

**ODUFA**

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

ALSO BY OTHUKE OMINIABOHS

*A Conspiracy of Ravens*

*Aviara, who will remember you*

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

# ODUFA

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS  
*a lovers tale*

**OTHUKE  
OMINIABOHS**



MASOBE

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For  
MY PARENTS; MY TEACHERS  
THROUGH YOU, I HAVE TOUCHED THE SKY. *DIGWOR*

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# Prologue

*My end was near . . . I could feel it.*

I felt it in the cold of the pouring rain, in the glassy stare of the pedestrians and in the frenzy of the motorcyclists racing for cover. I noted the crystals of ice falling from the sky, an oddity I had long gotten accustomed to since my arrival in this land that birthed joy and pain. I remembered briefly my surprise, the first time I witnessed this ice rain during my first visit here, but that was a long time ago. A lot had since happened, a lot had changed and most likely, things were never going to be the same again.

I shivered as I thought of her.

*Odufa . . . my love.*

*When did everything go so wrong?*

I had been walking for so long, my feet ached. It was time to go home.

*Home.*

The word was like a knife plunged into my gut. But I had to return all the same, to the one-room apartment I had once joyously called my home.

The walk back was long and torturous. The street was flooded. I rapped on the front door and waited. The rain had since worsened, pouring now with a vengeance. I heard a bolt

pull back and the door was thrown open. I ran inside, quickly shutting the door.

I raced across the room past Odufa and into the bathroom dripping buckets. I towelled my head and face. At the same time I stared at the occupants of my home. Odufa sat cross-legged on the bed, resting her elbows beside the tiny light-skinned bundle sleeping soundly amid the loud din made by the rain. Her chin was set, fixed like a stone in the mouth of a tomb. She did not smile. She did not look my way, so she couldn't see the tears or the shivers that wracked my body.

I shifted my gaze farther to the other edge of the bed. Odufa's mother lay there, eyes closed, mumbling inaudible words. She shook her head and shook her feet, and once in a while she would raise her head to peer at the sleeping bundle and then relapse into her mournful state. If she was aware I had returned, she did not show it.

Looking at them, I had a gut-wrenching epiphany—I *was not wanted here*. I reached for a fresh pair of clothes from the nearby wardrobe and changed. I opened the bathroom door and signalled for her to come.

Odufa looked at me and then she turned to face her mother as if seeking her permission. But the woman remained shut out from her surroundings, enjoying the ritual of shaking her feet and her head with her eyes tightly shut.

Odufa stood up reluctantly and approached the bathroom. She gazed woodenly at me, hands folded across her breast. Her fair skin shone in the dimness of the small room. Her lips were full with a pout and as she raised her chin a notch higher so she could look at me, I could not help but appreciate the perfect curve of her jaw, the sinful black of her hair, the hard glitter of her eyes . . . her striking beauty.

"What is happening to us?" I asked, reaching for her arm.



She studied my feet, and then she looked at my sodden clothes which I had piled in a corner.

“Where did you go?” she asked, ignoring my question. She turned her arm, freeing herself from my grip.

“Away from here,” I said. “I needed to clear my head.”

“Is your head clear now?”

“I don’t know. Please, don’t go.”

“I have to. My father has spoken. I have to go.”

“Baby, please I beg you, don’t leave. Would your father control you even in your own home?”

“This isn’t my home, Tony, at least not yet,” she said, avoiding my eyes. “I have to go so you can come and do what you are supposed to do. Then, my father won’t have any say. But until that time, I am still my father’s daughter.”

I studied the lines on her face, my heart yearning in silence. “I’ll come to Lagos to pay your bride price since your mind is made up.”

“When exactly will you come?” she asked, reaching for my hand now.

“I don’t know, before the month runs out maybe. I’ll talk to my parents and they would surely accompany me.”

Doubt crept into her eyes. “Are you sure?”

I nodded. “Do you have your fare to Lagos?”

She shook her head. I reached into my trouser pockets, counted twenty pieces of one thousand naira notes and handed them to her.

“Thank you.” She leaned forward to kiss my lips. “Don’t worry, Tony, even if you don’t come, I’ll find a way to trick my parents and I’ll come to Delta with our son.”

I nodded. “I have to leave now,” I said.

“I thought you were travelling with the night bus, why leave now, it’s just one o’clock.”

“Don’t worry; I’ll wait at the park.”

I did not wish to stay a minute longer. If she was taking my son away from me, the earlier I adjusted to the change the better I'd fare.

