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It was near evening, I judged, with the calmness of the atmosphere and the increase in the number of voices I heard from across the street. Workers were coming back home, and children were returning from school. I could also hear the voices of hawkers as they advertised varieties of ingredients enough to make an evening meal. “Buy tomatoes”, one shouted. “Your green vegetables here”, another added. “Fresh fish. Fresh fish”, I heard coming from a distance. I chuckled. I missed Nigeria for so many reasons, and this was one. It was good to be home after more than five years in London. On the day of my arrival, my mother cried all day, my father ordered a chicken to celebrate his ‘abroad’ son, and my siblings hugged me every five minutes. I had the nostalgia too in London, a lonely place for one whose family is in Nigeria. It was good to be home.

As I listened to more hawkers, I let my eyes roam our living room. Not much had changed. Every wall was painted yellow, and the ceiling was white with a black fan gently rolling. My parents still hung pictures on the wall. My siblings and I called it the ‘wall of fame’ as every landmark in our lives had a memory picture hanging. The last of mine was my graduation from the University of Ibadan. Beside the wall of fame stood our ancient television and my father’s old DVD covered with an off-white towel. There had seen better days and were simply part of decorations in the living room. I noticed the cabinet was a new and modern one. I could credit that to my brother for his love of interior decorations. My parents’ home had not changed. As night drew near, my parents came to join me in the living room when I decided to tell them more about the purpose of returning home. First, I missed my family. Second, I wanted to visit my hometown, Gboko. As soon I mentioned my second reason, my mother began to pray aloud, and my father called my siblings and Uncle, that came to visit. Everyone came rushing in, and I wondered if I had just opened a can of worms.

“That is why I do not go to the village”, my Uncle said as he ended his story with a sense of satisfaction, and everyone in the room nodded as if to validate his words. I squirmed in my seat but could do nothing but listen to his story of how every successful man ran away from our rural community due to evil powers. My mother nodded so hard I was sure she would have neck pain the next minute, my father was in his usual state of silence, and my siblings hooded together like they had a different plan. Plan to bundle me to the states if I took one step to the village. “Thank

you, Uncle. What were the steps taken to stop this evil spirit?" I asked. "Nothing!" my mother squeaked. "Ever since that evil Dorcas came as a slave into our village, things turned upside down. She bewitched her captor and started spreading evil in the village", she continued. Truthfully, I was more confused than convinced to stop my journey. I silently wished I had headed to Gboko directly without informing my family or visiting them in Lagos. "I do not understand the evil you explained. Sleeping disorder is possible", I countered. "But not half of the village should have it or talk nonsense like a madman, itch oneself or walk like a drunk", my father argued. They did not understand the reason for my defiance. I had to visit Gboko or will have no project research work at the end of my postgraduate studies at the University of London.

"Sir, I would appreciate it if I could change the location of my research", I concluded my request. I had been on the phone with my supervisor, Professor Edwards, as I explained my plight about the evil spirit in my hometown. It sounded ridiculous though I was ready to err on caution. "That is fascinating and strange", he commented. "So many people attribute some unexplained sicknesses to evil spirits. Are we sure we are not dealing with an endemic in Gboko?" he asked. His question quipped my research brain as I twirled the curtain in my room and looked outside. "It might be. I could enquire more from my family and search online", I replied. My Uncle's tale about the evil spirit was intriguing but had many holes and assumptions. I asked him if everyone attacked eventually died, and he had a vague answer. He was unsure if ten victims had died in the last ten years. "It could be malaria", I suggested. "Yes, or something else we need to alert the world about", Professor Edwards concluded eagerly. "Find out what you can. I am ready to support you. In the meanwhile, conduct your data collection in Lagos. You are in Lagos, right?" he asked. I laughed at his mispronunciation and corrected him. We ended the call with a fixed date for feedback, and I got to work.

I interviewed every family member separately, asking questions concerning the myth they heard. No one had the same story. I proceeded to interview extended family members and was surprised that no one knew Dorcas, the witch. Someone also confessed that not only adults were bewitched but that it also affected children. Days rolled by, and I made several calls with no breakthrough. I was almost on the verge of giving up when my grandma's sister told me Dorcas had bewitched her, but she survived. I had just one problem with this breakthrough. My grandaunt lived in Gboko,

Benue State. I battled with the urge to travel down and continue my research. Every Nigerian knows not to belittle spirits, including me.

I called Aunt Maria and probed more about what she did before she was bewitched, her feelings and her way to healing. Aunt Maria ranted for several minutes, making my ears sore. From one neighbour that does not believe she has a relative in London to the market sellers that wanted to dupe her. “Did you see Dorcas?” I asked for the tenth time with my left hand on my forehead in frustration. “No. Nobody has seen Dorcas in a long time. She visited me in my dreams”, Aunt Maria finally answered. I probed more. “Tashi Tashi “, she explained. I got my answer. The spirit of Dorcas, a tse tse fly, had bitten Aunt Maria. I could not hold back my laughter, and for a moment, she thought I was insane. Quickly saying my thanks, I ended the call and browsed the internet.

Every symptom my grandaunt claimed Dorcas inflicted on her was all there; fever, headache, itching, confusion, behavioural changes, and joint pain. Dorcas had not inflicted anyone. They all had African trypanosomiasis. Sadly, few researchers focus on this tropical disease. “Truly a neglected tropical disease”, speaking to myself. My mother looked at me before returning to her activity. What struck me more was that the vector, Tse tse fly, was more prominent in Northern Nigeria and my hometown, Gboko. “There is no evil spirit in Gboko, Mama”, I commented. “I know you would not listen. Too much book has made you ignore spiritual warnings”, she countered. “See Ma”, was my reply as I showed her my findings on the internet. “60 million Africans are at risk of African sleeping sickness yearly because, in Africa, Northern Nigeria and places where agriculture is the major occupation, Tse tse fly covers 80% of land mass”. “Although we have less than 500 cases per year in Nigeria, it is still a lot”, I continued. “100 million people at risk of at least 1 Neglected Tropical Disease in Nigeria yearly”, I also added. My Ma nodded and asked the salient question, “So what do you want to do about it?”. I smiled. “First, we stop accusing poor Dorcas or whomever she is”.

Months rolled by, and every milestone reached in my research work, was applauded. I had just completed my project data collection at Lagos and was putting full force bringing to the limelight the cancer NTDs had created in Nigeria. Professor Edwards helped appeal for funds while I reached the Ministry of Health. I had gone back to London for some weeks for deliberation and budget defence. Currently, we partnered with The END fund, WHO, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to sensitize rural communities on the prevalence, prevention and treatment of African

trypanosomiasis. As I shut down my laptop for the day, I smiled at the turn of events. “Thank you, Isaac”, Mummy Kachi whispered at one of our community sensitizations. “My daughter was Dorcas”, she confessed. I was more than fulfilled in my fight against NTDs that day. I had just saved a lineage from wrong accusation.