

So I guess I have to introduce myself first and foremost. Every one of you will have to know my name before I start on this journey, Smiles.

My name is Promise. Non-apparently, I am a guy. But that doesn't matter. It doesn't until you start calling me Proms. Then it matters. I hate the name, but it stuck to me since childhood. It started as a house name before it graduated to church and then school and before you knew it, I was Proms. It was bad enough to have a girl's name, but then...

So yes, Meet me. Proms.

Where was I? Yes. I am off school, like, Secondary School. And you know what they do to you, the JAMB guys that is. They make you stay at home and grow beards while your former class mates come around every three months and tell you tales and stories about their mad and crazy universities. If I was asking them, that would be a different story. They would start gisting me about everything. From their classmates, to the girls they've been with, to their crazy lecturers and mad raving parties they have been to during the semester. Some of them simply tell me about their campus fellowships and the miracles God has been doing in their lives. These ones even promised to invite me to their fellowships once I gained admission to their university. In any case, I had made sure all the institutions I picked in my JAMB registration form were miles and miles away from theirs.

Sakiru was one of those class mates. Don't get the wrong picture oh, he wasn't the fellowship guy. He was more of the party story trolley.

Nevertheless, Sakiru was a day one guy. Like my *gee*. Although lately, because of distance and time, we mostly said less to each other. But we were still guys. I and Sakiru did something one holiday when he came back from school. One holiday that changed everything. It was an Easter holiday.

Ever heard of a trail? I am not talking about a road or a path, like a trail. The worst type of transportation channel. It is like a path, just that its worse than a path and there isn't actually a path there, people just 'jungle' through every time. I don't know if you get, but don't worry, you will.

I live at Badagry which is situated on the west of the west of the West African Map. And trust me when i tell you, Badagry is filled with trails.

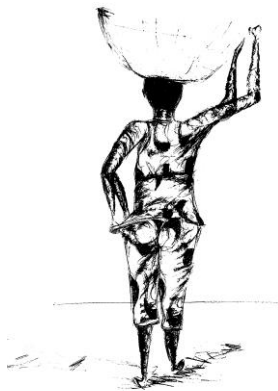
My house, like every normal home has a mother that loves her son so much. Except when she has an errand for that son to run. And she almost always has an errand to run because, come on, i am the one who stays at home and doesn't go to school. And because of my shortcomings, she has every right to slave me. Right?

Forgive me if I keep sounding like a low self-esteemed prick. I have only just learned to bring myself down and

have faith in God to lift me up. I know im doing it the wrong way, but I don't know any other way to do it and the happenings and situations around me weren't really giving me a choice.

So on Good Friday, the day I started on the trail. I was being sent on an errand to the market by my mother. It was a hot morning.

“... and from there you will go straight to Iya Samson. She has moved her stall, so she is now behind the fish seller,” my mother was counting on her fingers, “Tell her to give you one hundred and fifty-naira worth of ugu leaves, then tell her that your mummy said she should give you three cups of beans. Tell her that way o, so that she will add extra for you. okay?” she paused enough for me to remember why my self-esteem is low. I'll tell you all about that later sha.



“Proms.” she continued with this change of tone, my mother stared into my eyes with this sudden change of face.

“Ma?” I was apprehensive.

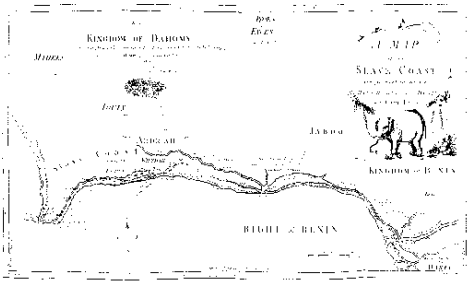
“I know you must have heard the stories. The market isn't safe nowadays. Children are going missing. God protects his own. But still, be careful.” she drew her ear with one hand and twisted her face like it was supposed to have some effect on me.

My stomach turned. My point was being made for me. “Mummy, I’m not a child, more so, it is Agbara we are talking about, I’ve been going there since I was little.” I was trying to show maturity, “Besides you won’t be this worried if i had a phone.”

“That is not my business. Be careful, That’s all i will say. Okay?” she was dragging the ear again.

“Okay ma.” then I had a thought, I had to be smart once in a day now, prove that I wasn’t the dumb baby I was seeming to be, “Mummy what if Iya Samson isn't around? Where should I go?” I was feeling like a proactive thinker.

But my mother thought otherwise, “Where does she want to go? Go and buy what i sent you *jare*.” she thrust some naira change into my hands and I went on my way.



Good Fridays were like any other Friday you can imagine. Only thing i heard is a sect of religious people paused eating meat or any other blooded

food for the day. Don't tell me you envy them, because I don't. Why pause for a day and continue for the rest of the year?

Nonetheless, I was on my way to the market. Agbara market is at the heart of Badagry. The place is actually a heart. It is this valley-like busy place where residents of the whole Badagry division come to buy and sell.

It wouldn't be a lie to say the market contained majority of the contraband items being brought to Lagos and owing to that fact, the market accommodates the cheapest price rates in the state.

Usually, trucks with funny inscriptions on the body drove into the market square once in a while with the loading boys waiting to off-load goods to nearby stores. But today, Agbara was a bit empty. And it was already 11 o'clock in the morning.

I was just going to guess that it was because it was Good Friday. Nothing really made sense these days in Badagry and I couldn't wait to leave.

