

Church Tales

# A Dubious Baptism

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Boma Somiari

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“So you’re telling me you left because she received the Holy Ghost?”

*That’s why I can’t tell you anything.* “The Holy Spirit wouldn’t slam you on the ground and have you in a chokehold”.

Tell me, was I wrong to flee the scene when at church, while they’re praying for a lady, she hits the ground, rolls around a bit, and then struggles to breathe while trying to be free from the grip of what was holding her? The whole time, everyone was saying “Thank You, Jesus”, “Praise the Lord!” “God is good!”, and I’m thinking, *this lady needs help.*

When Mrs. Thomas got up, I’m certain I saw a strange combination of relief and mischief in her eyes.

*This cannot be the Holy Spirit. This is not what the Holy Spirit does to a person.* I had to leave. I’d gone for a prayer meeting, not to become a suspect.

I come home and explain the situation to my roommate, and she taunts me to no end. “That’s why they still suspect your Christianity to this day”. “You do not have a career in criminality, or you would have known you should be getting your scent off of every trail, not stuffing your face with food”. “Should we get our things?” Should we run?”

Sometimes I wish I lived alone.

“Theresa, she looked dead. I don’t even know why they were praying for her”.

When she returned a blank stare, I admitted my fault, “Fine! I was late”.

“Again”, she said, “And you wonder why they don’t take you seriously in that place.

“At least I don’t skip the whole thing entirely”.

Now she adds to her list of reasons why she doesn’t go to Church anymore. Church people are too judgmental. So far, we’re unforgiving, unkind, too critical, hypocrites, and judgmental.

“But is she OK?”

“Who?”

“The Holy Ghost filled woman”.

I picked up my Bible, said a short prayer (because I knew how much that would annoy her), and wished her a good night’s rest with just enough nightmares to wake her up on time so she’s not late for work.

Then I beat my chest in repentance and explained to the Lord again how hard it is to live the Christian life around Theresa.

I will try to do better tomorrow.

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I hadn’t finished grading papers for the test my class wrote, so I left early the next

morning. (OK, fine, it was just an excuse to leave early). I mean, as soon as this girl was up she started singing about the anointing and the power in the blood, and ad-libbed with reasons why I should be singing too.

As I left, I told her to have a blessed day. That shut her up.

She didn't even let me tell the whole story yesterday, but that's just Theresa, impatient with everything religion.

I was supposed to help her see the truth. That was my major reason for opening my doors to her three years ago after we met at church and I learnt she needed accommodation.

Three years later, I'm needing major doses of faith to fortify myself against the tidal waves of unbelief assaulting foundations built by years of doctrine, belief, and truth. Sometimes I think it's a disease that doesn't show until the harm is done, and it's almost too late. So I go to church, leave for work an entire hour before I have to, and read my Bible when I do not want to encourage conversation.

Remember how they say you can be pulled down faster than you can pull a person up? I should have listened.

Imagine my surprise when my phone rings, and it's Mrs. Thomas, the Spirit filled woman, calling.

“We’re moving today’s prayer meeting to 4 O’clock this evening”, she told me. Before I could respond, she started speaking in tongues. After waiting for what seemed like forever, I dropped the call, covered myself with the blood of Jesus, and called the group leader.

She said at least five people had called her in the last hour asking about the same thing.

*So this woman just decided, on her own, and started calling everybody!*

Mrs. Thomas called again, but I let the phone ring. By the close of work, I had fifteen missed calls from her.

I have to say this, I do not see how the Holy Spirit would make a person behave like this.

Before the service ended, on Sunday morning, I was sure that Mrs. Thomas had not received the Holy Ghost.

We couldn’t say two words in prayer before she would break out in screams, “My children.... My children.... I am the Lord....”

She cried the entire service (OK, nearly!) asking God to not cast His children away. *Why would He want to do that?*

She told God to forgive us despite our stubbornness and continued indulgence in sin. *OK, speak for yourself, Lady!*

And then she wouldn’t let us close the service because God had more to say to us.

One moment, she's barking orders, and the next, she's like the sweetest grandma you know.

I have to tell you, more than a few were confused that day.

But I kept these things in my heart and mentioned none of it to F, in spite of the arduous prodding I endured at her hands. It was as if she knew, "How was the service different today, you know, with the Holy Spirit filling and everything?"

