

R&D

Red is said to symbolize warnings, danger and pain.

Folani!" She heard her name for the fourth time this hour. She knew it was another gruesome task that awaited her. What did she do to deserve all this? Was she never destined to be happy? Why her? Only if her mum didn't- "Ahhh Mummy!" an 'abara' broke her train of thoughts. Yoruba women were known for their famous slap on the back known as 'abara'. They were smart enough to calculate where the receiver would be unable to touch in order not to ease the pain.

A sharp pain cut across her back as she wiped the two hot teardrops that ran down her cheeks. She struggled to touch where the pain was; to try to ease it but failed. "Who's your mother? You this bastard, so you are deaf now?" Folani didn't respond as she was nursing her aching back. "Oh you're mute now". A slap on her left cheek made her realize that she was getting the witch angry. "I'm sorry Ma". "When are you never sorry? I'm hungry make me Amala and Efo" But Folani wasn't done picking out the weeds she had told her to "But Ma-" "I don't want to hear anything" she said as she walked back into the house. A white duplex with six rooms, each room being spacious and comfortable. It had a large backyard, perfect for relaxing or entertaining guests. It's lush and green, with plenty of trees and flowers. The house had a classy design, with a marble-floored front porch and an automatic black gate. Its interior décor was fancy as it had chandeliers on both floors and foreign paintings gracing its white walls. Apart from the chandelier in the living room, the large plasma TV was the center of attraction. The whole house was a beauty to behold, after all it was situated in Lekki Phase 1, one of the finest places in Lagos..... But sadly it held no form of humanity.

Folani managed to get up to prepare the food. There was no point wasting a minute. She was used to such hostile treatment. Her only wish was to leave that house, the house that has traumatized her.

"The only reason I didn't throw you out was because I realized that you'd be a useful house help" Mrs Oyedele said as she motioned for Folani to take the now empty tray of food to the kitchen. Folani had heard these words a billion times. Why hadn't her mother dropped her off at an orphanage? Why this woman? Mrs Oyedele was a dark plump woman that looked like she was in her late forties. She had small eyes and a pointed nose. She was obsessed with looking rich and young, so you'd always see her with artificial nails, too much make up, heavy jewelries and extravagant clothes. Her husband was quite the opposite, he was tall, fair and modest but he was rarely home. He was the kind to send money to make up for his absence. Despite Mrs Oyedele's husband's wealth, she owned a shop where she sold clothes and bags. Folani always worked there whenever she wasn't running ridiculous errands. Mrs Oyedele had three 'little demons' as Folani would prefer to call them, one boy and two girls. They weren't any different from her. They were all ugly people but not in looks. Thankfully they had all gone to schools far away from home.

She suddenly remembered the night Ola had called her into his room. She knew



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what he wanted but she refused, she had even bitten him when he persisted. He had gone ahead to tell a foolish lie to his mum to get her punished. She had received a lot of whipping that day but she didn't mind, as long as he didn't get what he wanted, she was fine.

"Before I forget, clean the rooms and prepare plenty food tomorrow, my children are coming home" 'Speak of the devils' she muttered under her breath. "Yes Ma". Maybe if the witch had allowed her to go to secondary school talk less of the university, she'd be welcomed home like other kids. She left the room with the tray.

After the day's work, she dozed off imagining what life would have been like if she had been allowed to continue her education. She suddenly saw Ola and his mum smiling at her. She was wondering what was happening. As she was about asking when a strange woman shouted "Folani run! Leave this house! Now! This house is not as safe as you think!" She couldn't recognize the voice but it felt like it could be trusted. She wanted to ask the woman who she was but she heard her name again. "Folani!" She jolted back to reality. She woke up to Mrs Oyedele shouting at her to start the day's work. What kind of dream was that? She thought. She pushed it to the back of her mind and began preparing for the day's work nevertheless.