"OK. I'll help pack your bags," she said turning away.

Five minutes later I was out again under the drizzling rain. Odufa stood by the doorway, our son nestled in her arms.

"Come say goodbye to Efezino," she called.

I lifted my boy from her arms and tickled his soft cheeks till his lips widened, the outer corners of his eyes crinkling in a smile. I prayed for him. Handing him over to his mother, I turned quickly so she wouldn't see the tears pooling around my eyes.

With my backpack weighing heavily across my shoulder and another big travelling bag clutched in my hands, I made my way out of Dambari to the tarred road under the rain. The dark sky, gloomy and cloudless, brought with it a knifing wind that intensified the cold.

Twenty minutes later, I was at the Sabon Gari motor park. I paid the fare, and with most of the belongings I had acquired over the short period I lived in the north, I climbed into the bus. I looked down at the overcrowded park, at the different buses with their indigenous tongue-twister names branded on their colourful bodies. I heard the trampling of human feet, noting the burly bus conductors whose cracked voices still rang loud like church bells. I overheard the calls of the underfed, malnourished street-hawkers, peddling fruits, soft drinks and water. I saw the uncouth and sleazily dressed youths with their puckered scars and unshaven beards haggling relentlessly for the milling passengers, the almajiris with their mournful eyes and meaningless chants walking aimlessly in all directions . . . but I gazed through it all, feeling nothing, only the nagging question that sought how my life had come to this.

Tears slid down my eyes as I reminisced. And as I replayed

the past events in my head, I had a sudden urge to tell my story, to unfold its intimate details in its fullness, so that you who would be patient enough to follow me on this journey, may judge. So that one day my son would know what truly happened in the months preceding his birth, in the weeks after his birth, and in the months and years that were to follow.

I closed my eyes and journeyed to the beginning.

It all began in February 2010 . . .

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BOOK ONE  
FRIENDS

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# One

The doctor's words rang like a doomsday bell in the far reaches of my mind.

*"One of your test results had me worried. On a hunch, I ordered a fertility test to be carried out. I can't say it's normal, neither can I really pinpoint its origin. But it's possible your untreated hypertension is the primary culprit. We would have to run more tests to ascertain exactly what went wrong. From the result in that test slip, you do not have the required sperm motility rate to impregnate a woman."*

*"I-I don't understand sir."*

He had leaned back on his seat, and said the words that were to change everything, forever: *"Sixty percent of your sperm cells is dead, another twenty percent is non-motile. At this rate, you may never be able to father a child."*

*No!*

*I was sterile!*

There was no getting used to this piece of bad news, no mastering the tide of aches it brought along. No amount of grammar or medical jargon could change the way I felt. The doctor went on to speak of medicines, sperm boosters that could correct the damage. He told me of people with worse motility rates who made miraculous recoveries after treatment. But nothing he said could reverse the tide.

How could a full grown man go through life without the

hope of siring an offspring? What woman would understand and stay with a man who was incapable of fathering children? As if on cue, I lost my girlfriend the very week I told her about my condition. I felt betrayed, cursed. I slept and woke up in agony, begging for release; release from this prison of horrors. How in the world was it possible, I asked myself, that one still so young and moderate in lifestyle, a child of always healthy parents, could be thus strangely afflicted with severe hypertension and dead sperm cells? How did this cruel fate find me?

Several times I asked God 'why?', waiting for a response, yet only hearing my question echoed back to me, fainting out in desolate silence. I was all alone.

I didn't have the courage to tell anyone but my family who, though deeply shaken, yet with nothing but love, sympathy and optimism in their hearts, took it rather well.

Without much faith, I began to see the doctor for medical treatment. Most nights I woke up to find my pillow soaked with blood—one of the many symptoms presented by high blood pressure. I went through the last days of school cold and withdrawn. Surprisingly, I noticed that with my withdrawal came a fascinating increase in the number of my female admirers. It was as if my sudden disinterest in things around me was a huge attraction and turn-on for the opposite sex. At first I wanted nothing to do with them, so I ignored them. If most of these girls knew the truth about me, they probably wouldn't have bothered to give me a second glance.

It was this thought that irked me.

I was like a fruit without a kernel, an empty husk. Why not have them now that I could, I reasoned. Why not enjoy this alluring prospect of sensual bliss, I argued with myself. It didn't take long for me to succumb to the force of my own persistent persuasions. At this time I lived in Aluu, one of the semi-rural townships neighboured within the University of Port