I told her the seeds in her were good and thriving and that one day we would all see the harvest. I had not meant to confuse her, but I can't deny that I enjoyed seeing the perplexity that smothered her face, even if it was only briefly. Also, I thanked the Lord, for the rest of the day, for the peace and quiet that followed.

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"We need to buy things for the house".

*How bold! How brave! Finally, tackling the elephant in the room!*

When I didn't respond, Theresa continued, "There's no milk, washing soap is almost finished, onions too, and gas. I don't know why everything finishes at the same time, all the time".



There was still no response because, all the things I meant to say, the Lord said no.

She handed me a list and volunteered to stop by the market later that day.

I continued to plead my case with the Lord. Then I gave her what she asked for, and stormed off to work.

“I’m hardly at home, yet I have to pay for everything, all the time”, I told the Lord, “This was not the understanding when she asked to stay with me. And I didn’t even think she would stay this long”.

I can’t always tell what’s more annoying — that I have to feed Theresa and clean up after her, or that she doesn’t even realize the fact.

When we discussed her failure to hold up her end of the rent agreement earlier, she reminded me she was still looking for work. So tell me why when I get back from work, on this day when she has me fuming from her guts to finally tackle the elephant in the room, there’s a stranger in my kitchen, and another one sprawled on my sofa, mindlessly flipping through TV channels. It’s pay-per-view, people, see the problem here?

And then Theresa waltzes from the room and introduces me as her roommate — with the same flippancy you’d inform an annoying brother that the postman brought him a letter when you’re already holding it.

Now, these strangers think we're squatters in her house, and that they're higher up some food chain than me, and I have to babysit them, and they can come and go as they please, sometimes with visitors.

And the whole time, the Lord kept cautioning me against my proneness to impatient reactions.

*I didn't do anything, Lord! This time, Lord, I didn't do anything! You know they started this whole thing! I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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The thing with receiving the baptism of the Holy Ghost these days is that you need to be careful what you open yourself up to.

As a Christian, you need the Holy Ghost, so it's not wrong that you desire this baptism, but the current state of the Church calls for due diligence on your part.

You don't have to believe me. Just look around and tell me what you see.

Also, tell me why Mrs. Thomas is now the final authority at our church.

We have to run everything by her — to make sure we're keeping step and are in tune with God, they say.

Strange currents were stirring underneath. Wildfires were burning.

Some argued that she just joined our church.

Others said she's not the only one filled with the Holy Ghost.

And then there were some who were sure everything just boiled down to her generous offerings and donations.

I do my best to keep away from every cross I have not been called to carry. So I go to church, and then I go back home. I no longer attended meetings. They had become mere formalities to adopt whatever Mrs. Thomas says.

You never know what to expect at Bible studies and prayer meetings. And, more than once, I apologized to visitors I invited to church.

We all knew what the problem was, and we could have easily resolved this situation, but we prayed that God would intervene — at least some people prayed. Some of us just wondered how we let this happen and why we continue to let it happen.

Also, there was no way I was leaving my job to work with Mrs. Thomas as an assistant. She could prophesy about it all she wanted.

*And if she does not stop cornering me every Sunday to try and sell that agenda, she might bear the brunt of all the perplexities badgering my life.* Lord knows I'm not even playing.

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Things at home were not settling at all. It seemed like the more I prayed, the more things got out of hand.

I tried talking to Theresa.

Then I tried talking to her friends — three of them had taken up permanent residence by now.

I stopped buying as much groceries and didn't renew subscriptions and utilities when they were due. But then I felt like a hypocrite every time I went to pray.

I told the Lord over and over again that this present situation was not what I bargained for when I opened my doors to Theresa. I only needed Him to approve at least one of the plans I'd presented to Him to deal with the situation once and for all.

His disapproval was not a surprise to me, considering those plans were bloody affairs — in a manner of speaking, of course — and, well, if not properly executed, literally. But I just wanted to put my case out there. I was honest with my strong reasons, and waited to see how heaven would respond.

Imagine my surprise when Mercy, one of the friends, said she would come to church with me. I didn't even invite her, considering

all the drama going on at church. Also, by now, I was mostly a Sunday, Sunday Christian.

