

Willem Ngouane

**FROM HIS
SHADOW TO HIS
DARKNESS**

Story of a downfall

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Аннотация

Paul Endenne was far from imagining to live one of the worst experiences of his life. Recruited at the Ministry of National Education, he will climb the ladder to occupy the position of direct collaborator of the minister. A very envious position that has given rise to some animosity towards him from some employees. But Paul, who has always been able to remain honest in his work, will find himself at the center of several scandals that have a direct link with the one he considers as a father.

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Chapter 1

Caroline was once again acting up, and it had become very irritating even for the regular that I was. For over thirty minutes, I had to support the bad side of her high standard and demand for dressing style. The impatience that resulted from all these, plus the time elapsing, forced me to choose the first tie I saw and that pick did not at all satisfy the lady. From that moment on, she kept insisting on her preferences with the passion of the fashion critic she had convinced herself to be.

“Don’t play with this baby. Don’t forget who you are. Let me remind you-you are one of the chiefs!” She repeated with conviction and fervor.

My wife was a “fashion addict” as they say nowadays, and unsurprisingly, my outer shell had to go the way the elegant woman she was, wanted it to be. I have to admit, her advice, even though most of the time, she abused it, had been the key factor most times in my work and lifetime in the past. Appearance counts a lot. I won many contracts and convinced many customers in my previous job also because I looked better than competitors. But this time around, I wasn’t the center of attention, so it wasn’t a great necessity for me to pay much consideration to her recommendations. If at least she could grope less, I would have gladly followed her instructions.

This is how time was passing in a funny exchange

of arguments among which mine were far more relevant than hers but still couldn't change her standpoint.

“Baby! Seriously, this tie fits you better than that one and will go well with that suit,” she persisted despite my palpable exasperation.

Then she started tenderly petting the tie of her choice and presenting it before my eyes like a dynamic sales agent in a superstore. But I didn't fall for her seduction even after all those other techniques she used later. I was focused on the dead hour that was fast-approaching. I had barely an hour and a half left, adding that there was usually huge traffic at this time of the day. It was normal to worry!

However, some minutes later, we were still on that same subject. She insisted and finished by making me change clothes again as if I was a superstar preparing for a show. It has always been difficult for me to resist her determination. She had a strong personality, and when you add love and all the stupidity that comes with it, it becomes easier to understand how this could happen despite the electricity and the stress inside me on that day.

I was putting on this and then, change and put on a different one; a black suit and then a blue suit, a red tie then finally, a purple one. I had suffered so much. But the alarm inside my head hadn't stopped functioning; I had frequent notifications of time without checking my watch. After each of them, my heart was brutalized and my soul, begging me to stop this nonsense we were doing and start going.

“Sorry baby! No more time to waste, I have to be there before the minister. I have to go, babe.”

“Yeah, but your job obligations shouldn’t make you lose your elegance,” she said with sincerity before adding: “you have to be well dressed in public; people will have their eyes on you. Everybody is used to seeing you stylish and classy; do not deceive them; don’t deceive all these persons who have always appreciated your dressing style, baby.”

“You’re funny love. You know, I will not be the one to be interviewed,” I said to her.

“Yeah, it’s true you are not the one but...”

Suddenly, the sound of my ringtone cut our discussion like a judge who came to end a disagreement between two lawyers. After a quick look on my watch, I felt my spirit possessed with a panic I had never felt before. I knew this could happen; I did everything to avoid it, but Eve provoked the downfall of Adam. Why me? Lord, have mercy on me.

“Where’s that phone, where is it?” I shouted at my wife who was also gravely anxious and was searching everywhere in our room in a stern terror.

I knew the call was another warning regarding my unpunctuality, but because of what happened at the beginning of the month, my greatest fear was the eventuality of mister minister being the caller. One of my colleagues narrated to me the hard time he passed through in the hands of the furious minister one time he went late to a meeting. Since that day,

even his normal and regular calls sink my spirit into the darkness where doubts are like kings who abuse their power like Bokasa, ready to do whatever they want with your life as if they were the ones to provide the air you breathe. The moment his name appeared on the screen, I felt a strong pain in my head as streams of questions without answers traumatized my brain: will he sack me? Will he give me a word of warning? Then, the surplice continued during the long conversation that took place after. Finally, the deliverance comes only after he dropped the call because of his superiority and the respect he is supposed to benefit from me, create that law and expects me to follow it. So when the hard conditions of this period add to this usual stress, it was understandable to panic like someone locked in a building on fire.

The reason for all this morning frenzy was an interview the minister had planned to have at the country's most popular private television channel on that day, just two weeks after the media revealed alleged corruption and misuse of funds in our administration. Tension was running high in this particular period and his Excellency was mostly irritated, full of grumpiness, and so far from his ordinary good temper. But regardless of all what he had been going through these last month, nobody could blame him for being so nervous.

It all started with a harsh smear campaign by numerous tabloids in the country who accused him of being a cult member, and as if this was not bad enough, during the same period,

people from his own administration started spreading rumors about his infidelity with numerous mistresses. He was trying so hard to face all these and survive from it when a bigger problem emerged. Unfortunately for him, this particular one was based on facts from the Herald, the newspaper that reported the breaking news which is known for its credible information and quality of its investigations. From the very first time, most of us read the title of their latest copies, we were prepared to face hard times. But things went worse when just a week later, they brought out some terrific proof of their allegations: in a special edition of the newspaper; they showed how an organized system of the distraction of goods and donation from Enesco had been taking place in our organization with the knowledge and participation of many of our leaders. A large part of books and school tools that were supposed to be given for free to populations had been put up for sale in the market. This misappropriation had been going on for five years; a huge mafia indeed.

They mentioned that a financial estimation of funds and goods misappropriated was in millions of dollars. This was definitely a serious matter. The saddest part of the story for us was that we, the most reliable administrators in the country, the one that had never been accused of any misuse, were now subjects to insult and deception. It was so shocking for many of our country people, even though they were sadly used to this type of deceiving news. More than any other person in our organization, the minister was deeply devastated about

this situation. He, who acknowledged people's love and hope on his person in the past, he who had always been considered by many as a role model, couldn't feel anything else but pains to be treated as the boss of thieves. He needed to act, to do something before doubt completely changed the love people had for him into hatred.

People were waiting for his word; his supporters were expecting a reaction from him. So that's why he went for the most watched television show in our country to calm things. This was the context of that day; circumstances made special, a usual communication move, we were asked to be more punctual than ever before, to come an hour before the boss. I couldn't imagine after all the warning during preparatory meetings, that on the D-day, I will still be late; I was seriously upset with myself.

We were now panicking in the bedroom, searching for my phone everywhere, turning the room upside-down, such a huge crime for orderly people like us. Fortunately, after a tiring search, my wife found it. The phone had found itself under the bed.

"Baby, this is it! This is it!" She yelled while brandishing the phone as if it was a piece of gold discovered in the depths of a mine in Katanga.

"Give it to me!" I shouted at her harshly, far from the usual sweetness that comes with every word I address to her.

As my eyes fell on the phone screen, my entire body sank into a reel nightmare; my initial fears were confirmed and he was indeed the author of the phone call. I had to face my blame, no

other choice! With a high level of anxiety, holding the phone with a trembling hand, I pressed the green button and accepted the call with nervousness, ready to hear the unmerciful sanctions that would come.

“Hello sir, yes sir...”

As if the situation wasn't tense enough, while I was struggling to fight the torturous stress, Caroline was adding more nervousness by mumbling her frustration behind me. She was still possessed by the irritation I provoked in her by addressing her rudely a minute ago. Gladly, we came back to a better mood after the phone conversation ended. There was enough reason to make us forget the previous frictions we had; Mister Minister was calling me not to shout at me but to inform me of the cancelation of the show in favor of a different activity in the afternoon. I had free time to spend at home, and I was not the only one to appreciate that.

“It's not bad news. At least, you will eat something and rest,” she said while arranging our room that was not all fit to be seen. Five minutes later, the tension was totally erased after I asked forgiveness for my attitude and blamed the fear of sanction; she happily accepted my pardon and went to the kitchen to make a good meal for me.

Just sometime later, my nose caught a pleasant aroma of a boiled egg while I was dressing the table. Caroline was a very talented cook, as good as a five-star chef of a New York restaurant. This was one of the first qualities that seduced me

when we started dating; her cuisine was an aphrodisiac.

I was now on the table, waiting for her to bring the delicious meal when I saw her coming with dishes so full that some bread was almost falling from it.

“Wow, baby! This is too much, I hope it’s for both of us?” I said while looking at her with a bothered face. After replying to me with a scornful smile, she shook her head negatively.

This was too much. She slid four slices of bread, five boiled eggs, and avocado salad into my plates; I was full even before I could start eating. The mere view of all this food ended my hunger and finishing this food without suffocations at the end seemed impossible. As my clear lack of appetite was reflected in my body language and after she saw how I was struggling, she felt enjoyed encouraging me to the task with some special words.

“Eat baby, you need to eat. See how dry you are. Soon, your mother will call me to complain about your thinness,” she said with an unhappy look.

My size had always been a controversial topic in my family. For my mother, I was thinner now than I was in my jobless days. For her, it was unacceptable to see a wealthy person like me continue to look like I was emaciated. I needed to reflect all the blessings I received in my life and not keep on being that permanent testimony of our financial difficulties of ten years ago. That’s why on every phone call with Caroline, especially whenever she was just from seeing me, my mum never lost the occasion to remind her about how correct my diet should be.

This was an implicit way to hold her responsible for my thinness. The consequence of this was full dishes like the one of that day and a funny transfer of pressure on me as I was obligated to finish every plate served by Caroline herself. This was such regular and severe torture for me; even if I was satiated nothing should remain on the table if I didn't want to attract her anger and complaints. Eating in her presence became a valuable act of bravery; unhappily, I barely escaped to this totalitarian issue.

