

# A BLESSING IN *DISGUISE*



## CHAPTER 1

“Korede, you must not forget anything!” I heard my mother yell from the sitting room, as I put my third pair of socks into my suitcase, I had always looked forward to going to secondary school. Chike and Chidi had told me and the other children in the neighborhood so many stories about Mayfair college. It was a school that every young boy wanted to attend. The stories were usually a combination of joy and freedom; freedom from household chores and errands. I had prayed all my young life to be a student of that school.

I had always wanted to attend Mayfair secondary school. I had written the entrance exam and passed. My Dad and I had traveled all the way to Ikeja to get my admission letter, a trip filled with anxiety and a partial tour of the economic city called Lagos.

Barely a week after our trip, my father called me into his room on a cool evening shortly after dinner. He had been moody since he returned from work. Pointing to the chair next to him, he signalled for me to have a seat. He cleared his throat, sighed and broke the worst news I could have ever imagined at the time. He had lost his job and I was going to lose my dream of attending the great Mayfair college.

He would not be able to afford such expensive fees. “Korede, you will have to attend Ilegbon Grammar School, now that I don’t have a job, I have to support your mum with the little I’ve been able to save. You know your siblings still have to be catered for”.

My future felt shattered as trickles of tears embraced my face. All I could think about were the beautiful stories Chike carefully repeated each time he was home. My heart sank. Ilegbon Grammar school? Not only was it the worst boarding school in town, it was also filled with the most notorious teachers.

Ajala and Ajike the popular twins in our neighborhood had narrated the horror they experienced after their first term in that school.

“Korede, oya come and eat before you go o”. My mother’s voice snapped me back into reality. After eating, I bid my mum goodbye and hugged my siblings who were already in tears.

“I’ll miss you Brother Korede,” Kayode, my three year old brother said. I kept waving at them as my dad drove me down the street, into the express and the journey began.

## CHAPTER 2

The journey was a quiet one until dad broke the silence with a question. "Are you scared?" he asked.

I sighed and answered him, "a little daddy".

He assured me with a smile and said, "don't be. Be brave as a lion". I nodded my head in acceptance.

He chipped in a piece of advice to me saying, "always make your family proud. Set a good example for your siblings. Do not keep bad friends, and above all be close to God, okay son?",

"Yes sir. I promise not to disappoint you, Daddy", I replied and he smiled in return.

After four hours of driving, we finally approached the school gate. Honestly, it was worse than I imagined. The face of the gate man that ushered us in was not appealing; an average man with a round face of which was designed with tribal marks running from the top of his face to the bottom and worst of all he squeezed his face, making him look like a frustrated military officer.

I shivered in fear. The school block was an old and rusty building surrounded by a lot of flowers.

When we reached the school block, we proceeded to the principal's office. It was a relatively large one with chairs that had a lot of tears and threads fraying. There was also a noisy, rusty fan standing at the corner. It seemed like a nightmare.

I was snapped back into reality by a deep and snorty voice, "Mr Gbadamosi, you're welcome please have a seat." Displaying brown set of teeth was a fat, bald headed man with bulging eyes who was the school Head Master.

"Good afternoon, sir. Thank you, sir" my dad replied.

Staring at me, the Head Master said, "welcome Korede. Kindly sign this form. I immediately did. A senior was assigned to me as my dad bid me goodbye. Tears rolled down my cheeks as I was ushered into the hostel by Senior Udodi, the senior assigned to me.

"Hello, I'm Korede, I was directed by Senior Udodi to room 4. I said as I entered the room. I met just 1 of my roommates, Dele. Dele was much taller than me. I noticed an empty bunk and asked Dele, if it was occupied, he replied, "no it is not, you can have it but take the upper bunk instead".

Dele seemed nice; he sounded like a proper gentleman. Since it is my first time in the school setting, I agreed and felt he knows best. I reintroduced myself and we got talking about school life in Ilegbon grammar school. I narrated my ordeal to him and how I was not happy about being here.

Dele assured me that the school was good in terms of academics, as they had won several mathematical competitions and also have the best WAEC and jamb results in Ibarapa Local Government Area of Oyo State.

He stated that the only vices were students cults and one could be easily lured into them. He warned that I abstain and not get involved in any. He assured me that I was his friend now and he would protect me. Dele seemed to know a lot about the school because he was in JSS 3 and had spent 4 years in school with 1 class repetition.

After Dele left, I arranged all my items and sat down to take a look at my timetable. I had already missed some classes in the morning so I headed out of the dormitory for my afternoon classes.

It was my first time in such a large class and I was quite nervous. I took a seat at the back of the class because I came late and other seats were occupied.

“Good day, class and welcome to English class. I am Mrs Funke and I am going to be your English teacher”, she said.

The class responded in unison, “Good Afternoon ma, you are welcome to JSS1A.” “Thank you class”, she responded and went ahead with her teaching for the day.

If I were to rate Mrs Funke’s teaching, I would give her a big fat zero. It was quite a handful. The only thing she got right was her introduction to the class, her lecture on the other hand was a disaster.

One of the examples she gave that struck me was when she said, “Coming is you going to Ade’s house”. It was dreadful to have listened to my classmates repeat this sentence over and over again. The other students were excited repeating it but I wasn’t. Rather, I changed the sentence to what I thought to be correct. “Ade is coming to your house”. I had never liked Mrs Funke’s mode of teaching. I had promised myself to be more serious in English. I had promised to engage myself in tutorials to help myself in the subject. After few minutes of the class, Mrs Funke ended it by giving us an assignment.