And then imagine my rage when Mrs. Thomas accosts me at the door the first time Mercy follows me, and asks me why I was being disobedient to God's word and His will for me.

I introduce Mercy as a newcomer, hoping she would reconsider her approach and be sensible, but this woman doesn't even acknowledge Mercy. Instead, she pronounces a judgment so vile Mercy's jaw nearly drops to the ground.

I turned so fast, I nearly slammed into a metal flower pot but was saved by an usher who had been standing at a distance and had witnessed the whole thing.

"Sorry", she mouthed, then shot a piercing look at Mrs. Thomas who was oblivious of the ramifications of her actions — or she didn't care.

Mercy ran to catch up as I made my way to the front of the church. As we took our seats, she fixed her gaze on me and continued staring. Then she finally asked, "What did you do?"

"I'm about to find out", I muttered. *Help me, Lord Jesus!*

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I didn't blink, the whole service. I had my eyes on Mrs. Thomas. I don't know what my intent was but I got too much joy from catching her squirm more than a few times, I almost felt sorry for her.

Tell me why this woman would call my job making all sorts of claims, then meet me at the front door of the church immediately after to tell me I was living a wasted life.

So I've been here this whole time minding my business and just trying to worship the Lord, but somebody is about to find out that the same liberty she has in Christ to wave her hands carelessly in praise is the same liberty I have to invade her space with my hallelujahs.

I don't know if Mercy followed the service or heard anything that was said because she was in my ear the whole time going, "What did you do?" "That woman is cursing you endlessly in her mind." "Does this church have this much drama every day?" "I think everybody hates you here...."

I came so close to shoving the bulletin in her mouth, but the Lord restrained me.

As soon as the service was over, she asked, "So what are you going to do?"

"I don't know, Mercy", I told her, "But if you stopped talking so much maybe I might

think of something or even hear what the Lord is saying”.

You would have thought I’d just dropped a literal bombshell on her. “He speaks to you?” she asked, eyed wide as saucers, jaws hanging lower than when she first heard that judgment, “You can hear God speak to you?”

Then she fired a string of questions in rapid succession, “Do you have some kind of calling?” “Are you a minister or a pastor?” “How do you know it’s God speaking and not your mind or your thoughts?” “Can you hear Him now?” “What’s He saying?”

Every question was fuel under my feet so by now she was running after me, trying to catch up. For a moment, I felt sorry for her and almost slowed down when I remembered she was doing all that running in three inches stilettos, but she chose that same moment to ask if I was running from God’s calling like the prophet in the Bible who was swallowed by a big fish, and if that’s what the woman meant by saying I was being disobedient.

I hope she understood the look I shot her. Anyone would — well, anyone who didn’t talk so much, that is, but that girl was on her own until we got home. And I didn’t even feel the tiniest bit of remorse. That bothered me a bit.

But did she stop talking? I wish I could say the answer was different from what you're probably thinking now.

The thing is, Mercy never stops talking. I was starting to realize that.

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Pity parties are terrible things to have, especially when you throw them often.

Life was throwing curveballs my way and the realization that my attempts to navigate properly were weak made me remember home — I mean the home I couldn't wait to grow out of.

The episode with Mrs. Thomas had revealed layers of something I didn't even know had been carefully packaged and hidden.

Years away from home had provided layers of covering that were now unravelling and coming undone.

The last time someone asked why I was being disobedient, I packed my bags and travelled to another city. My resolve was to at least attempt to make a new life for myself — and I was covering good grounds until life decided to get in the way.

I called my mother for the first time in a long while.



Our hellos were immediately followed by long silence.

Did we really have nothing to say to each other or were we just overwhelmed? Unable to decide, I apologized for interrupting her day.

*Maybe it's too soon*, I told myself.

Then I heard the sobs.

*Why is she crying? What am I supposed to do now?*

“Just come home”, my mother said,  
“Please?”

I told her I'd just wanted to find out how they were doing, then I explained that I couldn't just uproot what I was building at the moment before it was ready for harvest.

I promised to call again, ended the call, and then I gave in to the pull of utter despair that had been tugging since I found out I was suspended from my job.

In addition to teaching at the school, I give private lessons to students. Several of the parents of these students had complained about text messages I was sending them asking for help with rent, a sick relative, and even for food.

