he became in life, he could not forget his roots.

They got to Salako's house. Olusegun and Mr Ayoade alighted from the car, after Mr Ayoade had parked it carefully. Olusegun gazed at the hut. He remembered when he used to play around the hut some years back, with his friend Wale. They entered the house. Salako was sitting on a chair while Aduke was busy in the kitchen.

'Father!' Olusegun called.

Salako looked up. He recognized his son effortlessly.

'Olusegun, my son!' he exclaimed.

They embraced happily. Aduke joined them from the kitchen. She wore a brown skirt and a black blouse. She embraced her son too. Her eyes were filled with tears. Tears of joy. Olusegun shed tears too. It was a happy reunion. Olusegun observed that his parents' hairs were already greying.

'I came back from America a week ago,' Olusegun said, when they were all seated. 'I've already secured a job. I've been given a house in Lagos to be living. My car is parked outside. This is my driver, Mr Ayoade.'

Mr Ayoade exchanged pleasantries with Olusegun's parents. They were exceedingly glad. They moved out to look at the



Salako prayed on Olusegun's car

car. After admiring the car for a while, Salako went inside the house. He returned with a bottle of wine he had kept under his bed. He said a barrage of prayers on the car. Some wine was poured on the car during the prayers, while the rest was shared among them.

Not long after, the news of Olusegun's arrival had spread round the village. Some of the villagers came to Salako's house to welcome Olusegun. They found it hard to believe that it was the same Olusegun who left the village some years ago for the USA. They were glad over the great honour Olusegun had bestowed on the village. Some came with their children, who never knew Olusegun. The children gazed at him in undiluted admiration. Olusegun thanked them all. The visitors were entertained with biscuits and juice which he brought from Lagos. Olusegun also shared out some money among all the visitors.

Olusegun informed his parents to get ready to leave the village for good as soon as possible.

'So soon?' Aduke said. She could not belie her surprise.

Olusegun surveyed the house. He shook his head. His mind flashed back to the splendour of the houses in the USA, and even in Lagos where he presently lived. He felt bad that his beloved parents had been confined in the environment they were for so long a period.

'Yes, so soon,' Olusegun said. 'You've both suffered long enough. It's high time you began to enjoy the fruits of your labour. You're moving to Lagos.'

'Ok,' she said.

'You'll stay with me for a while. I'll then secure a decent

apartment for you in Lagos.'

'Olusegun,' Salako said. 'You know I can't just leave this house like that. I suffered to build it.'

'That's true,' Olusegun said. 'You can let it out. With the high population density I observed in Bare while coming, getting people to rent the apartment won't be difficult.'

'Better,' said Salako.

'What of Mr Abdullaih?' Olusegun asked, changing the subject of discussion.

'He's very much around,' Salako said. 'He's still his caring self. He asks after you often.'

'Oh,' Olusegun said. 'We communicate through letters when I was in America. I can't wait to see him.'

'He should be at home,' Aduke said.

'I hope he hasn't moved houses?' Olusegun asked.

'Not at all,' Salako said.

Olusegun asked Mr Ayoade to stay with his parents while he visited Mr Abdullaih. He still recollected the route to Mr Abdullaih's house. He trekked to the house. Mercifully, he met Mr Abdullaih at home. He wore a brown vest and a pair of black trousers. He was roasting a few cobs of maize. His joy knew no bounds on setting his eyes on Olusegun, who had changed considerably. He hugged him. Olusegun bowed for him. The heat inside the house was unbearable.

'Ponmile...Ponmile,' Mr Abdullaih called.

A teenage boy came from a room and joined them in the living room. His hair was uncombed. He greeted Olusegun. 'Take



two chairs outside,' Mr Abdullaih said to Ponmile.

Ponmile took two chairs to the front of the house. Olusegun and Mr Abdullaih sat on them. They chatted for a while. Olusegun talked briefly about his memorable stay in the USA.

'How's St John's Primary School getting on sir?' Olusegun asked.

'I'm no more there,' Mr Abdullaih said. 'I retired a few years ago. I'm now into buying and selling.'

Silence .

'But I must confess to you,' Mr Abdullaih broke the silence, 'the academic standard of the school has fallen considerably.'

Olusegun's forehead creased. 'Fallen?' he said. 'What went wrong?'

'I did my best possible when I was still there,' Salako said. 'But it was like knocking my head against a brick wall. A wasted effort.'

'But sir, something must have been responsible for the fallen standard.'

'Money. That's it. Poor funding. The financing of the school has not been easy. The government is doing their best, but the number of pupils struggling to get education is increasing every year. Every parent in Bare now wants his child to go to America like you.'

