

A young Black woman with dark braided hair is the central focus, looking directly at the camera with a calm expression. She is wearing a grey top. The background is a warm, golden-hour scene of a rural village with mud-brick houses, thatched roofs, and several large clay pots on the ground. The lighting is soft and directional, coming from the upper left, creating a gentle glow on her face and the scene.

M Õ R Ó M Õ K É

A CHILD OF
DESTINY

— ADENIKE OLADEJI —

MOROMOKE: A Child of Destiny
Adenike OLADEJI

MOROMOKE:

(A Child of Destiny)

written by

Adenike OLADEJI

MOROMOKE: A Child of Destiny

Adenike OLADEJI

Adenike Oladeji 2011

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MOROMOKE: A Child of Destiny

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Dedication

To all the youths I taught throughout my 28 years of public service as a teacher.

To all the youths in the Nation Nigeria.

To my parents, **Pa James and Ma Abigail Afolayan**, of blessed memories, for being my channel of existence. For their faith in me and their love showered on me as a child.

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Moromoke's birth was foretold but her mother did not believe it. She was sure she had had all the children she needed, after all, she already had grandchildren.

Still, she conceived and Moromoke was born. Her birth was greeted with great joy.

But before she could grow to enjoy her place as a child of destiny, tragedy struck, leaving their home in shambles.

While in school, she encountered problems. In one of such, she had ruffians and a cobra to contend with. Again, a senior boy got very interested in her and was sparing nothing to get her to accept him as her boyfriend.

Would she yield to the pressure?

Would she survive the snake fight?

Would her new faith have an impact on her life?

Let us find out!

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Chapter One

Olabode opened his eyes as rays of dawn crept into the room from cracks in the wooden window. He got up from bed and rubbing his eyes he walked outside. He could not hear bleating of goats or of sheep that was common noise in his little community in Ekiti state which he had left for search of greener pasture. He stretched and yawned and tried to relive the wonderful sights of Ibadan city that he had seen the day he came. This was not his first time of coming to the city though, but on each occasion he felt lifted.

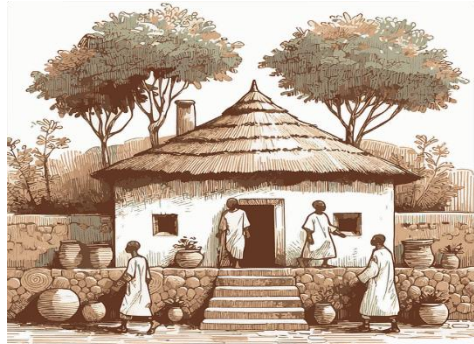
Like his father Olabode was lanky, about five feet tall and very healthy. Being the first in his father's polygamous family he knew that tradition normally imposed responsibilities on him. Believing that the

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journey to success was more tedious in the village, he had moved to Ibadan to start a tailoring business.

He went back inside to start preparing for work. He looked around his decent one room apartment and nodded his head in appreciation. He reminded himself that he had lived in Ibadan now for about two years and was already doing well in the business. He told himself time was ripe for him to marry and build his own family. His parents had already talked to him about it.



About an hour later Olabode was set to go to work. As he buckled his sandals, the image of the girl in the neighbourhood that he had noticed some months ago dropped in his heart. He smiled to himself as he allowed fantasy take hold of him for what seemed hours, even though it lasted for less than a minute. He wished he would see her again and probably speak to her.

Oyinlola was coming back from Iya Bose's house. She had gone to deliver a message from her mother and to plait her hair. The cloud was growing dark and moving. She suspected rain would fall and she did not wish to stay outside while it rained.

She was young and ravishingly beautiful. Her ebony complexion and spotless face gave her a graceful appearance. She was humble and

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disciplined. She hummed her favourite song as she trekked. Suitors had been coming for her, but somehow she had not settled yet for any one of them. Her parents were not worried though. They knew their daughter. They knew she would make a good wife and that the right man she would appreciate would certainly come. They were proud of her and did not want to pressurize her to settle to any of the men so far.

Olabode had seen Oyinlola go home. Like he had said to himself several times he told himself again that he had found a wife. He told himself he was going to initiate marriage arrangement before it became too late. Four market days later, Olabode brought his people to Oyinlola's house. Shortly after, the marriage was consummated.

Olabode and Oyinlola were now married for years. This evening, he sat on a log under a mango tree in front of their house, eating the fruits his wife served him. The children were all inside playing some games. Oyinlola gazed in the space as she enjoyed the fruits also. The breeze whizzing about them was gentle and it created in her a cheerful feeling. The moon cast soft shadows of them under its diamond brilliance. This was one of those fine nights they never wished to diffuse into dawn.

"Iyawo mi," Olabode spoke.

"Yes," Oyinlola answered.

"We shall be going to the village this Christmas."

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“That would be wonderful, the children will be very excited,” Oyinlola replied.

“When we travel home, we won't be coming back to city.”

“*Ah ah*, why, is there a problem,” Oyinlola queried, worried.

“My dear, . . . mmm, you see as the first son in my family, I have to go home to replace my father. All of us have to live in the village for us to do well in farming,” Olabode said, waving his palms in an arc to indicate his entire family. When she did not say anything, he continued, “You see, I know you would not find this easy because you have lived most of your life in the city. I know you're a hard-working woman and you can cope. You've always been supportive. I appreciate, but I cannot watch our family name die by my refusing to go to play my role.”

“But, . . .,” she began to say, but could not put her thought to word.

“My younger brother sent message that I should come home. I already know why and that's what I'm discussing with you.”

“Well, . . . , if you say so, fine,” she managed to say.

They talked till late in the night and later retired to sleep, having agreed together.

Village life was not bad, after all, Oyinlola observed.

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They had been in the village now for two years. Though farming was tasking when compared to life in the city. She enjoyed it, notwithstanding. Her children were helpful. She envisaged they would have abundance of food next season, going by the way their crops were faring. They were already reaping the fruit of their labour; she could say with authority. At least, they had enough to eat, though not that much to sell.

This evening, she prepared *ewedu* and pounded yam. She had taken time to prepare the food, and she was sure her husband would enjoy it. She used some of the stockfish she had bought last market day and the bush meat Olabode's trap had caught the previous day, which she had roasted and kept by the fire to preserve.

“Oko mi,” she called her husband when the food was set. She served him water to wash his hands, kneeling down.

“From the aroma of this food, you have hit my heart again,” Olabode said, “right from when you were still cooking, I've been salivating.”

Oyinlola smiled, washed her hands too and joined her husband to eat.

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None of them talked while they ate. They could hear their children outside, chorusing fables songs.

Olabode finished eating, washed his hands and walked out to get something to pick his teeth.

Later, he relaxed back in his chair, his left arm on the head rest of the wooden chair in a way that it formed a pillow for his head as he used the toothpick. He watched Oyinlola clear the plates and came back to occupy her seat, which creaked under her weight.



He drew his stretched legs and sat up. He cleared his throat. “*Iyawo mi?*” he called.

“Yes,” Oyinlola responded.

“Have you noticed that Baba Akin seem to be doing very doing well in farm.”

“Yes.”

“What do you think is responsible for it.”

“Well, thinking about it, I'd say it's because he has many hands assisting him,” Oyinlola said. She knew that Baba Akin had three wives and about twenty children. She had never bothered to count

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the man's children. She knew the man couldn't be doing better than most people if not for this factor.

“Don't you think it's the type of soil?” her husband asked.

“How can it be?” Oyinlola responded. “Is one of his farms not very close to ours near the giant tree.”

“But . . .?” her husband could not finish.

“I'm sure it's the children,” Oyinlola insisted.

“Any way, I've thought of several things.”

Oyinlola waited. She felt something was in her husband's heart.

“Iyawo mi,” he called.

“Mmh.”

“I want peace in this house.”

“Peace?” she repeated not knowing what her husband was driving at.

“Yes. Absolute peace.”

“Ah. I don't know, I mean, I don't understand why you should be talking about peace now. As far as I'm concerned there's peace here and we're enjoying it.”

“It's okay then.”

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Oyinlola kept quiet. She knew it was not over yet. None of them talked for a while. They appeared to be waiting it out. She wished it was daytime so she could try and make something out from his facial expressions.

Finally, "I'm taking another wife," Olabode spoke out, this time very quietly as if speaking louder could anger the ancestors.

Oyinlola peered at him as if she did not hear well.

"Yes," her husband said, slightly nodding his head.