Another thing about Agbara that I am not sure how I feel about is that I am a little famous here. Most people I greet here reply me back by my name like; 'Hey! Proms how are you? How about your mother?' or 'Ahan Proms, Proms, is this you? Your face is scarce o,' or 'Proms, won't you buy *ponmo* today?' But I was sure about one thing, if everywhere in the world was dangerous, Agbara is one place I was sure nothing could happen to me.

Iya Samson's new stall wasn't too far from my approaching end of the market. so before long I had gotten to her stall. Her stall was made up of a table that had a roof, with more tables in front, a stool on which she sat with her little toddler (Samson) on her lap and then her wares occupied every other space.

I met her talking to the meat butcher so I just greeted the both of them and waited for them to finish talking.

The butcher left in a minute and Iya Samson acknowledged my presence, “My husband, longest time, what do you want to buy?” and we started transacting. When I say transacting I mean touching and asking then pricing before buying. My mother mustn’t hear that I had bought something without trying to haggle the price down.

“They are all thieves,” she had always said “They will add one million to the original price so they can gain everything.” But I was sure if she saw me now, with the way I was making Iya Samson frown, she would smack my head and call me the thief.

I was almost done buying all I had come to buy at Iya Samson’s when he came.

There he was, Sakiru. He was about four inches taller than I was. He wasn’t even what you called tall. I was the problem. I was just short. He was dark in complexion, arguably darker than the last time i saw him, and he was wearing shorts that showed his legs. Those legs that won the track events times without number back in school. I had more of the football kind of legs, which almost every boy did, so nothing to boast about there.

We exchanged wild ‘howfars’ and shook for a long time while he talked about how he would have called me but gave an excuse of how the network of his network provider

was horrible since he got to Badagry. I consoled him by giving him the greater problem pill. I told him i didn't even own a phone.

The greater problem pill is the activity of consoling a person with a problem by informing him/her of your own problem that is greater than theirs. Genius, right?

So where was i? Yes. So while Sakiru was trying to come up with his own greater problem pill (yes, GPP is reciprocal. It is something guys do.), Iya Samson who was fond of calling me on calling me ‘my husband’ in Yoruba gave me some bad news.

“My husband, the ugu leaves are finished o. See the ones that are remaining, they are wrinkled and i trust your mother. If you collect these, she will send you back.” She wrapped my other items in a polythene bag before she went ahead to begin attending to Sakiru.

Sakiru took a glance at me once in a while as I thought about my issue. He looked concerned but then, you can’t really tell much about the seeming of a friend you haven’t heard from in a while. After a period of time, you barely know them. right?

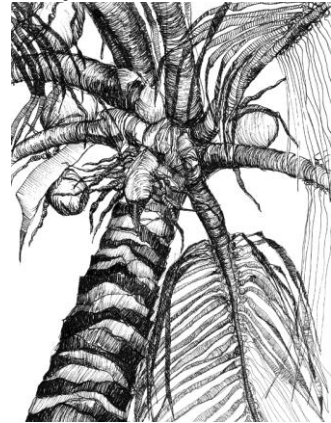
Decision making wasn't my forte. Especially when the decision making involved my mother, the chief decision maker of the house. I can’t imagine myself making decisions for the person who might decide to make a decision for me not to take any decisions and finally

deciding my future. Oh. I almost didn't mention my Dad. Cool guy. He is a Customs Commandant at the Seme border. He is rarely at home sha, so yes. My mother is the chief decision maker.

So in the spirit of decision making, i decided to wait for Sakiru to get what he wanted to buy then later, we would leave the market. That was the plan.

Fifteen minutes later, Sakiru and i were still perambulating round the whole of Agbara, buying so many foodstuffs that i started to wonder what was actually being cooked in Sakiru's house.

Everywhere we went, they seemed to have everything else except the vegetable leaves that my mother was so expecting.



It was around 1 o'clock in the afternoon and like us, the sun wasn't looking like it was going home soon. I kept wondering what my mother would say about not buying the ugu leaves and still coming late. The most obvious lie would cover me though; I was looking for somewhere else to get the ugu leaves. I trust my mother to see through this lie. But then, she had no proof of otherwise. And i was past spanking age. Still, getting the vegetable bothered me a bit.

“We can get your vegetable from the farms.” whispered Sakiru after a long walk in the half empty market.



Not like that hadn't crossed my mind. But I know myself and i know fear, i hope that explains a lot. I couldn't do it. But then, someone thought otherwise.

"I passed by a farm earlier, it is one of those ones owned by the Eegun people. It was empty. And they had ugu there, plenty! They wouldn't even know you were there. They are fresher there you know." I didn't know. I just knew that he was tempting me. The word 'yes' was just playing on my lips. But fear...

"Guy, don't worry. My mother will understand. It the only thing i didn't get to buy. Let's get going already."

"Calm down, let me get a bag from this lady." I waited while he bargained with the woman who sold bags. As I stood in the middle of the semi-busy market, I started to play the scenes in my head; in each one, we both either got caught or I alone got caught or something happened to the ugu leaves in my hand.



This was the worst idea ever. But that was the only choice asides going home without the ugu leaves and disappointing my mother plus increasing my value of being useless. At least I wouldn't have to be whipped in the market square or mobbed by angry Eegun people. For your information these Eegun people are not even Nigerian, they are Togolese immigrants who acquire lands in the border parts of Badagry and think

they have equal rights with all citizens of Nigeria. Come to think of it, some of them vote. I don't want to be beaten to nonsense by a self-important immigrant. I'll rather go home in self-shame.

I told Sakiru my decision when he finished bargaining, and he just shrugged.

The market was beginning to get filled. Apparently, housewives were trooping in to get food-stuffs to cook meals for their families and trucks were beginning to arrive from wherever they came from.