Mr Abdullaih exchanged greetings with a fat woman who passed by.

'Things were already getting out of hand,' Mr Abdullaih said, 'three or four years after you travelled out of the country.'

'Who's the new headmaster?' Olusegun asked.

'His name is Mr Samuel. He lives nearby. Since he took over from me, Mr Samuel has faced several challenges in the administration of the school. But he's the ambitious type. He perseveres. That's why he's still there.'

'Good. I'm pleased to hear that.

Olusegun thought for a while.

'What are the school's major needs?' Olusegun probed.

'More classrooms, a good library, and good and hardworking teachers.'

'I'll donate a sum of two hundred thousand naira to the school, to address some of these pressing problems. St John is the spring I drank from; I must never forget that. Without the school, I may not have become who I am today.'

'That's magnanimous of you. Indeed, you're a good ambassador of the school. Thank you very much.'

'You're welcome sir. But you'll do me a favour. You'll take me to the headmaster's house as soon as we leave this place.'

'No problem. I'll do that. The money will definitely be spent on the school. Mr Samuel is trustworthy.'

'Good. Very important. What of Mr Edet?'

'Mr Edet has relocated to Lagos with his family?'

'Is that so?'

Olusegun was noticeably excited. He remembered Mr Edet's daughter, Ngozi, who usually sat beside him on the hospital bed when he was admitted to Okeowo Hospital several years ago. 'And Ngozi too?' he said.

'She's fine,' said Mr Abdullaih. 'I gathered from a reliable source that she graduated from the University of Lagos last year. She studied Banking and Finance. Whenever she comes to Ibadan, she branches here. She visits your parents and me.'

'Really?' Olusegun said. He could hardly belie his emotion.

'I mean it.'

Olusegun decided to change the topic. Inwardly, he said he would make more enquiries on Ngozi from his parents.

'You said you're now into buying and selling,' Olusegun said.

'Yes,' Mr Abdullaih confirmed. 'I buy and sell farm produce. One must keep body and soul together.'

Olusegun dipped his hand into his pocket. He brought out a thick ward of notes. He counted fifty thousand naira. Mr Abdullaih's eyes were glued to the wad of new notes as Olusegun did the counting. He gave Mr Abdullaih the fifty thousand naira. Mr Abdullaih thanked him immensely.

'You're very big in my eyes,' Olusegun said. 'And priceless. But for you, I wouldn't have become who I am today. I remember all your advice to me. They're now part of me. You took me as if I were your biological son.'

Olusegun also gave him his contact address in Lagos.

'I'll check on you any time I visit Lagos,' Mr Abdullaih said. He tucked the money away in his pocket, smiling broadly. He could not remember when last he held such a lump sum of money.

They moved to Mr Samuel's house in order to fulfil Olusegun's promise of donation of money to his alma mater.

Olusegun and MrAyoade set off for Lagos at about five o'clock in the evening. It had been a busy day for Olusegun. His parents escorted him to Challenge. An arrangement was made that Olusegun would be back in two weeks' time, and his parents would follow him to Lagos for good. The two weeks were enough for Olusegun's parents to be fully ready for their relocation to Lagos. Salako was torn between selling off his house outright or letting it off. He would take a decision on that soon enough.

They had a chat in the car, as Mr Ayoade drove on. Olusegun went straight into an issue which had occupied his mind since he visited Mr Abdullaih.

'Mum, when last did you see Ngozi?' he asked.

'Mr Edet's daughter?' Aduke said.

'Yes, Mum.'

'She has moved to Lagos with her Daddy. She visits us once in a while. The last time she came was a month ago. She asked after you whenever she came around. Oh...Ngozi is such a nice and caring lady. She often assisted me in housework whenever she came.'

'I like Ngozi,' Salako joined the conversation. 'When I sustained a deep cut on my leg in the farm some time ago, she gave me a first aid, as she was luckily around on that day.'

'And she kept on saying she would like to see you again,' Aduke said.

'Do you have her address?' Olusegun asked.

'Yes,' Aduke replied. 'She gave me the address sometime ago.'

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### *The Marriage*

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**A**S earlier promised, the Federal Ministry of Education organised a reception in honour of Olusegun. It was a tradition the Federal Ministry of Education had maintained with all the recipients of the Gifted Children Examination scholarship award.

The reception was publicised and well-attended. Some stakeholders with the ministry, and university lecturers were invited. People of high calibre graced the occasion which was held at Glover Hall, Ikoyi, Lagos. Some of the invited guests who could not honour the invitation sent their representatives.