To Oyinlola, this was a blast of tornado or something close to it. How could he be talking about another wife, Oyinlola thought to herself. She had several times thanked her stars that her husband had not thought of going into polygamy, which was common. This was quite far from anything she could have imagined her husband intended to say.

Stammering, she asked, "*Eeh*, . . . why? Am I no longer enough for you, *oko mi*?" She was close to tears.

"*Noooo*. It's not that. I'm sure you must have observed that we're not doing exactly well in this farming when compared with neighbours. We need more children to be able to do better."

Oyinlola watched her husband, not knowing what to say. She knew that he did not tell her that to seek her opinion or for her to assist him in a search for the right woman. She was sure he had already seen whom to marry and might have paid her dowries without her knowledge. She knew, quite well, that tradition permitted polygamy

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and that her husband was entitled to marry as many women as he desired.

She was only worried about what could become of their family. Yes, he had talked about peace in his home merely to warn her ahead of time that he would not tolerate any nonsense.

She had seen homes that lived literally in fire as a result of polygamy. She had seen families crumble; wives fight themselves and children turn against each other. She had seen families that could never tell what peace meant. And she did not wish these for her family. She had dreaded polygamy as she dreaded evil. Now, it was coming to her.

Indeed, she had seen polygamous homes that were beautiful, that did not have any trace of acrimony. She made up her mind to lead exemplary home. "I will accommodate and tolerate whoever the second wife is going to be," she told herself, but spoke out to her husbands hearing, "No problem."

Oyinlola reminded herself the axiom her parents had taught her about relationship. "Human beings have differences in many ways that could be offensive and pungent. The only way to brush off conflict is to play the fool. To tolerate and to smile even when you're seriously hurt."

It's been many years now. The two wives already had five children each. Oyinlola, would have had six children now, but her very first

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son died shortly after he had begun to walk. Kemi, the second wife, as a result had the overall first son.

Olabode had been able to instil discipline, tolerance and respect for one another in the family. The wives were very happy with their wonderful boys and girls. They lived like sisters. They did things together. Everyone in the house ate from one pot. They had a united and peaceful family. Neighbours envied them, wishing that their homes could be that peaceful and united.

Olabode could not remember how many times neighbours had come to him for counselling on family matters. Neighbours knew that he had exceptional talent in establishing orderliness, which was why he could set his family in that wonderful line. He knew he was the source of the unity in the home. He knew also that it was possible because of the cooperation of his wives. If they had thrown his admonitions to the bin and fight each other, would he have killed any of them? He knew he wouldn't have.

Oyinlola just returned from farm and was peeling the cassava she had harvested. The children were not back yet. Some had gone to a nearby bush to fetch firewood and others to the stream to wash clothes and perhaps fetch water. The sun was heavy, but she was under the shade of the tree in their compound. She hummed a tune and concentrated on her work.

A shadow came towards her and she looked up. A man had come and stood at about a foot before her. He was Fulani, she noticed.

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She welcomed him to a seat, feeling that the man must have come a long way and needed to cool off, to escape the heat of the sun. She offered him a jug of water and a cup to help himself. The jug, indeed, was a calabash. She had kept it and the cup beside her so she would not need to walk to and fro the house each time she felt thirsty.

The man drank to his satisfaction and chatted away some minutes before he stepped out of the shade to dare the harsh heat.

“Madam, thank you very much,” he said to Oyinlola.

“Haba, Mallam, why are you thanking me again?” she asked.

“Well, I just don't mind how many times I express my gratitude,” he replied.

“You don't need to repeat yourself over and over for me to know you are grateful.”

“You know, it's absurd. I mean I didn't plan to stop over to cool myself.”

“You did the right thing. This heat can smoulder somebody.”

“You have some sense of humour, Madam. Thank you once more, the final time,” he said and stepped into the sun. He suddenly turned and looked as if he forgot something very important.

“Is anything the problem,” Oyinlola asked him, seeing the quizzical look he had worn.

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“No, nothing is wrong. It's just that I almost forgot to inform you that you're going to have another beautiful girl.”

Oyinlola exploded in a laughter, dropping the kitchen knife she was working with and throwing her head backward, as if she had heard the funniest joke of the time.

Instead of being embarrassed, the man joined in the laughter. When they had calmed, he said, “This is the way you would laugh the day the baby would arrive.”

“You seem so serious, don't you,” she managed to say as another burst of laughter overwhelmed her. She could not imagine where the man got that frivolous idea. She had already concluded with herself that she was not going to have another baby. She was already a grandma. Her first son, Bayo, was already a university graduate. And, her first daughter, Oyegbemi was already married and had kids. Why would she need another child. Still laughing hilariously, she managed to say, “Go well ooo!”

“Well, I've told you,” the man said finally and left.

But, about a year after, Oyinlola was delivered of a beautiful baby girl! They named her Moromoke. The same year, too, the second wife had a baby boy. There was unprecedented happiness in the family. Things went on fine with the family as if to say that everybody was looking forward to these babies.

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Revision Questions

1. Olabode hailed from which state?
2. Where did Olabode later move to in search of greener pasture?
3. What is referred to as “*Greener Pasture*”?
4. Briefly describe the composure of Olabode.
5. How many years did Olabode spent in Ibadan when he thought of getting married?
6. Who did Olabode marry?
7. Describe the physical appearance of Oyinlola.
8. What was the major reason Olabode gave Oyinlola for going back to the village?
9. How many wives and children did Baba Akin have?
10. How was Olabode’s voice when he expressed to Oyinlola his intention to get another wife?
11. How did Oyinlola feel when her husband told her about having another wife?
12. What did he say was the reason for getting another wife?

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13. The only way to brush off conflict is to

14. How many children did Olabode's two wives have?

15. What was the name Olabode's second wife?

16. The old man that foretold the birth of Moromoke came from which tribe?

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Chapter Two

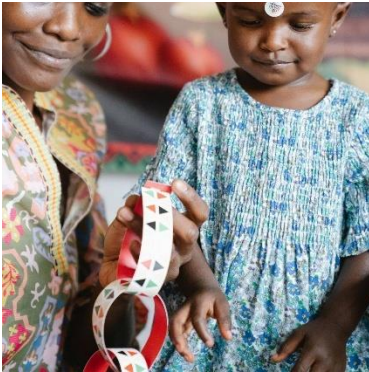
Moromoke was still very tender when tragedy rocked their happy home. It had begun with Kemi, the second wife, when she fell sick suddenly. Despite all medications she still died. The boy that was born also in the same year as Moromoke having been bereft of his motherly milk died shortly after. Soon, her father became critically ill. And, as battles were fought to save him, her mother's first daughter, Oyegbemi, lost her husband and three children in quick succession.

Olabode could not make it. His death was a jolt to the family. Oyinlola was heartbroken and hardly could cope. She had eleven children to cater for and vast land to cultivate, almost alone. She felt that life had suddenly turned tough on her. She felt she was drowning in a kind of pool against which tide she could not swim. Relatives and friends noticed she was dying gradually and came to assist. They took away all the children but Moromoke and two other boys, Dapo and Dotun.

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Moromoke was the only child in the family that had not started schooling. She followed her mother to the farm and assisted in keeping her sickly elder sister's company. The sister had become a ghost of herself. She refused to eat and to speak to anyone. She always mused in self pity, wishing that everything would return to status quo.



Moromoke had a deceptive physique. She looked frail in appearance but somehow had enormous strength and stamina for age and look. She would carry loads of palm fruits, heavier than what most people of her age could carry, from points of harvest to place of processing. Her mother always expressed fears and tried to restrict her from it, but she would never listen.

Dotun would always come home from school and ask his mum to let Moromoke start schooling.

"Mama, our teacher said we should bring our sister to school," Dotun said in one of the days.

"She is hearing you. Tell her yourself," their mother replied.

"I won't go to any school," Moromoke said from the far corner where she sat.

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“You will come,” Dotun said.

“I won't,” Moromoke insisted.

“Our headmaster will give order and the pupils will come and carry you.”

“They will not see me. I'll go and hide.”

“I'll show them where you are hidden.”

“Then I'll follow mama to the farm.”

“That makes it easier. We'll wait and capture you on the way.”

“Mama will not allow them, Mama will you?” Moromoke asked looking hopefully at her mother. Their mother seemed uninterested in their little chat.

“Mama will not protect you,” Dotun said.

Moromoke ran to her mother crying, “Mama, don't allow them carry me. I don't want to be without you.”

“Oya , Dotun, go and join your brother in the kitchen,” she said and ended the discussion.