"Mummy!" That was definitely Mercy's voice. She was the youngest and the rudest amongst them. She was the first to get back. "Folani! Come and carry my load, I'm tired" Folani rolled her eyes and did as she said. As she was sorting out Mercy's stuffs, she suddenly heard "You look voluptuous". She could recognize that voice anywhere. It was him. She pretended not to hear him until she felt his hand coming in contact with her waist "Ola what is it?" she said shaking her body to separate them. "So you heard me?" he laughed. She just hissed, abandoned Mercy's things and left the room. She thought he had given up, clearly he hadn't. She went ahead to serve their food. After doing that, she left to sort out all their stuffs while they ate.

The revving engine of a car was heard. "Your sister must be back" Mrs Oyedele said as Ara walked in and greeted her mother then nodded her head in acknowledgement of her siblings' greetings. Ara has always been cold towards everyone apart from her dad. She was the eldest and most sophisticated. She came home only when she was called or during the holidays but this didn't stop her from being mean to Folani as well. "Folani get my bags from my car. Bring my food upstairs too." Ara demanded walking to her room. This holiday was going to be a long one, Folani was dreading it already.

BLACK

Black is linked with evil, mourning, darkness, destruction and sadly death.



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This particular day felt off. It was eerie. Folani felt uneasy, like something was going to happen. She couldn't place her finger on it. Today was the day they were all going out. Mrs Oyedele, Ola and Mercy were going to Landmark beach while Ara was going out with a friend. When it was time for them to leave, Ola said he wasn't going anymore, then coincidentally he and his mother were smiling at her. She felt a sense of déjà vu but couldn't recollect when this situation had pre-occurred. As she helped them pack their things into their different cars, she suddenly remembered her dream. That was it! What should she do now? Run? Where would she run to?

She buried her thoughts deep down and watched as they all left. She entered the house and went straight to her room. She would have locked the door but she wasn't allowed to keep her room key. Mrs Oyedele said that she might steal things and keep it hidden in her room. How petty she was! Folani sat in her room in thoughts, she didn't even hear the knock on her door. Then it came again. She heard it this time, she wondered who it was because no one ever knocked before entering her room. Then it occurred to her that the only person in the house was Ola. What could he possibly want? She pretended not to hear when he knocked again but thanks to Mrs Oyedele seizing the keys to her room, Ola opened the door with ease and walked in. He was smiling and holding something in his hands. Was that a key? The sound of her room door being locked confirmed it was a key; and not just any key, her room key! She was alert. She stood up and said she wanted to get water but he only looked at her and put the keys in his pocket. "Ola I'm not in the mood for your games please" she said perturbed. "And who said I came to play games?" "Then why are you here?" she said feigning ignorance. She was trying to stall him before she could think of a way to escape. "Folani you're nineteen years old for God's sake, you obviously know why I came to your room!" "Well if it's what I think I'm not interested" she said boldly. He chuckled as he looked at her lustfully.

He started walking towards her. She moved away from him. She was trembling now. She then told him "Don't come near me, I'd scream" "You're so naïve, scream! Who would hear you? There's no one around remember?" Then it dawned on her that she was really doomed but that didn't stop her from biting and kicking him when he tried to touch her. He became angry and slammed her head against the wall. She got really dizzy and couldn't see clearly. She felt herself being pressed down and her gown being removed, she resorted to begging as she was weak "Please Ola don't do this. I'm begging you" Fears dropped from her eyes but the beast didn't pay attention to her. She screamed in pain as he deflowered her, the struggle was over. She had lost her pride.

He walked out of her room with a satisfied wicked grin. Folani just laid there lifeless as hot angry tears dropped from her eyes. It felt like she was in a trance, when she saw a familiar woman. She was crying as she looked at Folani, like she was bitter and sad concerning what had happened. "You can still leave this place" she said in between tears. Folani wanted to talk to the woman but she suddenly vanished. This



was the second time she would be appearing to her...who was she? Folani picked herself up to have her bath and change her clothes.

