

Where Warriors Sleep



ADEGBOYEGA OSHODI

JUN 13, 2025

'Jude, what we are building will free us, I want you to know that.'

The heavy rain beat down on us, piercing the tree leaves with pebble-like drops as we walked through the forest. I don't think he heard me, but he still looked up at me, holding my hand tight, leading the way. He had such a bright smile, the brightest thing I'd ever seen.

'Careful Jude, the floor is really slippery.'

'G-Grandpa, I-look.' He stopped dead in his tracks, pointing forward with an aghast look on his face. I looked forward. The rain was so heavy that it took me a minute to see.

'No!' The structure had collapsed, with the ceiling caved in, destroying months of progress.

'Grandpa!'

'Shut up Jude!' Months of progress, months of investment, my entire life poured into this, no no no

'Grandpa, help me!'

Jude's cries broke through the loud, beating rain.

'Jude!' I screamed. The white ceiling of the hospital welcomed me as I suddenly opened my eyes.

'Baba, You're awake.'

'I made yam and fried egg today.' His poor attempt at a smile looked painful on his wrinkle-ridden face. 'Of course with scotch bonnet and onions in the egg, just the way both of you guys liked it.' He opened the food container and placed it on my lap. I sat back in the chair and saw him watching me from the corner of my eye.

'Baba, you need to eat.' He sighed.

'Thank you, David,' I said. Outside the hospital, the sound of the rush hour street created a cacophony of noises filling the room, with the repeating blaring of horns and the occasional arguments happening. It should be here now. It's always there, following everyone around, barking for food scraps, and even going into the rainforest with you.

'Baba, I have to talk to you.'

Seeing that I was not touching the food, he began covering it. 'I-I can't keep doing this.' David groaned. He sat back down, lowering his head toward the cold floor. 'Times are hard. The landlord has increased the rent, and the daily hospital bills are only getting higher. Y-you aren't even talking anymore.'

Where is it? The traffic was getting a little better now, with the cars moving faster. *I should've taken it in.* Spending all of its days walking around the neighbourhood, enduring weeks of heavy rainfalls or the dry harmattan, the least I should've done was fulfill its goal. 'I've been thinking, Baba,' David continued. 'About the last few years, you lying down here for so long, and I don't even know if you want to be here.'

Fists clenched now, 'I come here every day, talk to you for hours, letting the food I made get cold, all with no reaction.'

The road was free-flowing now, and with the road being free, I could see it lying down on the road, with the heavy rain pelting the gaping

wound on its body, splashing blood around. *At least I'm going to see where it's heading soon.*

'I've been thinking about Mama, too. He murmured. 'At first, I was mad, but I don't know anymore.' He stood up with so much effort, groaning as he moved towards me, 'B-But I know I can't keep doing this.'

He reached for my hand, holding it with his palms, with such a desperate hold. 'Please, Baba, say anything, anything,' he pleaded.

'I-I'm sorry'

He looked up, watching me; his eyes were red with fatigue, or was it tears?

'Please say hello to Jude for me.' Pressing the button to call the nurse.

Chapter 2

'Jheese, I can't wait till I finish this shift. There's a pickup game happening soon.' The sound of a pair laughing got increasingly louder as I regained consciousness. 'Ah, just in time! We are almost there.'

With the occasional bumps, it felt like I was being moved.

'Alright, here we are—

'Dude, get him down. He's still on the wheelbarrow.'

With them talking among themselves, the breeze announced itself to me. It was quiet in here, really quiet. We were surrounded by a deep, red sand with an imposing gate in front of us. It's warm in here too. Really warm with that red, cherry-coloured sun beaming on my neck. *When was the last time I saw the sun?*

'Alright, let's get you down now, sir.' The men picked me up and walked me to the gate. 'Alright, now we just need to confirm your name.' One asked, bringing a book from the wheelbarrow. 'Okan Nla—

'Okan Nla?!' Both men blurted out. 'Gosh finally, someone needs to put a leash on him—

The messenger on the right hit the left. They opened the gate, revealing a bustling, vivid market, with stalls bordering each side and a wide walkway in the middle filled with people. 'We have someone waiting for you, sir.'

As I entered the gate, a sudden rush of movement swept me deeper inside. The narrow walkway was flanked by successive three-story buildings, each as tall as the gate and quickly disappearing from view. Their balconies glowed warmly with candlelight, casting flickering shadows. We eventually reached a market, its scattered buildings resembling rocks on a flat plain. "This way, sir," one said, guiding me through a narrow passage between two buildings. It opened into a grassy area dotted with bonfires encircled by tall palm trees heavy with coconuts. Near the closest bonfire, a group sat laughing while others danced freely in the background, lost in their rhythm. Even the drummers joined in, moving to the beat of their talking drums. 'He should be around here somewhere—

'Grandpa,' someone suddenly shouted, running from the nearby forest, till he collided with me, hugging my lower half.