Until Moromoke eventually agreed to follow Dapo and Dotun to school, her mother never forced her to it. It appeared Oyinlola, their mother also enjoyed Moromoke's company.

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When Moromoke enrolled at the community primary school in 1968, she already knew from her brothers how to count one to one hundred, and how to recite English and Yoruba alphabet.

Moromoke discovered that schooling was enthralling. She relished each day with great enthusiasm. She would wake up early in the morning, say a little prayer with mother and went off with her brothers to the brook nearby to bath and fetch water for use at home.

Beats of August rain drummed on the roof and running down some grooves spattered on the ground. Moromoke stretched under the wrapper she had covered herself with, neck to toe. Other nights Moromoke would have enjoyed the rainfall. But, tonight, her mind was occupied. She had not slept well. She had tossed about, opening her eyes several times to discover the night was not in a hurry to give way for daybreak. She looked around her and everybody was sound asleep.

She was worried because the school was vacating that day. The question whether she would still pick the first position or whether some other person in her class would beat her to it could not stop sneaking into her nerves and subconscious mind, thereby making it difficult for her to enjoy her sleep. She sank deeper into the wrapper to see if she could sleep, but a cock crowed somewhere, and she knew day would fully break soon.

“There is no point for me to try and sleep again,” she said to herself.

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She knelt down to pray, but her mind was not in it. She managed to mumble some words and heard herself say, "Amen."

"Latest, at one o'clock in the afternoon everything would be over," she told herself, "And I will come home and sleep." But even the one o'clock was still like a year afar for her.

She got up and went to wash plates used during the night and to prepare for school.

The tension gripped her again. "God help me, I can't bear any position except first position," she prayed silently. She was afraid particularly about Ola, whom she had marginally beaten in previous terms.

The rain drizzled slightly when she and her brothers left home for school. It stopped totally some twenty minutes after they had got to the school.

By mid-day the bell was rung for the pupils to assemble in one of the classrooms where they would be given their report cards after the first three best pupils in each class was called and presented with gifts.

By the time the Primary four teacher was finished for the primary three teacher to take over the stage, the tension had returned in Moromoke. It was the turn for Moromoke's class. Her body mechanism worked her blood up to a mad rush. Her heart pounded harshly against her ribs. Her feet wobbled as if the bones in them were rubber-like. Luckily for her, she was standing beside one of the

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poles that supported the roof. She propped herself against it and saved herself from falling.

“God, help me. Let me not pee on myself,” she prayed in her heart. She was seriously pressed. She had eased herself three times since the time the bell was rung and the time she got to the hall. She crossed her legs to hold it back.

“Good day pupils,” Mr. Akintola said, turning to other teachers and nodding his head in greeting.

“Good day sir,” the pupils chorused.

“I’m standing in for Mr. Oye, the primary three teacher,” Mr. Akintola said, his fingers interlocked. “Mr. Oye went to somewhere. Without wasting time, let me announce the results.” He went back to where he had been standing among other teachers to pick a file he had left there.

“The third position is,” Mr. Akintola began, consulting the file, “Ayomide Jegede.” He looked up as the boy ran out. “The second is Bamidele Oje.”

Moromoke's heart thumped harder. She was neither third nor second, she must be first, she told herself.

“The first is Thom....”

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Moromoke did not hear again. How could it be? She hid her face in her palms as she wept.

She did not hear the uproar around her as people shouted that the result was wrong. The pupils announced as the best three, especially Thompson, could not be. Thompson was the most reckless and unserious pupil in the class.



The headmaster and two other teachers went to consult with Mr. Akintola on the result. They discovered that the results were not arranged according to positions. The headmaster made excuses for the error and went on to announce the positions. "The first, actually is Moromoke Olabode," he said.

There was a burst of ovation. Moromoke came to reality. Miss Bose, Moromoke's teacher in primary two, in excitement went and took Moromoke's hand and led her to the front.

Miss Bose had been very nice to Moromoke since the day she tried to punish her for a slight offence. Moromoke had run away from school. Nobody knew when. Every attempt to locate her had failed until a team went to their house and discovered she had come home to hide. Miss Bose had pleaded with Moromoke to come back to school and pledged that she would never beat her or threaten to beat her again.

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Moromoke's eyes were still misty with tears and two lanes left by dried tears were still visible in her cheeks. She tried to force herself to smile, but it didn't work. She ended up wearing a twisted smile that was unlike her.

She was happy and looked forward to the accolades her mother and neighbours would pour on her. She was a star. She always participated in the school's end of year party, especially, among the drama crew. She always rendered citations. And so on. She could not imagine how she could have faced all the people that had had faith in her had she not picked the first position. She could not imagine how she could have mixed with other children without them jeering her as the giant tree that had fallen. She did not know how she would have felt at the church on Sunday or how she could have come out freely to listen to moonlight stories or join others in moonlight dances. She would have been heartbroken. She would have hated schooling, to an extent though. But she thanked God.

Moromoke was feeding firewood into the fire upon which her mother, Oyinlola, was frying garri.

“Who am I seeing?” her mother shouted.

Moromoke turned and screamed, “Sister Bunmi ... Sister Bunmi ...” and ran to meet her.

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Bunmi was Oyinlola's second daughter. She was in Oke-Ogun with Oyedeji, her eldest son. She had sent message the previous week that she was coming home. The reason was to take Moromoke to the city of Ibadan to live with Bayo because Oyedeji would be traveling abroad. The mother had kept the news from Moromoke. She was afraid life without the young girl could be unbearable. To her, time had run too quickly. She managed to keep her cool, even though she had already begun feeling lonely as if Moromoke had already been taken away. Moromoke did not suspect any strange behaviour in her mother though.

Moromoke ran and jumped into Bunmi's outstretched arms who caught her in mid-air and clamped her on her chest. Moromoke entwined her arms around Bunmi's neck and her legs around her waist. When they disentangled, Moromoke, now on her feet, reached for her sister's travelling bag, but Bunmi obliged the nylon bag that contained bread and few other things she had bought on the way, instead. "My travelling bag is heavy. You can't carry it," Bunmi explained.

Moromoke swung the bag as they walked to the house. Their mother rose from her work and embraced Bunmi. "Welcome oh!. How is the journey?"

How are your brothers?" she asked.

"Thank you mama, they are all fine. They sent their greetings."

"See you, Bunmi you have grown. What do they feed you with there?" their mother asked. It was almost one year since the last time she

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had seen Bunmi. She noticed that Bunmi was slightly plump in the cheek compared to the last time she had seen her.

Bunmi was dressed in a patterned blouse inside a trench coat and a belt around her waist. Her blue stripped print skirt was just below the knee. Her hair was tucked under a brown hat. She was elegant. Her mother-like ebony complexion made her radiant too. She drew the chair Moromoke had brought her closer and sat down.

The women chatted on all manner of conversations

Moonlight cascaded from the star adorned sky. The women were seated around earthen plates having their dinner. The meal was one of their mother's best delicacies. Oyinlola had told herself that the meal should be special. "Is Bunmi not a special guest?" she had quizzed herself to justify the sumptuous meal. They all enjoyed it. It was with great effort that Bunmi stopped eating. She had overfed herself.

Later, after the plates had been cleared, "How is Dapo and Dayo," their mother opened a discussion. The two boys had been taken to the city by the eldest son, Oyedeji. The boys had grown stubborn and had become difficult for their mother to handle. She had reported her plight to Bayo, her second son. Bayo had come home and counselled the boys. But their remorse did not last long before their bad habits remanifested. Oyedeji, being well informed about their unruly behaviour had resolved to take them to Oke-Ogun where he would keep a close watch on them and guide them rightly.

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“Dapo and Dayo are doing extremely well,” Bunmi replied. “They are no longer rascally as you used to know them.”

“Thank God o!” their mother said, throwing her palms skyward in appreciation.

Moromoke watched as the women talked, her chin rested in her palms.

“You said you've come to take Moromoke,” their mother continued.

“Yes mama, Brother Oyedeji is travelling abroad, and he wants Moromoke to come to the city to be adequately taken care of and trained in a better school,” Bunmi said.

“Hmm...,” their mother groaned.

“Mama, you don't seem to like the idea,” Bunmi observed.

“It's not that my daughter. As matter of fact, I love it so much. It's just . . .” their mother hesitated.

“M...a...m...a...!” Bunmi called dragging the syllables.



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“It's just that I would miss her. She has been like a second body to me. I find it difficult to release her. It's as if my life is tied to her. I don't have a choice but to let her go since it's for her good.”