At the beach, Mrs Oyedele had left Mercy; pretending to pick a call. She went to meet a young man at the far end of the beach. He looked suspicious, he wore all black with a dark pair of shades well. He kept looking around like he was running from someone. The young man spoke first "I've done what you said I should, it's been a month now...I decided to lay low for a while" "Good...I hope there were no traces?" "No Ma, I made it look like a hit-and-run situation" "Well, that clears her out of the picture, you're relieved of your job" "Thank you Ma" "Send your account details". He nodded and walked away. Mrs Oyedele thought to herself "So Niniola is dead now. All the better, I no longer have to worry about Folani finding out what transpired between her mother and I" She smiled and walked back to meet Mercy. After some hours, they headed home.

Folani was still sulking at the time they got back. She was going to tell his mum what he did. His mum wouldn't definitely agree with him on this one, after all she was nobody in her eyes. Who would want their son to have anything to do with a maid, a nobody? Folani thought. Everyone assembled at the table for dinner by seven. She served their food and waited for them to disperse. She stared at Ola in disgust and didn't even notice Mrs Oyedele smile at her. Immediately Mrs Oyedele entered her room, Folani knocked on her door. Of course, she was nervous, she didn't even know how she was going to tell her that her son had abused her. What was she going to do, send him out? Give him a mere warning not to do it again? She was so lost in thoughts that she didn't realize Mrs Oyedele had opened the door for her. "What do you need?" "Ma I-I" "If you don't have anything to say, get out" "No Ma, I have something to say. When you went out today, Ola came into my room and"- "And what?" she asked in pretense "He abused me" she said close to tears. She didn't dare look at Mrs Oyedele, she looked at her legs.

A hot slap made the tears run down her cheeks "How dare you accuse my son of touching you? You filthy thing! How dare you?" "Ma?! I'm not lying. He raped me" she said, trying to prove that she wasn't telling tales. The truth was that she knew, Mrs Oyedele knew that Folani wasn't telling lies. Her son had told her of his intentions, she didn't agree at first but he was her only son and she wouldn't refuse him. She gave him the key to her room and planned his sudden lack of interest to follow them out so that Folani won't suspect a thing. When she saw the smile on her son's face at the dinner table, she couldn't help but smile. Though she would never tell Folani all this.

She slapped Folani again "If you say those words again, I will show you hell" Folani ran out of the room. She made up her mind, she was going to run away, she didn't know where but she knew it was time to leave. She packed her things, stole some money and ran. She didn't stop, she kept on boarding buses and stopping at the last bus stop, she kept at it until she couldn't recognize where she was.



WHITE

White often represents surrender and peace.

It's been four years, Folani is working at a restaurant now. She still thought about her horrible past once in a while. She was grateful that her escapade had led her out of Lagos, she couldn't bear to coincidentally come across the Oyedeles. If not for Mr. James who had seen her roaming the streets and taken it upon himself to help her; only God knows where she'd be now. She was serving a woman that had walked into the restaurant when the woman suddenly exclaimed "Niniola?!" Folani looked behind to see if there was anyone behind her. Mrs Bankole looked at Folani "how- how did you- why are you"- Folani smiled "I think you are mistaking me for someone else Ma, I'm Folani" The excitement and shock drained from Mrs Bankole's face and it was replaced with curiosity "What's your mother's name?" Folani stammered, she never knew, Mrs Oyedele never told her "Uh - Ma I"- "Never mind I'd like to see you when you are off work, you just really look like a good friend of mine." She gave her a piece of paper and told her to call the number on it when she was done with work. "Okay Ma" Folani could see a bit of sadness in her eyes when she spoke about her friend; but why sadness? What happened? Folani couldn't focus during her remaining time at work. Her curiosity got the better of her, she called the number immediately she got off work. They met at an eatery. Mrs Bankole told her to sit and placed a large brown file on the red table. "Hello Folani" "Good evening Ma" "Call me Mrs Bankole" "Okay Ma" "So I requested to meet you because you look a lot like my friend who died some years ago" "I'm sorry to hear that". No wonder she was sad Folani thought. "Thank you dear but that's not it. She had a daughter but she never saw her" "So you feel I might be her daughter" Mrs Bankole stared at her "Yes I do" "Well I never met my mother. I was stuck with a mean woman who never failed to remind me that she was doing me a favor by letting me live with her. Mrs Oyedele-" Mrs Bankole's eyes widened at the mention of that name. Folani stopped talking as Mrs Bankole held her hands sobbing "Your mother was a very close friend of mine. She wanted to come and get you but Mrs Oyedele said she'd kill you if she ever saw her" Folani remained quiet, so Mrs Bankole took it as her cue to continue. She put her hand in the brown file and brought out pictures of her mum. Folani's hands were shaking miserably, as she looked at them she froze.

