

FREE WOMEN

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This book is dedicated to all women; especially all
victims of rape.

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“We are driven to this. We are determined to go on with this agitation. It is our duty to make this world a better place for women.”

— EMMELINE PANKHURST

PREFACE

It's not a free world we all know, especially when it comes to the welfare of women and girls. And we cannot claim to not know why. We live in a world where we hear, see and feel the impact of our good and evil deeds. And we know the difference between the two. We also have a choice between the two: To remain as we are and keep watching things go down the drain or stand up and begin to address issues the way they deserve. I chose the latter about nine years

ago. That's why you are reading this book now. I've seen the impact of the evil, the beast called RAPE. I sure know that many persons and organizations have been involved in the fight to address it over the years. I salute their courage, efforts and resilience. I put this little book, **FREE WOMEN** together in my belief that it will aid in the campaign. I have not been able to capture all that everyone needs to know to help this campaign succeed. But I sure believe that the information herein (some of which you'd find elsewhere) would help further in achieving good success. But this will happen only when you believe in the campaign and join the train. Your gender, rank, social class, religion, etc. doesn't matter; the effects of rape affect us all. Therefore I implore you... help talk about it, act against it, identify with victims, and strive hard to prevent it. You would be doing the world (and this includes you) a lot of good.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Putting this book together has been much painful delight. After nine years of working on it and struggling to see it published in print, I've decided to publish and share it first on PDF. Sincerely, I anticipate more delight; not for me but for you, though I won't be awestruck if I hear of more pains. That's the way of the truth; it is always accepted by some and rejected by others. It bites, stings and hurts... most painfully oftentimes. It destroys... and even kills. But it also gives life to far more than it kills. The truth remains unchanged; never to be subdued. Let's all accept it. It's the succour we seek and the saviour we need against the global threat; rape. So let's live the truth henceforth. And spread the news.

1

MAMA WEEPS AGAIN

“Now, should we treat women as independent agents, responsible for themselves? Of course. But being responsible has nothing to do with being raped. Women don’t get raped because they were drinking or took drugs. Women do not get raped because they weren’t careful enough. Women get raped because someone raped them.”

— JESSICA VALENTI

Exhausted from the steep ascent up the slope that led to his hamlet, Mike paused to catch his breath. He was famished to breaking point. It was Friday, about two o' clock in the afternoon. He loved Friday and always anxiously awaited it. It was the beginning of his brief weekends at home. Every Friday was special to him. Because it always gave him another time to unite with his dearly cherished mother. It was another time to bond with her. Mike had come to value Friday more than other days. Though he spent many hours every Sunday serving God more than other days, over time he had started to become apprehensive with its approach.

Sunday evening saw him separated from his mom, his best companion ever, for more days than he could imagine. Actually, it would be till the next Friday unless something kept him from returning. And it must be something very important, very unavoidable. Whenever his weekend ended and he was due to leave, his heart would leap and bounce in anticipation of his mother's embrace. It was a very deep, engrossing farewell, which usually stuck to him like leech.

And he had always done one thing. He had always embraced his mother with his chest bare. That way he believed that her scent stuck to his skin and permeated deeply through his skin pores to seep into his blood. It was at such moments that he believed they bonded again blood for blood, heart to heart; their oneness renewed.

It seemed as he gasped for breath that the fresh air from the dense green foliage lining the path bore a song. He felt it strongly. Then he heard it, *“Who sat and watched my infant head, when sleeping on my cradle bed...”* Instantly he sprang up and with renewed vigour, hurried home; the song spurring him on. Closer home, the tin roof of his father’s house came into view. He broke into a trot.

“Mama!” he called out as he rounded the corner of the house, and burst into its compound. “Ma...” he started calling again but halted... his mouth agape. His mother was sprawled on the ground, unkempt, her face sullen.

“Mama...” he muttered. His bag slipped off his shoulders. Naturally, his distaste for dirt wouldn’t have allowed his bag to touch dust but with the sight before him, who cares? He hurried to her, and

stooped instantly to help her up. Rather than rise to stand, she sat. *What again?*

How angry he was to behold his pearl in such demeaning, unwelcome state. She had been weeping, had wept herself dry. Mike accepted her cold hug. *No!* This wasn't his mother. This surely wasn't Oriaku!

"Nwa m kedu?" (My child, how are you?) She asked him looking deeply into his eyes. She knew he shouldn't have met her in that pitiful state.

"Mama, I'm fine. O gini?" (What is it?)

"How was your journey?" she asked, carefully avoiding his question. Holding him close, she caressed his head in an attempt to soothe his shocked nerves.

"It was good. Why are you like this?"

Oriaku managed a smile baring a set of immaculate teeth which accentuated her beauty whenever she smiled. Mike sat beside her.

