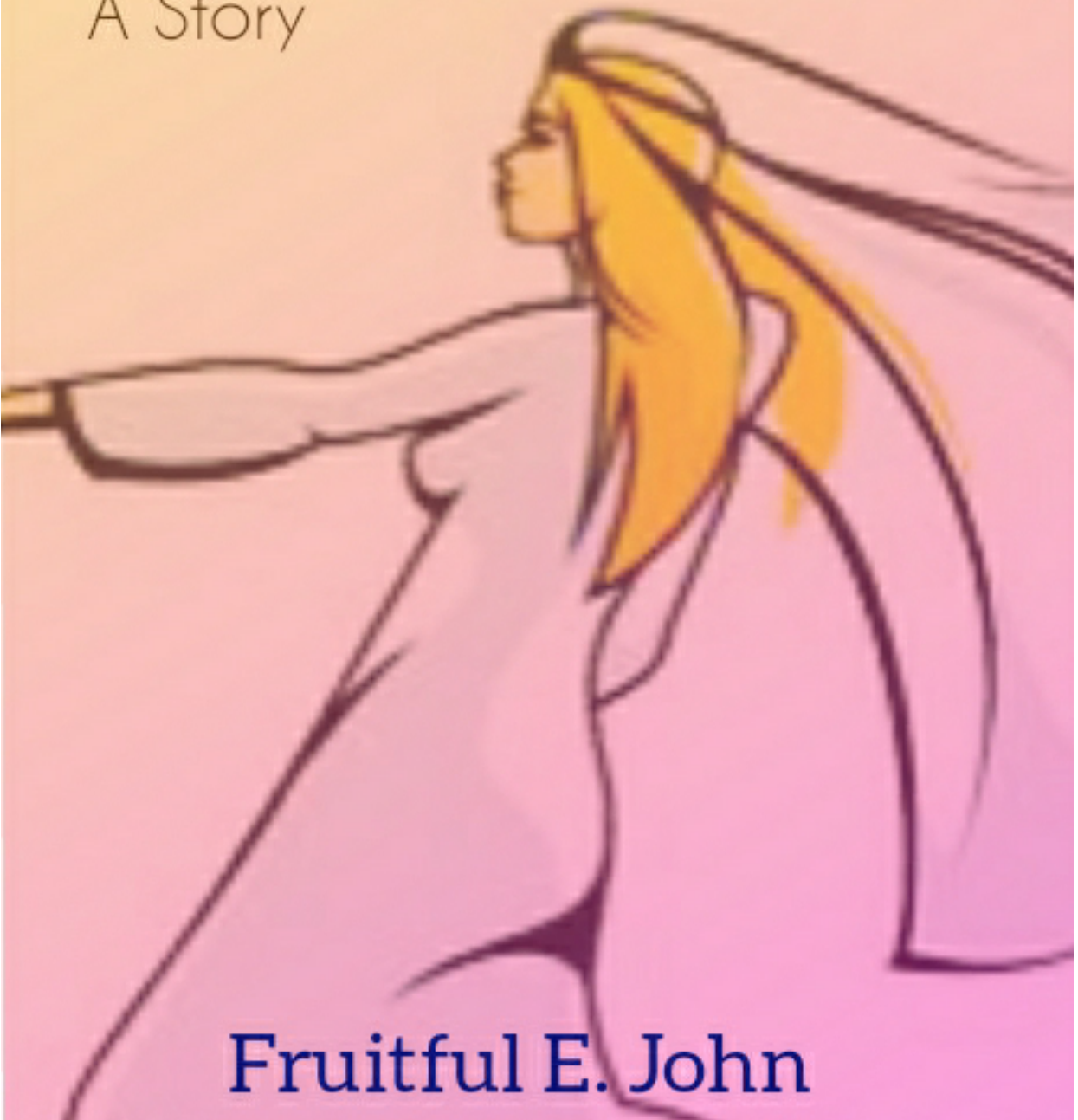


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A Story



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Written by Fruitful E. John

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1

THE SPARK

The men shook inwardly as she passed by. Her high heeled shoes carried her elegantly revealing the ropes twisted around her legs. In a tightly fitted sleeveless green gown that matched her complexion, every step she took revealed the contour of her figure. The cross on her necklace moved back and forth drawing more attention to her already revealed cleavage.

"Lord have mercy." Edward, the usher at the main entrance muttered, his eyes blinking at every of her step. He managed to swallow hard as she walked passed him, her shoulder almost brushing his.

Her Cologne filled the air as she made her way to the front. Quite a number of people looked her way. The Sunday school teacher skipped

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a breath as he caught a glimpse of her. Few like Mrs Anabel stared with disgust.

Jarvis tried his best not to shake as she sat beside him. Her gown jumped up and the slit revealed her light skinned thigh. He adjusted his trouser, biting his lower lip at intervals.

As soon as Pastor Jones mounted the pulpit for the Sunday school summary, he cracked a joke to get back the attention of his congregation. The rest of the service went smoothly. The choir rendition was excellent and the sermon was quite interesting.

"Gush! You're the most sexliest thing I've ever seen in church" Jarvis said, almost immediately after the grace was said.

"Excuse me. Did you just call me a thing?"

"Oh! I'm sorry but you're damn sexy"

"Thank you" she replied with a smile.