'Jude, oh Jude, my dear grandson,' I picked him up, hugging him intensely. 'Oh boy, how have you been—

With the nearby deep orange bonfire, Jude's scruffy face glowed. There were several cut marks on his face, with some still dripping with blood.

His ashy, grey afro swayed as I moved him like plant weeds on a windy day.

'Jude, what happened? Who did this to you?'

I turned back to the messengers, but they had on a disapproving, almost unbothered look. 'We'll leave that wild boy to you.' They walked away.

'Sorry, but I had to get started,' he said, squirming out of my grip on him. 'Follow me!' He ran into the forest, holding my hand as we maneuvered past the heavy trees. As we ran, the sounds of waves splashing gradually arose, with the smell of salt welcoming me. Passing through the last couple of trees, I saw a vast, almost deserted beach with tree barks and seaweed on the shores. Looking over at the left, I saw a plane. Made with ashy, gray metals, with a slight rust on the edges. It was the size of a water plane, small enough to fit just two passengers. *He did it.* 'Look at this Grandpa. We can finally do it.'

'Jude I—'

'But we need palm oil to make it fly, and I have been struggling to find any—'

'Jude!' I held him, grabbing his attention from the plane. 'What's going on? Have you been doing this all along? W-Where are you going to fly this thing to?'

Almost immediately, he pointed behind me, prompting me to turn around. A large, imposing hill loomed in the distance. Atop the mountain stood towering buildings, illuminated by a radiant, bright white light. So bright, it was dimming the starry night, polluting with its unnatural rays. *What an eye-sore.*

'Over there is where humanity's greatest people are staying. Like how those messengers dropped us here, the messengers dropped the greats

up there too.'

He grabbed my hand, looking up at me. 'Think of the life in there rather than living here in this wilderness.'

He had a disdainful look on his face, squinting it intensely.

'I'm sure you of all people understand.' He sighed, walking towards the deeper forest. 'Come on, let's go.' He hurried off towards the deep trees

The long walk was tough on my aging joints with the forest's hilly inclines making it more challenging. I had to move cautiously, watching for misplaced branches that could trip me while Jude glided effortlessly ahead. The cherry-coloured sun hung bright in the sky, its rays are hotter now, though I couldn't tell the time. Shadows cloaked most of the forest, but streaks of sunlight pierced through, lighting the rainforest floor.

'Walk faster!'

Why? Strolling now, I can listen to the birds chirping, constantly flying above us, and the waves crashing onto the shoreline, creating such a soothing orchestra of sounds. Does he notice? His head remains fixed at the front, never glancing to his left or right to notice the waves. 'We are almost there!' He glanced back at me, smiling. He reminds me so much of his father, smiling and at peace. I certainly hadn't seen that smile on him in a while—the actual David smile, with him smiling so hard, his closed eyelids seemed to be smiling too. Did I even notice his smile fading?

He went out of sight, leaving me behind, listening to the crunch of tree barks below me, a sound I'm far too familiar with. I ran through the rainforest right from the womb, searching for a stick shaped like a sword or a gun to impress my classmates. Even in my adolescence, I

ran through the rainforest, finding solace after another difficult day at school.

'Grandpa!' I heard Jude's voice as I approached the beach shore. The palm trees were much taller, reaching as high as a two-duplex building. Along the bonfire-lit beach shore, other people were already around palm trees, with some climbing them and carrying a bottle to harvest palm wine. 'I'm right behind you.' I walked towards Jude, waiting for me as he excitedly pointed at the palm trees.

'Okan?' Someone called me from the bonfire group beside the palm trees.

'Tani?'

As I stared at Tani, studying her face, I could hear Jude calling out for me, but at some point, he stopped shouting, muttering, 'I'll just do it myself.'

'You look well,' she said, patting on the stool next to her for me to sit on. 'I haven't seen you since—'

'You left the house.'

'Yeah..'. Her tall afro was an ashy, grey colour now, with noticeable wrinkles on her face, especially on the sides of her lips. *Must've had a happy life afterwards.* 'How long have you been here?' She asked

'Just got here. I wanted to see my grandson.'

She looked up towards the left, staring off at the boy climbing up the palm tree, with onlookers watching with hands on their heads. 'I see. He reminds me of you.' She said, with a smirk. 'How was David? Did you see him in your final moments?' She asked.

'He's good. The house is also good, the neighbourhood is also good, and I'm sure the pigeon that shits on the balcony is also good too.' I said.

There was a bit of silence as we stared off into the fire, watching it blaze on and on.

'Ow.' A flicker of fire landed on my hand, with the bonfire getting more erratic.