With the intention of changing the mood to a better and happy one after she provoked this gloomy atmosphere we were captive to two minutes later, Caroline brought out a conciliating subject while we were still on the table. Knowing that most of the time, I agreed with her whenever she complained about how stressful my work schedule was; she didn't hesitate to talk about that.

"Seriously, I don't get the way your administration works. I mean, with all this preparation, and then finally, they just canceled the interview like that?" She said while I was struggling to swallow bread.

"I swear, that's terrible..." I said after drinking a cup of juice.

Even though her remark sounded like a lame tactic to reduce my annoyance against her, she was right; we had been in a traumatizing pressure since the first hours of the day, all for nothing. I was still feeling the pain of this tension; I forced myself to bathe with cold water because of rushing; I suffered to change suits many times to look good in the way my wife wanted, all this to finally hear that they changed the planning. Alas! This

was just a symbolic example of my difficulties through all this period as everybody in new functions... The Minister couldn't take all the blame even if most of the time, it was my fear towards an eventual sanction from him that was stressing me up. He had always been nice to me; I don't even remember a single criticism from him about me. But because of all the nervousness that was going on in our ministry, I preferred panic that much but still prevented myself from ever testifying the dark side of our boss.

It was because of this same tension in our office plus, the multiple solicitations from the Minister I had to postpone my holidays. My decision really hurt Caroline that it took some months for her to finally accept it. Even though she had never explicitly complained, it was easy to see how upset she was only by noticing her moody behavior during that period. But I had no choice; I was on probation, so my dedication to work was particularly high. How could we survive if I was not confirmed? How could we pay bills? Who would have taken care of the school fees of our children? What of the house under construction? It hadn't been an easy decision to take. I knew how difficult it was to be the wife of a busy man like me. Since my childhood, because of my parents, I also loved to spend time with my family, I needed that. My annual leave has always been special; a great celebration of love and care, a manifestation of happiness and joy, with Caroline always smiling and cheerful. Whenever I'm home with her, she would put some music, do her housework with an unusual gaiety, narrate some of her family

stories that I already knew with passion. She would put on her most beautiful gown, make her face look younger with secret make-up. We would hang out in the streets romantically; hold hands and kiss publicly. Sometimes, we would return to the restaurant of our first date, enjoy peaceful and joyful moments as those of when we were still two young persons with no money, no kids and no job solicitation worries. Some other times, I will follow her to do shopping, endure to stay on a queue to buy a revolutionary product, a trending shoe or a unique fragrance. We would go back home, chilling and enjoying movies, most of the time, romantic ones, as she always preferred. After a scene, she would reminisce how it was difficult for me to convince her for a date. Then we would reminisce our sweet days in the past as if tomorrow won't exist. She would laugh, smile; her skin color would turn red because she laughed too much. I'm always like a small child who is enjoying firewood in those days; it is so amazing to see her like that.

But I had to painfully accept to wait a long time before seeing this happiness on her face again. The situation was critical in our administration; I couldn't leave them knowing how important I was in the organization.

The interview we were supposed to attend was replaced by a charity event where Mister Minister was supposed to donate some equipment in favor of a public school in the West Region. From the point of view of his communication team, this would have had a better impact on the national opinion than the

television show. Even if it was difficult for me to understand their reasons and make them mine, at the end of the day, I had no other choice than to follow an approved decision. I was still trying to accept that modification of the planning when they notified me of the place of the donation: a village in the northern part of the West Region. That locality had terrible publicity all over the country and all was true: a risky road to reach there. With multiple accidents only this year, some thugs and bandits specialized in holding up and assaulting travelers by using tree trunks to block the road before harassing them; many things were made for this area to be known as the most dangerous place in the country. Adding to the fact that historically, the whole region had always been the base of mutineers and rebels, there was enough to hold any intention of visiting without any other argument. Even twenty years after the latest war in our republic, the place was still full of animosity; hatred toward the government hadn't disappeared. The most recent evidence of this detestation was the vast riot that took place only some months ago; people were complaining about a government tax, a land tax. The protest movement paralyzed the whole region for months. If it wasn't because of intense negotiations with the government, the situation would have gotten worse. But although there was a sort of peace since that time, everyone who had the occasion to travel there had always testified about the abhorrence citizens of that region felt. Every representative of state authority was not welcome. So for me, it was such a crazy decision to go there.

Besides, schools in need were not lacking in the country, this was a suicide...

But finally, despite my reluctances, I put my feelings aside and follow my unpleasant duties. After a short nap, I did a brief prayer session with my wife then went to my car before heading straight to Waloua. I had to travel with two gendarmes for understandable security reasons; they joined me at the junction before the highway.

However, I was shocked at the beginning of our trip; I couldn't imagine it was that peaceful and joyful. The beauty of nature carried me into something I had never felt before; a brutal and sweet emotion that erased took away all my fears and made me regret all the apprehensions I had had before taking the road. The wonder ride sent me into a powerful delight and a brutalizing pleasure when I discovered the artistic way the coffee plantations were made. It was as if the farmers of that region had some creative intentions when they planted them. I had never seen anything so amazing. The architectural design of the houses was way more inspirational than the urbanity in which I was forcing myself to get accustomed to in the capital city. The air was so pure that I felt I was in heaven; a sweet humidity touched my skin, leaving me with a juicy sensation as our car was facing the wind. From time to time, especially whenever we had to stop at the transport tax office, we found ourselves in the middle of a huge crowd of aggressive sellers; an authentic demonstration of rural people's resourcefulness. Even though most of them

were teenagers, they all showed a remarkable ability to attract customers and perseverance to sell at least one of their products. They presented to us some good food I could hardly find in the city at cheap prices, and various regional provisions like cassava baton, pistachio meal, etc. Their outstanding kindness and their seductive approach rudely challenged the usual and tyrannical domination of my stinginess. I couldn't resist for long with the addition of a guilty feeling of not helping young people in their legal hustle in a region known for its high rate of criminality. Unsurprised, I bought some things for myself and my family.

Desolately, the rest of the trip before reaching Waloua was very much more disappointing regarding this surprising start; it came as a poignant confirmation of my multiple apprehensions. Just some yards after the tax office, the juicy paradise was disappearing and replaced by a dark and pathetic picture before us. Everything was sorrowful; the indication plate that welcomed people was a sufficient sign of poverty and desperation. After all these years, the place still looked like a war zone, think Syria or Libya. The atmosphere was terrorizing as if we were in a haunted house with demons everywhere. I felt like one of those crazy reporters ready to risk their lives for professional motivations in hostile territory, so enthusiastic in their job that they finally become mad enough to accept anything.

How could they live in this misery? Poverty was running all over! Even basic things were lacking; how were they able to survive? Why all this treatment from the rest of the country?

Why was the government so silent about that? It is a shame that even after all these years, many of us still considered these people as rebel supporters. Leaving them with no resources to live. Treating them with no mercy as the most hated enemies ever. We will all have to respond to this injustice one day.

It took me a long time before reconnecting my head to the mission I was assigned to do; I had never felt so pained. But as I was now trying to move over and start thinking about the first people to meet in the village, I saw a group of about ten young men coming right at our car with hostile and unsympathetic looks. And when I looked in the car to see the reaction of my bodyguards, I saw tension burning in their eyes and anger all over their body language. Their muscles were already tightening up, the rage was dominant on their faces, and their fists were clenched ready to destroy their opponents. Just some seconds later, as I was looking back at those young guys to convince myself they were not that hostile, I heard the backseat door opening and subsequently; I realized one of the gendarmes was already out and was facing the youth with his gun pointed at them and ready to kill.

“Where do you think you are, man? We’re in Waloua here man! Go ahead! Shoot! You will have to kill the entire village, man!” One of the guys said with confidence, he seemed to be their leader from the way he was behaving. Tension made him uglier in my eyes. Surely, his domination on the member of his gang was due to his hideous face because he was the least portly

in the group, plus he was as small as a teenager and not really charismatic.

An insecure silence took place after his word. All the challengers were exchanging aggressive looks, gazing at each other face-to-face like in a cowboy movie, a scene that could be cast in the good, the bad, the ugly western movie, with me as the “good,” the gendarmes as “the bad,” and the youth leader as “the ugly”. A little voice in my head advised me to do something before things turn into carnage. With this high tension in the atmosphere, the gendarmes were at the point of shooting those idiots who wielded simple machetes as weapons. I needed to intervene and avoid press titles and international community blames, as they are always ready to blame and accuse African’s governments sometimes without embarrassing themselves of verifying and investigating.

So I suppressed my fears, opened the car door, and addressed the gendarmes in the most polite manner possible:

“Hey guys, it’s ok, put your guns down. Let’s discuss with them, ok?”

After clearly showing their discontent via body language, they finally obeyed. None of them would have felt guilty after shooting and punishing those miserable hooligans.

“Hey! My name is Paul Endenne. I work for the Minister of National Education, and we are here for the charity event organized by the Minister himself for the benefit of your village’s public school. Please, just allow us to carry on with our duty...”

I told the youths in an imploring manner.

Strangely, they took my gentle manners as an insult to their authority and started staring at me with disrespect. For them, I was not fearful enough and was too confident as if they could not do anything wrong to me. This was just the normal and predictable conclusion one could expect from terrorist like them since they were used to fear and fright from visitors. As a matter of fact, if a stranger did not kneel before them, it meant he was not afraid or he was impolite. If they could only see inside my brain, they would have realized I was far away from the self-control displayed in my attitude. In fact, I had never been so terrorized.

“Charity event?” One of them asked.

“Yeah, charity event, idiot!” Another one replied.

Then the entire group started a conversation in their local tongue. Despite my knowledge of most of the dialects in our country, I couldn't get any word from what they were discussing. While I was patiently and calmly waiting for them to address us, the gendarmes were getting more nervous than ever before, still ready to fight, carrying their guns, and staring at the group with much enmity.

