

PRAISE FOR THE MECHANICS OF YENAGOA

“Michael delivers a super engaging story with profound social commentary and cracking humour in a fluid style that keeps you flying from page to page. This is not just the story of the Mechanics of Yenagoa; it is also the story of Merchants of Power in the Nigerian society.”

— **Simon Kolawole, Writer and Journalist**

“Humour and wit peppers this beautiful narrative. Here is an author and a story to look out for.”

— **Timi Dakolo, Singer and Songwriter**

“This gripping narrative takes off with little warning and speeds up rapidly, swerving through breath-taking, cliff-hanger moments and navigating perilous passages with abandon. Love, heartbreak, friendship, back-stabbing, loss, and the ultimate payback all feature in this rich telling. Afenia presents the colourful hapless, Ebinimi and his “three crazy colleagues” in his auto repair garage, facing down multiple challenges – all against a backdrop of crime, love, religion and politics, centered in his home city, Yenagoa. Threaded with spicy humour, this unforgettable story gives an insight into the racy lives of four young men as they navigate real (and sometimes surreal) paths in a modern African city.”

— **Martin Egblewogbe, author of *Mr Happy and The Hammer of God and Other Stories***

“Afenia’s *Mechanics of Yenegoa* seemingly reads like the stories of Ebinimi, his girls and his apprentices but it is much more. It is a work which speaks to our everyday reality: men who claim to speak for God, politicians ready to maim and kill, marriages that are so only in name and leaders who are nothing but dealers. This amazing book marks him out as a master of suspense and a storyteller to worship and his language is simple but not simplistic. It will be worth your time.”

— **Olukorede Yishau, author of *In the Name of Our Father***

“Raw, gritty, warm...A rollicking read.”

— **Chimeka Garricks, author of, *A Broken People’s Playlist***



THE
MECHANICS
OF YENAGOOA



PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS



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MASOBE

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To
Moji, Biboye and Weniebi –
for believing in me the most and for opening up our
home to the characters in my head.
And to the many fans of this story that saw the potential
in the first episode and urged me to keep writing,
episode after episode until now we have this.

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PART ONE

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CHAPTER 1

I guess I should begin by introducing myself. That's what people do when they have a story to tell. My name is Ebinimi, and that's what my friends call me, not Ebi or Nimi because I don't like people shortening my name or calling me anything other than the name I was christened at birth, and people have tried and failed to trust me.

Like in secondary school some of my classmates thought they could nickname me Bola Tinubu and make it stick because they said I looked like him. I think it's the eyes, and the way they droop when I smile. But I shut it down only after two weeks. Don't ask me how I did it. What is important for now is that it didn't end well for the principal initiator.

Once in a while, I allow Jacob. But that's my surname and so I prefer that the person calling me was older – like my teachers and lecturers at school or people from the church who insist on calling me Brother Jacob, which I detest by the way. As far as I am concerned, that moniker was a ploy to gnaw at my conscience and make me feel bad for not showing more commitment to the ministry of Reverend Ebizimor. As if allowing him use up almost

half of our compound for his Sunday and midweek deliverance services without collecting a kobo from him was not enough.

A few days ago, I saw him supervising the replacement of the small signboard of the church with a bigger one. In shiny black and gold lettering, “REVEREND EBIZIMOR AND THE JERUSALEM WARRIORS INTERNATIONAL” was now visible from at least one kilometre away and there was nothing I could do to get him to bring it down or revert to the old signboard. And then there was all that singing, drumming and prayers that only reached heaven if it was acted out in deafening decibels. But what could I do when he had my elder sister, Ebiakpo, wrapped in his crooked fingers, what could I do when she was his biggest fan and staunchest convert?

She said it everywhere, all the time: Reverend Ebizimor was responsible for her first and only pregnancy. Responsible, not in the sense of him being Anda, my nephew’s biological father, but that his prayers, fasting and spiritual conjuring somehow made her union with her husband Benson fruitful after almost eight years of marriage.

Letting the church share part of the land we inherited from our grandparents was a compromise. The deal was – if I let the church stay, then she would allow me use what was left behind the house for my mechanic workshop. I had no choice but to agree because renting anywhere else for my business was out of the question. Yet after four

years of being co-tenants, it was beginning to feel like I was the tenant and the church and its members were my landlords.

I was losing my sanity. I had lost control over what went on in my compound and sometimes even inside the three bedroom flat I shared with Saka, Biodun and Broderick, the apprentices in my workshop. But don't get me wrong, I am not complaining. I would be an ingrate to do so because the church has also been a blessing in disguise.

Patronage to my car repair shop increased significantly since the church moved in. Every single day, power hungry politicians, profit-seeking businessmen, lonely married women and desperate single ladies trooped into number 9 Kalakala Street, Ovom under the guise of fixing their cars. But what they really came to do was procure miracles and obtain divine solutions for their problems. I really don't know what would have become of my business or how much of a mechanic I would have been if it weren't for the referrals that came directly or indirectly from Reverend Ebizimor and those in his ministry.

