

SÀN YÀ

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

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MASOBE

Published in 2022 by Masobe
An imprint of Masobe Books and Logistics Limited
34 Gbajumo Close, off Adeniran Ogunsanya,
Surulere, Lagos, Nigeria
Tel: +234 806 316 6939, +234 701 838 3286
Email: info@masobebooks.com

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Nigeria

ISBN: 978-978-59451-2-6

This is a work of fiction. All names, characters, places and incidents portrayed are the products of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Cover Design by Oriahi Ofuzim Anderson and Abdulkareem Baba Aminu
Cover Illustration by Nonso Brendan

For

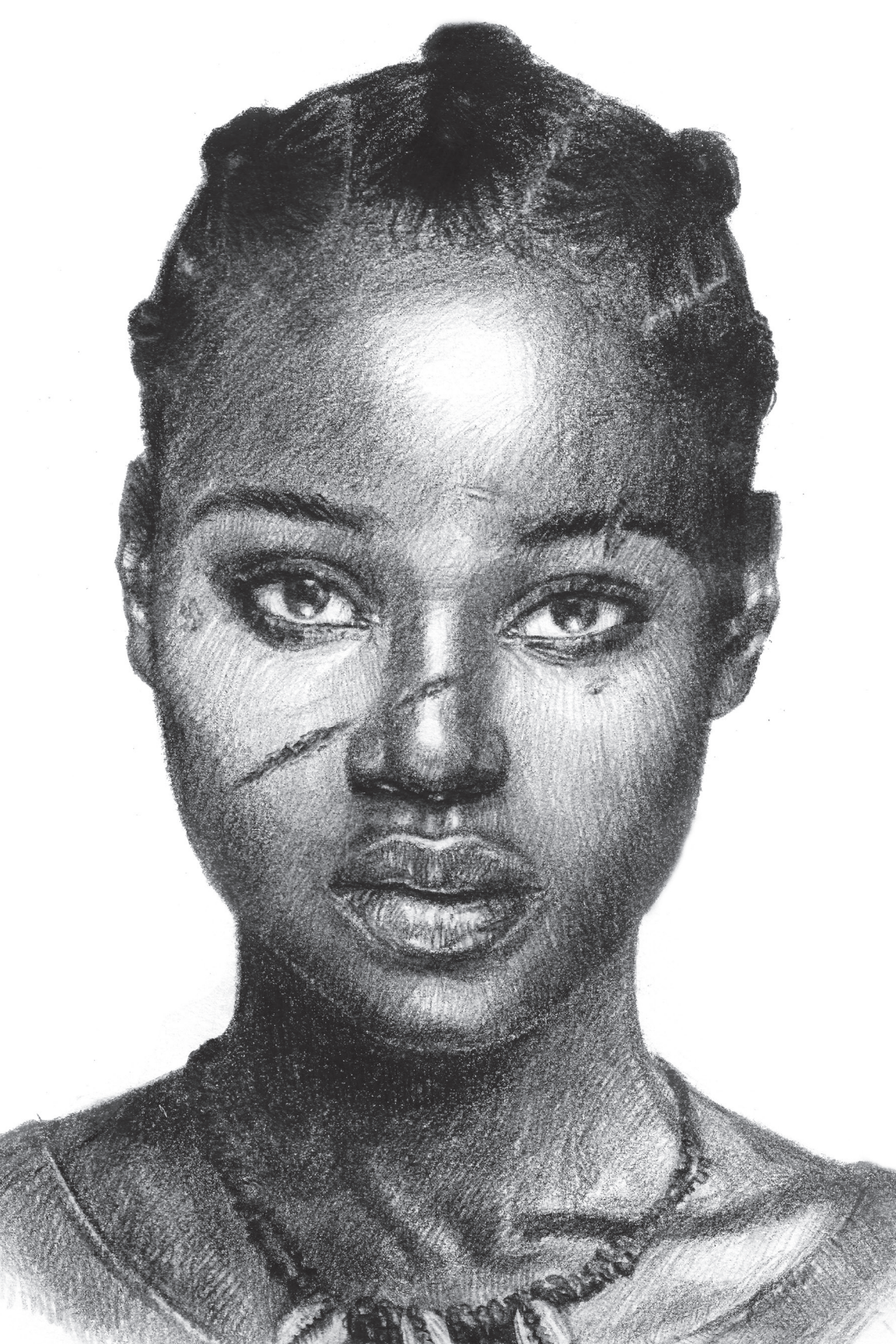
Mayowa

Simi, Eni, Tomi (and the little Bun in the Oven)

And every single creative yet to come out from Nigeria,
the world awaits you.

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PROLOGUE

In the beginning, gods and sorcerers ruled the West. The gods were called the Òrìṣà. They were also called the good ones; for every good thing that happened was brought about by their benevolence. Òrìṣàs dwelt amongst men and sometimes saw fit to bear seed with them. And any household that birthed the offspring of the Òrìṣàs was greatly revered.

Sorcerers, on the other hand, were not as revered. They had sprung from one Òrìṣà, Èṣù, and they were known for magic that was sometimes dark. While some did not think that magic was a bad thing, others were wary of sorcerers because their powers were rooted in disobedience.

Èṣù was the first and most powerful Òrìṣà created by Elédùmarè. He was trusted and cherished by Elédùmarè and endowed with the privilege of carrying out important tasks, one of which was to see to the needs of humans, at the special request of the Supreme Being.

After several errands, Èṣù became ambitious and craved human relations much more than with his own kind. On one of such trips to earth, Èṣù never returned. He settled in the West, and started a family. His children, born out of congress with humans, were the first sorcerers. His offspring wielded their own kind of power, different from the Òrìṣàs. It was sustained by intense emotion and soon, they wrecked so much havoc with this power that men cried out to Elédùmarè for succour. And it was decided to send the Òrìṣàs to restore peace on earth.