## CHAPTER 3

The final bell rang for the day. "Hurray!" I exclaimed. I carried my bag and leaped out of the classroom. I refused to talk to anyone as I was still unhappy I was not in my dream school. I was silently hoping my wish would happen just like in the fairytale cartoons I watched.

I got to my hostel and began to think about what Dele had said again. How could he have won several competitions and have the best WAEC result? How did he do it? I rolled on my bed as I thought hard about the situation. If he attained those achievements, it only meant that becoming the best was possible.

In that moment, I remembered the words of my father, "Wherever you find yourself, no matter the situation, aim at being the best."

My father had told me to make myself proud and to make the family proud. I was not going to make them proud if I refused to studious and be the best. Besides, he had also promised to buy me a bicycle if I came out top in class.

Dele came into the hostel. He waved at some students around, greeted me, and sat on his bed. He brought out his book and quietly began to read. If Dele read everyday, I would do the same too. I promised myself I would read everyday after school, and that was exactly what I did.

On a quiet Sunday evening, my new friends and I, were reading in the library, preparing for a test on Monday. Suddenly, we heard some strange noises. Someone was hurriedly packing library books into a bag. We observed that it was Senior Chizzy, the bully and his friends that were taking the books.

In the library, the rule was that no student was allowed take books away from the library. It meant that Senior Chizzy Bully and his friends were stealing the books!

## CHAPTER 4

At exactly 7:30am on Monday morning, the teachers of Ilegbon Grammar School assembled for morning devotion in the assembly hall. They appeared buoyant, radiant, and enthusiastic.

After the praise and worship, the headmaster came to the front to address the students. It was our greatest surprise to have heard the headmaster calling out Senior Chizzy and his other friends for the books they had stolen from the school library. The headmaster flogged them and they were suspended from the school for indulging in such act and we were also warned to avoid any unlawful acts.

“How could the school have known so soon? Who reported these seniors? So it’s not good to take something that doesn’t belong to one. These were the thoughts that kept running through my mind till I got to my class. “I must be determined, I must be serious, I must not indulge myself in stealing or anything that can destroy my family’s image,” I kept telling myself. I didn’t even know the time our English teacher, Mrs. Funke, came in.

“Korede!” “Korede!!” “Korede!!!” She called my name with a loud voice. Immediately, I jumped up. “What were you thinking of?” She questioned.

“Noooo-o-thing, ma,” I stammered. “Okay, be seated.” “Class, what was our last topic in English?” She asked the class.

“Open sentences,” the class echoed. Mrs Funke talked for some minutes and she gave us an assignment. I had never loved the way Mrs Funke handled our English studies. My hope was to meet with other senior colleagues in my school to explain better to me.

One fateful day, a new English teacher was posted to our school named Mrs Chukwudi. She was to replace Mrs Funke who was to go on sabbatical soon. I was so elated to meet Mrs Chukwudi.

Mrs Chukwudi was smart, diligent, and very outspoken. I had promised myself to always be attentive in class. Whenever I had a confusing topic, she’d call me into her office for further explanations.

I promised myself to always have good grades in all my subjects. Every teacher liked me because of my excellence in academics. I promised to keep to my father’s word. I read everyday and solved past questions.

My determination towards school work was what got the attention of the school headmaster. He called me to his office and advised me to keep it up. He advised me not to join bad gang and he promised me that I should always meet him for any assistance.

After the conduction of the assembly on Tuesday morning, the headmaster came to address the students.

“Good morning, students,” he greeted.

“Good morning, sir,” we all responded

“Listen to these few announcements,” he started. “In two weeks time, you’ll be commencing your promotional examinations. Prepare well in order to come out in flying colours.”

“Also, the school management has promised to award a scholarship to the best student of the year. You’ll all pass in the name of the Lord,” he ended.

We all chorused, “Amen”, in response.

After this, we all matched down to our respective classes.

I was happy all through the day. Each time I remembered the words of my father, I became more serious. Mrs Chukwudi had done a lot by assisting me in my studies.

I attended evening lessons in her house. I had sleepless nights. I promised to be the best student of the year because I believed that was the only way for me to keep to the word of my father.

The day of the exams finally came. Every student had seated in the exam hall as early as 7:00am, awaiting the supervisor to come in.

After a week, the results of the examination came in. We were gathered in the assembly hall. The headmaster came to the front of the students, as usual. Fear gripped every student’s heart.

He started from the 3<sup>rd</sup> position who happened to be Ebuka, a senior colleague of mine. He was awarded a dictionary. After a moment, the second position was announced too. It was Dele.

I was elated and at the same time, transfixed. I didn’t know which position would be mine or if I would even be among those who would be called out.

Could I have failed? Didn’t I do well enough? These were the questions that kept coming in.

At last! The first position was called. “Korede Bello!”

“Congratulations on your well deserved success.” He said as he shook my hand. “This school is proud to have you.” I was so happy to receive the honour and award.

“You have just been awarded a scholarship. The school will now be responsible for everything needed in your academics from now till you’re done with your secondary school education, and even to the higher institution level. Congratulations once again. Your parents should be here next week.” The headmaster shook my hand again.

“Yes, sir!” I shouted and jumped in excitement. The assembly stood, applauding my excellence and award.

I couldn’t cry or even laugh. I kept thanking God for His blessings. I kept thanking Mrs Chukwudi, our English studies teacher for her assistance towards my success. I didn’t even realize the tears rolling down my cheeks. Then I remembered my father’s word again “Wherever you find yourself, no matter the situation, aim at being the best”.