“Alright, alright, you people can continue to the village, but we are doing this because you are with Mister Agbwala. If this would have not been the case, you know what would have happened...” The claimed leader said two minutes after the beginning of their conclave.

After this conclusion, the entire group moved out of the road synchronically. Rage was still full on the gendarmes' faces as they returned to the car. This conclusion was just another disrespect for them, insolence men like them could not tolerate knowing how people usually treated them and punishment they gave to this type of thugs in the past. Even though I was as annoyed as they were, sometimes, it is better not to respond to aggression with violence but to peacefully discuss with these hooligans. Gracefully, we arrived at the center of the city with no other incident.

When we reached the school, I met with the principal first but unfortunately, I couldn't find her in her office. On my way back to the car a few seconds later, as I was walking across the school courtyard, I had the genuine idea to find about where she could be from a young man who was selling cigarettes. He pointed her as she was discussing with some kids on the opposite side of the courtyard. It shocked me to discover how beautiful she was. My head was full of clichés before I met her. I was expecting to see a woman with dry skin and heavy spectacles, cold personality, and unsympathetic. She was just the opposite; gracious, attractive on her high heels and long hair. This was the tempting beauty men usually chase all their life not only for marriage. She had an average height, dark-skinned, and a round pretty face with sensual lips covered in red lipstick. Sublime in the African gown she was wearing, more like a Ghanaian gown, her entire person was buzzing off an amazing

freshness capable of provoking addictions and admiration like one of the most splendid Michel-Ange work of art. It had been so difficult for me to stay focused on our discussion without contemplating her face. Her gorgeousness absorbed my entire person like Indian air does to cobra. Apart from my eyes, nothing else functioned. I turned deaf, I couldn't even hear her name. But the sudden irritation in her facial expression surprised me and pushed me back on the right track. As I started listening to her with more attention, I rapidly felt her involvement in the community; her frowning face was putting more intensity to her speech, complaints after complaints were continuously running out of her mouth with sincerity and passion. After delighting me, she now put me in deep melancholy. The saddest part was that I wasn't the solution to most of the problems she was narrating, so all I could do was listen with commiseration.

Our conversation ended when she left for the chief's house, leaving me with sadness in my heart not only because of the difficulties she expressed to me but also because of her gracious person leaving, replaced by this old man, a less sympathetic individual with an old school manner. A quick look at him made him a sexagenarian in my eyes, I didn't need to see this picture of him with a military uniform on the wall to conclude he was surely a veteran. The direct opposite of the principal, the man caught my attention quick; his first words were full of charisma and power before he asked me:

“Mister Paul! Tell me! For you, what's the reason for this

charity event?”

“Sir, you know Mister Agbwala is a very generous person. Plus, you know he is...”

“Exactly!!!” He shouted. Many people here are accusing him of having a hidden agenda of using this region for his political ambition. That’s bullshit. I know him! And I know he is a man with a lot of compassion and concern for every citizen of this country. He has a good heart, unlike most of his colleagues. You know, after twenty years, they still consider us as traitors, as outcasts, but most of us have never been in any way associated with the rebels. It’s unfair that today, we are suffering because of that. Even basic needs, we cannot fulfill, no light, no current water! Why will the youths not turn bandits?”

Expressing the poverty in his village and the injustice his people were suffering for many years, ignited anger in him as if he was just from noticing those inequalities. Knowing that I could not do anything to change this situation sooner and that I was actually working for the government that was oppressing them, I decided to remain quiet and showed him some compassion with my attitude. No word could have calmed his bitterness. After spitting his fury for about five long minutes with me listening attentively, he remained silent for some seconds as if he was trying to rest after a serious effort. Then he took his phone and made a call. As soon as he finished the phone call in which the conversation was in the same dialect as that of those thugs at the periphery of the village, he looks intently at me and said:

“Son, I just had one of my guys on the phone. Go back to school; he and his friends will help you.”

“Oh, thank you very much, sir,” I responded a little embarrassed.

To say the truth, I wasn't expecting nor desiring any help, even though I appreciated his affability, looking at the task we were about to do, any assistance other than that of my colleagues seemed useless. But my estimation of the workers needed was totally inexact. I found myself mentally thanking him more sincerely when we faced the issue of transportation of plastic chairs and tarps. We could not have finished installing all the equipment required for the event without these young people's help. I was so pleased by their enthusiasm while helping us. They showed us a better image of the youths of this region by behaving friendly and far different than those bandits who wanted to aggress us when we arrived.

Two hours later, everything was ready before the entire regional establishment arrived. We could now rest a little before the beginning of the ceremony. As I patiently waited for the arrival of the minister and my other colleagues, I noticed that at forty minutes before the commencement; the place was still empty; that was a very bad situation. Knowing that all this was also organized to show the love mister minister benefited all over the country, even in the regions known for their detestation towards the regime, poor attendance would have sounded like a defeat. In this particular period where he was

facing so many issues, the press would have not hesitated to take that as an advantage and turn it as the ultimate demonstration of his downfall. Even though the popularity of my boss was an acknowledged fact, I couldn't be a hundred percent confident about the success of the event with all the bad luck that has been chasing him for the past three months. That's why I anxiously prayed to see the crowd coming. Sometime later, the small number of people attending was turning into a crowd; and ten minutes before the official opening of the event, a large crowd was present and ready to welcome mister minister. The entire village was present; no single member of the regional establishment was absent. The ambiance was jovial, cadenced by drums, people were shaking and giggling their bodies before a group of kids demonstrated a delighting ballet that they surely prepared for months. The excitement was all over. The national television channel was also present to capture everything during the ceremony as Mister Minister required from its general manager, a special team for that purpose.

Everybody was now patiently waiting for the main person of the occasion. The wait didn't last long. At exactly four o'clock, a black Mercedes emerged in front of a convoy of about ten vehicles from the same standard. Then two minutes later, Mister Agbwala's team of security guards, three tall guys wearing black from head to toe, speaking on their small earpieces with a lot of focus, moved out of his Volkswagen before opening the backdoor of the car. Subsequently, the Minister came out of the

luxurious automobile with his usual and notorious classiness; he was in a stylish grey suit, designed black sunglasses, working on a red carpet in an astonishing allure. The whole crowd went into a noisy fervor after his salutations, displayed a remarkable passion who sounded like a proof of his undeniable popularity despite all the denigrations on him since the last three months. He was still their hero, the one who had always defended them and assisted them no matter their political point of view. These cheers from this village were what we came for. Capturing an image of people from an acknowledged hostile region celebrating their champion, showing him love, was an amazing element we could use for propaganda.

A gorgeous little girl came to welcome him with a bunch of flowers, and then he made an outstanding speech that ended with a standing ovation from the crowd. He insisted in his speech on the need for everyone in the nation to come together and to forget the past. He called the authority to come and assist the population of Waloua and encouraged the youths of the region to continue to work hard and progress. He couldn't end his propos without adding some propaganda for him and his party, which was a normal move from an established politician like himself. After that, the main part of the ceremony came when he officially handed his donation to the principal of the school. The lady received with a large smile, the ten computers and four new generation printers he offered. Her joy was so extreme that she could not hold herself to express it with a funny dance move that

made the entire crowd laugh as if we were watching a comical show. Some young men just by my side even testified their shock after seeing this usually shy and reserved woman dance like this in public without looking uncomfortable. I was surprised, but, thrilled to see her so content after all the pain she had narrated to me earlier.

This cheerful and pleasant ceremony ended when the regional delegate of the state invited the establishment members of the region and the ministry of education workers to share the buffet with him in a classroom near the principal's office. The rest of the crowd also had their own collation at the courtyard. I couldn't eat much, I focused my entire person returning to the city, even though the trip was a success; I had some personal things to do on that same day.

But thirty minutes later, we were still there, impatiently waiting for mister minister to finish this very long discussion he had with the governor. I was complaining in my head about the length of that discussion and bored like never when I heard a voice calling me:

“Paul, Paul come.”

Gracefully, his discussion with the governor had ended and we could now leave. So I hurried to find out why he was calling me with so much excitement. When I came close to him, I was delighted by his first words to me; he knew how to stimulate and thank his workers.

“You did an outstanding job, Paul, I'm proud of you.

Just maintain these qualities, in some years, you will become a minister too.”

“Thank you, sir, thank you very much, sir,” I said, grinning. This wasn’t the first time I received these motivational words from him. For me, it had always been a great honor to be acknowledged by such an established person like him.

As I was still seriously enjoying these appreciations, I saw him putting his hand into his right pocket and then pulling out cash. Despite being rich, the amount he displayed shocked me. A second later, he just pointed it at me without even embarrassing himself of counting it and said:

“Take this; distribute it to every single person who assisted you during the equipment installation.”

“But sir, the budget...” I shyly tried to object. For me, it was a little too much even though I appreciated his intentions. But as generous as he was, I couldn’t stop him.

“Do as I say,” he replied quickly without letting me finish my sentence, “you will understand later,” he added.

That was why people loved him so much; he always had the good words, the perfect attitude with people. He was a brilliant mix of charity and charisma. I had a great admiration for his personality and a real desire to resemble him even a little. With my timidity, my agoraphobia, my introversion and my clear lack of charisma, it wasn’t hard to say that I was his opposite. Adding my stinginess to all these characteristics, the list of my faults will be complete.

Thirty minutes later, we were finally on our way back to the capital city. After expecting an eventual new modification in our planning of the day, I was closer to mister minister by traveling back in his car and left my own to one of my subalterns. But twenty minutes later, I started to feel insecure and regretted my choice because of the high speed at which we were traveling. My heartbeat was rising every time we passed near one of those gigantic trucks specialized in wood transportation and frequent user of this highway to assure the connection between the coast and the interior of the country. While I was stressing and trembling because of the dangerous ride of the driver, the others were not showing any sign of alarm, among them, the minister who was even comfortable with this tempo. After praising the driver, he was now absorbed in a phone discussion. I could hear him saying: “my love, yes my love” what made me conclude that he was surely discussing with his wife, Mister Agbwala was a married man with three kids.