Some of Olusegun's friends and well-wishers attended the occasion. Wale, who now worked with an insurance company in Ibadan, came with his wife and son. Olusegun had reestablished his friendship with him since he returned to Nigeria. Ngozi and her father were also present.

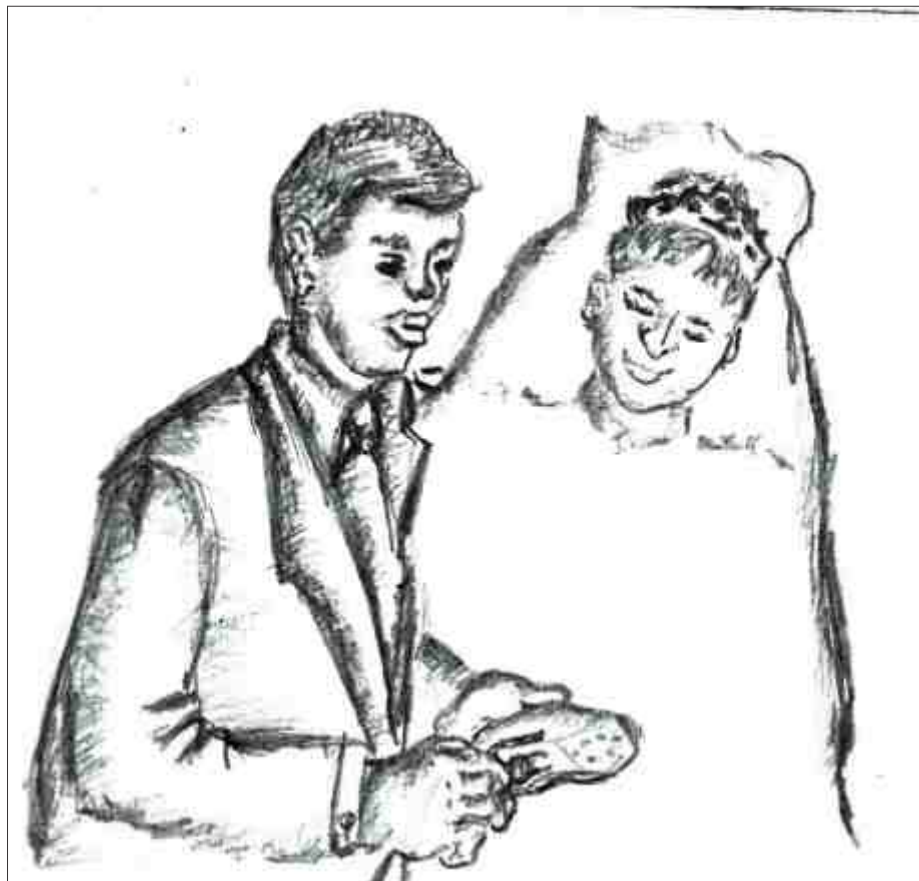
A few speeches and addresses were made by a few of the invited guests. They all spoke at length in praise of Olusegun,

having earlier being served with his academic profile. The speeches centred on the importance of hardwork and education.

The most impressive speech was made by Professor Femi Ilori, a well-known author, lecturer and an educational psychologist of international repute. He was a lecturer at the University of Ibadan. As he was invited to the podium by the Master of Ceremony to deliver his speech, he received an ovation from the audience. He moved out in a slow, measured gait, and took the microphone.

Professor Ilori's speech was entitled: "Hope, Courage and Determination." He said he was highly impressed by Doctor Olusegun Salako's biography. He believed Olusegun was a young man who was hopeful, courageous and determined to succeed in life. He told the audience that some years ago, Olusegun got involved in a terrible motor accident which nearly ruined his academic career. Yet he was not discouraged. He made the second attempt in his school work. And today, he had become a medical doctor. On a last note, Professor Ilori urged the audience to borrow a leaf out of Olusegun's book. He said that whatever condition they found themselves, they must remain hopeful, courageous and determined.

The party proper followed the speeches. A variety of delicious food and drinks were there for the people's asking. The eating arrangement was popularly called "serve yourself." The variety of food and drinks were placed in two different spots in the hall. The members of the audience simply moved to the spots, took the plates, and served themselves food. They then helped



Olusegun married Ngozi

themselves to drinks.

'Ah...Gabriel, how do you hope to finish all this food?' one man said to his friend. He stared at the large quantity of jollof rice on Gabriel's plate in disbelief. Six large assortments of meat and several fried plantain pieces were on the jollof rice.

'Mind your own business,' Gabriel snapped. 'It's "serve yourself", isn't it?'

'Anyway,' the man said, 'Andrews Liver Salts is just thirty naira per sachet. Ride on.'

After eating, people danced to melodious tunes of music supplied by the disc jockey.