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"Can I have your contact?"

"Not so fast. You didn't even introduce yourself"

"I must have been so caught up with your exceptional beauty. I'm Jarvis, Mrs Anabel's grandson"

"Wow! How come I've never seen you around here? For the records, I'm Melissa"

"I'm not a church freak you know. Its actually my first time here"

Mrs. Anabel approached from behind as they exchanged contacts.

"You'll hear from me" Jarvis said and walked off.

"You must feel so fulfilled having a number of guys stare at you through out the service?" Mrs Anabel asked, her look much weightier than her words.

"Do you by any means think something is wrong with my outfit ma'am?"

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"But for His mercies you should have dropped down dead disrupting the service"

"I'm sorry ma'am but how is this my fault?"

"Do you mean to say someone dressed you up the way you did?"

She asked and paused, restricting herself from speaking any further.

Melissa stood speechless waiting for her next words. Then she said calmly "I quite appreciate beauty Melissa, if only you could be more decent. I believe your life will bring more honour to God if you could dress more decently to His presence" She ended, patted her back and walked away.

Melissa stood, her eyes travelling through her own body as if ruminating on the words she had just heard. She almost froze when she realized her crush was standing right in front of her, his hands cutely fitting into his trouser's pockets.

2

THE MAKE UP

Edward looked up and there she was, dressed gorgeously in a red tube dinner gown, her blonde hair flying freely as the cool breeze of the garden blew. He had asked her out on Sunday, after the service. They had agreed to meet at Omega Garden by 5:00PM today. For Melissa, it was a dream come true, her crush whom she admired greatly had finally deemed it fit to ask her out.

"Hello" she said, her lips spreading wide enough to reveal the gap between her two front teeth. Somehow she hoped Edward would comment on her beauty but he didn't. He simply welcomed her and ordered for their meals. They ate in silence except for the

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occasional smiles when she caught his gaze. His eyes travelled through her face every second of the meal, observing intently every detail. Melissa could only wonder what he was up to.

The wind blew slightly and the flowers danced to its rhythm. Melissa packed her hair rightward to prevent it from been ruffled by the wind. By now the meals were done with and Melissa's mind raced with thoughts of what the rest of the evening would bring.

"I'm sorry its such a boring place" he said cutting the silence.

"Not at all. I love the serenity" She replied.

They warmed up into a conversation and by 6:30PM they were on their way home.

After leaving Edward, Melissa climbed the stairs to her room with conflicting emotions. Was this a date? "Yes it was" she told herself. "No it wasn't" she reconsidered. Their conversation had been more serious than she imagined. Her bed gave her solace as she sat

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resting her back on the wall, holding tightly to the pillow the whole scene played back in her head. The pictures came crystal clear as though it was just happening. From the part he asked her how much her make up kit costed to the point where he asked her if her beauty depended on it. Then to the part that hit her hard. She could almost hear his voice again.

"I'm amazed at how much you spend on your looks just to imitate a celebrity that has a life of her own. If I could get the exact amount you claim to spend on fashion every week? I'll invest it in the life of an ex-convict who needs money to start life afresh. A number of them are out there, tempted to go back to crime because of the untold hardship. That amount can help feed a low class family in a week Melissa. It could even cater for the school needs of a girl struggling through school"

She could almost see his passion in her head. How he moved his hands and the seriousness in his voice. She remembered how she

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had just stared at the table as the words pierced through her tender heart.

"Melissa, I know you want to look beautiful and appreciated. I love that too. But you can do that without extravagance. Besides, beyond your physical beauty is your life and destiny. Melissa, when you die now, your beauty dies with you, but the good you have done will live. Just look at the hardship in the world. Should you and I close our eyes to it? That will be so inhumane"

The tears formed again just like they had in the garden. No one had ever talked to her in such manner. She had never seen the world in that perspective before. She's not to be blamed. She grew up with a silver spoon in her mouth. His voice continued to echo as she dug her face into the pillow.

"Find your place Melissa. Find it!"

"How?" She had mumbled softly while the tears flowed.

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"By finding God. Look, I know you come to church and all. But what I'm talking about is different from that. To see the world from a new perspective you need a new life. It is only God that can tell you why he created you. Believe me, you were not meant to just live, eat, drink and die. Find God Melissa, then you can find purpose"

She had cried her eyes out as Edward held her two hands in prayers. Now that she thought about it, the tears rushed out again, this time the pillow was there to mop them off.

3

THE PROPOSAL

After two hours of reading on a Friday evening, she decided to take a break. Catching a glimpse of a busy road from the balcony was a ready option.

It's been three months since Melissa's life took a new turn. Three months of making hard decisions, one of which was giving up her modeling career. This should have created a friction between her parents and herself, if she was in their vicinity. Her decision to live alone at this time must have been divinely arranged.

Eight months ago, the pressure to settle down with a man had intensified from both friends and family. "A woman still single at 35 will soon become an object of mockery by the society" her mum had

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asserted. It was like a bullet traveling into the heart. Fear fired at her and desperation set in. But who? What responsible man would want to build a home with a 35 year old model who had given her body to just any man to gain relevance? Her last resort was to play religion.