After he ended his phone call, he gave an instruction to the security guard at the front seat. Subsequently, the man transmitted the order to the driver before a long silence took place. I was a little frustrated; usually, mister minister will communicate to me this order before everybody. But this time, I had to suffer to be out of the process. Knowing that the main reason I was physically close to him was to know of any information and any modification, I couldn't feel anything else than dissatisfaction. The only thing I could do was to guess

our next stop because, for me, we will surely not go directly to the office. My intuitions were confirmed some minutes later when we arrived at the periphery of the city and the driver took the road going to the business district instead of the left street of the junction. I then concluded that we will surely hold a meeting at a hotel to discuss briefly, our next plan when the driver turned at the city's main boulevard with his multiple hotels five minutes later. But I couldn't imagine that our destination will be at the Atlantique hotel, a marvelous place known for its quality of service and architecture and also selective even for those who were not discouraged enough by the elevated prices of the rooms. Even though all this beauty delighted me, the feeling that I had since the marginalization I suffered thirty minutes ago when mister minister kept me away from the information he transmitted to his driver, turned darker immediately we penetrated the five-star hotel. The bad reputation of this place was all over my head. The hotel was not only known for its splendor; many other stories about mysterious cults holding meetings there and organized prostitution occurring in this same place rubbished the image of the "Atlantique" these last years. Adding the fact that mister minister barely came to this hotel in my presence and that we had held no meeting there in the past, it became very difficult for me not to have in mind all those rumors that stated that my boss was a member of a cult and that he also secretly used to come there for his dirty activities. His behavior was not just helping; he had just left us at the hotel hall

and went to the elevator with only one bodyguard without telling me anything. I was now troubled; a victim of every kind of dark thoughts, doubts, and mystery always go in pairs, and his actions were mysterious. I couldn't get these suspicions out of my head, whenever the beauty of the hotel got me absorbed, the length of his absence will subsequently turn back into thoughts.

Gracefully, the wait finally ended and mister Agbwalla impedes my uncertainties and my frustrations subsequently when he asked me to excuse his previous attitude, blaming it on a family emergency. I was so enchanted by the way he presented his excuses I forgot to ask whether the problem he mentioned had finally been solved; he just wowed me by displaying so much humility. What a great man!

Five minutes later, we were moving out of the hotel on our way to the parking lot, when we met with a group of street children; four little boys in a dirty outer shell, they all looked hungry and weary. Their appearance was a clear example of the consequences of poverty in our country. The grimness of their frizzy hair made them look like neglected dogs in the street. Immediately they saw us, they started begging for money. Insistently. Their dirtiness was in perfect dissimilarity with the luxurious environment around them and made their presence turn into a serious proof of the incompetence of the security guards of this hotel. After the minister's bodyguard noticed that they were a little too close to us, they decided to rudely make them go away. As they were dealing with them, the minister

intervened:

“It’s ok, it’s ok, leave them...” he shouted to the bodyguards.

Even though we all knew how generous he was, his reaction was a little too exaggerated, knowing that the guards were only doing their job.

Subsequently, he took the oldest boy of the group apart and started questioning him.

“Tell me, young man, what are you people doing here? He asked gently.

“Our parents are dead sir, I’m with my brothers, we are looking for something to eat, anything to calm our hunger. We used to sell groundnuts and clean people’s shoes when some guys stole our equipment three days ago.”

“Hmmm...” Mister minister reacted before calling one of his bodyguards to give him some instructions.

We could hear the kids shouting out their happiness and expressing their gratitude towards the unexpected benefactor mister Agbwala was. Even though I couldn’t know what mister minister gave them to provoke this spectacular mood change, I was deeply impressed again by his bigheartedness. He was such a charitable man. I would have surely not acted the same. I usually hesitated before giving money to these abandoned children, and this behavior was because of my opinion on the topic. There was an amplification of the number of children in the streets, but all of them were not homeless. Many left their villages to look for a better living in the city. Others were used as a means

of income of poor families already living in the city for years but sadly suffering from misery and unemployment. My compassion for those children who lived in the streets with all its dangers and uncertainties was as high as my anger against all the adults who sent them there. And any single person who had the means to change this situation but still didn't. But the reaction of mister Agbwala came as a huge lesson for me: give first! My mind was now focused on the rest of my day, I needed to develop this kind of generosity and stop calculating all the time.

Later on, when the night arrived, I couldn't hold myself for not relating to Caroline what happened at the Atlantique and especially on Mister Minister generous and humble actions. But as usual, whenever Mister Agbwala's name was mentioned, my wife only noted the negative elements of the story. She first started complaining about the danger we faced on our way to Waloua when we encountered a group of thugs. Then also followed the many rumors on Mister Minister's mysterious spiritual activities when we were discussing on the Atlantique. She even insisted that I should avoid or refuse whenever my boss proposes to go to such places Like many people in the country, she too believed that that hotel was nothing but a dark and dangerous institution. Hopefully, we didn't argue on this subject much as we usually did when it comes to mister minister and my job.

For many years, it had become a strong habit to converse on him in our family life. In fact, my job was like a second

family and a dangerous concubine for Caroline. That's why most of the time, she acted like a possessive and mad rival, always trying to know her enemy for a better demolition. So it was just normal that her belief on Mister Minister and my workplace was permanently negative. Mister Agbwala, who was a praiseworthy man, a role model for the society, had a very different image in my wife's eyes. For her, he was a bad influence to me; he had a double personality and hidden face that will be pulled out one day with destructive consequences for people close to him like me. Even if I had never agreed with most of her opinions towards my boss and my workplace, her hatred was understandable for me. It was just a manifestation of her frustration, regarding the number of nights she slept alone and the number of times I left her because of a phone call from the office. She was deplorable.

The harshest part for her was the passion I had for my job and the power of constant motivation, adding to the fact that she had never succeeded to influence my view on my Godfather even after her perseverance. Apart from my invariable admiration, I started feeling a deep commiseration for him after all the attack he endured these last months. I was sad that despite his good actions, people still hated him. But most of the time, he was able to deal with it that even when the revelation of the Herald came out; he didn't look much concerned about it. He surely thought it was "fake news" like the multiple ones he had been facing before. But this one seemed to be true. That was surely why for three weeks, he was particularly absorbed, sad and nervous, he

wasn't the same joyful and cheerful man I knew. Sometimes, I will find him sunk into deep thinking, so absorbed that he will not even notice my presence for long minutes. The worst was that he had a pile of newspapers treating this subject permanently on his table. I couldn't be in his shoes but for me, reading all these rumor mongers wasn't a good thing. He better stay focused on his work and has confidence in his lawyer and justice. I used to ask myself if he was feeling guilty of something, or if he had some key information, we did not take into account. We, his supporters, continuously showed him love and support.

The day after, despite my unusual punctuality and the tranquility, I was hoping at the beginning of the day, huge was my surprise to see a long queue of people waiting for my arrival, expecting an appointment for most of them. With no hesitation, my instructions to Jasmine, my secretary, were clear; no appointment until further notice. I had much work to do, and I focused my entire planning on that, even though the desperation I saw on many faces pained me. But I had no choice. But three hours later, a bigger duty sanctioned my dedication to work and reminded me that there was no higher obligation during my working hours: a phone call from Mister Minister completely changed my scheduling and made me postpone the termination of my work. He asked me to meet him at his office as soon as possible. Like every single time he requested my presence, it sank me into prayers and fears; the short distance between our offices turned like the way to the execution room.

When I entered his office, a pleasant silhouette of an unknown lady who was facing him welcomed me. As I hadn't seen her face yet, I was speculating on her beauty, thinking of how gorgeous she could be. Then she turned her body to my direction, and I finally discovered her charming visage and her pretty lips. She looked shy and bent down her head while greeting me. The minister introduced me to her before instructing me to look for her an office where she could work. He stated that she will start as an intern, "then we will see," he said before they exchanged a candid smile. Their unique and remarkable complicity made me conclude that they were probably from the same family even though some little doubting though forced me to focus on this subject for some long minutes. Since all these rumors about the cheating habits of mister Agbwala, it had become very difficult not to suspect him of bad intentions every time an unknown lady was around.

Her name was Caroline... This coincidence provoked a strange attraction in me; I was now treating her more kindly. She was stunning. While working with her, I noticed again her nice derriere. Some minutes later, we were discussing in a friendly atmosphere as two old colleagues; she was less reserved. I succeeded to make her open up. That's how she detailed me her school background; she had a master's degree in Bilingual Letters and Translation. It really impressed me. She looked too young to have attained such an academic level. Shortly after, we arrived at the office I chose for her at the Operational

Department. I presented her to the chief of the department and left him some instructions. Christian, as they called him, couldn't hide his feelings; he was shocked to see such a beautiful lady. I had never seen him that excited to welcome a newcomer before. The funniest thing was that the lady did not even notice the impact she had on him as she was seriously concentrated to appear sympathetic in this unknown universe she was brought into. After we exchanged friendly smiles, I left her and promised myself to keep my eyes on her knowing all the dangerous male of this office.

In the afternoon, as traditionally every third Wednesday of the month, Mister Minister invited his closest collaborators for a dinner. Contrary to our past consideration of this tradition, as many of us usually thought it was just a waste of money and time, this time around, we felt the necessity of it and took it as a good opportunity to have a good time and momentarily run away from the tension occurring in the office during that period. The place chosen by mister minister was the restaurant, "Monte Carle," the best restaurant in the city, known for its amazing cuisine and the reputation of its chef, but very expensive for average people in the country. The cheapest plate there cost equivalent as food allowance for over three days for most families in the capital city. But that was the choice of Mister Minister. Who could blame him? He had the means, and sometimes, we all needed to enjoy life as far as we find time and money for.

