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Peter's phone rang again. Again, he ignored it. He did not think

he could have a conversation with Winnie. He was not exactly sure why he had been avoiding her calls; he did not even know what he felt now, but he knew it was not guilt.

As he put on the TV, hoping to catch a program and distract his thoughts from Winnie and from the incident of the day before, he caught Robert Redford making his indecent proposal to Demi Moore and Woody Harrelson over a pool table. He changed the channel. He knew that movie; he hated that movie. Not because he did not enjoy it growing up, but because it reminded him of his father's death. It was only amnesia that could make him forget. He could remember exactly where he was and what he was doing, when his mother's phone rang from the kitchen. He was in the sitting room, seeing *Indecent Proposal*. The movie had heightened his anxiety and curiosity about sex. It must be something very valuable that a man was willing to pay a million dollars for it.

When he heard his mother's phone ring, he did not know what the caller had said until he heard a loud scream from the kitchen. It was the scream of a madwoman; it was the scream of his mother. She hurried into the sitting room, disorganised and screaming repeatedly: "Peter, give me car key." The haste in her voice and the repetition confused Peter who sprang to his feet and picked the remote control before dropping it to pick up the car key from the centre table. They—Peter and his younger brother—watched her run out. They heard her start the car and zoom off. They had never seen her like that. All she had on as clothes were a black sleeveless top and a wrapper tied around her waist.

When Winnie would not relent, he knew he had to take her call, or she was never going to stop. He sat up and frisked his jacket lying on the other side of the bed. He gazed at his cell phone, expecting the caller to, somehow, be another person. He sighed when he saw

that it was still Winnie.

"Hi, Winnie," he said.

"My mother is in town, Pete," Winnie said quickly, sounding excited.

"Really?" Peter asked. He was expecting her to complain about the missed calls. He was expecting her to be mad and ask "Where have you been?" But for some reason, she had not.

"Yes, Pete," she said.

"How is she? When did she come?" Peter tried to let the conversation flow with the calmness she had established.

"She is good, Pete. I want you to meet her today."

Peter's heart skipped a beat and he started stuttering. "I..I..I need to...Okay, okay."

"Please, love. This means a lot to me."

"Okay, okay. I will try and come around."

"Thank you, love," she said.

"You are welcome."

And when she paused, Peter knew exactly what was next.

"And why have you been avoiding my calls since last night?"

"I was tired, Winnie. I was tired."

"Too tired to take my calls?" she said in that same voice that Peter had not been able to decide whether it was genuinely playful or dangerously sarcastic. The kind of sarcasm that overlaid anger.

"I put my phone on silent; I did not want to take work calls. I apologise."

There was another pause and Peter knew she still had questions to ask. But he also knew she would just let it go. It was either she did not feel she had enough ownership over him or she valued what they had to a fault, to the point of ensuring it is free from avoidable squabbles. He did not want to believe it was just her nature. There was always something calculative about her, even in her liberalness.

"Okay," she said. "I will just wait for you."

"Okay, dear," He said and hung up. A part of him wanted to be back at Neta's. She gave him an option of sticking around for her to make food when she returned from church. He did not

have a particular reason for choosing to leave before she got back from church, but he also was not sure if he would have found a logical enough reason, free from the trappings of his feelings, had he decided to stay.

NETA LAY IN bed, tossing and turning. Like Peter, it had also been impossible for her to put the events of yesterday off her mind. She held an old picture of her and Peter; it was taken at a fast-food restaurant named Chuckies the first time they went out on something resembling a date in Unizik. The picture held memories that mixed happiness and sadness. She wondered if Peter still had a copy of it. When she returned from church and found the key to her apartment under the foot mat, where she had told Peter to keep it if he decided to leave, she was a little disappointed. Not finding Peter at home made her think momentarily that maybe, it had all been a dream and she never met him, that yesterday just did not happen. She undressed and took another shower. Then she headed to the balcony to feed T.T, her Congo African grey parrot, groundnuts and diced watermelon. Seeing Peter now made it impossible for her to spend that Sunday alone at home. Her apartment, in which loneliness had become comfort to her, could no longer hold her. T.T, being one of those parrots that did not speak, did not offer the kind of company she sought. She needed to be around people, not birds, to keep her eyes and head occupied, and think less of Peter. When she put a call through to her friend, Esther, she told her that she had gone to see her boyfriend, Declan, a married man who she had warned her many times to leave. Then she decided to visit Aunty Chidinma and spend time with her three children. She shared a special bond with them and had fond memories of when they were but toddlers. They had grown into teenagers and Small Ben was not that small any longer.

When she returned from Aunty Chidinma's house, she went into her study, one of her rooms that she had cleared. All she had in it were a table and chair, a bookshelf by the corner filled with books that cut across literary genres, and space—enough space to think and create. It was in this room that she put finishing touches

to *The Angel You Know*. She sat and powered on the white HP laptop. She opened a blank MS Word document with the intention to just write, anything. As she stared at the blank page, the only thoughts she had in her head were of Peter, and she could not control the urge to attempt to write something about him, about him and her.

Strings from the past, she first wrote. Then she deleted 'the past' and changed the title to 'Strings from an Old Love.' But before she could drop her fingers on the keyboard again, she heard her phone beep

with the receipt of a message and she knew it was Aunty Chidinma, in her usual fashion, asking her if she got home safely. But when she made her way back into the bedroom and picked up her phone from the bed, her heart raced when she saw the message from Peter. She had not saved his number, but she knew the message was from him.

I cannot keep you off my mind, the message said.

She sat on the bed, looking at the message and trying to decide what to do. Everything in her wanted to send a reply, but the cautiousness of her memory restrained her. *Maybe this is a bad idea*, she thought.

Eventually, she responded. It was like her fingers had now developed minds of their own, acting against her self-control. *Neither can I*, she typed and sent.

Can I come around?

It is late, Peter. I don't want to stress you. You've got work tomorrow.

But do you want me around?

Of course, Peter.

Then I am around. I am at the door. Your door.

A strong chill ran down her spine. She wanted to reply and ask "are you serious now?" But she knew Peter and she knew he was not joking. So like an enchanted woman, she walked into her living room, to the door, and opened it slowly. There, was Peter in a black hoodie. They stood staring at each other like zombies. Then she moved to her right and rested on the doorjamb, making way to invite him in. He walked in and watched her bolt the door before they both walked into the bedroom.

"Peter," she said in a whisper. "You should have told me before

coming.”

Ignoring her words, Peter moved closer to her and immediately planted a kiss on her lips. She did not push him away. With their lips still locked in passion, he slowly lowered her to sit on the bed. Still without saying a word, he took his lips to her neck. When he spoke again, he was whispering endearments: “You are the love of my life...” And when he looked at her face, her eyes were closed and her lower lip held in a bite. Then he slowly removed her glasses and kissed her face and the hollowness of her eyes. He dropped the sleeves of her red silk nightgown to reveal her breasts. Her nipples were now like short spikes. When he tugged at the nightgown by her waist, she moved her hips to allow him undress her down to just her white underpants.

Then he started to undress himself too. When he came at her again, to touch and kiss her breasts, his penis had risen, responding to the sensualities of his body and mind. Soon she dropped on the bed and he on top of her, reaching for her underpants.

After they had sex, he held her from behind, listening to her paced breathing and scenting shampoo from her dreads.

She turned around to face him, and touching the scar on his chest, she asked, “Do you think of him sometimes?”

“Who?” Peter asked, the tone of his voice suggesting that he knew who Neta had asked of.

“Derek,” Neta said, her voice heavy and dull at the same time.

“Every day,” Peter replied. “Every single day.”