Moromoke was listening to the discussion with mixed feelings. The idea of going to live without her mother did not impress her and at the same time the idea of going to the city excited her. She had heard stories about city life and she had never had the opportunity to travel out of their village. She was confused and so she could not join in the discussion.

“Mama, don't worry,” Bunmi said. “You'll get over the loneliness. And as for Moromoke, she would be happy to go to the city. You will be doing her a great favour by encouraging her to follow me.”

“Don't bother. I'm already an adult. I'm used to moments like this. She will go. Moromoke won't you? She asked, looking at Moromoke.

Moromoke just nodded her head, what ever that meant.

A week later, Moromoke was in Ibadan.

The following day, she was prepared to go to the new school she was enrolled in. She was dressed in flower-print silk gown. The cloth was one of her best seasonal attires. She hardly wore it, except the occasion was very special.

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This day was special, anywhere, she had told herself. She was going to a new environment. She was going to meet people she had never met before.

So, she must look her best, even though she didn't know how she would sustain the show-off until her school uniform was made. She would not just be wearing just one cloth, even though she didn't have too many clothes. Nevertheless, the thought of going to the new school took her breath away that she forgot she didn't have too many clothes

Her few weeks in the school proved quite interesting. She discovered that she struggled in class to keep up pace with her colleagues. She told herself she would get over the situation soon, it could be that she was having problem with acclimatization.

By the end of the term, it dawned on her that the situation was not child's play like she had thought. Her classmates were all brainy, she realised. There was stiff competition. She discovered that despite her being the champion in her village school, she was no match to most pupils in her class. She had assessed herself to be nowhere among the first ten in the class. This term proved her right!

Irrespective of all the efforts she made during the exams, she was in the twenty-eighth position, in a class of fifty. She wept profusely and her situation worsened when she finally got home. She was sternly chided and made mockery of by her sisters and brothers.

She could not understand why they could not understand her plight and wouldn't show her any clemency. Was she not the baby of the

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house that should be pampered instead? Have they forgotten that she had been a village girl and that city life and school might be too fast for her to cope as expected

What she did not realise was that their actions were deliberate to spur her on to the challenge.

The following term, she worked harder and was in the fourth position. She was happy with herself, but very careful to suppress her real feelings before her relations. She did not want to give them the opportunity to read her feelings from her actions. She suspected they would never stop to scold her until she assumed the first position in her class.

During the subsequent terms, she worked harder, but her efforts did not still take her beyond the fourth position. She was struggling against smart students who were not willing to relinquish their top positions on account of any academic laxity. They were pupils who also understood quite well that the competition was stiff and therefore were very astute and committed to their studies. She told herself that if she could not beat anybody at the top for a better position, nobody would beat her to her position either. Thus, she maintained fourth position till she finished her primary six.

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Revision Questions

1. Describe briefly the nature of tragedy that struck Olabode's family
2. What was the level of Moromoke's academic competence by the time she was enrolled at the school?
3. How did Moromoke feel after she was admitted in the school?
4. On the result giving day, Moromoke was filled with anxiety. What was the reason?
5. What was the name of the teacher that stood in for Mr Oye?
6. Who did Mr Oye call for the first position instead of Moromoke? What happened to the result?
7. How did Moromoke react when Miss Bose punished her for a slight offence?
8. 8.What was the position of Bunmi in the family and where did she live?
9. Why was Bunmi's trip to the village for?

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10. With which cloth did Moromoke dress when going to the new school she was enrolled in Ibadan?
11. What was Moromoke's position at the end of the first term?
12. Complete this sentence by filling in the gap. "Thus, she maintained _____ till she finished her Primary six."

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Chapter Three

Moromoke wore her new school uniform and admired herself in a mirror. She was excited. She had looked forward to this day. She had hardly slept last night. Three times she had got up from bed to admire her school uniform and flipped through her blank fresh-smelling notebooks.

By 6.00 am, she was already awake. Before 7.00am when she would leave the hostel, she ironed the yet-to-be worn school uniform and spent some time polishing her new sandals, from time to time looking out through the window to see how quick the sun was rising.

Now fully dressed, Moromoke went to the administration office to complete her registration that was begun the previous day by her brother, Dotun, whom Bayo had sent to bring her.

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The principal assigned her to Class One A. The reason was because her score in the Common Entrance Examination was very high. She



was even offered admission, also, in another school. It had taken some serious and critical deliberations to decide which of the schools she would be enrolled into. Eventually, Moromoke found herself at Orioke Baptist High School, which was at the outskirts of Ibadan.

Moromoke was happy with the decision and had looked forward with every anticipation to the day she would begin. She did not want to school at Ibadan town. She wanted to be away from home so that she would live in the school and come only during holidays like her brothers and sisters.

At the classroom, Moromoke was thrilled that college experience was quite different from that of primary school. She did not find any desk or chair that was supposed to belong to the class teacher.

When the first teacher for the day came into the class, he taught Mathematics. Moromoke guessed he was their class teacher, but she was wrong. The man had left the class for another teacher when the bell was rung 40 minutes later for change of class. Before break time, she had learnt that unlike in her former primary school where one teacher taught the pupils in his or her class all the required

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subjects, teachers in secondary school taught specific subjects across the classes.

“Who can remind us of our topic for last week?” the English Language teacher, Mr. Adedeji, asked.

Moromoke raised her hands. She had been the overall best student in English Language the previous year and had been presented a gift at the award giving day. Though her competence in the subject was dwindling as a result of lack of competitive spirit in other students on the subject. Also, the fact her mates called her names and explained her efforts at improving her English Language communication which she had imbibed from the primary school as “*yanga*” (pride) made her lose interest in the subject. She had forgotten her popular adage that “*A man who must lead the orchestra must turn his back against the crowd*” as she joined others to flow in the tide.

“Yes, Moromoke” the teacher called.

“The topic was 'Parts of Speech',” she answered standing on her feet.

“Clap for her,” the teacher instructed the class.

They roared in a thunderous clap. Moromoke was elated. She was doing very well in English language.

“Everyone recite for me what a noun is,” the teacher asked

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“A noun is a name of a person, animal, . . .” the class chanted, but Mr. Adedeji interrupted them. “Stop . . . stop . . . some of you are humming,” he said.

Moromoke and some other students in the first few rows in the front looked back. They knew that had come from the '*Colony*', the name of one of the '*rough boys*' who occupied the back seats in class called themselves.

“I could not hear some of you clearly,” he said. “You people in the front, recite it.”

Moromoke, one other girl and three boys stood up and chorused, “A noun is a name of a person, animal, place or thing!”

“Good, clap for them.” The students clapped.

“Now, the four of you at the back, recite it,” Mr. Adedeji commanded pointing at Dimeji and his friends. The class laughed. Moromoke's laughter sounded louder and longer than the others. Everyone knew Dimeji, alias '*the Colony*'; Tunji, alias '*Zambutu*'; Olu, alias '*Fancy Face*' and Shittu, alias '*Mamba*' were in deep trouble.

Sometimes, Moromoke wondered how these boys had picked those funny aliases. Shittu inherited the name, '*Mamba*', from his primary school because he had a way with snakes. He would enter a bush and come out with a live snake with which to frighten anyone that posed a threat to him. Dimeji got his in the class when severally he always read 'the Colonel' as '*the Colony*'.

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Moromoke was not sure how Olu got his. But it was funny to her how Olu should be called '*Fancy Face*'. To her, there was nothing fancy about his face. In fact, he was ugly! His face looked as if it was chiselled out of wood. His mouth was wide with his teeth that he always had problems hiding beneath his lips. His nose was too big for his face and his eyes slant with a sinister look that even a cobra would envy.

The boys called themselves '*the Captains*'.

They were the big and dreaded boys in the class. They were big in statures, much bigger than any body in the class. Dimeji was the biggest and toughest. They must have started schooling late in age. Every student in the class feared them. They could beat up anybody that messed with them. There were rumours that some senior students also feared them. It was in order to tame Dimeji that he was made Toilet Prefect in his dormitory, where he had been a real terror to his fellow students.

"A noun is . . . ehm . . . ehm . . ." one of them began to say.

Moromoke lost her composure and led off another round of laughter that made the boys feel really humiliated. The class knew they were always a bunch of truant fellows.

As the boys stood mumbling inaudible things, Dimeji looking at his friends whimpered, rubbing his stomach sporadically and slightly turning his head one way and the other as if in serious pains.

"What?" Mr. Adedeji asked.

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Dimeji continued rubbing his stomach.