That was one problem.

The other problem was that I didn't send those messages. There were no records of them on my phone, but the Principal insisted

she saw the messages because the parents showed them to her.

I don't know what hurt the most — that she couldn't believe me after five years working with her, or the realization that you could spend your life tending someone else's vision and they would let you go like what the doctor recommended the minute they believe you're bad for the optics.

I didn't know if it was just an unfortunate mix up or if I had a bigger problem on my hands — did someone text those parents with my phone? Who then? And why? And who knows what else they've been doing with my phone?

Pending the outcome of the school's investigation, I was suspended.

I didn't know how long the investigation would last. The unexpected full house had impacted my savings — not that it was a lot to begin with, “but I would have managed fine had it been just me”. I tried to make this point with the Lord every chance I got.

And then there was rent that was almost due.

But I couldn't tell my mother any of this.

So I sunk deeper into despair's pull and wallowed in the mega pity parties my desperate situation precipitated. I hoped it wouldn't cloud my sense of judgment so much and

make me do something out of the blue like call my mother, again, after nearly ten years.

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My present dilemma displaced my resolve to say my piece at church (but not with words).

None of the parents who had received the text messages agreed to meet with me.

I'm not tech-savvy, and I couldn't decide whether or not I wanted to pay for something like that. So I decided I'd bait my housemates and watch them like a hawk. It didn't take long to realize that it wasn't a viable plan.

They left my phone alone. They didn't even unplug it to use my charger. Not that it was out of character — at least I didn't think it was until the situation with the text messages.

We still had the situation at home with who replenishes what when we run out of food and other things we need.

I was still trying to negotiate myself out of that responsibility with God, because I didn't think it was fair that I should bear the burden of the upkeep of all those entire adults in my house.

And my mother called more than once, but I let the phone ring.

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One day, after slamming groceries in cupboards and daring anyone to get in my way, I blurted out, without thinking and before I could change my mind, “Who’s using my phone?”

You would have thought the whole world screeched to a halt, afraid to move so they don’t set something off.

“Who’s sending text messages with my phone?”

I was reminded it would be suicidal to do that and that no one would dare.

“There’s an invisible line in this house”, Mercy said, “Why would we cross over to your side and risk all that danger?”

I could tell though that Theresa knew something about the messages.

She looked like she’d been caught with her hand in the pot of stew. And she tiptoed around the house the entire week.

Still, I couldn’t confront her because the Lord said no — even after I presented Him with all the evidence supporting my case.

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I’m not happy to say this, but I’d become a Sunday, Sunday Christian. I wasn’t always, but I’d been for a while and just when I was

starting to overcome that, the situation with Mrs., Thomas happened. It was easy to slip back into old ways. And then deteriorate further.

The first time, my job was my excuse.

This time, Mrs. Thomas was the strong reason I gave the Lord.

“I’m trying to avoid trouble” I would tell the Lord every time I felt convicted, “I’m trying to avoid her”.

Before long, I was attending church once a month, sometimes not going for two or three months at a stretch.

Mercy continued to go. She brought back many stories of the shenanigans that now defined worship in a place that was once fully devoted to God and pursuing His purposes.

At first, the stories were unbelievable, then they were annoying, and then they were just sad.

For instance, tell me why Mrs. Thomas now influences and, in essence, directs the activities of the church with prophecies that cannot be confirmed.

The same Mrs. Thomas who has become a menace to her husband and children.

It was such a pity seeing her husband run from pillar to post, trying to understand what had happened to his wife.

Her growing influence was corrupting something but her now larger and growing tithes and offerings posed a gruelling dilemma to the church leadership.

The whole time, I said the genesis of this situation can be traced back to that prayer meeting — what spirit had Mrs. Thomas received?

And who hath believed our report? I mean, I'd only talked about it at home but I am persuaded still that it is a valid question.

You don't receive an anointing or baptism from God and get slammed to the ground and then roll from one end of the building to the other. He's just not that kind of God to do something like that to you while blessing you with a gift.

Is anyone listening?

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Expect good things to happen to you.

You know these deep sayings, words, and wisdom of our fathers that just grate on your nerves when they spring to mind at the most inconvenient times? This is one of those for me — Expect good things to happen to you.