There were no much drama on the street after all, it had just been a way to exercise her legs and body. She sat back on the bed ready to continue her reading. Her phone vibrated. "How about dinner at our usual venue by 7?" – the text read. It was Jarvis, her two month old friend. They had grown so fondly in a little while. They had even been out together on a date twice. She had to reply and she did speedily. Then a notification popped up – "sex on the beach, click to watch".

"You should watch it" her mind whispered to her. She stared at her phone helplessly for a minute. Her breathing rate increased at the thought of it. The urge was strong – she gave in. In less than five minutes she was there – watching. Her heartbeat changed. She

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could feel the tingling. Her internal organs were sparking, getting ready to be set on fire.

“Stop! Cry out for help! Lust, pornography, masturbation, they’ll all land you in hell” It was her pastor’s voice – a line from the Sunday school summary last Sunday.

She shooked and looked up. “I shouldn’t be doing this” she thought. The sound from the video called her back. She was about concentrating again when her mouth opened wide “Lord help me!” she cried out loud. He did help.

“...I pledge allegiance to the lamb...” her phone sang. It was Jarvis. “I’m on my way already” he told her.

She ate in silence with guilt written over her mind. One could tell her smiles were from a well of condemnation. Jarvis noticed it.

“Hey bae, what is wrong with you?”

“Nothing” she replied, turning her face rightward to escape the

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alcoholic smell from his mouth.

"Nothing? Why is it that I have this feeling that your smile is fake?

Common you can talk to me"

"You won't understand"

"I will" he said, putting the cigarette in his mouth.

"What do you think of pornography and masturbation?" she asked.

"Heeeeeee" he said smiling. "My bae is in the mood o. I could treat you well you know" He added.

"I shouldn't have asked you" she said with a frown.

"Ok. I'm sorry" he said clapping his two hands to apologize.

"Pornography and masturbation is a good way to sort yourself out if you are not ready for sex" He added.

She shook her head pitifully with a look that meant "I regret asking you". A young man in black suit walked up to their table.

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"Miss Melissa Addison?" he asked.

"Yes"

"You have a parcel"

"From who?" Jarvis asked.

"I don't know" she replied.

The post man requested that she signed reception of the letter which she did, passing a glance at the envelope over and over again. With curiosity written over her, she removed the seal. It was a card. As she opened to read, an object hit the floor with a sound. It was a ring.

"Marry me" he said, going down on one knee. She sat speechless as he picked the ring, holding it high enough for her to see. "It's a diamond ring" one of the waitress whispered to her colleague.

"Yes! This is it. It worked. Now I have a man to myself" she thought.

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She closed her eyes in excitement and she saw the picture – the bible. She opened her eyes and her joy deflated like a punctured balloon. Apart from the reality that age was not on her side, she had grown to love Jarvis. Unfortunately, she had to choose between her new found faith and her lover.

4

HER CHOICE

She wiggled on her cosy warm bed wishing she could enjoy more of its warmth, but the noises from her busy world would not permit. Living in one of the notorious districts of Lagos comes with such price. She stretched herself and her eyes opened, catching a glimpse of the wall clock. Its 7:00AM on a Saturday morning.

Raising her two hands apart, she yawned and the burden of the previous night returned. Jarvis had created a scene at the restaurant. He had gone down on one knee with a ring in his hand. Everyone had stared, waiting for her to say the three letter word. She couldn't, neither could she say the other. She had been overwhelmed with confusion and had walked out on him. The words of the Pauline epistle "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" had tormented her from the

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restaurant to her apartment. She had forced herself to sleep when her thinking was not making a headway.

"Jarvis is a nice guy" she assured herself again, cuddling up like a baby in its cot. "He doesn't drink much, twill be easier to change him."

"Stop decieving yourself Melissa, you can't change an unbeliever, only God can" her conscience called out.

"Hmmm... I should talk to Edward about this" she concluded.

Her left hand wandered on the bed in search of her phone. When she found it, the backlight was on. She had put the phone on silence so she didn't have to battle with the thoughts of picking Jarvis' call. Her eyes widened "15 missed calls?" She asked rhetorically. It was a strange number. She sat up to get through to the caller. At first, no one was picking up, then a familiar voice spoke.

"What!" She shouted, her voice loud enough to raise the roof. She threw open the wardrobe doors and chucked on the cloth she had won the

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previous night. She dashed into the bathroom for a quick touch of water on her face and off she flew.

A sick but clean smell welcomed her as she walked hurriedly to the entrance. Greeted by the gloomy faces of friends and relatives waiting to see their loved ones, she searched through the room for a familiar face. A female nurse almost brushed her side, wheeling a wheel chair into one of the wards. Her anxiety heightened, one could almost hear the beating of her heart.

"Melissa!" A female voice called from behind. She turned back spontaneously. It was Mrs. Annabel. She walked towards her beholding her swollen red eyes. "She must have cried through the night" she thought. "He's in the emergency ward" Mrs Annabel said softly with Melissa walking by her side.

"What happened?" Melissa asked, her eyes full of pity.

"He had an accident last night"

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"Last night?"

"Yes. The doctor affirmed he was drunk when they brought him"

"Oh my. He must have drank himself to stupor after I walked out on him. I just hope this is not serious" she thought.