The Òrìṣàs descended to earth and settled quietly among the people to serve as Mediators. They lived purely as priests, performing cleansing sacrifices for the people and the land, and purging it of the consequences of dark magic. Their popularity spread across the West and they were constantly sought by men for cleansing rituals or restoration of peace and order. They were worshipped as gods and mated with humans who bore half-divine offspring, descendants of the Òrìṣà. Soon, no one held Èṣù and his kin in high esteem anymore. The sorcerers were regarded with scorn and all that had to do with Èṣù was forbidden.

This did not sit well with Èṣù.

He had suffered rejection in heaven and had no intention of accepting it on earth. The sorcerers, Children of Èṣù, decided to go to war with the gods, the Òrìṣàs. They engineered the creation of a being born of diabolical union between Òrìṣà and Sorcerer. This being possessed abominable power, and under Èṣù's control, was the catalyst of a war that shook the foundations of the world. The fearsome battle lasted for several years. Dark magic scorched the earth and thunderbolts blighted the heavens as the divine battled, and humans suffered. Because the earth was cracked and broken, the war brought famine with it, and because the sky was parched, there was a dreadful drought in the land.

Once again, humans cried out to Elédùmarè to save them, and he looked down and saw that all was not well. For the second time, Elédùmarè intervened. He unmade the Sorcerer's diabolical creation, and called for a truce between the Òrìṣàs and the Children of Èṣù.

Èṣù's children would not consider a truce unless their demands were met. For all they cared, if the war were to last until eternity, they were more than ready for it. The earth was their home and they would not be disregarded and usurped even there. After all, their father had been the first of the Òrìṣàs to make a home on earth and so they ought to do with it as they saw fit. Elédùmarè considered their argument and came to a decision.

The Òrìṣàs were to leave the land of man. But they couldn't come back to Òrun as their positions had already been filled by other Entities. So, an alternate world was created for them. The Òrìṣàs were pleased with their new realm, and gladly relocated. They were to revisit the earthly realm only with the permission of their Queen Mother and were banned from further mating with man. Their already-existing descendants, half divine offspring though they were, were to remain on earth and take up lowly positions that would not evoke conflict.