The woman in the pictures was the exact replica of the strange woman in her dreams. So her mum had been the one warning her. Fears fell from her eyes. Mrs Bankole saw her tears and said "I think we should meet another time. I'm sorry darling" "No ma'am, I'd like to hear it all" Mrs Bankole began talking "Your mum was barely getting by as an orphan when she met Mrs Oyedele. That woman promised Niniola a job as a maid but she had other plans. She made your mum do dirty jobs like sleeping with big men. Niniola didn't want to agree but she had no choice. Along the line, Mr.



Oyedele and your mum had an affair and that's where you came in"- "Sorry Ma did you say Mr. Oyedele?!" "I'm afraid so" "Jesus Christ!" Folani was dumbfounded "When she gave birth to you she dropped you on their doorstep and ran. She knew Mrs Oyedele would make her life worse than it already was, she suspected that Mrs Oyedele knew about her affair with her husband. She also knew that Mr. Oyedele won't let harm come to you. So she took the risk. She tried so many times to get you back but Mrs Oyedele never let her" Folani had so many questions. Did Mr. Oyedele know he was her father? Did Mrs Oyedele know she was her step-daughter? Folani began to cry excessively now.

Mrs Bankole suddenly said "I think I cried more than this on the 5th of June, four years ago; when your mother died" "If I may ask, how'd she die?" "A car hit her and run, to me it didn't look like a mistake but to everyone it did" "What?! Who would try to kill her?" Then it occurred to her, only Mrs Oyedele would, but why? "I don't know, it's getting quite late. You should head home now. Please if you need anything, anything at all, call me. It's the least I could do for your mother" "Thank you Ma" "Let me drive you home" They left the eatery and Folani directed her to her house. It was a small dull colored bungalow located quite far from other houses. Well what would you expect from a house on the streets of Abeokuta?" "Thank you so much Ma" Mrs Bankole smiled. Once Folani walked into her house, Mrs Bankole made a call and in about twenty minutes, a car pulled up, out came Mrs Oyedele and two other men. "Lara, you're the best. I don't know how you managed to find both daughter and mother" "Honestly, I don't know" Mrs Bankole said and laughed.

Folani was laying on the couch and thinking when she saw Mrs Oyedele, was that Mrs Bankole beside her? "What do you want?!" she asked irritated "Is it me you're giving that attitude? Anyways you thought you could escape but thanks to my friend I found you" Folani's eyes widened in shock as she turned to Mrs Bankole "You said you were my mother's close friend" "I lied. This is my friend and your mother broke her marriage. I'm just doing my innocent friend here a favor" Mrs Bankole smiled. Folani knew that she had really messed up, how could she even trust a stranger in the first place? She had left her phone upstairs, how was she going to get out of this mess? Mrs Oyedele's words interrupted her thoughts "You know, I hated your mother because she made a mess of my marriage and I hate you because you remind me of her. I'd have disposed of you if my husband didn't say I should keep you but now you're going to die just like she did." "So you killed her? you're so heartless!" Folani spat out. Mrs Oyedele rose up her right hand in anger, Folani was about to scream when she heard a gunshot. She hoped it wasn't her that got hit but she felt herself staggering, hot tears running down her cheeks, so this was the end for her. A hot slap resounded in ear as she heard the words "Rot in hell like your mother". Another bullet was shot at her, it pierced through her skin and went straight to heart. It hurt so much, she didn't know if it was the thought of her mother or the bullet that hurt more. Two shots were all it took for her to embrace darkness. At least there was peace in death.



THE END



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