Sometimes, I'll tell you, it's just laughable considering the course my life has taken.

So, imagine my plight when, out of nowhere, it sprung to mind again.

With everything going on, I thought it called for a pity party — it was the rebellion I could afford — so I indulged it for as long as it could.

The thought was stuck in my mind like a broken record, precipitating a singeing diatribe which in turn inspired a doleful *woe-is-me* stance that coloured the rest of the day.

It was exhausting!

It was like trying to get ahead with one leg in the door and the other leg out — because, you see, I’m still a Christian. And the fruit of the Spirit is joy! And the joy of the Lord is my strength! And in the presence of the Lord there is fullness of joy! You see my dilemma?

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Remember the song that tells us to “Take it to the Lord in prayer”? That’s good counsel. Jesus truly knows all our weakness, and He stands ready to help if we would just call out for Him.

So I received this call from a number I didn’t know — usually, I would have ignored it — but it turned out to be the help I needed in that time, albeit, from an unlikely source. And I didn’t know it at the time.

It was Jonah, Mrs. Thomas's son.

His mother had showed him some text messages I had sent her, and he wanted to talk about the messages.

*What messages?* It was like a recurring bad dream.

I cut the call and looked at the phone, wondering what I'd done to warrant this betrayal. Why is it letting messages get sent that I did not send?

Jonah called back almost immediately.

I let it ring this time.

Then he sent a text message explaining the situation.

I agreed to meet with him after church the following day. It would be the first time in a long while since I'd last been to church. The realization was unsettling.

*But I'm still a Christian*, I consoled myself. Then I repeated it the rest of the day, hoping it would sink in and dislodge the anxiety that realization occasioned.

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I told Mercy I'd be going to church on Sunday — you'd have thought I'd informed her she'd been willed a hefty inheritance or something.

And she wouldn't stop talking about it.



It happened to be the Sunday for our annual thanksgiving and, as per Mercy's tattling, the preparations had been one huge rollercoaster ride.

Some people were of the opinion that the budget was a reflection of the imprudent use of resources that had meddled with the state of things in recent years and befuddled many in the church. We used to be a church that took the Bible seriously.

Others were indifferent.

And some, like me, just stayed away.

As far as Mercy was concerned, the buck for this present frenzy stopped with the chairman of the planning committee. "He's too proud", she would say, "He doesn't know how to do anything modestly".

Then she would reel out cheaper alternatives to everything they wanted to do and effectively reduce the cost by at least forty percent. And she kept working to bring it down more.

When I asked if she had shared her ideas with someone who might actually do something with it, you'd have thought I'd accused her of plotting the fall of civilization. She looked so hurt, I nearly believed that lie.

But at least I had a break from the endless badgering with information that was useless — since no one was doing anything with it.

I stepped into church on Sunday and my heart sank.

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When we go to church, do we go to worship God or man? That Sunday, it seemed liked the latter.

I wondered if Mercy had continued coming because she was amused — because it dawned on me that everything she had told me about church since I stopped attending regularly involved one drama or another. If people weren't falling and breaking chairs during services, worshippers were falling over each other to try and tap anointing from some man of God. And if the sermons they had been preaching were anything like what I heard that thanksgiving Sunday, I wonder why people even bothered to return every Sunday.

Jonah met me on my way out.

"You're leaving already?" he asked.

Before I could reply he said he couldn't blame me for wanting to leave.

I couldn't ask what happened — I already knew that — so I asked how things deteriorated this fast.

He only shook his head and sighed.

"I could have forwarded the messages to you earlier, but I thought it was best to wait

and show them to you in person”, he told me as he brought out his phone.

My heart sank — for the second time that morning.

Mercy.

Only she was privy to some of the information shared in those messages.

Had she been coming to me under the guise of seeking counsel just to mine material for her vile purposes?

For a moment, I considered going back and dragging her out of the service by her hair. But what aim would that achieve? I’d managed to avoid Mrs. Thomas all morning. If anything, it would only put me back on her radar — assuming I’d ever fallen off it, that is, which was very unlikely, but still....

*But then, again, what if it was the woman herself orchestrating all of this?* I dismissed this thought as soon as it came — because, clearly, the messages had been sent from my phone.