“What's the matter?” the teacher asked again.

“Sir,” Dimeji began.

“Yes . . . yes . . .?” the teacher replied

“Sir,” Dimeji called again.

“Yes, what is it?” Mr. Adediji asked, an alarm in his voice.

“Stomach, paining me, outside shit,” Dimeji managed to say in mispronounced English

The class burst out in laughter. Somebody coughed as another drummed on his desk.

“What do you mean?” Mr. Adediji asked oblivious of the noise around him.

In response, Dimeji bent double and gritted his teeth.

“Who can tell me what is going on here?” the teacher asked.

“Sir,” Moromoke stood up to explain, “he is saying he has running stomach and that he must leave the class now before he . . .”

“Ah, please go,” the teacher said cutting Moromoke in mid-sentence.

“Sir, I think he is acting,” Moromoke said, but the teacher didn't seem to hear that.

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Dimeji quickly walked out of the class in a manner that indicated he was seriously constipated, giving Moromoke a cold look as he walked past her.

Mr. Adedeji turned to face the others and discovered they were also rubbing their stomachs and holding their buttocks as if to block off fart.

“Now, what is it again?” the teacher asked them

“Sir, all of us, stomach, running,” Tunji said. “Sir, break period, us and Dimeji eat together, now stomach problem.”

“Alright. I give all of you just two minutes to go and ease yourselves and come back to this class!”

“Thank you sir!” they replied

They ran out. They did not return to class until Mr. Adedeji left the class

School dismissed at 1:50pm. Moromoke and her friend, Lola, did not return to the hostel immediately. They had stayed back in the class to revise some of their books as they would be having Geography test the following day. Moreover, examinations would commence in two weeks' time. Moromoke was seated on a desk, her legs crossed and dangling and her eyes closed as she recited in her mind what she had just crammed.

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“Moromoke!!!!”

Moromoke opened her eyes and turned to the call.

It was from Dimeji and his friends. They stood at the door, evil smiles on their lips.

She knew *the Captains* were there not for any pleasant company. Moromoke could smell trouble. Could she and her friend overpower them? She was confused, but managed to reply them, “Yes?”

“We have come to talk to you.”

“About what?” She asked with feigned confidence.

“Oh, about that little incident in the class, this afternoon.”

“Which incident?” Lara interjected.

“Shut up that your dirty mouth, before we twist it for you,” *Fancy Face* said, his eyes as cold as ever.

“Well,” *the Colony* continued, “Moromoke, you think you're the only one that is brainy. You think you can humiliate us.” He turned to Shittu and said, “*Ore*, show them your stuff.”

Moromoke shrank towards a corner, thinking the boy would come and beat her.

Instead, Shittu picked the bag that had hung on his shoulder which he had dropped on the floor shortly after they entered the class. He untied it, dipped his right hand into it and pulled out a long black

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roundish stuff, then the head came out too. It was a snake! He dropped the reptile on the floor making it face Moromoke and her friend. Fear gripped the girls. For a whole minute, their larynx could not open to the shriek that wailed in them.

The snake crawled in a very slow pace in a way that caused goose pimples to appear on the girls.

Moromoke eventually found her voice and screamed, and the snake seemed to be awakened and reacted as if it was seeing the girls for the first time, seeing them as enemies in its territory. It plunged at Moromoke, but she had jumped onto a desk, in a fraction of a second before the move. It landed on the foot of the desk and made to climb the foot of the desk, but paused a moment and turned back to where it had come from.

Moromoke, with her feet wobbling, realized the desk on which she had jumped onto was too weak to carry her. She jumped down and with her friend scrambled to a corner, where clutching themselves in fear, they screamed hysterically and begged *the Captains* for mercy and to take away the beast. The snake began its slow crawl again towards the girls.

“Help!” the girls screamed torturously and almost simultaneously.

All the while, the boys laughed, finding great fun in the game. Shittu was whistling, perhaps it was his way of commanding the snake.

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Anthony was coming back to his class. He had forgotten his Biology textbook in his locker and it was not locked. Walking down, his short stature and bulging biceps gave him the look of an ape. He was rumoured to be the strongest boy among all the seniors and by extension the strongest in the school. He was the games prefect.



He heard the scream and the shout for help. "Who could still be in the class by this time?" he asked himself. "Worst of all from the junior classes."

He heard the shout again and knew that something was wrong. He picked a race and stopped short when he saw Dimeji and his group.

"What's wrong with you boys," he asked as he pushed in.

Three of the boys looked surprised at seeing him, but Dimeji did not even seem to have seen him or cared whether somebody had come.

"What are you boys up to? Go back to your hostels now before I descend on you all!" he yelled at them.

Dimeji continued to enjoy himself as the black leathery-looking reptile continued to advance toward the girls.

Then Anthony looked down and saw the snake for the first time.

With the new sound from Anthony the snake had paused, corked its head and hissed.

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“My God! What kind of game is this,” Anthony shouted.

The snake worked its jaws opening and closing, exposing its fangs and darting its tongue out and in. It crawled again toward the fright-stricken girls bobbing its head as it moved. It appeared to be enjoying the cold menacing fear it had cast on the girls.

A bird chirped. The reptile snapped up, alert, watchful. It looked back and forth, scanning in small jerking shifts. Then it relaxed and proceeded toward its preys again.

Shittu made some hissing sound and the snake changed direction in amazing swiftness. It now crawled toward Anthony.

“Attack!” Shittu ordered. The snake stood in its mid-section with part of its body coiled and ready to spring. Its forked tongue darted in and out, just as its hood contrasted and expanded. Its metallic eyes did not blink.

Anthony stood transfixed, staring at the dangerous animal in fright. He immediately began to mumble, not knowing what he was saying or who he was addressing.

How could these boys be toying with a cobra. How could he defend himself and the girls against the snake? He realized he had held his breath for so long he couldn't tell how long. He released his breath and sucked in air hungrily. He admitted to himself that he was fear-stricken.

But his character took over him. He seldom feared. He told himself that fear would not solve the problem. He had to act and act fast.

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"If only I have a weapon," he mused to himself. But then the snake was set to launch at him.

Anthony edged toward the window.

"Attack!" Shittu ordered the snake a second time. It shot itself into the air with the speed that amazed Moromoke. But then Anthony had anticipated that move and had dashed behind *Fancy Face*, whom he had gone very close to in those backward moves.

The snake missed Anthony by a whisker. He pushed *Fancy Face* to it as it was recovering from the onslaught. In the few steps *Fancy Face* took to try to regain his balance, he stepped heavily on the snake, in a force that made it whimper. It turned with fierceness to bite, but Shittu, *the Mamba* had said something that made the snake calm down and crawl back to him. He picked it up and dropped it back in the bag and knotted the bag.



Dimeji then descended on Anthony and others joined him in the mass beating. To them Anthony had spoilt their good fun. He was an unwelcomed companion, an intruder that must be punished. Anthony fought back, swinging his arms here and there and most times landing them on flesh. Someone timed a blow at him. He saw the fist from the edge of his eye. He dodged it and the attacker landed on his shoulders.

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Anthony hoisted the person off the ground and threw him down, unknowingly on the bag containing the snake which Shittu had abandoned on the floor to join his group in the mob attack. This was Zambutu!

Zambutu was plump and overweight. In the brief moment he was lifted off the ground, he could not explain how he had missed that power-packed blow. He had thrown all his weight on that singular blow hoping to knock sense out of Anthony. But he had missed Anthony's head and caught himself in centrifugal motion until he was thrown down on the bag of snake. His weight must have been like a heavy rock dropped from a height to crush the reptile, because he could hear a bone-snapping sound and felt something twitch under him. He hurried to stand up, but then something else happened.

Mamba knew that his snake was in danger. He dashed off to rescue it, but Anthony saw another opportunity to wreck another havoc. He stretched his leg to cross path with Mamba. Not seeing the move, Mamba ran into the crossed leg and there was a brief interlock, which made him lose his balance, and he collapsed heavily on Zambutu and the snake. The animal made just one short twitch. By the time Mamba extracted the snake from the bag, it was dead.

Meanwhile, Lola had jumped out of the window the moment the snake turned to face Anthony. She ran to the staff quarters to call any teacher she could find. Moromoke was filled with terror and could not do anything but watch and scream. She felt like vomiting.

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Anthony was in serious tangle with Dimeji. He could faintly feel that some people were raining blows at his back, neck and sides. But he was stubborn and did not seem to feel the blows.