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Olusegun began work in earnest at the Federal Medical Centre, Ikoyi. He and Ngozi had fully established their relationship. She had recently commenced her compulsory one-year national youth service. She did it in Lagos State. They started courtship. They visited each other regularly.

Olusegun got to know that Mr Edet relocated from Bare village to Lagos in order to set up a small scale business of his own. Olusegun gave him a sum of thirty thousand naira to support his business. Mr Edet thanked him for his generosity. He appreciated the money.

When Ngozi completed her youth service, she secured a very good job with First Bank Plc, Lagos head office. Olusegun proposed marriage to her not long after she assumed her



appointment. This was after a year of courtship. She readily agreed.

'You surely will make a good wife, Ngozi,' Olusegun said.

'You too will make a good husband,' Ngozi returned.

Olusegun's parents were pleased about the wedding prospect between their son and Ngozi. They were in full support. So was Mr Edet. The wedding introduction was done two months after the marriage proposal. The wedding date was fixed.

The wedding ceremony was colourful and well-attended. The couple were exceedingly glad. Olusegun reflected on his life, and he saw himself as a conqueror. Indeed, he had every cause to thank his stars.



## WORD STUDY



The following words have been explained according to their meanings in this book. If you come across other words that are new to you, your dictionary will be of help.

- |                     |   |  |
|---------------------|---|--|
| <b>abode</b>        | - | the place where somebody lives                               |
| <b>affluent</b>     | - | having a lot of money and good standard of living            |
| <i>akara</i>        | - | bean cakes   |
| <b>alloy</b>        | - | make something (e.g. pain, trouble, fears) less              |
| <b>alma mater</b>   | - | the school, college or university that somebody went to      |
| <b>antidote</b>     | - | a substance that controls the effects of a poison or disease |
| <b>apprehension</b> | - | worry or fear that something unpleasant may happen           |
| <b>barrage</b>      | - | a large amount of something                                  |
| <b>belie</b>        | - | give a wrong or untrue idea of something                     |
| <b>bona fide</b>    | - | genuine, real  |
| <b>casualties</b>   | - | people who are killed or injured in an accident              |
| <b>chauffeur</b>    | - | a person whose job is to drive a car                         |
| <b>chilly</b>       | - | (especially of the weather or a place)                       |

		too cold to be comfortable
<b>cluster</b>	-	a group of people close together
<b>cockpit</b>	-	the area in an aeroplane where the pilot sits
<b>commendable</b>	-	deserving praise and approval
<b>commotion</b>	-	a noisy confusion
<b>complications</b>	-	a new problem or illness that makes treatment of the previous one more difficult
<b>corporal punishment</b>	-	the physical punishment of people, especially by hitting them
<b>cot</b>	-	a small bed with high sides for a baby or young child
<b>dab</b>	-	to touch something lightly, usually several times
<b>departure lounge</b>	-	a room for waiting in at an airport
<b>designer</b>	-	expensive and having a famous brand name
<b>diligence</b>	-	careful and thorough work or efforts
<b>disc jockey</b>	-	a person whose job is to introduce and play recorded popular music at an occasion
<b>dislocation</b>	-	when a bone is out of its normal position in a joint due to an accident
<b>dismay</b>	-	concern and distress caused by something unexpected
<b>dormitory</b>	-	a room in a school for several people

		to sleep in
<b>ecstasy</b>	-	a feeling or state of very great happiness
<b>elated</b>	-	very happy because of something good that has happened or will happen.
<b>environs</b>	-	the area surrounding a place
<b>gait</b>	-	a way of walking
<b>gate crashers</b>	-	people who go to a party or social event without being invited
<b>Good Samaritan</b>	-	a person who gives help or sympathy to people who need it
<b>heartily</b>	-	in a way that shows that you feel strongly about something
<b>hectic</b>	-	very busy; full of activity
<b>hefty</b>	-	(of a person) big and heavy
<b>humane</b>	-	showing kindness towards people
<b>hurdle</b>	-	a problem or difficulty that must be solved before you can achieve something
<b>hustle and bustle</b>	-	full of people and activities
<b>intensively</b>	-	done with a lot of care
<b>loathed</b>	-	disliked
<b>magnanimous</b>	-	generous
<b>maiden</b>	-	the first or earliest of its kind
<b>marvellous</b>	-	extremely good
<b>mediocre</b>	-	average