*But what if she had enlisted Mercy’s help?*

I told Jonah that I hadn’t sent those messages.

I didn’t think he believed me so I explained the situation at work.

“So what you’re saying is that somebody is trying to sabotage you?” he asked. When I didn’t reply, he added, “But why?” I wasn’t sure what irritated me most — his blank

countenance or my interpretation of the meaning of his words.

I'd had it by then, so I started to walk away, but he came after me.

"You have to stop running away like this", he said trying to catch up with me.

I stopped and spun around with rage fuelled by desperation — and who did I bump into?

His mother.

But I didn't know it then and had blurted out, as I turned, that he'd accused me of lying.

It was like the opportunity she needed to sink her fangs. And she was merciless.

I left church that morning covered in blood, sweat and tears.

But at least I knew now who had been using my phone — or, that's what I'd thought.

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The rest of the day, Jonah kept calling.

I switched off the phone when he wouldn't stop calling. What did he have to say now that he couldn't say at church? He'd just stood there as his mother gloated and tried to shame me for failing in my scheme to soil her name and legacy.

“You reach out to me for help”, she’d said,  
“And then you turn around to try to injure me  
with what you got from me”.

I saw the text messages so I couldn’t blame  
her.

From the text messages Jonah showed me,  
I saw that she’d been making monthly  
payments to my landlord — hefty amounts, I  
might add, from one of the church’s accounts.

And then she’d been told to give up her  
place on the church’s leadership otherwise  
she’d be accused of misappropriating church  
funds.

I don’t know why she couldn’t go to the  
church board to inform them of the situation.

I don’t know why she felt threatened.

But when she accused me of betraying her,  
I literally felt old wounds reopening.

And then she told me to go home and  
return what I took from my sister.

My *friend*, Mercy, had been strategic with  
her ploy. But to what end? For what purpose?

By the time she returned from church in  
the afternoon her bags were packed and at the  
door. She could go with all the Jollof rice and  
gifts sent from church for me. She’d texted me  
and told me not to bother about lunch. She  
was coming with enough food and drinks to  
host a party. “I didn’t know you had such

goodwill in this church. Even after abandoning them”, she’d said.

What I hadn’t taken into account was the way she crumbled to the ground after seeing her bags, and Jonah walking in immediately after.

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I wanted to throw that girl out of my house. I really wanted to, so I argued when God said no.

And then, from nowhere, this thought came to mind, “You do not know who your enemies are”.

Mercy was on her knees. She didn’t say a word — only her lips moved.

Tears flowed freely — hers and mine.

“Just tell me why”, I said, “Why would you do this?”

At this point Jonah intervened. When he said we should pray, I almost emptied the bottle of water I’d been drinking from on him — because, *about what, Sir?! What are we praying for? Why do we need to pray about a situation that’s already unravelled? We know now who’s been orchestrating all this mischief.*

Again, the Lord told me to behave, so we formed a circle, the three of us, and he led the prayers.

Let me tell you, I did not agree with everything he said in that prayer but I said Amen, nonetheless.

Mercy's *Amens*, however, were heartfelt — and the fact was annoying — because now I began to be a bit remorseful for how I'd reacted earlier. Also, I wasn't sure if it was only an act and the uncertainty was fuel for the anxiety that followed after.

Jonah had prayed for peace to prevail in the present circumstance, grace to forgive, wisdom to know what to do, and for courage to do it, then he'd gone and prayed that we'd be willing to suffer losses if that's what it'd take for these things to be. Tell me, what kind of prayer is that?!

It was like a whole prayer meeting because after that he'd led us in some hymns and worship songs, and then we'd looked at the Scriptures and prayed some more. I have to say though, that by the time we got back to the matter at hand, I was no longer as furious as when they'd first walked in.

By this time Mercy was getting a better sense of what the situation was, and it seemed like the more she understood, the more confused she got.

It might have been amusing had I not been so affected by this mischief. I was still suspended from work — without pay — with

rapidly depleting savings (and not without reason considering I'd been responsible for the upkeep of at least two other adults at every given point in time for the last year), and Jonah's mother was threatening hail, brimstone and fire — and I believed her.

Eventually, Mercy asked what we were talking about.

Jonah showed her the text messages.