He laid on the bed helplessly, his face towards the other direction. Melissa moved close, her right hand holding firm to her mouth. She walked gently to the other side of the bed hoping to catch his gaze. He was asleep. Dr. Stanley walked in and Mrs. Annabel approached him at once. Melissa joined her.

"This must be Melissa?" He asked.

"Yes" Mrs Annabel replied.

He smiled. "He called your name few minutes after he was resuscitated" he said.

She could only smile a bit, her heart was hitting hard at her with guilt.

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"He's not a drunk, if she hadn't walked out on him the way she did, he wouldn't have drank too much" she argued in her heart.

"He has many serious wounds and would need many stitches. Soon enough, an xray will be done to be sure no bone was broken" Dr. Stanley explained.

"Thank you doctor" Mrs. Annabel replied.

The doctor's last statement called her to soberness. First, she broke his heart. Now, the tendency of a broken bone. She would never forgive herself if there were any complications. Beholding his blood soaked bedsheet she prayed. "Oh God, please let nothing silly happen to him".

Melissa's mind raced again as Mrs. Annabel postioned her on a chair. To her, his love for her had just been proven. "He almost drank himself to death because of me?" Her mind asked her. "He loves me too much to be rejected" she told herself. With a strong mind and a

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resolute heart she watched him - ready, waiting. If ever he had to open his eyes, she'd be there to say over and over again "Yes!".

TOO LATE

Excited Melissa hopped into the car, sitting comfortably at the owner's seat. Mrs. Annabel passed her a smile, started the engine and the journey began. This respected deaconess would soon be her mother in law. She was there when she said yes and she had been happy about it. Jarvis, her cute fiance would be discharged today, all things been equal he should meet her parents in less than two weeks. These and many more thoughts kept her face bright as they journeyed to the hospital.

"Peeeeeeeem peeeeeeeem" Mrs. Annabel honked and Melissa's wandering mind travelled back. A shabby young girl ran out of the way with a terrified look. She had been right in the middle of the way trying to stop a vehicle that didn't stop. She drove the car to a small packing space angrily, Melissa could tell she was going to give the girl a hot rebuke.

"You should learn how to be more careful on the street" Mrs Annabel

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said, raising her voice.

The young girl stood still, timidity written all over her. Clothed in a tattered brown gown torn from her neckline to her left shoulder revealing her black skin, she held her tangled hair as a drop of tear ran down her left cheek.

"Its OK young girl, just be careful next time" Melissa said softly.

"Please let me work for you" the young girl said, stretching forth her two hands apologetically, her knees finding their way to the ground.

"Work? How old are you?" Melissa asked.

"I clocked eight last month. Please let me work for you, I can do anything"

"Why do you want to work for me?"

"My mum is dying. We use to walk the streets begging together but she's sick now. I don't want her to die. Please let me work for you"

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Melissa's eyes lost strength as tears formed in them. The girl stared expectantly. Mrs. Annabel started the engine without saying a word.

"I could be of help" Melissa said as the car kicked off.

"Sure! Those kind of people need prayers. They need the gospel too"

"I mean we could help take her mum to the hospital"

"Don't be deceived girl. Beggars on the streets of Lagos are scammers. Its all deception, a way to rob you of your money"

"Even if she were robbing me, a token would not be bad"

"That token should be dropped in the church's offering bag, Melissa"

The discussion was getting longer than she anticipated. She's just getting to know Mrs. Annabel and she wouldn't want any disagreement just yet. She looked back and the girl was out of sight. They had traveled farther. The journey continued and her conscience kept knocking bringing to memory the words of Edward

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on the day she confessed Christ. For three months now she had been searching for her place in the world - what she could do to make the world a better place. Here was an opportunity. If only she was alone, she could help this girl.

"Such is life Melissa, you can't change the world" Jarvis said when she raised the issue on their way back.

"But we can change a world Jarvis, we can change the world of a little girl child, we can change the world of a sick poor woman"

"The only lasting change is the change that Jesus gives. Pray for them and if you have the opportunity, preach to them" Mrs. Annabel projected.

"How? How do you preach to a young girl whose mother is dying? That Jesus would heal her mother when you have the money right in your pocket to take care of the situation?"

"Are you yelling at my mum?" Jarvis questioned.

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She had been consumed with passion she didn't realize her voice was getting high. She apologized and remained mute for the rest of the journey. An idea roamed in her head and she couldn't wait for them to reach their destination.

She sat still on the edge of her bed, her eyes swollen from too much tears. The tears had rushed out as soon as she got to her apartment. Melissa had gone back to the street to look for the girl. She was nowhere to be found. She asked the banana seller by the road and she narrated;

"She was knocked down by a speeding vehicle as she attempted to cross to the other side. She died instantly. Her sick mum who laid in that shop heard the noises of people mourning and she came out shivering. She collapsed. She died too. Its such a tragedy I've not recovered from myself".

She had carried the weight of the news in her heart as she travelled back home. Now that she's home, she could cry all she want to. She

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was her last hope and she failed her. It wasn't Mrs. Annabel's fault neither was it Jarvis'. It was hers - her inability to look away from what they thought to what was right. With her teeth squeezing firmly her lower lip, she had to ask herself again, if walking down the aisle with this man would be purposeful.

