

Lekki Headmaster Chapter 5

Snake in the Roof

LONG BREAK. Joyful sounds of pupils at every corridor. At the primary and secondary sections, the children never missed the opportunity to play despite the fact that it was time to eat. It was also a time when Principal Bepo and Teachers on Duty moved round to ensure there was no dangerous play, as one or two students had had an arm or the other broken in the past. Mrs. Ibidun Gloss had just uploaded her lunch. She escaped into a room in her spacious office for a little rest.

This get away was a top secret very few people knew in the academic community of about 1,500 folks, comprising students and staff. Yet, if the privileged few knew she had time out in any room, none really understood why. They never knew the health condition that plagued her buttocks, leaving her with a peppery pain whenever she sat for long. She had been to doctors within and outside the country. She had, in the course of over 30 years living with the condition, explored spiritual and traditional interventions: all to no avail. She, therefore, learned to live with it, especially as it did not immobilise her.

Minutes after, she chose to alter her schedule a little by taking a walk around the surrounding. And she, in the end, thanked her stars that she did.

The MD decided, a little instinctively, to exploit the opportunity to inspect a piece of land that Stardom acquired two years before. That was some five minutes away from the back gate of the school. As she approached the gate, the two security men manning it stood at attention, with one hurriedly opening it as she gestured them to do. Both made a move to accompany her out, but she asked one of them to remain at their duty post.

On getting to her destination, she found out that, although the property remained fenced as the management had left it, about a half of the three plots were filled with cars of different brands.

They were not new, but it was obvious to the Stardom's big woman that they were in use, and that some people were using the place as 2 park.

Our staff park here, Ma," the guard, Jombo, said to save the MD from puzzle.

Which staff?" She asked as she could not hide her shock. "

Our teachers and other staff."

She was confused the more because she knew there was a staff's car park in the like almost everyone else, knew who had cars and who did not

"Ma, it is not everyone that brings their cars into the school," fumbo said in a sons that meant more than he uttered

The MD took time to inspect the rides, wanting to know who owned them. Jumbo was right because many of the cars bore Stardom Schools stickers. So, many of her staff were hiding their cars from management, she thought. She saw different brands and models, including Toyota, Hyundai, Venza and Mazda. She even saw the big, Toyota some drivers called Muscle. The MD skipped a breath and shook her head self-pityingly. There were even two buses at the far right of the park. One was white, while the other wore the ubiquitous Lagos' yellow colour. Were some people cheating on her by engaging in public transportation? She felt more anger mixed with fear run through her system. She summoned the principal and school accountant via a phone

Too bad for her and too bad for the school, she thought. Something must be wrong, The school's purse must be leaking. How were the teachers getting money to buy those kinds of cars? She further thought as she surveyed the park again.

"Afternoon, Madam," the accountant said as he arrived. "Accountant, what is happening in this school?" the MD asked.

"Great things, Madam..."

"Accountant, I didn't call you for a motivational speech. What is happening?"

How safe is this school? How safe is our money?"

Before the accountant, who could no more hide his confusion, could say anything further, the MD added: "Where are all these monies coming from? Where are teachers and storekeepers and every gardener getting the money to buy these cars? When did this happen? How did this happen to us?"

Jeremi Amos - the accountant - now understood his boss' fear. She thought people were stealing to buy cars. He and the principal, who had also arrived at the scene, exchanged glances. It was an understanding that the latter should speak. Mr. Bepo, therefore, first ordered Jombo to go back to school.

By this time, the fear was quite palpable all over the MD's face.

For the first time in a long while, she sweated profusely, "Ma, please let s go to the office." Bepo said.

In the MD's office, the accountant and the principal assured her that the schools finances were intact. He noted that while some of the teachers had raised money for their cars through various personal means, including loans, the main source of financial strength for about half of those who owned the 17 vehicles was the school cooperative. According to the two principal officers, a good number of the members of staff were taking loans, which they had also been duly paying back; after all, the loans were being deducted from source.

Yet, if the information did calm the MD down, it also raised another m. question. How fat was the cooperative's purse that it guaranteed those she saw every Tom, Dick and Harry a choice car?

And, perhaps inadvertently, that was the way she asked the question.

"How much is in the account of the Stardom Cooperative Society that it coul

buy every fool the car of his or her choice?"

The word 'fool' hit the two men like a thunderbolt. They did not find it funn; all. They again exchanged glances but managed to maintain their cool. Bepo v happy that neither the VP nor the Physics Teacher was at the meeting. Neither mi have been able to stay so mute in the circumstance based on their extroverted profi The following day, she called a meeting of the board of directors— all memb of the same family: the chairman, Chief Mrs. Solape Bayo, who was the MD's moth Martins Bayo, a non-executive director; and Oye Bayo, the last born, who was board's secretary. Not willing to take any chances, the MD asked for details of cooperative society's account from the accountant and the principal. In the purse w N95 million, while over N50 million had been loaned out.

"It's like hanging a snake in the roof and going to bed," Chief Bayo said. "What the staff rebel and jointly establish their own school with the money? They wou have stolen our brand ideals and every other thing about us."

The board weighed the threat and unanimously reached a decision, which guided the cooperative ever since: no staff member could borrow more that N250,000. Also, all loan requests had to be approved by the MD, and the management must be duly informed about the cooperative's elections.