She read the messages and looked at us like, *"What am I looking at?"*

This time, even I could tell she wasn't faking it.

She affirmed my belief by stating the fact.

"So what were you so shaken about?" I asked her.

"I thought you found out about the books".

"I'd been stealing the new series you bought", she said, "One book at a time". And then as if to disclaim liability or something like that, she held up both hands and added, "I return them after reading."

Now, I was confused — and she must have seen it, because she looked at me like an exasperated mother held together by the last thread and told me, "Your picture should be beside the dictionary definition of overreacting".



Then she got up and took her bags back to her room.

*How convenient, Mercy, how very convenient! I mean, look who's talking! The drama Queen herself!*

I hoped Jonah knew this was all his fault — and I did my best to communicate this by the pointed look I shot him.

For some reason, he found this amusing and burst out laughing.

*I blame myself!*

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You don't know who your enemies are — at least not all the time.

I didn't even know Theresa that well when I let her stay with me. Eight years later, and I'm beginning to consider that it really might be true that we cannot completely know people. I hate that this might be true because of the pressure it elicits — I mean, if we can't trust people, how are we supposed to live in a world full of them?

But then, there are good people — which poses another challenge, because, how do we find them?

If you say, "Go to church", I might consider you delusional because, for instance, I met Theresa at church.

I thought it was the Christian thing to do — the right thing, even — to help a person in need.

I'd already helped her with rent for two months when she showed up at my door early one morning begging me to let her stay with me until she could sort herself. She said she'd been evicted without notice.

Did I believe her? No.

But did I let her in? I thought it was the right thing to do.

Now I believe that there are things you get yourself into that God would let you see to the end, no matter how remorseful and repentant you are — because I've spent these eight years begging Him to deliver me from the problem that Theresa had become to me.

Sometimes I think it's for a purpose.

Other times I blame myself for not praying about it first before letting her into my house.

Walk circumspectly.

Walk circumspectly.

And again I say, walk circumspectly!

I cannot even begin to describe my shock when we found out that Theresa had been the orchestrator of this whole mischief — in addition to other malicious schemes we discovered.

Mercy had walked in on Theresa reading her diary once. After dealing with that

situation, she'd not thought much of it until Theresa began to use the information she had mined from the diary.

I wasn't her only victim.

We had to rally round to help Mercy offset a huge debt incurred on her behalf, unknown to her, by Theresa. And Mercy had to move back home after that because it took everything on her part.

Around the time things began to unravel, Theresa had said she was travelling home for a wedding. She didn't return, and we didn't hear from her again.

We tried to reach her but it was like her existence had been deleted from our circle without any hope of recovery.

Phone calls, text messages, emails, social media — all our effort yielded no results — and no one was so invested as to take further measures like hire someone to help us find her, report to the police, or anything like that.

She still had property in the house — which we didn't know what to do with, because we were concerned about what we might find.

After Mercy went home, I stayed for three months before deciding that this house would not see the end of me.

Mercy continued to badger me to return home.

I'm not sure what finally did it — Mercy's persistent badgering which, no doubt, wore down my defences (because she came with strong points!), the realization that she was not wrong, or my coming to terms with the fact that everything was slipping from my hands, like grains of sand, and there was nothing I could do about it (I know this because nothing I tried to salvage was saved).

When my mother opened the door to find me — with my bags — I thought she was going to faint.

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What is home? Where is home?

Does anybody really know?

Sometimes, I believe some of the many definitions of home. At other times, I'm sure that they don't know what they're talking about.

At this time, though, I was beginning to lean towards the idea that your root would always be home — I was beginning to, until the people here began to play with my scars.

The prevailing attitude, it seemed, was, "If it wasn't guilt, what drove her from here in the first place? Why did she leave?"

My sister, the object of their sympathy, didn't miss any opportunity to milk their kindness and spit it in my face.

She still blames me for pushing her husband to her best friend — never mind that she was never married to the man and that the said best friend was already with child while he continued to play my sister and hide from her the fact that he was already married, with three children, to another woman.

I became privy to this information in the thick of arrangements for their wedding. Of course, he denied it, invoking heaven and earth to smite him and strike him dead if he was that kind of man.

He was a pastor based in another town so that was plausible reason why he was always away.

He left town one day and never returned.