FIRE PLAY

She shivered with fear as two hands covered her eyes firmly from behind. Beaten with hunger, she had hurried back from church, forgetting to lock the main entrance as she dashed into the kitchen. After a sumptuous meal of noodles and egg, she had settled down to watch a movie on her phone not remembering to lock the door still. A nice but familiar smell graced her nose from the hands. She smiled, realizing who it was. She held the two hands, struggling to remove them. He bursted out laughing and she joined him. It was Jarvis.

"You met everybody after service, except me." He said, pretending to be annoyed.

"I'm sorry I couldn't. I was terribly hungry." she replied, offering him a seat.

"But you still had time to see those girls?" He asked, settling down on the arm of her chair his right hand finding solace on her right

shoulder.

"Like seriously, you saw me?"

He nodded. "What's up with you and those girls anyways?"

"Yeah, for some reasons I couldn't take my mind off them after sighting them in church, I felt I needed to caution them on their dresses."

"Which you did?"

"Yes. You won't believe it. They were surprised and asked if I could mentor them."

"Looks like you're gradually becoming another Mrs. Annabel." he teased, his hand playing with her ear. She noticed it. She stood up to offer him water, using the opportunity to sit on another chair. He smiled, taking a sip of the water.

"I guess this would be our first meeting after you said yes?"

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"That's not true. Have you forgotten so soon we were at the cinema on Friday? I haven't forgiven you for making me miss that prayer meeting."

"Perhaps you'll forgive me after now." He said softly with his eyes firmly glued to hers. He stood up, his hands fitting into his pockets. "Talking about today being our first meeting? I meant it would be my first time in here. The other time I didn't get a chance to come in."

"That's true." she nodded, wondering what he was up to.

He took two steps forward, his eyes firmly focused on hers. She blinked, his gaze becoming unusual and uncomfortable for her. He moved over, squeezing himself beside her. She shifted trying to create a little space. He smiled.

"Don't be scared Melissa, I know your faith is against premarital sex."

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Melissa nodded in affirmation. His right hand travelled through the strands of her hair and then to her back. Simultaneously, his left hand moved slowly along her thighs. She looked helpless staring into his eyes, her heartbeat increasing gradually.

"Stop!" She said, holding his right hand as it approached her shoulder again.

"What is it?" He asked leaning forward with protruding lips. She turned her face away staring at the floor.

"Are you scared? Believe me, it won't go beyond this. I respect your belief." his calm and soft voice whispered into her ears sending a pleasant sensation across her body.

"You should respect my body too." she said rising to her feet. She must have feared his irresistible touch.

"What's wrong with you Melissa, we are not babies. We are engaged to be married. Why can't we do this?"

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"We can't do this because we can't. Its lust Jarvis and its defilement. Marriage is honorable in all and the bed undefiled. I'm sure you've heard that scripture before."

"Yes! And I keep telling you, we are not going to have sex. Its just a play would-be couples play."

"Play you call it? Well, I call it fire play. Can a man put fire in his bosom and not be burnt?"

"Enough!" He said, raising a hand. He was obviously tired of her attitude. Standing up with a stern look, he adjusted his collar and walked out.

"What are you doing Melissa? This man is totally out of place for you, can't you see?" Edward asked with concern after she had explained her ordeal to him. His call had come in few minutes after Jarvis left.

"There's no going back on this relationship Edward. I'm not getting

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any younger. I can tell he loves me. I'm sure he just needs time to come to terms with my beliefs. All I need now is your advice on how to prevent this in the future."

"You think so?. Well, my suggestion would be that you register with the church marriage committee or a Christian marriage counsellor. That way, your relationship would be accountable to someone. It will help both of you to be conscious. Also, I think you should avoid meeting in secluded places, if you must do then make sure there's a third party."

"Hmmm... I'll see to that Edward. Thanks for always been there."

Her mind raced back as she ended the call. This was not the first occurrence. He had rough handled her burst while they kissed at the cinema two days ago. She had been totally helpless and had given in. Now that she thought about it, she had not even asked God for forgiveness. First, for missing prayer meeting for such frivolity and secondly for defiling the Lord's temple. As she knelt down to pray, a

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part of her wished that this wouldn't be the end of her two weeks relationship.

THE TWIST

Melissa was glad to leave and be by herself. It had been a hot afternoon session with Mr. Glisson. Rather than just taking down her name and giving her a date for the commencement of their premarital counselling, he had been more concerned with helping her reason through her decision. After getting her to give every piece of information he wanted, he had perceived that a lady may be making a wrong choice.

"Miss Melissa, you must be sure that you are compatible with this man. You need to take a compatibility test and your faith should be the first to be considered." He had said after giving her a date.

Her hungry stomach jumped for joy as her nose breathed in the smell of a nicely prepared food. In less than three minutes of

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settling down in a chair, the waiter was there to receive her orders. It took longer to finish the meal as she pondered the words of the counselor again. Truth be told, she hadn't known Jarvis enough to ascertain their compatibility. The little she knew however were too obvious to be ignored. Their last misunderstanding had been more of a cold war. Jarvis had not been responsive the way he used to be. They hadn't had any outing since then and he didn't seem excited when they talked on phone.