<b>nook and cranny</b>	-	every part of a place
<b>operating theatre</b>	-	a room in a hospital used for medical operations
<b><i>osiki</i> soup</b>	-	a special type of soup prepared with vegetable, melon and fish
<b>parlance</b>	-	language as used by people of a particular profession
<b>pensive</b>	-	think deeply about something
<b>persevere</b>	-	to continue trying to do or achieve something despite difficulties
<b>pervade</b>	-	spread through every part of
<b>pleasantries</b>	-	friendly remarks made in order to be polite
<b>podium</b>	-	a small platform that a person stands on when giving a speech.
<b>pop-eyed</b>	-	having eyes very wide open with surprise
<b>portable</b>	-	easy to carry or move about
<b>profusely</b>	-	produced in large amounts
<b>prospective</b>	-	expected to become
<b>provisional</b>	-	arranged, but not yet definite
<b>reassure</b>	-	say or do something to remove the doubts and fears of someone
<b>rummage</b>	-	turn things over, while looking for something
<b>sightseeing</b>	-	the activity of visiting interesting places and buildings as tourists

- spruced** - to make somebody clean and neat
- stethoscope** - an instrument that a doctor uses to listen to somebody's heart or breathing
- thickset** - (especially of a man) having a strong, heavy body
- uterus** - womb
- waive** - to choose not to demand something in a particular case



# REVIEW QUESTIONS



## Chapter One

- a.) What is the meaning of Olusegun?
- b.) Why did Aduke weep?
- c.) At what age did Olusegun start primary school?

## Chapter Two

- a.) What did Olusegun want to discuss with his father?
- b.) What was Salako's favourite meal?
- c.) What did Baba Lolu want his son to become?

## Chapter Three

- a.) What was unique about GCI?
- b.) Why was Salako angry with Olusegun?
- c.) What was the major contrast between Olusegun and Wale?
- d.) What nickname did Wale give Olusegun?

## Chapter Four

- a.) Why did Mr Abdullaih summon Olusegun to his office?
- b.) Why did a pupil come to Mr Abdullaih's office?
- c.) What was Olusegun's average score in the common entrance examination?
- D.) How did Salako celebrate his son's success in the examination?

## **Chapter Five**

- a.) Why was Mr Agomo unpopular with the pupils of St John Primary School?
- b.) What did Mr Edet forget at home?
- c.) What was the name of the pressman who came to the accident scene?

## **Chapter Six**

- a.) Who broke the news of the accident to Salako and Aduke?
- b.) Who was Mr Edet's neighbour who followed them to the hospital?
- c.) Where was Okeowo Hospital located?

## **Chapter Seven**

- a.) What was Mr Edet's sister's name?
- b.) What happened to Olusegun's left leg?
- c.) What was Ngozi's future ambition?
- d.) How long did Olusegun spend at the hospital?

## **Chapter Eight**

- a.) What date was Olusegun discharged from the hospital?
- b.) Who brought the discharge notebook?
- c.) Where did Doctor Laore go to after leaving Olusegun and his parents?



## **Chapter Nine**

- a.) How many houses did Baba Ijose have in the village?
- b.) What did Baba Ijose do when he wanted to start talking?
- c.) Why did Baba Ijose drop out of school?
- d.) How many surviving children did Baba Ijose have?

## **Chapter Ten**

- a.) Why did Olusegun unable to secure admission to GCI?
- b.) Why would Ajayi like to be involved in a motor accident?
- c.) Where did Olusegun write the Gifted Children's Examination?

## **Chapter Eleven**

- a.) Mention any two of the other Nigerian pupils who travelled to the USA with Olusegun.
- b.) Who accompanied the Nigerian pupils?
- c.) What amazed the Nigerian pupils about St. Benedict College?

## **Chapter Twelve**

- a.) Mention any three of the states visited by the Nigerian pupils during the sightseeing tour.
- b.) Mention any two of the American universities which offered Olusegun admission.
- c.) What was the popular name for Wisconsin?

### **Chapter Thirteen**

- a.) What was the postman's age?
- b.) Where was Olusegun to work when he returned to Nigeria?
- c.) When was Olusegun expected back in Nigeria?

### **Chapter Fourteen**

- a.) Where did Olusegun do his residency after graduation?
- b.) How many years did Olusegun spend in the USA?
- c.) What were the names of the man and the lady who met Olusegun at the Murtala Muhammed Airport?

### **Chapter Fifteen**

- a.) What was Olusegun's chauffeur's name?
- b.) How much in naira did Olusegun bring from the USA to Nigeria?
- c.) Why was Salako reluctant to leave Bare village for good?
- d.) How much did Olusegun promise to donate to St. John's Primary School?

### **Chapter Sixteen**

- a.) What was the title of Professor Ilori's speech?
- b.) Which state did Ngozi do her National Youth Service year?
- c.) How much did Olusegun give Mr Edet?