

It was not too long ago that Salim bought his first smartphone. It was the Samsung brand and it had this wide screen that responded to a stylus touch well as the fingers of the owner. They called it the Note Series. It was really unique and he was so proud of it. Of course, it was expensive. But for someone whose marriage had not been fixed, even Salma herself encouraged him to enjoy his money before marriage responsibilities ensnared him.

He hearkened to her advice and said he was going to use the phone. He discovered several dating sites and downloaded the applications. In the beginning Salma was not aware of this. The social media was awash with many of these chat rooms and all one needed to do was to download the application of a particular chat group and one would be linked up to whoever one desired.

Salim was into all conceivable instant and distant relationship social outlets. I think they still abound. He was on Facebook, Tweeter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Badoo, 2Go, WeChat all these plus so many others that Salma could not remember their names. He told her all this after his nasty experience.

One day, Salim had gone to his friend, Lawal, all excited, and told him he had a new girlfriend.

Lawal was sitting in the living room watching his inevitable wrestling programme. He muted the sound from the remote control in his hand to better listen to his friend.

“Salim, I don’t know what is wrong with you. You have Salma as fiancée and now you are talking about a girlfriend. What kind of life is this?”

“Point of correction, my friend. Salma is technically my wife. We are just waiting for the day to be fixed. But you know man must be allowed some moment of unchecked rascality before becoming another woman’s personal property or slave.”

“I guess you found yet another girl that seems to catch your fancy. Where you meet her? She must be a quintessential beauty for you to go on about her did like this. Have I met her before?”

“My friend, stop joking. You have not met her before. But you will now.

See? Come and have a look.” Salim brought out his phone and showed a particular picture to Lawal.

“You did not tell me you now like Indian women.” Lawal said.

“You see? She is that beautiful. She is not Indian. She said she is Fulani.”

“When did you see her?”

Salim hesitated and shrugged. “I did not really meet her physically. But we have been chatting for over one week now.”

“And you are convinced that she is who she has claimed to be?”

“Sure. Why should I doubt that?”

“Why not?”

“She gave me her phone number. And I gave her mine. And by God she has such a beautiful voice. Voice befitting a princess?”

“Princess?”

“Yes.”

“And how does the voice of a princess sound?”

“Look here my friend, are you accompanying me to see her or not?”

“Me? To accompany you to see a person you have never met before and yet you want to make your girlfriend? What do I tell Salma? No. Go and see her first. Subsequently, we can go together.”

Salim looked at Lawal like he was going to strangle him. But suddenly, he saw the wisdom in what his friend said. What if they went and on seeing her she turned out different from what they thought? Or, worse, what if she saw him in real life and decided she did not like what she saw? That could really be embarrassing if your friend was with you.

He went ahead to see his social media princess with whom he had been chatting for over a week without seeing each other.

When he came back a few hours later, he met Lawal seated where he left him several hours before. He was watching a different film this time around. “Mr Romeo is back. Or do I call you Casanova? How did it go, man? How is our Indian princess?”

“Hell, my friend. Are you a clairvoyant?” “No. What happened?”

“My princess turned out to be a hideously unpresentable creature. Her face...oh, my God. You were right. It was someone else’s picture she used as her DP, her displayed picture. And that was how I was deceived.”

Lawal began laughing uproariously.

“My friend, what is funny here?” Salim said when Lawal would not stop laughing.

“I thought we are supposed to be talking about our new girlfriend, not about how our princess looks.” He laughed some more and proceeded to tell Salim some home truths about meeting a girl on the social media.

“You are lucky,” he said. “She even agrees to meet you. In other instances, she would so chat you up leeringly, invitingly, making false promises until she gets you to really fall for her, then she would start making demands. The demands begin from something as menial as a recharge card for her phone. Then gradually you graduate into sending money to her account because she would have claimed to be in another city and she wanted to come visiting. Or she would “kill” her relations and ask you to send funeral money.