"Mmm gh mmgh, kunie, nwa m," she objected and took his hand. She wouldn't want him to sit on the bare ground with her.

"Not until you tell me who or what it is."

It was more of a vow.

“Hmm...” she grimaced. Slipping an arm across his shoulders, she drew him closer and nudged his head onto her shoulder. “It has happened again.” She sighed. Jolted by her words, the young man sat bolt upright.

“What happened? Mama, what has happened again?”

“*Nwa m biko*, maybe I shouldn’t tell you this now,” she pleaded, “You need to eat and rest. We’ll talk later.”

“No mama, I’m sorry but you have to tell me what it is now.”

Oriaku knew it was no use arguing with him. She knew her son too well. On his forehead was that rainbow, those hard lines she had come to believe formed a rainbow which contrary to nature signified trouble. Any time she sees those lines, she would experience an instant rush of adrenaline. She always felt... in truth, always believed that her son’s anxiety (which always brought those lines) if not assuaged could make the inner line snap like a dry twig, and end his life.

How terribly she loathed that thought! How badly she feared losing her only child; her invaluable jewel ...

“They’ve done it again,” she sighed deeply, tears rolling down her cheeks. Mike was bewildered. Whatever could keep his mother so tongue-tied... whatever could keep her in such a painful state must be worth giving the battle of his life. And if that’s what it would take, then he’d rather go than live and watch his pearl downcast in sorrow. Inward, he swore to conquer her grief once for all time, before it would dominate him.

“This one...” she began, “... was in *Agunasaa*. They brought her home this morning. No one knows if she would live to tell her story. She couldn’t talk... couldn’t tell anybody what befell her... but the signs were there. She was attacked. *Heo! Chi m ooo...*” And she burst into fresh tears, weakened as she was, still cuddling her son tightly.

Tears had dropped from his eye before he knew it. Then he began to cry. Mike understood his mother’s concern now. Another woman had suffered a terrible ordeal. Another woman had been sexually assaulted in her farm at the outskirts of their village. Vividly he remembered this was the fourth time, at least from his count, the fourth time he would hear

such a report from his mother since by design, he shunned every gist from the village's grapevine. And he abhorred gossip too.

Oriaku wouldn't lie. As long as he remained Michael Ogonnia Chukwu, his mother, Oriaku never lied, and would not dare. At least, not to him and not in such circumstance... knowing the very sensitive nature of the matter. A notorious devil... one women hardly talked to their sons about was threatening to make him an orphan. He knew this matter had all the while been adult talk, always communicated in relative silence.

"No!" he blurted out, "I will fight this devil, be it spirit or human." And he rose swiftly. Oriaku rose too, in panic.

But who's the devil here? Where is he? How do I know him? And where do I find him? Puzzles were fighting in his head. And he swore again, this time, muttering to himself. Whatever or whoever is the devil threatening to steal his jewel, threatening to rob him of his joy, must not live!

Find it and kill it! Yes! He vowed, vaguely aware of his mother's arm hooked to his, and guiding him into their house.

2

MAMA MUST LIVE

“No woman has to be a victim of physical abuse. Women have to feel like they are not alone.”

— SALMA HAYEK

Sunday afternoon. Though Mike loathed that moment when he usually left his village to return to school, he sensed he'd heard a clarion call to duty. He felt it heavily in his spirit. Two nights before, on Friday, he couldn't sleep. One whip had scourged his mother too often. And time was ripe to deal with it. Rolling around in bed that night, he had remembered the lyrics of a song, *“Even when times are so bad, they are so cool, calm and collected.”* The singer knew about women. He knew their sufferings.

Had he not grown under the loving care and tutelage of his mother, he would not have understood those lines. He wouldn't have believed that singer. His mother, Oriaku was an epitome of divine motherhood. Though different songs he'd heard portrayed women from different fronts, Oriaku fitted into the most positive, most compelling and inspiring pictures of virtuous women. And if most women, if

not all, were like Oriaku, *why would anyone think of molesting them?*

Even if they are bad, did God assign anyone to be their judge and punisher? He was sure they were created to live. Not just live, but live in absolute freedom! As God's creation, they have their own rights. *What man or other creature has God empowered to modify their divine rights and define rules of existence for them?* That night after crickets had begun their nocturnal routine, his mother had given him the details of the attack. It was gruesome, very blood-chilling. Worst of all, the palace still kept mum.

Whatever made Oriaku weep so deeply in emotional distress for days was a cause worth fighting against, even if he would spend all his blood. She hardly wept. But the few times she had had been grievous, too heart-wrenching, and too unbearable.

Far into the night she had slipped out of the room leaving him asleep on their bed. Mike felt he was dreaming until he stirred, turned and felt around for her. But his hand kept touching the straw mattress until he felt the mud frame of the bed. Clearing his eyes, he searched around the dimly-lit room. Then he heard her or so he thought, transiting

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