As she chewed another spoonful of rice in her mouth, her phone rang. She searched through her bag to find it. "Not again." She said to herself. It was her mum. She had called two days ago to ask how far with her plans. She had assured her, she'll be bringing him home by the end of the week. Now that Jarvis is behaving strangely, she's not sure if that will be possible any longer. She ignored the call, putting it on silence.

"How lost can a pretty lady be?" A male voice said from behind.

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She jerked and turned back. He was a light skinned tall man dressed in a sky blue shirt on black trouser with sleeves rolled up to his elbow, holding his tray with both hands. Beholding the sight of blue made her eyes widened. It was her best color cutely fitted on a handsome man.

"Excuse me." She said, hoping he'll repeat himself.

He winked and with his eyes brought her gaze to the plate on her table. She had been lost in thought she hadn't realized the food had finished. The spoon had played on the plate as she moved her hands back and forth.

"You must have travelled the world in few minutes." He teased. "Can I sit?" He asked. She smiled, nodding in the affirmative.

"Would you give me the honor of knowing you? I'm Ken"

"Melissa"

The rest of the day was as lively as Ken himself - calm, cheerful and

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inquisitive. It was just thirty minutes and it looked like they had known themselves forever.

"You look beautifully dressed and moderate. A Christian?" That was Ken. He was good at playing around with words and digging into ones thoughts.

"Yes." She nodded. She couldn't help but notice his sense of humor. From sharing with her how hungry he was to how stressful work was. A sparkling straight forward sanguine almost impossible to resist.

"Shall I drop you off?" He said as they stepped out of the restaurant.

"Don't bother Sire. I'll be going to bible study from here."

"Exactly the answer I wanted to hear."

"What?"

"Where you'll be going after here" He said and winked. She smiled.

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He seemed to have the key to unlock her mouth perhaps her heart too.

"You see, God is interested in everything we do as believers. He's interested in telling us how best to carry out our assignments at work. He's interested in guiding us in the choice of a career. He's interested in teaching us how to win in the battles of life. The reason many believers find themselves in prolonged dilemma is because they forgot to carry God along..."

Bro. Jerry was the one handling the bible study today. His words carried much weight and the people listened with rapt attention. Melissa nodded her head meditatively, her right hand moving against her jotter at intervals. She must be hearing God from Bro. Jerry's mouth. She looked up again after jotting a few more things. Her eyes caught a glimpse of Mrs. Annabel in the front. Almost immediately, a hand tapped her shoulder from the back. She turned. It was Jarvis wearing a smiling face.

BIG TIME BONDAGE

A pleasant wave travelled through her body as she remembered him. "His goodnight message" her mind reminded. She blushed, her hand reaching quickly to her phone. The disappointment on her face was obvious as there was no message notification. She stretched herself on the bed and cuddled up again causing the memories to refresh in her head. Her life had not remained the same in the last one week. The joy she felt whenever they talked is unusual. "What is this feeling?" She had asked herself over and over again. Her phone beeped.

"Hey lovely. I hope today was kind to you. I had a pleasant day with pleasant memories of you. Just wanted to wish you sweet dreams and to remind you that I'm here for you. I'll still be here for you in the morning when your pretty face awakes. Good night my lady."

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Her heart melted. Ken was not only cute, he was romantic. Above all, she had found out that he was a serious Christian, passionate about helping teenagers overcome sexual pressures. Two days ago, she had been opportuned to join his team on the "Stay Pure Tour" in the outskirts of the town. She had enjoyed the tour and she wished she could be involved more frequently.

"I wish he was Jarvis."

"But he's not."

"I think I love him."

"But you're engaged."

"But I don't love him."

"You loved him before now."

"Maybe that was not love. Maybe it was pity or desperation or ..."

"What is wrong with you Melissa?"

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Although Ken had not proposed, the battle to leave and cleave to him had been headstrong in her mind. It won't have been a tough one if Jarvis had remained Jarvis. But no, he's changed. His appearance and the manner in which he spoke to her after the last bible study had been astonishing. She couldn't hide her surprise and he had to tell her the story behind it.

"I saw myself sitting down amidst a group of men and women, our hands and legs tied together with heavy chains. After a while, a man in black gown visited to take one of us away. A voice from no where said to me: "Jarvis, sin is big time bondage." He told me that as long as I continued to sin, I cannot go far in life because my soul was in captivity to the enemy of my destiny whose sole aim is to hinder me from fulfilling destiny and ultimately release me to hell when I die. He told me the key to my freedom was the Jesus I had been mocking and rejecting. I woke up from that dream sweating profusely. I had Grandma prayed for me and I'm determined to walk

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this path to fulfill destiny." He had narrated.

With the conversion of Jarvis and his growing interest in the things of God, one would think Melissa should be the happiest of all women. But no! She's not. She's confused. Her mum awaits the fulfillment of her promise to bring Jarvis home. Ken had found his way deep into her heart. Just this afternoon when the battle in her mind heated up, she had screamed "Lord! Who is the one for me?"

"Open Up Melissa. Open up!"

"I'm scared Lord. I'm scared you may choose another."

"I know the best for you Melissa"

"Ken looks like it Lord." She had prayed with Ken in her mind. After the prayer, Ken was still there, even now Ken is still there.

"You don't have to go through this trauma Melissa. Anyways when you're ready to open up, I'll be right here to bring you out. Remember, trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own

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understanding."