In another situation, she can even send you on a wild goose chase if you are that gullible. She may be just your next door neighbour and since she knows that you do not know her she may claim to be from Kano or Sokoto and ask you to come visiting. If you are stupid enough to go visiting, you would be shocked that by the time you would have travelled that long distance and called her, she would say she was not around or she had taken ill or some such nonsense. Or indeed she would just refuse to pick your call. Or, if you persist, she will just switch off her phone. “The other extreme, and this one is really funny, is when you befriend a lady based on the picture displayed and she turned out to be a man! Here, all you need to expect is extortion. And in this time when kidnapping has become so rampant and unchecked, you need to be careful. They may well take you and ask for ransom which nobody can pay.” Lawal paused in his admonition and looked at Salim who seemed to be lost in his thought.

“What is wrong, man?” he asked.

“There is something I have not disclosed to you before. It is something you have said just now about kidnapping. I have a genuine cause to thank God”

“We all do, my friend, we all do.”

“No. You do not understand. This my ugly princess was not the first case I went visiting. Maybe you did not wonder why I insisted you should follow me to see her for the first time and why I insisted on seeing her in the afternoon.”

“No, I did not bother to think about that.”

“Well, there was an antecedent. As I said, she was not the first. I was so ashamed to tell you about this experience that happened about a month ago. At the time it was frightening, later when I was free, it became disgraceful for me to even talk about it. But now that you seem to know all about social media relationships I can tell you about Natasha.”

“Natasha?”

“Yes. Natasha. She lives in the university town near Lafayette. I do not know for sure whether she is a bona fide student or is just claiming to be one. You know one thing with this social media, it appears more untruths are being aired unchecked than factual stories. In any case, Natasha sent me a friend request and I accepted.

Then we started chatting. As I was going through the pictures she uploaded, I was convinced that she was the one because the pictures were many and they all looked like her. What should have been worrisome to me was ironically what intrigued me and I wanted to get to know her more closely. More than half of the pictures were semi-nude and extremely attractive.

And she had such seductive language that breaks down any man’s wall of resistance. When you add the deliberately sexy language with the sexier pictures, you have a recipe for disaster which few men could resist. So when she invited me to come visiting I did not hesitate.

“She described their house to me which she said was at the back of the school. However, she said, she would not be allowed to come out in the afternoon. She insisted that I should come between eight and nine in the evening. In the night actually.

“When I set off to visit, I called her as I approached the school. She answered at once and was giving me directions on how to reach the location with ease. I could have sworn I heard male voices in the background, but I did not give much thought to that. I drove my car slowly down the alley she described. Any time my mind told me to reconsider my decision and go back I would look at her half naked pictures and the devil would win.

“I followed the description till I came to a place where there was very little illumination and she asked me to stop there. I turned on my full light on and saw that the place was actually a cul-de-sac. Characteristically, you know, I always parked my car military style fashion. This simply means that whenever I reached my destination and my route back entailed turning and going the way I came, I would do this manoeuvre and park my car facing the direction I would go when leaving. That way I did not have to waste time. I would just enter and drive off. That parking is called military parking in Nigerian parlance. So I manoeuvred the car to face where I was coming from.

“Even as I was trying to rn, she called to find out if I was leaving. I said I was just parking.

“And Natasha came out.

“She was even more beautiful than she appeared in her pictures. And she sure looked inviting. She was highly endowed and she had no qualms about flaunting those endowments. It was all I could do sto look away from her exposed cleavage. The moon was playing pranks with my sight for she looked infinitely more alluring than I thought she was going to be in real life. I motioned her to come in. She declined and said she was going to be just fine standing by my side. I was in my father’s SUV, that Sport Utility Vehicle which everyone called jeep around here.

“It was all well with me because from where she stood, I was afforded a better view of her frontal display. I was drooling over this when I heard the passenger door of my car open! I turned to see a very hefty stranger pointing a gun at me.

“The shock was so great that I did not hear when the second person entered my car from behind. I was petrified with fear.

'Do not say a word,' the man with a gun said. 'Just hand over the car keys and come to the back seat. Don't even bother removing the key. Leave it in the ignition.'

"I moved to the back seat.

'And you, ashawo,' he addressed Natasha, 'join your husband at the back.'

"Natasha followed, her body shaking, and she was whispering, 'Please don't hurt him. And you my dear, give them whatever they want. Please do not shoot us.'

"Of course I noticed the self-distancing in her first sentence. Don't hurt him. My eyes instantly cleared. I knew instantly that she was part of the conspiracy. She was the bait used to lure susceptible men into dark alleys. But my realization helped me nothing since I was held at the point of a gun.