When we arrived there, they welcomed us like kings by the

restaurant staff. They were so excited to receive such high personalities, particularly the legendary Mister Agbwala. He was also cool with them, really at ease, calling everybody by their name like they were longtime friends. The female workers of the restaurant were more agitated than their male colleagues; it couldn't be otherwise, seeing all these rich and powerful men were turning them into a trance. They were smiling for no reasons, displaying an eccentric cordiality. Many of them could easily offer their body to a man even if he was married just because of money; one has to be naïve to think dating this kind of girl will be a sincere love affair. But taking into consideration the poverty in our country, their salary and the harsh living conditions in the capital city, were they blameful?

Mister Minister requested the most expensive Champagne and some costly wine bottles. I was thrilled to see him in that humor, smiling, chilling, and joking. It was a memorable dinner, a break in a tense period we were facing.

Chapter 2

“Why all this hate? Why all this jealousy? Why Paul?”

The disenchantment full inside this passionate tirade had me imprisoned in a unique ambiguity at the beginning of a day I was expecting to be sunny and joyful. It got me to sink inside a huge confusion and left me with a difficult decision to make: which attitude should I have knowing that the author of this question was eventually talking alone even though he addressed me expressively and directly? I was facing a high risk of an incorrect judgment, taking the responsibility to respond could even worsen the psychological condition of this man already full of disappointment. Adding to the fact that consoling and reassuring people was not my biggest qualities, it was hard to pretend to have the solution to calm this kind of metabolism possessed by violent doubts. So I turned dumb, my mouth paralyzed, static like one of those Madame tusseauds celebrity's statues. I was once again displaying my lack of valor, but what else could I do; the level of his disillusion was too high!

“Did you read this bullshit?” He added while pointing me to a newspaper, the damned edition which had surely suffered a lot on his hands when he was expressing his anger towards the editors. The scene made me remember a childhood memory; his displeasure was as high as the disappointment of my mother whenever she found out that the home duty he assigned to me

in the morning before leaving the house wasn't complete upon her arrival after her harsh job activities.

I replied to him with silence once more, and it had become very uncomfortable. The vigor of this last question was forcing me to give an answer even if it was a lame one, plus his depressed attitude after my voiceless reply got me into a strange shame. The reaction became a necessity; he was, therefore, displaying a pitiful sadness that made me feel as if I was deliberately refusing to console him. I was now willing to say something, but what could I say? I didn't even read that article. I barely read tabloid and generally, every opposition's media channel. In fact, for me, reading those newspapers was masochistic and useless, just a big waste of time. Like many civil servants and workers in public administration, knowing the hate that they exhibited towards the government and the establishment, I had always viewed those media as horrible vultures.

"No sir, I hadn't read it yet," I said with much delicacy. After my answer, his body language displayed dissatisfaction that I confusedly took as a deception towards my obvious lack of interest for the press. But in fact, he was just implicitly expressing the loneliness he felt, now that he could not count on sincere support from me. I really felt bad, his sadness became mine, my antipathy towards these people turned me into an incompetent and an unskilled advisor, and I couldn't blame the ignorance. I was now regretting not to have read that article and to have always treated these media like a virus to avoid.

Even though I disliked those tabloids, consulting them from time to time was also supposed to be a part of my professional duties, so I was reproachful. A profound sorrow touched me during the long second of silence that took place later on. Coming to see him early in the morning was finally not a good idea, I was now blaming my politeness, my intentions were to greet him and wish him a good day. But, it would have been preferable for me to stay in my office, I would have avoided this incongruous situation. The Herald's article put him in a terrible mood; it was awful to witness!

“Those people are accusing me of any bad things, calling me names, can you imagine that in one article, they said that I was the joker of the president?” He said with a mix of irritation and discontent on his face. His detestation to that tabloid was furious; he was cursing the entire Herald organization, wishing hell for every single person working for that newspaper, from its general manager to its distributors.

“That's terrible sir,” I reacted timorously after his complaints. My reply could have been better; it sounded like a lame effort to show my commiseration and displayed my deficient vocabulary when it comes to word of compassion; but after being soundless during his previous cries, I needed to say something to prove my concern and end the uncomfortable silence that was occurring. However, I was still hoping to console him a little, but the unhappiness on his face grew even bigger, he was now captive into darkness and sunk into obscure resentment.

“The worst is that they pretend that the charity event was nothing more than useless propaganda and that I was using these poor populations for my political ambitions. For them, I did nothing to change their situation, so what did they ever do for these Waloua people? Have they ever helped them?” He said while shaking his head in piteous distress. I was witnessing a hurting picture presenting a betrayed man, full of love for people but permanently subject to hate and jealousy. “Can’t you people see he is doing all he can for this country?” I said while crying in my heart.

He was then flaunting the distress of a child abandoned in the street by his careless parents and obliged to push passers-by to look at him pitifully while displaying his goodness as moral caution and proof the injustice he was enduring. Every human has weaknesses and limitations, among them, the ones we all shared our feelings and death, but the most powerful one will always be popular, no one would ever claim to dictate people’s sincere opinions until they reach a unanimity. Even God has haters, so who is the human being who can be loved by everybody? Mister Agbwala was a human like all of us, even though he was unique and great in our eyes, he had to accept to be criticize like everybody on this earth even if in my point of view those criticisms were abusive. As a close witness of his political venture since many years, I thought he was strong enough to face hate and jealousy, but I had before my eyes, this morning, the demonstration that nobody can be strong enough against these

nuisances. I was deeply sorry for him; it was painful to stay powerless and condemned to only wish him to be continuing his mission and not abandon.

After using ten minutes to express his anger, suddenly, he began arranging his office before putting the controversial edition of the Herald that turned him moody in his cupboard. This unexpected behavior pleased me, it gave me the impression that he had turned this page and embraced the rest of the day in a better way. I was then hoping that he had definitely considered those media as enemies to stay away from and that he will never give much importance to these tabloids again. The main problem with popular people as he was, is to easily deal with persistent hatred and criticism. As a leader in a country where freedom of speech is supposed to be assured, he also had to tolerate opposition denigrations even if it can be as painful as torture.

Gracefully, my impressions were confirmed two minutes later. Matter of fact his humor switch became brutal even though I felt the premise before. He first started to hum a Papa Wemba song before deciding to play the disc of the Congolese musicians in his DVD. Just as the first song of the CD started playing, I saw him singing and dancing on his chair joyfully as if he was in concert attendance. That was stupefying! How could he so suddenly change his mood from a deep depression to an astonishing enjoyment?

His happiness was so wonderful that my entire person was

rapidly contaminated. But my delight didn't last for very long; shortly after, he shocked me again by asking me a question that made me regret my coming to greet him early in the morning.

“Paul, how far have you gone with the organization of the meeting with strikers?”

“Everything is ready, sir.” I reacted quickly.

I wasn't expecting such a serious topic in this thoughtless atmosphere it had immersed us in for five minutes but fortunately, the promptitude of my reaction to his question cover my stun. So he could make himself comfortable, sip some Martini, listen to some good music, sing, dance, put his company in a tranquil ambiance and then bring out a grave subject, all in a short time!

Since about two weeks, I had been avoiding discussing this matter with him. In fact, the whole week, I had skillfully dodged every single occasion to be alone with him. Alas, I was once again caught up by my habits; I innocently came to his office forgetting this concern.

Mister Minister assigned me the tricky mission of rearranging a meeting with a group of strikers who were threatening to provoke riot if we didn't treat their requests with more consideration. This was previously the main issue we were focused on before the Herald brought out their accusation about supposed corruption in our administration. After the parliament approved the memorable and controversial labor law proposed by Mister Bottom, the Minister of National Labor, every trade

union of our country expressed their dissatisfaction towards what they considered as unfair, as colonialism and slavery, but most of them did not turn their frustration into concrete actions with strike and limited their battle at the level of media. Unfortunately, among those few who showed a ruder reaction by going on the street, there was an organization under our responsibility: the Teacher's Trade Union. The worst was that this association became the most active one and was gaining more and more support from the population as time was passing, for many citizens they were only expressing louder what people really think about the government. This popular approval they benefit was a serious challenge for us and especially for the minister who had always considered himself as the people's hero. He was in a complicated situation; he had to choose his side between following people opinion on this law or supporting his colleague and the government he was working for. Regrettably, he followed his work obligation instead of his heart. I was, therefore, prepared to see his popularity decline, I even intended to warn him and advised him on staying loyal to people view but he insisted that his hands were tight. This situation was treacherous for him, I couldn't leave things goes that way, so I presented him a judicious plan that could satisfy everybody, But he found it difficult to follow and refused to take it into consideration. His attitude really deceived me, he abandoned me with much apprehensions and frustrations by not even doing a small effort to make my brilliant ideas his. However, after that,

I hoped that with the revelations of the Herald and all the other problems that came with it, he would change his decision and follow my advice. But sadly, he was just from destroying my last hopes this morning; I had no other choice than to do as he planned.

Despite my obvious lack of enthusiasm to follow his plan, I succeeded some days before to establish the first contact with the protestors. My dynamic colleague Christian noticed that he and one of them used to go to the same church, naturally, we used him as a liaison. So as I went out of mister minister office, I rushed to discuss the evolution of our plan with the young man hoping to catch him at his place, as he was most of the time assigned to activities in schools. I was lucky to meet him right at the corridor while he was preparing to leave his office into its ordinary wilderness. I discovered him in good company, Caroline, the new intern, was accompanying him with the goodness and devotion characteristic of every temporary staff. They were walking friendly; she was listening to him with much attention, and he was giving her some guidance for better work performance. Christian was literally glowing with happiness, and all this was because of the seductive prettiness of Caroline, it was so obvious that the young lady pleased him; I had never seen him cheerful like this before. I had a good opinion about him, for me he was a sincere and honest guy, a gifted, good worker with much value, and really disciplined person. Colleagues used to say that his good manners and his

value were natural compensation for his unpleasant physique: he was thin, his dressing style was strange, and that he got a cuckold look. For me, they were just haters.