Fancy Face ran towards Moromoke to beat her. But in his madness, he didn't see a stump that protruded from a desk. He ran into it and tripped. He crashed with a loud bang that shook the floor and deafened Moromoke. The desk also crashed on him. Zambutu went to help him up. Then Mamba shouted, "Serge is coming, Serge is coming." He picked up the bag with the dead snake and ran to the window across the class and jumped out. Dimeji managed to disentangle himself from the bull fight with Anthony and also jumped through the window. Zambutu and Fancy Face followed suit.

Serg was short for sergeant. He was the disciplinary master. He taught Physics. Serg was not his real name. His name was Mr. Tunde. Many students didn't know that anymore. He had a military background and never tolerated nonsense. Every student feared him. Punishment under him was usually like walking through a fire. The students had the popular saying that '*the fear of Serg was the beginning of wisdom*'. He and Lola were still far from the scene of the fight when *the Captains* jumped through the window and ran into the bush leaving Moromoke and Anthony to explain the mess in the class.

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Revision Questions

1. Was Moromoke a day student?
2. In her first year in school, which class was she assigned to _____ and why?
3. The name of the school was _____
4. The overall best student in English Language was _____
5. Explain the meaning of this proverb, *"A man who must lead the orchestral must turn his back against the crowd."*
6. What was Dimeji's alias? How did he inherit it?
7. The four boys called themselves _____
8. What was the academic standard of the four boys that called themselves *"The Captains"*?
9. Where were Moromoke and her friend, Lola, when the four notorious boys struck? And what were they doing?
10. Fill in the gap "The snake crawled in a very slow pace in a way that caused _____ on the girls."
11. What role did Anthony play in rescuing Moromoke and Lola from *"The Captains"*?

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12. Who was called “*Serge*”? Why was he called that?
13. What subject did “*Serge*” teach?
14. Where did “*The Captain*” run to and why?

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Chapter Four

End of term was near. Moromoke was homesick. She needed to see her people. She sat under a cashew tree with her friends. They sang to ease off their tension:

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*holiday is coming
no more warning bell;
no more come to school,
goodbye teachers
goodbye scholars
as we are going to spend our jolly holiday*

When the holiday came eventually, Moromoke did not spend a day more in the college like she usually did, before going home. She was anticipative of the usual happy reunion at home. She knew the first thing she would be asked about was her report card. She had performed better than the previous year and she knew her people would be impressed. She was prepared, also, with answers to her other extra-curricular activities within the school period, which she knew her brother usually had interest in.

When Bayo got home from work in the evening, Moromoke had been home at the least four hours earlier. He had his bath and changed to his evening attire. He went to the shelf and turned down the rock music blasting in the JVC Radio. He went round and sat down in one of the vacant seats. Bunmi, Dotun and Dapo were in the room too.

“So Moromoke, how was your journey?” Bayo inquired.

“My journey was smooth, brother.”

“You don't look so thin like I had imagined. What were they feeding you with in the school?” he asked

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Moromoke laughed. She knew her brother was teasing her. He wanted to know whether the school actually took care of the students, whether they were well-fed, and all other information.

“Brother, what would you expect from a school like ours. Of course, the school took very good care of us. They fed us well and made sure we read our books,” Moromoke replied.



“What about games,” Bayo asked. He believed there should be a balance between hard work and games.

“You know I would never compromise the time for games for anything,” Moromoke replied. She knew that was exactly what her brother wanted to hear.

“Good. Which of the games did you participate in?”

“Track events.”

“I know that's your sport. That's the reason you will never have flesh on your bones,” he joked and everyone laughed.

Bunmi, Dotun and Dapo were seated in the long upholstery facing the door, enjoying the discussions.

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“What about church,” Bunmi chipped in.

“I never missed church service and other church activities,” Moromoke answered. In fact, I will show you my notes. You people would see the dates, who preached and the topics. As a matter of fact, I will be attending the Youth Long Vacation Camp, organized by Scripture Union (Nigeria) at Oyo.”

“Yaayyy!!!” Dapo roared as he clapped for the girl. Somehow others joined him to cheer her up. Moromoke felt elated.

“Dotun has already told me about your academic performance and how you participated in debates and literary arts. Later bring me your report sheet, I will like to see it myself.”

“Maybe I should go and bring it now,” Moromoke said and made to stand up.

“No, I said later. About this camp, I don't know, I don't think you would go. Oyo is too far”

“Ahhh, nooo, brother please!! I want to be at the camp . . . Remember last year you didn't allow me to go, because of distance too . . .” Moromoke pleaded, almost at the verge of tears.

“Ok! Ok . . . ok . . . I will oblige you this time.”

“Oh! Thank you very much!”

“In the meantime, Dotun, go and get her the gift I bought for her,” Bayo said.

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“Gift!” Moromoke exclaimed in amazement, lifting her two palms to her mouth. She looked around herself and everybody was smiling. Everybody was happy with her. She got up, ran to Brother Bayo and embraced him. She disengaged to embrace everyone too.

She forgot entirely to tell them of *the Captains*. When she did remember, she told herself she would tell them some other time. There was no point spoiling the sweet evening so soon with such sordid story.

Moromoke was happy to attend the Scripture Union Youth camp. She was especially happy because it entailed travelling, which was one of her hobbies. The camp was an expedition she would not have loved to miss. She relished the prospect of watching forests running in fast pace against the direction of the vehicle, seeing beautiful sceneries and natural endowments and making new friends.

At the camp, Moromoke was really thrilled. She witnessed an atmosphere of love among all campers and camp officers. She saw humility in action. Prominent men and women, movers and shakers in government, and successful business juggernauts were fully present to minister to the needs of the campers. If Moromoke was not at the camp it would have been difficult to convince her that these personalities could stoop to serve the youths in the camp

Moromoke was particularly touched that Professor Akali, whom Dotun said was a head of department in University of Ibadan was at

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the camp too, assisting in the kitchen and washing plates the children used.



She was really touched, and she promised herself right at that moment that she would lead a life worthy of emulation. She determined she would not play some of the pranks many girls at the camp played. She attended all the programs and more than ever felt touched by God. By the end of the camp, she had given her life to Christ.

Before departure, Moromoke, her sisters and others that had accepted Jesus Christ into their lives as their Lord and Saviour were assigned to follow-up personnel, who took their school addresses with the hope to write them and possibly visit them to ensure they

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remained in faith. The one assigned to Moromoke was Mr. John, an Agricultural Engineering Student at the University of Ibadan.

Moromoke returned to Ibadan. She was happy over her newfound faith. She shared her experience with as many people that cared to listen to her. She had come to see that the usual Thursday fellowships in her school was poorly organized and that rather than it addressing the spiritual needs of the students, they were avenues for senior students to witch-hunt and brutalize the psyche of the junior students. Half of her was occupied with thoughts of how she could assist in improving the school fellowship and the general understanding of the students. She wished everybody from her school had attended the Youth Camp Programme.

On the other hand, she wished she could be transferred to another school, where she could refresh her Christianity on a clean slate. But she did not have any authority to enforce this wish, so she made attempts to shove it aside as wishful thinking, even though it kept recurring in her mind.

A couple of times, the thought to move to another school had dropped in her heart while praying and she had handed it over to God to perfect it. A few times she prayed this prayer, she had condemned her request as hypocrisy, telling herself that the way to prove her genuine repentance was to dwell amongst her old folks and let them see the difference in her.

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The holiday was drawing to an end. Moromoke was revising some topics in mathematics when Bayo came home from work. Dotun, who sat in one of the chairs reading newspaper, dropped the paper and took from Bayo his portfolio and followed him to his room. Bunmi, Dapo and Moromoke stood up to welcome Bayo and sat back after the pleasantries. Dotun returned to the parlour, this time he sat beside Moromoke instead of on the seat he had sat before their brother came in.

Thirty minutes later, Bayo had refreshed and come back to the sitting room where others were seated and watching a television programme.

“By the way, how is the spiritual atmosphere of your school?” Bayo asked nobody in particular though he appeared to be directing the question at Moromoke. At least Moromoke believed so.

“Well, brother, I think I have a better understanding now. The spiritual state in my school is nothing to write home about,” Moromoke responded.

“This is contrary to what you told me before.”

“The SU camp opened my eyes.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes. We were just religious at school. But now I know better,” Moromoke said.

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“Hmmm.... Interesting,” Bayo said crossing his legs. He picked a paper on a side table, which Dotun had dropped. He appeared to scan the headlines. He dropped it again. Moromoke knew her brother very well to understand that he had something on his mind. She waited. Everyone waited.