Her spirit wanted to. Her soul would not agree. If only she knew that this was a battle - a battle between her spirit and her soul. If only she understood that this was big time bondage - a bondage to self will.

HIS WILL

After some thoughts and natural struggles within herself, she summoned courage to reply his text.

"Dear Jarvis, I'm sorry for what i'm about to write. The truth is that I'm not seeing us together. I'm not sure we're meant to be. The appointment with Mr. Glisson won't be necessary anymore." He had sent her a message to find out the time for their first appointment with the marriage counsellor.

"You are joking, aren't you?"

"I'm not. I'm sorry."

"Like seriously? You don't want to marry me anymore? Do you think I'm lying about my conversion? I'm not. I'm changed for real. God helping me, I won't bother you with my sexual urges anymore.

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Please don't do this to us."

She could almost read his sincerity in the text. She bowed her head not knowing what next to type. Her conscience scolded her "You shouldn't be doing this." Her head applauded her "Do this once and for all. You never loved him. You said yes out of pity."

With her head still bowed she attempted to mutter some words of prayers "Lord..." Her mouth ceased. She was still scared - scared of God's will. She opened her eyes, lifted up her head and got her fingers back on her phone's screen.

"I'm sorry Jarvis. This is for the best."

She looked up to the clock. It was a quarter to 1:00PM, the time for their first premarital counselling. She stood up, arranged her hair, packed her bag and hurried out.

"Miss Melissa, I want to believe you're a practicing Christian?" Mr. Glisson asked.

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"Yes sir."

"And you have prayed about this?"

"Em...em..."

"Well I do think you should pray about this seriously. It's not about who you love or who you don't love. Its about who you are convinced to marry. You said Ken is yet to propose? What if he never does?"

"He will sir." She said assuredly with a faint smile above her lips.

"Sure?"

"He should this evening. We have a special date."

"I see. So you decided to cut off with Jarvis before he does?" She nodded in the affirmative.

"I respect your decision Miss. Melissa. But..." He paused, trying to find the right words. Then he continued. "I perceive you have trust issues. Many Christian marriages have failed because one or both

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spouse have trust issues."

"Trust issues? How?"

"You see, if as a Christian you find it difficult to trust God, the one who knows you and knows all things. The one who gave his all for you. How would you trust your husband? Besides you can't truly say you love someone when you don't trust the person. Haven't you read the scriptures that says if you love me, you will keep my commandments? How do you keep a commandment that you are not even willing to hear? How can you truly say you are a Christian when you don't trust the Christ you claim to believe in? How do you say you believe in him without trusting him?"

The words soaked in gradually like a piece of bread in water. She had never reasoned along this line. Her spirit broke into tears as she tried to comport her body. She loved Ken but in the process she was loving the Savior less. Maybe it wasn't just about Ken. Her mind had been so engrossed with marriage, she had forgotten about her

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Savior, the one who cleaned her up and brought her to lime light. How could she forget too soon the mercy she received at Calvary? How could she dare to exchange the Savior's love with that of a mere mortal? The session ended and she made her way home.

With much heaviness she dropped her bag on the rug and knelt down, her head and her upper body laying on the chair. A drop of tear ran down her left cheek as she opened her mouth.

"Marriage was already taking your place Lord. I'm sorry I thought I was wise carrying a burden that wasn't mine. You are my Savior Lord and I give this up to you. My life, my marriage, my future. Please Lord take the wheel, drive me wherever, lead me wherever. I know you love me and I know you want the best for me."

Her repentance opened the door for great peace within her soul. Its been a while she felt like that in the place of prayer. It was like a heavy burden was lifted. Her heart was rested and her body was light. Then she decided to be specific in her prayers. She was ready

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to hear God now. Whatever he says would be the final. That's because now she's rest assured he would give her the best.

While she prayed about Jarvis, a verse of the scripture dropped on her mind. She didn't know what was there but she was rest assured it must be God speaking. It was John chapter eleven verse forty four. Her eyes widened as she read the last line "...loose him and let him go."

This was not the first time God was laying a scripture on her mind but this was the first time, it would be so direct. "Maybe its a coincidence" she told herself and continued her prayer. Another scripture wandered in her mind and she paused to check it. The last line shocked her again. "...let him go free." It was Psalms chapter one hundred and five verse twenty. This happened two more times with two other scriptures meaning the same thing. Joy welled up in her soul, the joy of hearing God speak to you.

Then she moved on to pray about Ken. She was resolute this time.

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Her fear had disappeared and she was ready to take God at his word. First Samuel Chapter Sixteen verse seven was the verse that dropped on her mind this time.

"But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

Her mouth opened gradually as she read the verse over and over again. Maybe she wasn't ready for this after all. Her mind went blank for a second. When she gained consciousness, her brain began traveling. What would she tell her mum? That she hasn't found the one yet? Once again, she had to choose between two people. This time, it was between her Savior and herself.

THE END

He stood at the door with a tray in his hands hoping the beautiful figure on the bed would look his way. He moved few steps forward and bent down to drop the tray on the table. It contained two cups of tea and a plate of fried eggs - golden brown, exactly the way Melissa loved it.

He climbed onto the bed and whispered into her right ear "Good morning love." There was no reply. He knew she was not yet awake, her sleep was always deep except on days when she was sick.