As for Èṣù and his children, they were to stop all forms of dark magic and sorcery immediately. To placate them, Elédumarè decreed that they could assume the roles of Kings and Rulers, and their descendants would hold sole lineage to every throne. Èṣù was given his own realm away from the other Òrìṣàs.

Lastly, Elédumarè forbade any union between the lineage of Èṣù and the offspring of the Òrìṣàs that remained on earth. Then he ascended back into heaven. Èṣù's descendants ruled as royalty while the offspring of the Òrìṣàs were content to be simple farmers, tradesmen, and artisans.

And time passed. And memory faded. And laws became myth. And because only beginnings are sure and no end is certain, another new beginning was born.

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The background features a repeating pattern of white, hand-drawn geometric shapes on a light gray background. The shapes include triangles, squares, rectangles, and various lines, some of which are grouped together to form more complex symbols. The overall style is minimalist and modern.

PART I

STEMMA

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CHAPTER 1

Àjoké stirred from sleep and opened her eyes. Darkness shrouded the space around her like a thick cloak and she could barely make out anything in the room even after blinking away the gritty feeling of drowsiness.

She yawned and sat up, careful not to wake Aganjú, who was snoring softly beside her. She peered down at him but her husband was just another figure in the gloom, his dark skin making it hard to tell how his body was positioned on their sleeping mat.

Àjoké shifted, resting her back on the wall. There was no crowing rooster to tell how young the morning was, but she sensed that she was up earlier than usual. Her heartbeat sped up as the thought of the important journey that awaited them at sunrise crept into her mind. She let out a gentle sigh, the warm air leaving her mouth speaking volumes.

Six years had passed since the birth of Àjoké's first child, Dàda. His birth brought untold joy to her household, and many trooped into their hut to welcome the mystery child who was born with three locs on his head. The rumours of the good and rare omen had spread far and wide almost before the new baby's head crowned between her thighs.

For days, the young couple welcomed throngs of villagers who came bearing gifts for the new born. Aganjú's joy was palpable because the birth of his son provided him an heir to carry on his family name and appease his father. His family was greatly respected—the Obayans had produced a line of skilful warriors and were also of royal stock. Even

though his family could one day be in line for the revered throne of Báníré once their aged king crossed into the realm of their ancestors in death, Aganjú was a simple man with simpler dreams. He had no aspirations to royalty or fame as a warrior, and preferred to just live a good life, tilling his farm with great success and taking care of his young family.

Aganjú had been expected to carry on the family traditions that came with their elite status. And although the young man was a proficient warrior, skilled in the use of several weapons and especially the axe, strong as an apádò tree, and towered over his peers, he had chosen the simpler life of the common-folk, much to his father's chagrin. But because Aganjú's stubbornness was legendary, no one dared his quick temper. The great Obayan family had no choice but to accept his decision. So, Dàda's arrival was the answer to their prayers, a precious heir who would carry on the family's lineage, and, even more auspicious, one who had come into the world with evidence of greatness on his head.

Àjoké nursed their son with a motherly love that made some of the villagers scrunch up their noses in envy. Some chuckled at her fervour and predicted that the novelty would wear off in time, just as it had for many new mothers before her. But they were proved wrong; the blaze that was Àjoké's affection showed no signs of waning as months passed. Àjoké fiercely protected her baby from prying eyes and all the curious hands that wanted to have a feel of his hair. It was such pure delight to watch Dàda grow before her eyes. The love for her son overwhelmed her so much that everything else around her seemed trifling. She would watch him sleep at night, gazing at his beautiful face lovingly and gently stroking his locs.

Sometimes she watched him for too long and it would often take a mild reprimand from Aganjú to nudge her to sleep. Nothing else mattered more to her than this bundle of joy that was a wonder to the village. Children born with locs were considered àkàndá, revered children who were the favourites of the gods and not mere mortals. So, she treated her