“Moromoke, I think I'll remove you from that school,” Bayo announced.

Moromoke did not expect that. But merely suggesting it gladdened her heart.

“I'll speak with Mr. Ajibola to see if he can admit you in his school,” he said.

Moromoke knew Mr. Ajibola very well. He was the principal of Oke-Odo Baptist High School and bosom friend of their eldest brother, Oyedeji. The school was at least four kilometres away from Ibadan. She would have to travel and live in the midst of other students. She liked the idea very much. She was sure, also, that with Mr. Ajibola, she would be in good hands and would be able to practise her newfound faith without hassles, coupled with the fact the school was church-owned.

Some days had passed. Bayo had contacted Mr. Ajibola like he promised, and the principal agreed to register Moromoke. He had asked for Moromoke's report card, which was provided for him two days later.

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Moromoke was unable to hide her excitement on hearing the news. She was sure it was God that effected the transfer, that her brother was only an instrument that was ready and willing to be used. Had she not prayed for the transfer? Of course she had! She had toyed with the idea of discussing it with her brother to change her to another school, but she never mustered the courage to do so.

“Thank you, Lord! I appreciate you,” she spoke out to the hearing of furniture and bare wall in her room. “God, you are my Father! You did for me what I could not do, what I did not have strength to do. Would my brother have listened to me if the suggestion had come directly from me? Of course not! You are awesome. You are God of all miracles,” she appreciated God until she drifted into sleep on the long chair she was lying on

About a week to resumption, Oyedeji and his wife visited. The day was Sunday.

“I see you have done very well taking care of everyone and everything,” Oyedeji said to Bayo. Oyedeji had just returned from abroad.

“I know you wouldn't have expected less,” Bayo responded.

“My friend, Mr. Ajibola, told me about Moromoke coming over to his school,”

“Oh, that.”

“I think I like the idea very much. His school is much better than the former one Moromoke was in.”

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“I thought as much too,” Bayo said.

Bunmi came in then to announce that lunch was ready. She called everybody in and they ate together. It was rice and stew. Moromoke observing everyone, concluded they all enjoyed the food. Bunmi served fruits afterwards. Later Bunmi, Oyedeji's wife and Moromoke cleared the plates while the men and the boys relaxed with chit-chats.

It was later in the night that Oyedeji and his wife decided to leave.

“Moromoke,” Oyedeji called.

“Sir,” Moromoke answered from inside her room and ran out.

“Be a good girl when you get to school, okay?” Oyedeji said brushing her hair as she ran to him. “We may not see again before you leave because I have to be in Akure tomorrow.

“Take this!.” he handed over a parcel to her.

“Thank you, brother,” Moromoke said wondering what was in the bulky envelope.

“Inside that envelope is your school fees, pocket money and enough money for your textbooks. I have already spoken with your principal; he would ensure you lack nothing.”

“Thank you, brother,” she replied joyfully.

“Dotun and Dapo.”

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“Yes, brother,” the boys answered, almost simultaneously, looking at him.

“You boys are coming home tomorrow. I've already discussed with Bayo. Bunmi will remain with Bayo,” Oyedeji said and shook hands with them and embraced everyone. He and his wife then took their leave. Bayo followed them to the car to see them off

Moromoke could hardly wait for the day to break when she began preparing for the long journey to her new school. The thought of making new friends and starting life in a new environment kept the blood in her veins warm.

About 6:00 a.m., Moromoke was brought to the Motor Park where she boarded a vehicle bound for the town where her new school was. The journey took so long because of several bad spots on the road which made the bus go *'humpty dumpty'* and very slowly.

By the time she arrived at the school only few students were around, but by the evening, many more students came in. Soon, she chatted up two girls who came in from Ibadan and another two from Lagos. They chatted as if they had known themselves before then

A couple of weeks later, the school was a beehive of activities. The social prefect, Senior Bose, had noticed that Moromoke had a good command of spoken English. She approached Moromoke to become one of the few students to make presentations at the forum of the literary and debating society.

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Moromoke accepted the offer. Her excellent performance exposed her to a popularity she had never imagined. She became a target for fun-seeking boys who struggled to befriend her. The senior boys looked for opportunities to have contact with her to express their feelings for her.

On several occasions, when she was cornered by any of the boys, she was diplomatic in her responses knowing they could make life difficult for her. She also knew that what they said to her were actually bloated talks. Her strategies did not last long. The boys realized too soon that she would not budge, so they tried another approach.

The usual practice in the school was to make a roster for weekly duties for all the students. Senior students were assigned groups to supervise. This day was Friday and Moromoke was on night shift. She was happy because the following week she would be on morning shift. She hated the night duty!

On Monday morning, Moromoke was surprised to still find her name in the night duty roster. The roster was not alternated as was the status quo. She thought it was an oversight, and so, did not complain. After another week, she found herself still in the night shift. That was when she knew something was amiss

One day she approached the labour prefect, who was one of the senior boys that had sought for her friendship, in order to report her plight.

“Senior, I don't understand what is going on,” Moromoke said.

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“How do you mean?” he asked.

“I've been on night schedules for four consecutive weeks.”

“So?”

“I should have been alternated to morning shift.”

“Well, maybe you liked night shift,” he said shaking his shoulder to indicate it was not his fault.

“No, Senior, I don't like night shift at all.”

“So, what do you want from me?”

“Please.”

“Please what?”

“I'm tired of the night shift.”

“I'm not your supervisor. There's nothing I can do for you.”

“No, there is something you can do,” Moromoke replied. She was surprised she could be bold talking to the senior

“Educate me,” the labour prefect said.

“Senior,” Moromoke began. “You're the overall supervisor. However you like, you can arrange the roster. If you don't wish any particular person to participate in the exercise, even the immediate supervisor cannot disturb the person.”

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“That’s making me feel like a knight.”

“Senior, you’re king in this matter.”

“Anyway, I didn’t know you realized that.”

“I do, really.”

“So?”

“Change my shift!”

“Only if you would be my girlfriend.”

“But I told . . .”

“I know what you told me! It’s either ‘Yes’ and your name is erased from that roster completely, or ‘No’ and you remain on night shift all the time,” he said in a tone of finality.

“Ok, please could you allow me some time to think it over?”

“Oh, I will, if you promise me you’re not going to take too long on it.”

“Sure, I won’t.”

“So, like how many hours do you need.”

“Hours?” Moromoke exclaimed.

“Ok, days?”

“Two weeks.”

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“You're not serious at all! I give you three days.”

“Ok! one week.”

The senior looked up as if in deep thought. “Ok, you win. One week.”

“Will you change me to morning shift now?”



“You're off the list for now and it will remain like that if your answer is eventually ‘Yes’

The one-week Moromoke gave the Labour Prefect ended sooner than she had expected

She began to dodge the prefect.

Three days later he caught up with her.

“You know our school is a small community,” the senior said to Moromoke.

“I don't understand, senior.”

“You were dodging from me.”

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“Nooo, I never dodged and would never do such a thing,” she replied. They were standing some feet apart. She had deliberately made it that way.

“Never mind.”

Moromoke remained silent.

“What have you come up with?”

“Please give me a little more time,” Moromoke pleaded.

“I'll give you the time, but I'll return you to the night shift.”

The thought of the night shift made her stomach churn

“I was only pulling your legs” Moromoke said.

“My legs?” he asked and Moromoke nodded.

“So now that you have pulled my legs, what's your answer,” he asked.

“You don't give up easily,” Moromoke said.

“That's not the answer.”

“I like your doggedness,” Moromoke said, winking at him

“I don't have patience for flattering.”

“My answer is . . . it's difficult for me to say.”

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“There's nothing difficult in it. It's either Y-E-S or N-O! please tell me.”

“It's YES!” Moromoke said flatly. In her mind she meant 'No'. She had to say what he wanted to hear and save herself from the punishment. She forced out a smile as she went to her hostel resolving to avoid contacts with him.

The school fellowship was not as vibrant as Moromoke had hoped it to be. Nobody was following her up in Christian faith.

“The person to followed me up can't reach me,” she told herself because of the change of address.

She wished she had changed the school before the Camp. She was desperate to grow in her faith, but she was too weak to make that growth happen in her by herself.

If she had a spiritual mentor, maybe she would have been guided on how to handle her case with the Labour Prefect. She knew her spiritual life had degenerated. Otherwise, how could she have willingly yielded to a boy for friendship?