When I saw the way he and Caroline were enjoying working together, I started to imagine them as an eventual couple, in fact, that idea became interesting in my head: as the mentor and protector of this new intern, I preferred to see her dating a good guy like him than one these vicious people of this office. So I decided to cleverly push Christian to declare his obvious attraction to the lady soon and pray that a love affair begins between them soon.

“Hello young guys, I hope everything is going on well in the training? Caroline, is he taking good care of you?” I asked paternally.

“Good morning Paul, I am taking good care of her,” Christian replied instantly even though the question was not directly addressed to him. And soon, she will be capable to manage the communication process in school, he added while eyeing the lady as if he was expecting support from her. Hopefully, for him, she didn't hesitate to promptly bear his affirmations.

“Yeah, Mister Paul, things are going perfectly, I am learning fast, my trainer is skilled.” She stated with a passion that made Christian go red in the face.

“Oh, ok, that's good. I'm glad that your assimilation came so swiftly, keep on being so hardworking, that's a great job Christian,” I added while approving with my head.

They were now looking each other with a mix of passion and smile, which made me suspect that the love affair I was planning to provoke had already started for long ago. Their complicity was not normal, their mutual attraction was clear, and if eventually, they were not dating yet; it was unproblematic to predict a passionate romance between the lady with an angelic face and the young executive full of value and very admirable. Even though it was pleasing me to be in this joyful atmosphere, and to see them exchanging lovely look and smiles, I had no other choice than brutally change the ambiance, I could not forget the reason I came to their office, my situation was critical, I needed to urgently discuss apart with Christian on the strikers matter before mister minister call me for an update. It was painful to see them distance each other with unhappiness and to hear the soprano voice of Caroline telling him “see you later”. This was wonderful to witness! In less than a month, their person became so emotionally involved that be separated for long minutes was surely now an awful thing aching to deal with.

“Christian, you will need to contact that man, that contact who’s a member of the teacher’s union. We will have to faster things and organize a meeting with them as soon as possible, mister minister is on my neck about that issue,” I told him curtly.

As if he was still trying to wake softly from a long and sweet sleep in which he had some wonderful dreams, Christian took much time before entering the conversation. However, it was noticeable that even under a horde of emotional feelings he

could still give me a part of attention for much professionalism in his character. When he finally recovers from his emotion, he directly noticed that I had unmasked his feelings toward Caroline and drove my concentration to a different subject to feel less embarrassed.

“So he still wants to do as he planned despite all the arguments you showed him?” He said with an annoyed look.

“I’m telling you; let’s hope that we will find a point of understanding with their leader and that his popularity will not decrease more after that meeting.”

“I’m not optimistic Paul, the determination of these guys his high.”

Christian shared my view and my apprehension: we were in a weak position but still preparing to go in the enemy’s territory and face real voracious who will surely make not a concession, our worries were understandable!

So we elaborated an approach that will calm the opponent before the meeting by making them feels confident. Regardless of the fact that mister minister did not share our commune conviction and that his behavior toward the strikers till then was rude, this was the best way to reduce the tension before the negotiations.

Christian’s help was praiseworthy, although the matter had not much to do with his department and functions and that he was not a part of the team assigned for the meeting with the protestors, he was still putting a lot of energy and strength of mind in this

mission. I was appreciative toward his usual friendship and admiring of his devoutness to work and availability to always assist others. He was a committed workaholic, full of enthusiasm, permanently focus on his job obligations during his office lifetime, not as distracted in conversations or others diversions like some of us used to be. That was the other reason that encouraged me to push him to flirt with Caroline, for me she was the entertainment an over-focus man like him needed, and also a better way to prevent him of one of those bad and materialistic girls out there always ready to ruin a man. A good soul like him must be protected in this world!

That's why I couldn't prevent myself from not bringing out that topic some minutes later when we finished elaborating our plan for the meeting.

"Bro, you know you, my brother, tell me, for real, Caroline, you like her right?" I asked him.

He first acted as if he did not understand what I mean before displaying a shy smile. I was expecting an answer but was instead left with a timid attitude from the guy who was actually still trying hard to hide his uncovered crush. I insisted and repeated my question faintly to make him feel at ease and secure, people like him always hesitated before sharing confidential things, one needs to look trustworthy before convinced them.

"I can't lie, I'm attracted, and she is damn beautiful..."

"But..." I added after perceiving a harsh skepticism on his face. He then started to display the embarrassment of an obeisant

child caught doing the wrong thing, my anticipation of his reaction disturbed him as a woman whose nudity had been accidentally exposed to strangers, I was far from being a mind-reader, he was not just capable to hide his feelings toward Caroline.

A silence took place after my reaction, and just at the moment I wanted to add something he finally replied:

“I don’t know... will a pretty girl like her be interested to date a guy like me? She is sweet and graceful; girls like her always date ministers or rich business people.”

“Why being pessimistic, plus you can never know if you don’t take a try. From what I saw she seemed to like you too.”

His lack of self-confidence didn’t surprise me, what can one expect from a disciplined and focus man like him. I couldn’t blame him; all his life was focused on work, and he had surely never been to a nightclub in his whole life none date a girl before. If it is a fact that being a quiet and serious guy is a quality, at some point it can also be a weakness, his lifestyle made him as naïve as a teenager. However, I was still hoping that after our discussion he will find the courage to declare his love to the young lady.

But my hopes reduced the more when him was displaying his inexperience in a love affair in the discussion. By God’s grace, he too finished to note that his attitude was a little embarrassing for an adult and that he was really exposing the fact that he was surely a virgin, hopefully, he jumped in another topic with no transition.

“Did you also read the Herald article on mister minister? Those guys are real suckers, always there to criticize even when it is not needed,” he said.

Even though the said subject was no less boring than his previous stories about his inexperience with girls, at least this was a good way to end the embarrassing atmosphere we were captured in since some minutes. So I also jumped in it with no hesitation:

“I hadn’t, but why this entire buzz? Why all this noise for something so ordinary? They are what they are...” I said with much sorrowfulness.

“Yeah but still that they are just rats. It is true that as opposition they need to criticize the government but when something is good, they also have to appreciate it, that’s unfair what they did to mister minister.”

My reaction made things look as if I had no concern about the unjust treatment mister Agbwala was a victim from the press, but I definitely agree with Christian’s anger, in fact, he was expressing louder my toughs. However, on the contrary of him and many colleagues, I have decided not to pay much attention and give much credit to this press, the result of reading them will always be unfruitful and useless indignation, so why will I kill my happiness for something I can’t change? By yelling at them I would have instead of giving them much importance and help their buzz good for their sales. For a very long time ago I found out that all this frenzy about mister minister was

a shameful commercial plan, talking and gossiping about him interested many of my citizens as mister Agbwala was one of the most popular persons in the country, any news gossip on him assured them high sales of newspapers prints. The worst was that whenever they lack information on him because mister minister had always attempted to be transparent and straight, they will not hesitate to create fake one and lie on him with no guilty conscience just to meet up with their business target. I had always wondered on my boss attitude towards these people, if only I was the one to face this kind of denigration and defamation, my reaction would have been rude, straight to the court for defamation of character and defamation. But since he had always wanted to be seen as an angel and good person, something I still found understandable and praiseworthy, he always judged inappropriate to lodge a complaint. He had always cherished his popularity and whenever we succeeded to make him catch the importance of using them, he will then state that this would be deliberately confused as freedom of speech violation by the non-profit organizations. However, his hesitation was more understandable in a way that no politician had ever done such a trial before.

Matter of fact the entire establishment was a victim of this press, so, having a bad opinion and saying rude things about a minister was not shocking originality. But what was special in mister Agbwala case was that even though he was the most popular person in the country, he was also among the short list

of rare politician and public personality genuine. For years, these usual attacks and all the previous fake news on him turned me in a strong incredulity about every new scoop and every press organization including serious ones like the Herald; it took me a day before taking seriously their sensational revelation about supposed corruption in our administration, at first when the news came to my ear I thought this was another press strategic article to make good sales.

But among all these media, it was necessary to distinguish between the one that really does their job even if their critics were most the time rude and the one that only specializes in gossip and fake news. The first ones were praiseworthy, our country needed their critic, mister Agbwala good behavior and value could not cover all the scourges in the government. The press was only using the population hate toward their politician as an advantage and for me; it was understandable, even useful. Our citizens hold a grudge against politician since a long time ago and that anger was not ready to end with the mismanagement of public resources that was going on. Nobody had forgotten that this was the main cause of the two major wars that really traumatize generations of citizens and in where about ten thousand of our country people died. Indeed, just about ten years after the independence of our country, two successive putsches occurred with the justification by their authors to act for peace and better economic conditions that civil government couldn't assure. Many years later our country was still trying

to recover of those two military regimes conditions, matter of fact they had been economically worse than a civil one, plus they were autocratic, dictatorial, liberticidal. The worst was their long duration and the fact that they had been successive. Hopefully, as everything always ended, this difficult period also finishes by ending eight years ago with God helps after the last dictator dead. That same year, a free and fair election took place before our first civilian president since a long while been designated. This new era had everybody enthusiastic, but after enjoying democracy and freedom of speech for some time, we noticed that nothing had economic change; the same bad government which was occurring since forty years was still present. These last years the situation was even going worst, the country became highly corrupt, this time not only politician were to blame, in fact, every activity was touched by this scourge, but corruption was also so omnipresent that two years ago we topped the most corrupt countries in the world ranking, such bad publicity! Adding to this corruption, an unemployment rate very elevated and poverty, there were enough reasons to support the deep detestation of the population toward their leaders. That's why mister minister was so special for me; he was unique, very dissimilar from his colleague. He had always displayed remarkable transparency in his manner of running our administration; he was the only minister who will always communicate and explains his management choices to the citizens. But it was a pity that the press was not taking

all this to consider, in fact, they deliberately refused to see it, for a witness of mister Agbwala honesty and good heart, their behavior had always been painful to me. However, I was happy that no matter how rude can be the opposition about him, no matter the frustration; he would still be that good and peaceful leader. That's why I was afraid that this meeting with the strikers could spoil his image ruder than the denigration campaign he endured.