"The only thing I could say was from God we came and unto Him is our returning. This is the standard prayer in the face of any calamity. I kept reciting that till the man with the gun shouted at me to stop or he would waste me. I was shivering from head to foot. But they did not notice. The man's vocabulary seemed to consist of only one word, waste. I was instinctively beginning to have a wasteful idea myself.

"He instructed his companion whom he addressed as Roger to start the car. Strangely enough the car would not start. He did his best but the car would not start.

"They did all they could but the car would not budge. Obviously it was the car they wanted. But I was also sure they would not hesitate to shoot me if I gave them the slightest opportunity. When the car refused to pick after the third attempt, I was asked to start it.

"I was bemused to see that when I sat behind the driving wheel, I touched the gear lever and discovered that it was still engaged. Since the car was an automatic transmission, the ignition would not pick so long as the gear is engaged. But I was still rattled, thinking for a way out without getting myself killed. Meanwhile, the robber with the gun kept threatening me to start the car or he would splash my brains across the dashboard and the windshield.

I returned the lever to Park and turned on the ignition. The car started. Then I was ordered to come back to the back seat while the other fellow drove. He went and sat behind the wheel and attempted to engage gear. Again the gear lever proved uncooperative. Tried as he could, the car would not move. 'Let this lover boy drive the car himself to the office.'

"I did not know what they were talking about. But from the moment I once again sat behind the wheel, there was only one thought; escape or death. I started driving slowly then when I came near another turn which they said led to their office and instructed me to take that turn, I ignored them. The man with the gun kept threatening he would waste me if I did not turn. Impulsively, I decided to waste all of us in the car. I pressed hard on the accelerator pedal and the car gathered momentum and flew ahead. I did not stop till I came to an intersection about three hundred metres later.

"My stopping was not borne out of any rational decision to obey traffic regulation. Indeed, at that moment when I neared the intersection, I did not know whether I was the one on the narrow road linking to the major road or vice versa. The very self-preservation instinct that made me to drive at such a break-neck speed with the robbers inside the car was the same impulsive decision that made me to pause and look if there was a vehicle coming from my either side.

I swerved to the right when I saw that the only vehicle coming was from my left. As I swerved, my right front wheel got momentarily stuck in the mud but I accelerated and it became unstuck. While this was going on, I looked to my right and discovered that the man wielding the gun earlier had disappeared from the vehicle. I turned around. There was nobody at the back seat either. Roger and Natasha seemed to have disappeared into thin air.

"Thereafter I drove steadily, but my heart was palpitating, till I reached home."

"What happened to them?"



“To God who made me, I do not know. My guess is they must have jumped out and disappeared into the darkness, no doubt after sustaining bruises. The thought of going to the police crossed my mind the next day but I said to hell with it. Since I was alive and healthy, why would I add police wahala to my life? No. I said let them go. One day would come when they would be caught in their shady and wicked game.”

Lawal looked at Salim and said, “You are really a wonderful guy.”

“Why, because I did not tell anyone?”

“No, because you still had the heart to engage another Facebook friend in another chat.”

“You mean my ugly princess? Don’t worry it won’t happen again.”

And it never happened again. Shortly after that incident which he narrated to Lawal, Salim got engaged to Salma.

Teemah turned her chair and looked at Omar. “So, Mr Smartphone, you have heard what you are getting yourself into. Even older people who had more sense than you escaped the evil of social media by the skin of their teeth. What guarantee do you have that you would be good?”

“Mum?”

“Omar, I do not have anything against your phone. You deserve it. Just be careful about the negative effect of the social media.

“I will, Mum, I will.”

“So would you tell Teemah not to be in a hurry to tell Dad?”

"I have a better idea," I said.

"What is it, mummy?" all the girls asked as in a chorus. "We will tell Daddy together. We sit here and wait for him to come back and as soon as he enters we would all jump and let the news come out loudly that Omar has gotten admission. That way he would be so excited whatever you ask, you would get."

"That is superb. You really know your man." The girls said all excited

"We will wait for Daddy," I said.

So we all remained seated there under the tree, waiting for Daddy.

already.