"Wakeee wakeeee" he said into her ear again, his voice a bit louder. She rolled to the other end of the bed. He stretched out his second leg to prevent her from falling off the edge. "She must be dreaming." He thought to himself and smiled. The last time she fell off the edge

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of the bed, she had confessed she was playing hard with him in her dreams. "Who knows what she's doing in her dream this time?" He thought.

An idea popped in his head. He positioned his two hands at her sides, shooting forth his index fingers. The tingling worked. She jerked, her eyes opened wide immediately. Her anxiety disappeared as his cute smiling face greeted her. "Good morning love." Her smile replied. It was coming from a grateful heart. Waking up every morning into a cloud of happiness was a divine gift she was always grateful for.

"Morning devotion and tea in bed on a Saturday morning." he said and pouted his mouth, his left hand pointing towards the table. She raised herself slightly and caught a glimpse of the tray. Her face lit up with a magical smile. "awnnn awnnn" she hummed softly. She wanted to give him a kiss in appreciation. He wanted a kiss too. But they both knew they had to have their morning devotion first.

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"We are grateful oh Lord...." Charles sang. She sat up and joined in the song. He stretched forth his hands to meet hers as they lifted up their voices in worship.

With her eyes deeply closed and her mouth opened wide she sang on "...for all you have done for us, we are grateful oh Lord..." She was indeed grateful. God had cleaned up her past and made a new creature out of her. He had given her a sense of purpose in life and she lived daily with the joy of fulfillment working as a counsellor in one of the first class secondary schools in Lagos.

Why would she not be grateful? When she was desperately running into a relationship that will ruin her, God was there. Two weeks after her wedding, she was driving past a bar when she caught a glimpse of Jarvis with his friends drinking away their lives. Apparently, his whole born again stuff was a lie. How could she had lived out her purpose in life with a drunkard? Had God not helped her, she would now have been of all women the most miserable. Ken was almost a

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good option but definitely not for her. He never proposed until Charles came along.

"Let's thank God for our past, present and future" he said, raising the first prayer point.

"Thank you Lord, for the good, the bad and the ugly of our lives." she said. Her life could be defined in these three terms. Even when she had given her life to Christ, there were the bad times she felt like giving up on God, just like when He told her to let go of both men. There were those ugly moments she had fallen into temptations especially in sexual areas. But God had been faithful. His grace had kept her.

"Let's thank God for the new addition to our family" Charles mentioned as they continued the prayer. Yes! She had to be thankful for this too. Eight months after her wedding, she had been scared that her past was here to hurt her. Everyone expected her to be pregnant except her understanding husband. She had been so

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worried. Just last month God did it. The doctor confirmed she was four weeks pregnant.

"Let's thank God for our friends and family"

"Lord we thank you for our relatives and our friends..."

Now that she mentioned friends, the memories of Edward came into her mind. He had been a friend that stocked closer than a brother. Indeed he was the brother she never had. One should thank God for his life. Two months ago he had called to inform her of his missionary trip to Ruwanda. She had been happy and had adviced him to look out for a suitable lady for a wife on the mission field. "That's if God wants me to have one." He had replied jokingly. He wasn't stranded. He was a man any sensible lady would want to settle down with. He must be waiting for divine timing.

"In Jesus name we pray."

"Amen." A part of her was glad the prayer would be suspended.

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Usually what they did on days like these was that after the prayer of thanksgiving, they would suspend the prayers, take a shower together, have breakfast and spend the rest of the day in deep communion with their Lord.

"Let us now pray..."

"The teeeeeaaaa" she cuts in like a baby whose biscuit has been snatched away. "Its getting cold" she added.

"Oh! In Jesus name we pray then."

"Amen."

As they had breakfast staring into each others eyes, she couldn't help but wonder how much love God had for her, blessing her with such a Christlike husband. She had met him in one of the counselling sessions with Mr. Glission. It was on the day she came to appreciate him for how God used him to help her marital decision. She was hurrying out when this cute young man met her. Two

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weeks after that, she saw his chat on Facebook. He must have gotten her name from somebody. She prayed before the intimacy got strong and God led her on. He proposed after two months of frequent chatting and calls. She was shocked the day she went to register for their premarital counselling. Charles was Mr. Glisson's son. God had given her a man who knew all about her past and still decided to marry her. A man who was ready to support her faith as well as her calling.

"Who says God's will is not the best?" She spoke out.

Her husband looked at her in amazement wondering what she had been thinking. He nodded his head "Certainly not me. And not any Christlike Christian. God's will is the best. It may not be all together pleasant but it is always the best."

THE END.

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God alone,

He alone can show,

Every path that you should go.

He will lead you to the source of life this I know,

He alone has your life's plan.

Let this God discover the best way for your life,

For tis God who can show you the way.

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She's 35, single and desperately searching, has a dirty past, found faith on her journey to marriage.

When faith interferes with her desperation what would she do? Who will marry her? How about her past? What does marriage hold for her? Find Out.



Fruitful E. John

The author, Fruitful E. John is a passionate youth counsellor, a public speaker and a writer.

Her desire to see marriages fulfil God's purposes has driven her to write stories and articles to help singles choose right as a foundation for a purposeful marriage.