On the following day, with the help of Christian's contact, we finally came to an agreement with the strikers concerning the date of the meeting and the place of the debates. As I receive their confirmation I directly informed mister minister and with both decided on the hour of the meeting. Everything was set, but my fears were still high. Even though I succeeded to calm the protestors before the meeting as planned with Christian, I couldn't get out of my mind the many tragedies that occurred at this event in the past years. Things can really get deteriorated at the end of the meeting depending on the decisions taken by both parties; frustrations can turn to passionate riot. Meeting like this are sensitive, it had been the main cause of numbers of crisis in our country in the past, the latest riot that occurred in the capital city was provoked after a frustrated union demonstrated their anger in the street. Six months ago, a peaceful manifestation organized by drivers' union unhappy about a new government tax was infiltrated by thugs just an hour after it begins. Although most of the protestors quickly dissociated themselves from these

hooligans, things get worse when the first scenes of looting occurred, the police were rapidly sent by the authorities to control the manifestation; the clash was unavoidable, and a peaceful protestation ended in an urban guerilla with hundreds of people killed or injured. Added to this, the riot that occurred in Waloua around this same period, it was logical to have high fears concerning the conclusion of this meeting we were about to hold. That the other party was a teacher's union, and that teachers are not known for being violent but respectful and diplomatic, could not make me feel secure, a matter of fact, they could also be infiltrated by thugs ready to provoke destructions of public goods and brutality.

Three days later, it was on a sunny morning that we headed to the Okoroka public school which was stated as the place of the meeting. Our delegation comprised two vehicles, mister minister and two colleagues were the passengers in one of them with the presence of a gendarme, me and two other gendarmes were occupying my car. With three gendarmes with us, we were ready for any eventuality. Nevertheless, I still couldn't feel secure, a somber feeling disturbed me, and I couldn't stop fearing the horrific drama that could be if the meeting turned into a mess.

We rode slowly, coming closer to the meeting point, as the minutes were passing, anxiety was increasing in us. I could feel my heart beating fast as if it were begging me to run and prevent myself from the tension that was coming forward. When we came to the last yard preceding the school, there was an insecure

silence. As I step out of my car, a strange wind touched my skin and provoked goose bumps all over my body; fortunately, my suit was large enough to hide this shame. Just as soon as we penetrated the school, ear-splitting male's voices welcomed us with much hostility just to show us their passion and fervor. Their vocal aggression aggravated low groans in our group; I was seeing my colleagues trembling like little cats, this was disgraceful!

The more we were progressing across the courtyard, the more the tones of their voices were louder; it was as if they could feel our apprehensiveness and find motivation in it. We were moving like a convoy crossing an arid desert, checking on one another, all fearful like children except one person: mister minister was not displaying any sign of fright, he was instead looking determined. He was slowly and quietly moving forward despite the noise of the protestors. I knew that these people would have physically attacked us if the gendarmes and their huge guns were not there to frighten them. It was surely because of not being able to physically express their hostility that they put their dark excitement in their vocal cords by yelling their anger with much virulence.

A little time later, we noticed a skinny silhouette approaching us; it was an under-weight man, very tall, a pile of bones covered by a dry skin similar to those of far north people. As he came closer, he gladly introduced himself as the leader of the union before displaying a devilish smile which exposed his bad intentions. He then asked us to follow him toward one classroom

at the border of the courtyard. We did as he asked, but dashed toward the classroom as boots started back louder since the protesters saw their said leader address us with much confidence and defiance. Once we entered the room, we saw three men with somber looks as skinny as their leader, seated on a table with many documents. Even though their unfriendliness was really frustrating, their physical appearance was not as dangerous as I imagine; they were just simple teachers with immense spectacles. After introducing them, their leader then invited us to have a seat with a more sinister aura. From the atmosphere in the room at the beginning of the talk, we knew that this will be a harsh confrontation and that our opponent will do everything possible to have the last word. Subsequently, the group of strikers who welcomed us noisily at the courtyard came at the windows with the same hostility toward us, but this time with less noise although they were still spitting insults. They were displaying the favor of supporters of a football team, encouraging their side with vigor, hoping to enjoy the victory at the end of the encounter. The whole meeting was like a fight in a Roman arena, a gladiator battle where surge pressure and intimidation were weapons, everyone fighting to win at all cost.

Thirty minutes after the beginning of the debates, each party had doggedly to their positions. Mister Minister surprised everybody with his character, he who was known to be ordinary meek shown a different face during the talk. Even the openness to dialogue he seemed to display before our arrival to the meeting

point had totally disappeared in his manners, he was defending the controversial labor law as firmly as if his position of the minister depended on it. The leaders of the protestation were as unyielding as him, but on the contrary of him, the more the time was passing the more clear signs of impatience were displayed in their attitude. Regarding our communication prior to the negotiation and the assurance they had, they were supposed to be disappointed.

“I have heard your complaints, just permit me to discuss it with the head of state and get back to you.”

It was with these words that mister minister ended hopes about finding a consensual solution to end the crisis in a little while. With this promise he had just extended the lifespan of this upsetting problem, I was deeply discontented, this answer means more stressful time in a period already to stressful. But I wasn't as upset as the strikers, and the reason for their anger was deeper than mine: how was it possible to succeed to meet the minister, discuss with him on a table and finally end up with an unsure promise?

“We know where politician promises always end,” I heard some of them affirming.

Subsequently, the din became louder and provoked insecurity among our group. Tempers were flaring, tension had built to bursting, and people's nerves were fraying, our bodyguard noticed the danger coming, they were now on their toes. One of them whispered something to mister minister, surely to notify

him the emergency of living the place. A minute later, we all left our chair at the same time and started heading to the door hurriedly. But to our surprise, the group of strikers outside during the talk was now blocking the way out angrily. Hopefully, the gendarmes used their ferocity to free the exit. However, therefore a clash occurred; people were punching me, kicking me hard, and hurting me so bad. I was sadly witnessing what I predicted anxiously for weeks since the day my boss decided not to listen to my advice and instead follow his dangerous plan, what was the result: we got our ass whoop!! I who did everything to prevent this was now struggling to save my life and health in this rush like a trapped mouse. It took me a great effort to come out of it and none of the gendarmes came to my rescue as they were all focused on mister minister.

Despite all this violence from people, we couldn't expect this kind of animal behavior, the entire group succeeded to return safely in our car. My clothes were clear proof of the brutality in that rush as it was torn and wrinkled almost everywhere, no need to add that I wasn't as glamour as Caroline as me to be. I was shocked but my colleagues seemed more traumatized than me, I could see the terror on their attitude, one of them was whipping his sweating face while groaning like a maltreated puppy. None of us had done this physical effort for years, my back really hurt but compared to others, my situation was better.

Mister Minister came out of this with no scratches or damage; he was as fresh as before our arrival, elegant in his very expensive

suit. Concerning him, the gendarme did a wonderful job; they protected him perfectly but what about us? We could normally take this as an injustice and started feeling a kind of jealousy but what would have been the need for this kind of feeling and conclusion? That's how things are in our country... There was at least something to be content of, nobody died, and they shot no striker although they were enough reasons for the gendarmes to use their guns; however, many of those protesters were rudely brutalized too.

But all this would have never happened if only mister minister followed my plan, I was upset, all this was his fault! We were obviously in a weak position; we were a small group in enemy territory, this meeting should have not been held. But since he always wanted to be looked like the angel, the hero, what could we do? His obsession was risky for his workers and I had to tell him that eyes to eyes, I was too angry I needed to let it out.

It was with all this resentment that I came to his office the following day. He who considered me as his son needed to hear my sincere complains. Being the boss is also to assure the security and the good conditions of his worker, he had to assume that he had felt in this mission. And if only I followed Caroline words my reaction would have been harder, she was more upset than I was and it was understandable. My harm had her massaging me all night long. I had the grudges against him and not even our mutual respect and friendship could stop me.

But as he entered his office and started complaining about his

reaction really took me by surprise. Although he didn't apologize about causing the brutality we endure, his statement about our greatness after our sacrifice got me pleased. I saw myself as a kind of hero too, as a martyr of a good cause. He then started to show me the future fruit of this sacrifice on the peace in the country and resolving the crisis with the teacher. He affirmed that when the national opinion will know what happened, when they hear about the violence that these strikers use on a small group of peaceful people who just came to listen to their problem and follow their request, they will, therefore, stop bearing support to those protestors, and then we will now have the position of power.

He didn't need to add more to make me forget the massage with hot water my wife administered me the previous night, and the unusual physical effort we were forced to do to save our life. I was letting myself be literally subjugated by the exceptional logic from the wise man mister minister was and started to feel guilty for showing shameful selfishness. He succeeded to change my mood without making a real effort; I was coming to ask verbal reparation and excuses from the man but I found myself guilty of misjudgment of the case. It takes much humility to come to this kind of conclusion; mister minister was a unique person. Those guys too disrespected and insulted him, but he didn't complain about that, he instead took advantage of it.

Many other leaders would have sought revenge after this kind of humiliation but not him. He would instead seek for peace and

calm everybody. Now that he was in a better position he would quietly end the crisis by bringing a resolution that would contain every party. Just for acting like this, for displaying such wisdom, such a vision, he deserved a Nobel Prize!