The best friend aborted the pregnancy and moved out of town.

I knew this man's family. I could have taken my sister to meet them, but what purpose would that have served — especially for his wife and children? At the time, I thought it best to just let things play out.

My sister couldn't believe me. This lack of faith was the instrument that inflicted this wound that has continued to reopen after all

these years — because we were two peas in a pod and almost inseparable.

She spun wild tales that got out of hand and eventually drove me out of town. What I didn't realize was that they would follow me, like foul smell emanating from dirty clothing I needed to take off.

I had let bitterness take root — and it amplified the stench.

Perhaps, in all this, our mother was the most affected, but we couldn't see it at the time — at least, I couldn't.

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Christmas that year, I gave in to my mother's imploring and went to church again. It would be the first time after many months.

My sister had taken a job out of town shortly after I returned. She too gave in to constant imploring and came home for Christmas.

At first, we did our best to stay out of each other's way, but it was obvious our mother had other plans — for instance, she would develop sudden mortal fears or conditions that require me to go to the kitchen while my sister is there.

One time, she needed freshly boiled water for a headache she started to feel as soon as

she saw me. “I can’t use the stove when I have headaches”, she told me, “The smoke just makes everything worse”.

When I asked her why my sister couldn’t bring her the water since she’s already in the kitchen, she said my sister was busy with other things — which was funny because the girl literally had the kettle on the stove with boiling water. And we could all see it.

Eventually, we began to laugh at her antics, and work together to not get caught in whatever she was plotting.

Soon, I was telling her my ordeal with Theresa and Mrs. Thomas and the school — she was proud of me for not going back there even after the matter was settled and I was asked to return.

She had ideas for what we could do to Theresa — none of which was very Christian and caused me to worry a bit about the status of her salvation and the kind of circle she kept. She assured me she was still saved.

Thank God she was because when Mercy showed up with Theresa at our house on Christmas day, it was my sister who was the proper Christian.

Mercy had told me she was coming, but she hadn’t said anything about coming with Theresa. All I’m going to say is that my shock at seeing Theresa, when I had not expected to,

threw me a bit off balance. For the good of all, I was banished to the kitchen for the rest of the day.

But Theresa was like a stone that kept showing up on my path, bent on tripping me, no matter how much I tried to avoid it.

The girl just kept coming back.

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After Mrs. Thomas found out what had really happened, she didn't stop trying to reach out to me. She continued to press for me to come and work with her at the church she now had wrapped around her little finger.

Her son was supposed to convince me and bring me over to her side, but he told me to run for dear life.

The church was like a war zone and, sadly, most failed to realize that the enemy was not flesh and blood. So they fought themselves and still tried to worship together.

Mercy still kept in touch and visited the church now and then, but I think it was mostly to indulge her natural inclination to lean wherever there's a tale to be told — I would call it gossip but then that would make me complicit because I listen to everything she tells me.



My mother says I encourage Mercy in her gossiping habits — and that I shouldn't — but I and my sister tell her that the stories help us know what to pray about. Yes, slowly but surely, we're taking out roots of bitterness, and that foul smell is dissipating. I call my sister and we talk about the body of Christ and all that's wrong with it, and then we say we should pray about it. I hope she does.

Can we not all see that the solution is simple and not that out of reach? — Jesus, after all these years, is still the answer, whatever the problem is.

Jesus at the centre of any life — or situation — would make everything else to fall into place.

I really believe that.

I do not have any other answers to life's challenges.

My mother found Jesus. She showed Him to us, and now I'm showing Him to you as the One who can help you unravel the mysteries of life.

I'm still unravelling these things — for instance, I still keep in touch with Theresa. I think I've forgiven her, although I still watch my back around her.

Things may never be the way they were with me and my sister, but I can't say I would go back to those former days if I had the

opportunity because of the depth and beauty that now defines our relationship. I know she holds the same sentiment.

Mrs. Thomas has become like the aunt your mother threatens you with when you don't behave, and her son is the older brother my sister believes she never had — I can't tell you how annoying I find this!

I do not know where this journey ends, but I know that it is a good place — because it's Jesus who's leading us.

And it all began with a prayer — like it always does — *Jesus, please, come and be the Lord of my life. I surrender to You today. Please teach me how to live life right.*