And then there was Blessing. I never would have met her if I didn't give in to Ebiakpo and let the man of God establish his ministry on our joint inheritance. It's hard to imagine life without all the excitement Blessing colours it with. It wasn't love at first sight, but hearing

her sing Sunday after Sunday . . . it wasn't long before I started feeling something.

That was how she became the love of my life; the sugar in my tea, the cockroach in my cupboard, the kidney in my suya. But all that was before the pregnancy. That was how the wahala started, this pregnancy we didn't plan for.

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CHAPTER 2

“Ebinimi, it’s like you’re not even listening to me. Where is your mind?” Blessing asked in frustration.

Her question brought me back to the matter at hand. Our conversation had been interrupted by a call from a complaining customer who wanted me to know that after all the money he paid for a new fanbelt, his car was still over-heating.

“Look here, Blessing, I’ve told you I cannot bear this cost alone.”

“What do you mean you cannot bear this cost alone? When you were enjoying my thing, did you call other people to join you?”

She was shouting now, so I raised my voice to match hers. “Oh, oh, oh, so you wan make we go dia abi? You don forget say I sabi wetin happen between you and—”

“Don’t even go there, Ebinimi, I won’t take it. You cannot take this subject and change it into something else. When bad belle people want to spoil my name, you sef dey follow dem shebi? Abi you see me when I dey do anything?”

“Under my very nose Blessing, two times Saka and

Broderick catch you, yet you still get mind dey deny, abi?”

“I nor dey deny anything. Nothing happen, I don tell you taya you nor wan hear me. The man na my reverend and the founder of the church, me I be choir mistress, we nor go get meeting again? We nor go choose song or plan how to conduct service and move the church forward again?”

“Oh, so na sing una dey sing abi? When my boys dey hear ‘ah um ah yay.’ for window. That one na the latest Frank Edward song abi? Which kain chorus be that one?” I asked her, knowing how much she detested being romantically linked with our pastor.

“Ebinimi, think what you want, in fact say what you want. All I know is that you are responsible for this pregnancy and you know it.”

“I don’t know that I am responsible for anything. Come to think of it, is this the kind of conversation a choir mistress should be having with anyone?”

“As if you are not a member of the same church. Look, Brother Ebinimi, there’s no need arguing over this issue. I’m not asking you to buy me a car or send my younger ones abroad. All I’m asking from you is money to get rid of this baby before it is too late. I have been telling you this matter for some days now, but you nor wan shake body. Abi you think say na joke I dey joke?”

“In the absence of any DNA test, Blessing, I will contribute my share. Let Reverend Ebizimor bring the rest.”

“Hmmm.” Blessing wagged a finger at me. Her face turned red and her ample bossom jiggled as she spoke. “Ebinimi be careful of accusing an innocent man of God oh, so you don’t attract the wrath of God.”

“Now he is innocent abi? Weren’t you the one that told me about Sister Agnes?”

“Please don’t quote me or bring Agnes into this matter.” She became fidgety all of a sudden. Then she jumped from the edge of the bed where she had been sitting and headed straight for the door with her imitation Gucci handbag. My diversionary tactic had worked.

“Na go be dat?”

“In fact, just bring what you have,” she said, turning around. “I will look for the rest of the money myself. After all it’s not your fault. Nor be me, a whole choir director and Lagos-trained beautician and makeup artist agree to open leg for common mechanic like you?”

“For your information, I’m not a common mechanic. I am a graduate of Banking and Finance with MBA in view. Na me choose to become mechanic, nobody force me so make you watch how you talk to me.”

“Oya, Oga graduate banker and mechanic combine, let me have the money.”

“I don’t have it right now; you can come back tomorrow.”

I watched Blessing sashay out of my room and listened to the pitter-patter of her footsteps echo down the corridor, till all I heard was the silence of morning.

She did this whenever we spent the night together. She would usually sneak in at about 10 or 11 o'clock at night when there won't be a chance of her running into the Reverend or anyone else from the church. She didn't like running into the other guys in the house either, so she'd cook from home and we'd lock ourselves in for good food and adult fun until it was time for her to steal away again. Sometimes she left really late and I'd have to drop her off so she won't be harassed by the police or the bad boys on her street, and at other times when she slept over, she always made sure to leave before anyone else on the street woke up.

I loved Blessing, no point denying it. I loved her cocoa butter skin and the way she wiggled her waist when she wanted my attention. I loved that she was not all up in my business and controlling like my other girlfriend, Adinna in Akenfa.

Blessing had the voice of an angel and most times when we were alone together, she would sing and twerk for me like she was in a Wizkid video. The best thing about her was that she was an expert in making delicious edikaikong and pounded yam, and her banga soup tasted like it was made in the restaurant of a Niger Delta Five-Star hotel even though she wasn't Ijaw like me.

I liked and trusted Blessing a lot, but the rather sudden announcement of a pregnancy came across to me like a trap. She always bragged about being a big girl and knowing how to take care of herself, with or