I quickly shared the mister minister's perceptiveness to Christian as he came to office in the afternoon intending to pity me. He too found his mood rapidly changed from indignation to delight after hearing our boss affirmation. Then we both entered a serious celebration, this was a victory, something really rare during this period. As two of the most favorite mister minister's supporters and disciple, we couldn't stay without praising his lucidity and his ability to always find a solution in any complicated case he will face.

"This is definitely the week of good news Paul, guess what? I invited Caroline for a date and she accepted!" Christian added shortly.

This other good news made me happier than the previous one. However, a guilty feeling bothered me subsequently. This love affair that was starting was also a violation of one of our internal rules private relationship between members of the same department were highly prohibited, and as their chief, I had to sanction them. But this time around, I didn't border myself of reminding him the rule or even advise him to act with much discretion; I simply judge this incoming romance like a little violation by an ordinary good and honest employee. Regardless of the number of colleagues that date before them without been

sanctioned by anybody, there was not enough reason in my point of view to feel reproachable about any irresponsibility as a chief. I was convinced that Caroline will be a good girlfriend and eventually a good wife for him even though my opinion was influenced by the fact that she and my wife had the same name.

A little time later, Andre's sudden arrival startled us and ended our cheerfulness. As usual, he'd surely previously bored Jasmine for long minutes after receiving bad answers from the girl, he'd then put down all his frustration on the handle of my door before entering my office without knocking as if it was a Chinese shop. It wasn't hard to perceive that he and Christian had not a friendly relationship, matter of fact their obvious hatred was well covered by a kind of mutual respect they always displayed whenever they meet. Their characters were dissimilar, though Christian was quiet and gentle, Andre was disrespectful with people, a ladies' man, and pretentious. This man was a mad dog, but as bizarre as it could be, he was also my best friend for a long time.

"Mister Paul, I hear you get your ass kicked yesterday," said the latter before sneering like a hyena happy to see a lion defeated after a fight.

This mockery sounded like a nuisance to Christian's ear and made him feel uncomfortable. But instead of reacting by words, as respectful as he was, he left the place to keep himself away from a man who can so easily make fun of somebody misfortune.

An embarrassing moment of silence took place after Christian left, and then Andre who was feeling a little ashamed decided

to quickly turn the mood to a better one.

“Chill bro, let’s go have a drink somewhere, I guess you need that after getting your ass whoop, hahahaha.”

The same main reason that made me been his great friend was also the same reason that sorrows me the most concerning him if only he could expose his good side to people... He was the first victim of his bad behavior. Hopefully, I could feel his intentions of being friendlier with people after realizing the enmity provoked by his manners. But regardless of all the bullshit and the bad reputation he had, he needed to try hard to overcome the hate to love in colleague heart.

Thirty minutes passed, we were now quietly seated in a restaurant-bar situated a yard far from our workplace. The bar was one of those private selective places in the capital, most of their customers were rich and popular. Their main points of attraction were the discretion they assured to clients and the quality of their service. There was also a good ambiance and comfortable seat there.

It didn’t take us much time to be immersed in the noisy but pleasant atmosphere of the place. I was trying hard to hide and avoid being seen by any Caroline’s friend when Andre started to flirt with one bartender, a young girl with a huge bosom, she was not pretty but she had that little to appeal to the male gender. As I was now bored and left alone since Andre focused on the girl, I occupied myself by observing with discretion the other customers, but when I look to the door, guess who I saw? The

young Caroline coming hand in hand with a man who at first sight seemed not to be the timid Christian! That was terrible! He was just from sharing me his happiness to date her some minutes ago, what a shame! I thought she was a serious girl judged by her gorgeous and gentle look; I was wrong. Why did I not check on her better before pushing my friend to flirt her! Why was I not more suspicious, she was a stranger! The unfortunate guy, he was surely somewhere thinking about her without knowing that the girl was in a restaurant with a different man.

I was shocked, but the worst was coming ahead. That man who was holding her hand lovely, that silhouette, that gesture, that elegance reminded me, somebody, I knew well. Hell yeah, he was the one: mister Agbwala! What the hell was he doing there flirting with this young girl in a restaurant?

This was unbelievable, and no it wasn't a nightmare, I was not dreaming; I wished I was. The appearances had me troubled, so all these rumors about his infidelity were true! If only Andre could see what was going on that would have been the last straw! He who was the principal entertainer of those rumors, he that I always blamed for claiming that my boss was a womanizer would have laughed at me seriously if only he could catch this proof that was actually just near us. Hopefully, he was lost in seduction; occupy to seduce the young sexy bartender.

My eyes were focusing on them all the long. They sat at the restaurant side, shelter from people's attention as if they knew someone could expose them, which made me more suspicious. It

could also be to avoid the conclusion that I made that motivated their choice, who knows. Anyway, they got me inquisitive like never.

Two minutes later, I could no more see them; they were out of my vision, seated behind many obstacles. Trying to come closer could have exposed me, so I stayed at my place and visualize back the previous scenes, full of ambiguity and questions. The shock had me paralyzed; I was a captive in a prison with speculation as a company; it was mental torture.

The only thing left to avoid the worst was to keep Andre away. So I claimed an emergency at the office for us to leave the restaurant. Hopefully, he followed me but after taking the sexy girl number, his next sexual partner. Then we left the place hurriedly, with behind us inside the two people surely romancing and chilling, what a shame!

Chapter 3

Leaving with this secret was a horrible torment that was killing me softly, an unjust mental imprisonment in where I was condemned since two days. I wasn't helping myself by becoming an accomplice to the falseness, my silence had me guilty, and Christian's naivety was the harshest punishment among everything. The worst of all was that I became his favorite confidant subsequently in the same period, which was understandable since I was the only one who knew his romance with his intern. I had to suffer long minutes every day whenever he comes to pay a visit; his love stories were torture, every single detail was as violent as a stabbed wound in my heart. It was so agonizing to see a pure soul, a straightforward person like him enjoying a love affair in which he wasn't told of everything. Plus, he was embellishing the whole thing like an innocent child, narrating to me, his pleasant moments with his love, picturing Caroline as a one of those Disney movie characters like Snow White. Spending time with him became excruciating moments.

I was crying my pain in silence, displaying a fake enchantment toward his love affair not to discourage him. Sometimes, the guilt would push me a mile away from reporting him everything despite the consequences and the disastrous depression that could follow, but fortunately, even in these periods of weakness, I was still able to restrain myself and not provoke a disaster in that

young man's mentality. Why kill his dream and his first love affair without having facts? Even though the restaurant scene was scheming, for me, it wasn't enough flagrant, so, to prevent myself from what could be a misjudgment, it was better to gather further information before making final conclusions.

So extreme vigilance was a necessity, I decided to pay much attention to the suspect's moves by spying on them like a soviet agent during the cold war. Not only Christian's love for Caroline was my motivation, my own convictions were seriously engaged in this matter, I needed to legitimate back my opinion on mister minister in other to have the assurance of all his value again. The risk of regretting my effort in past discussions and debates with colleagues whenever they accused him of infidelity was also seriously tormenting me. Spying on them was the best way to calm my consciousness, but also to continue to protest every time ones would denigrate his truthfulness.

As if they were aware of my curiosity, they were barely together in the same place and never alone. As for that restaurant where everything started, I expected to see them back there every single day during the week, but couldn't see any trace of them throughout my spying activities, under-covered like a professional private detective as I was. So I started to have hope, I started to believe that what happened a week ago was in fact entirely innocent and that my imagination had just been corrupted by all these past gossip.

But just a few days later, an encounter came to destroy all my

hopes.

I was particularly tired that day, a huge fatigue almost got me sick, so after finishing working I decided to go back home earlier than usual. Once darted out of my office, the pain increases, my skinny body became heavy to move, I was now dreaming on Indian carpet's help to carry me up to my car. My gait was a clear proof of my muscular tiredness as people were seeing me limping, struggling to walk with my entire mass concentrated on my foot. As if my soul was not suffering enough in this physical pain, subsequently I also had to face mental trouble after seeing Caroline and Christian heading out of the building happily like roses in spring time, almost flirting in public but still conscious enough not to hold hands like every passionate lover normally supposed to do. Guiltiness was consuming my flesh as gangrene, destroying me like lupus, devastating my bones and my heart in their most hidden cells, I was feeling bad, I was sorry to witness a love affair apparently so pleasant to see but full of lies and secrets. I can't even remember how I managed to get to the garage, but sometimes later I was in my car, seated on his sweet and juicy sit that welcome me so gently once I open the door and tenderize me with an agreeable feeling. Hopefully the parking was still empty, so I had to go out before congestion begins. Two minutes later I drive off the building without a glance back, happy to go away from this white collar's stressful universe. I never needed my wife tenderness that much and eventually I could expect her to be home, so I accelerated

my car with the pleasant idea of her company in mind. But after remembering that traffic jam was supposed to be congested at this hour of the day my excitement just collapse. Even after the first yard I knew that it would be difficult to escape from the traffic despite his apparent fluidity. So when I saw group of car turning back I perceived the emergency of change direction fast to prevent myself of being stuck in a long queue of car for long hours. I followed them and choose to pass through a shortcut just before the Saint Eloi venue, the road wasn't easily practicable but I could count on the power of my car and his capability to drive through any kind of road as stated on the publicity that caught my attention and push me to buy it. Just like me a long line of vehicles decided to escapade through this small quarter road with resident's shocked looks, so unused to see this kind of huge traffic in this muddy street. I reached the Debanje Square fifteen minute after leaving the office, knowing that through the normal road it would have taken me hours, this alley was indeed a judicious solution. But not everybody was happy like me and the others people behind me who made that choice, as I was driving I saw a sad group of people parked at a junction, waiting impatiently taxis which were rare and barely present at this area because of the colossal traffic jam that was always occurring at that time of the day. Among these unfortunates, a particularly face caught my attention by leaving me a déjà-vu impression, this beautiful visage looked familiar, these small pretty eyes similar to Asiatic girls' ones, this dark complexion: of course it was

Christine!

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