'Sorry about that, today was my turn to start the bonfire.' She said

'I hate starting it,' she continued. 'For some reason, every time I start it, starts off way too wild, almost burning me in the process. And I can't put it down, every time I try, it only hurts me more in the process.' She spoke, not looking forward at me. 'The flame is beautiful, burning on with its warm colours, lighting up all room with its energy, its freedom, but gosh is it lonely, never looking elsewhere but trying to stay alive, stay blazing till it goes out in a short while.'

She had the same look on her face after that day. So terribly exhausted, tired of shouting, berating, and telling me, "I told you not to go outside. So selfish you took a young boy with you." Also, she had the same look, telling me she was leaving, leaving everything behind. 'I'm sorry,' I whispered.

'Ambition is a beautiful thing, but what's the point in glowing vibrant colours if you're going to burn everything around you, Okan?'

I looked towards Jude as he climbed down from the tree, running towards me. 'I'll go calm the flames now, dear.' Letting go of her hand, she looks up at me, watching me walk away with a genuine smile now.

'Jude, please wait—

'Can't '! We have to go now.'

He immediately ran past me and towards the plane along the beach shore. I hurried towards him, running on the deep sand.

'Jude wait, please!' He didn't hear me as he ran into the rainforest.

'Go along the beachfront! The plane has to pass through there.' I looked back, seeing Tani waving forward, laughing as she did it. 'I'll see you later!'

My pants were starting to grow heavy as I ran. At any moment, my old legs feel like they're going to give out. 'No not now.'

'Jude, wait!' I saw him fueling the plane with a jerry can.

'I was going to wait for you. We're going together,' Jude asked, throwing the empty can into the forest.

'L-Listen, I want you to stay,' I gasped, holding onto the plane for support.

'What why?'

'You don't need all of these, building a plane, flying to some mountain to talk with some elitists...' Moving closer, I held his shoulder. 'Stay here with me.'

'A-Are you serious? This is what we have been waiting for, what about the months of progress?'

'It doesn't matter—

'No it does matter...You know you did leave me out to die, remember? Flinging me away, seeing that the plane got destroyed in the rain. Not

once did you look back to see me crying for help, falling down the slippery slope.'

'Jude I—

Jude got a lot closer, face to face. 'And I forgave you. Maybe he'll say something when he gets here. Maybe he'll ask for forgiveness for taking me as a young boy, beaming with a bright future, unto silly excursions to watch him build a plane.' He backed away, opened the seat door and entered. 'I'll just go myself.'

He started the engine, instantly blowing me away with the exhaust wind. In an instant, it began to move, driving down the beachfront.

'No, no, no.' I immediately grabbed one of the wings as the plane started to gain speed, lifting up from the ground. '

Get down, what are you doing?' He shouted. I could barely hear him. I moved closer to the window, trying to see his face.

The wind was far too fast and cold, burning my hand with every second. 'I-I'm sorry, Jude...' One finger on my right hand loose, staggering me.

'I got you caught up with my selfishness. It's not fair to bring a young boy to a dark, secluded rainforest to watch me build something so ridiculous. Two fingers loose.

'You were a bright boy, so adventurous, so full of energy, and I robbed you of it cause it was so familiar to me.'

My right hand became undone, and my left was now on the plane wing.

'You didn't deserve such a short end, your father didn't deserve it.' I glanced at him, seeing him stare at me, barely holding the wheel. He began to descend the plane, allowing me to get a full grip on the plane wing.

We descended on a grassy plain just across the river. Immediately after landing, I fell on the floor, gasping for air, with Jude coming in to sit me up.

'Breathe, breathe.' He held me, soothing my easing breath.

There was a long silence as my breathing eased up, with both of us staring at the river. 'Gosh, you're insane.' He immediately busted out laughing. 'I can't believe you really did that.'

'I guess the fire hasn't gone out yet.' I said

'I'm sorry—

'No stop, there's nothing to apologize about.'

We both stared, watching the deep blue river reflect the cherry-coloured sun as it crashed onto the beach shore. There were also sounds of barking coming in from the distance behind us. We both turned around and saw two messengers walking a group of dogs along the beach shore.

'Careful now,' one of the messengers said, turning to me. He pointed to one of the dogs, saying, 'This one just arrived today,' Beaming with a smile as they hurried off along the shore.

I turned back to Jude. His gaze was on the airplane towards our right, watching it with a deep, concentrated look on his face, kneeling down towards it, almost like a servant to it. A few seconds later, he noticed my gaze, turning back with a smile. 'I heard they have amazing yam and eggs here.'

I smiled back, getting up from the ground. I took Jude's outreached hand, helping him up from the floor.

'Your hand,' he whispered, opening my palm.

'Ah must've burned it.'

The End.

Dedicated to Aderonke Daramola, my dear grandmother. May your soul rest in peace.