She felt tormented despite the fact that she still maintained her purity. She told herself she would protect it no matter the cost. She respected her brother, Bayo, and his wife, who were already Christians and she told herself that she would resist any action that could bring them disappointment.

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She began to think of how she could break up the relationship she had already consented to. She could not discuss it with her colleagues in the fellowship. They would not understand. Even if they did, they would not know how to handle it with a sense of maturity. She enjoyed coming to the fellowship mainly because it was another forum where she could go to in order to hide from her boyfriend.

She got to the fellowship with her Bible under her armpit. She had hardly sat down to pray when one of her friends came and dropped a letter on her laps. Her first thought was to tear the entire thing to pieces, thinking the sister had become an agent for one of those fun-seekers.

She stayed the action because she was afraid the people there would suspect she had been messing around with some *'irresponsible'* boys. She told herself she must shred the letter without reading it the moment she got to the hostel or to a dark and secluded place.

While the Bible study was on, as she wanted to open her Bible, the letter fell down. She picked it up and discovered for the first time that it had a postage stamp. It must have come from the city, she thought. None of the boys in the school could take that extra step just to reach her. "No, nobody!," she mused to herself and stuffed the letter in her pocket.

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Getting to the hostel, she tore open the envelope, extracted the letter and checked the bottom of the letter to know who the writer was. It was from Mr. John, her follow up teacher!

She gaped at the letter in surprise. How did he locate her, she wondered. She was extremely happy nonetheless because at last there was someone she could now write to in order to express her predicaments. She settled to read:

The letter read thus:

Dear Moromoke,

Warm greetings in the name of our Saviour Lord Jesus Christ.

It's been ages. I didn't have an idea you were going to be transferred to another school. I wrote you shortly after the Camp. I waited endlessly for your response and it didn't come. I left my school one day and came looking for you in your former school. I learnt there that you had transferred to another school

I saw Wunmi, you remember her don't you? She was at the Camp also. She was the one that told me that your sister told her you've transferred to Oke-Odo. You must be enjoying yourself there.

I wrote this letter as if I was shooting in the air. I didn't know if you would receive it or not. If you do, please write back. I

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desperately want to hear from you and to perform my role as your follow-up teacher. I have books to give you, but I can only send them when I am sure they would get to you. In the former letter I sent to you via your former school, I enclosed some books that would have been very helpful to you.

I know you would be having challenges there in your new school, especially on pressures from senior boys. It is common for girls with your built and brilliance. My advice to you is, "Don't yield!" It won't be too long and everyone would know your stand and would stop bothering you. I'll send you books about this too soon. If you have already compromised, don't cry off your head yet. You can retrace your steps.

Read the pamphlet I enclosed within this letter. You would get ideas on how to handle the situation to your best advantage.

God bless you tremendously.

Yours in Christ,

Brother John

Moromoke returned the letter to the envelope and wedged it between the books on her reading table. She laid back on her bed and read the pamphlet. Later, she prayed in her mind, tears trickling down her cheeks. Nobody was near, so nobody saw her in that mood. She made up her mind she was ending the relationship with the Labour Prefect.

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She picked up her pen and tore a piece of paper from the centre of one of her notebooks and began to draft a note for the boy. When she finished, she folded the paper to address it. It amazed her then that she did not even know the real name of her 'boyfriend'. She told herself that it did not matter and so she addressed it anyhow!

The next day was Friday.

School had just gone on break. Many students were still in the classrooms. Moromoke walked toward the Form Five classrooms. She stopped before one of the halls and stooped to pull out one of her sandals. She rested on one of the poles along the corridor and fiddles with the sandal, as if she was removing a pin or as if she had stepped on something that was pinching her. What she was doing was not uncommon and so nobody paid her any attention.

Meanwhile, the Labour Prefect looked out of his classroom and noticed her. He quickly completed what he was doing and left to come and meet Moromoke. His heart was thumping hard against his ribs. He suspected she must be there because of him. But, even if not, there is no damage in his going to chat her up, he told himself.

"Hello baby!" the Labour Prefect said

She turned swiftly in surprise and saw the funny smile on his face.

"Oh," she exhaled and slumped her shoulders. "I didn't see you coming."

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“Sorry, if I frightened you,” he said knowing that it was almost a grievous offence, though it is not documented anywhere that a junior student should not come near the Senior classrooms without a cogent reasons.

“Oh, nothing like that,” she said. Bending low to put on the sandal again, she opened her palms to reveal a paper she had concealed in it. The Labour Prefect reached out and took the note from her.

Moromoke stood up and walked away. It would have taken a very intelligent eye to observe what had transpired between the two in that brief moment.



The Labour Prefect turned back too and walked towards the toilet. He was very anxious to read his very first love letter

“Did I say love letter?” he quizzed himself. “Sure! What else can it be?”

He locked himself in the toilet as he spread the folded note. He had chosen to go to the toilet, because he didn't want anybody to see the letter, at least, not immediately. He also didn't want anybody to see his facial expression as he read the letter. He knew that human beings were emotional and he was not an exemption.

The message on the note was too brief, too brief for his liking. But, it was better than nothing, he told himself. He peered to read:

Dear,

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Please come to the Chapel on Sunday. You would meet somebody who loves you so much, much more than I can ever do

Moromoke

He turned the letter forth and back, thinking there would be something more to read. He was almost going to say “*rubbish*” when a fresh thought dropped in his heart.

“Wonderful,” he said to himself. “Who said it's bad for me to have more than one girlfriend.”

On Sunday, he dressed very well and sat in the part of the Chapel where he would be very conspicuous, so that the fellow Moromoke referred to would have no problem locating him. Until the service was over, nobody came to him and he was almost furious.

During lunch, he came to the dining hall early. He told himself he would wait to talk with Moromoke. He saw her come in the company of her friends. Moromoke saw him too but pretended not to. When they left, he followed after them.

“Hello girls,” he called cheerfully.

The girls turned back and greeted, “Good afternoon, senior.”

“Afternoon,” he replied.

They made way for him to pass, but he did not.

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“Moromoke,” he began, “I didn’t see the person you mentioned.”

“Is that so? Sorry about that, please come to fellowship on Thursday, it’s going to be different.”

As the girls were present, he could not say all he needed to say or did what he would have loved to do. Instead, he nodded to them and said, “I’ll try and be there.” Then he walked away in the opposite direction.

Thursday turned out to be prayer meeting.

Just like he did on Sunday, he sat where he would be easily noticed. Moromoke sat near the choir section. The exposition before the prayers was very brief. Moromoke wondered if it was not a waste of time to have invited him.

What she did not know was that the boy’s heart had already been pierced by the words of God being preached by the preacher. He wailed and rolled on the floor as the prayers were going on. Before he knew what was happening to him again, he had gone to the altar to give his life to Christ

At the end of the meeting, when he spoke to Moromoke, he was a new person altogether

“I’m sorry for everything,” he appealed to Moromoke. “Forgive me please.”

“I’m happy you’ve found **the Friend** I have been trying to tell you about, His name is **Jesus Christ**.”

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“Thank you very much. See you on Sunday,” he said and walked away, his face turned to the ground in a mixture of humility and wonder.

Moromoke went back to the hostel very happy. She settled down and wrote a lengthy letter. She sealed it in an envelope and inserted it into her Biology textbook. She intended to post it to Mr. John the following day



She laid back on her bed and for the first time in a long time, she had absolute peace of mind.

She drifted into a dreamless sleep afterwards

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Revision Questions

1. When Bayo got home from work, Moromoke had been home for at least _____ earlier.
2. Bayo went to the shelf and turned down the rock music blasting in the _____
3. Which of the games did Moromoke participate in school?
4. Where did the youth Long Vacation Camp hold?
5. *“Ok! Ok...I’ll oblige you this time.”* Who made this statement? To whom? On what occasion?
6. Why was Moromoke specifically happy for attending the Scripture Union Youth Camp?
7. What was the name of the lecturer that assisted in the kitchen?
8. By the end of the camp, Moromoke had given her life to _____
9. Who was the follow-up person assigned to Moromoke?
10. Who was Mr Ajiboye? Who was he to Oyedeji?

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11. The Labour Prefect was after Moromoke for what purpose?
12. Where did the Labour Prefect go to read Moromoke's letter?
13. What was the effect of Moromoke's letter on the Labour Prefect?
14. In which of the textbooks did Moromoke insert the letter she wrote for Brother John?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Adenike OLADEJI (PhD) voluntarily retired from public service in 2011 as Principal III Officer after twenty seven (27) years of meritorious service in Secondary School and one (1) year in Primary School.

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