

Fireflies on the Lagoon

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Fireflies on the Lagoon

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

A Novel

Tunde Leye



MASOBE

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And this new adventure. Together.

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West Africa
SLAVE COAST
1850s



Mahi

Abomey

Allada

Ado

Ajase

Ouidah

Cotonou

Bada

← TO ACCRA

The At



● Oyo-Ile

New-Oyo ●

Abeokuta ●

Ijana ●

Lagos Lagoon ●

Eko (Lagos) ●

Ibadan ●

Ijebu ●

Epe ●

Ile-Ife ●

Benin ●

Osun

Niger

Atlantic Ocean

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Spare

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Antics

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A satisfied smile played across Prince Kosoko's face as he watched Adufe's chest rise and fall. His agbada and her wrappers lay in a tangled pile on the floor, entwined just as their bodies had been moments earlier. Coral beads littered the room, evidence of the haste with which they had thrown them off. It did not matter to him that they had cost many slaves to buy. So long as ships came to Lagos, his coffers would be full, and he could get finer, more expensive replacements.

His eyes wandered from her body and surveyed the room. There was unmissable proof of his immense wealth in every corner. Half-open baskets overflowed with cowries and gold. Heaps of the very best cloth meticulously folded and categorised by design filled the spaces in between them. All manner of beads, glass and ceramic items, and metalware reflected the dim light. Even the bed they lay in, carved intricately with the various motifs of their royal house and his name, a gift from one of his Portuguese partners, was a part of the display.

Kosoko thought with bemusement of the reaction people had when they encountered his wealth. The widened eyes and envious whispers suggesting that the source of his riches was his being a

prince of the most prosperous city on the slave coast. Never mind the fact that he was not the only prince in Lagos, yet his wealth outshone all the others.

He dragged his gaze back to Adufe's body. Her full breasts were accentuated by the dim light from the low burning oil lamp in the corner. Her dewy skin glistened like polished bronze. He could feel the embers in his loins rekindling. She smiled in her sleep as if reaching some happy place in whatever part of dreamland his energetic performance had sent her to.

Loud voices from the courtyard interrupted his amorous thoughts.

Kosoko scowled and sat up in the bed. Should he go and check the cause of the commotion or wait for someone to come in and inform him?

Adufe stirred, smiled again, and continued to sleep. He listened again to the noise. There was no clanging of weapons, only the raised voices. If there was no fighting, then it could not be that serious. He decided to wait. Still, he reached for the ornate pistol he kept behind the headboard as a precaution and placed it under a fold of cloth, the cold metal providing some comfort.

He did not have to wait long.

The familiar figure of Oshodi Tapa entered the doorway, moving with the swift quietness that bore witness to his years of experience as an elite soldier. His skin was so dark that in the dim room, he was as a shadow. Many men had left the earth with that shadow being the last thing they saw. He was no taller or bigger than the average man, but he had a presence that made men of greater stature shudder. He was beside Kosoko before the prince could bring out the pistol. Had Oshodi Tapa been there to kill him, Kosoko would have been dead before he had a chance to react.

"My Prince," he said quietly. "Chief Eletu Odibo is outside with his entourage, and he means to create trouble." His eyes drifted to Adufe and then back to Kosoko, heavy with meaning.

Kosoko furrowed his brow. “General. What trouble can those old men possibly give you and your men *after* allowing their shrivelled selves into my compound?”

“My men have made sure they cannot come in, but I thought it necessary to apprise you of the situation. You know that beyond stopping him from entering here, we cannot lay hands publicly on a chief of Eletu’s stature, My Prince.”

Oshodi was right. There were those who had come into Lagos with their feet, but some of those feet were shackled. Others entered Lagos head first, and some of those heads were covered. Eletu was one of the covered heads, while Oshodi Tapa was one of the shackled feet. And even with his shackles struck off and a general’s staff placed in his hands, a freeborn chief of Eletu Odibo’s stature was not someone he could wield that staff upon. Still, it irritated Kosoko.

He stood up, gathering a large white cloth from one of the piles to wrap around one shoulder. Kosoko was a full head taller than Oshodi Tapa. He was an active prince, and his well-muscled body showed it. His sister always joked that since he was not destined to inherit the throne, the gods decided to bestow him other advantages. Kosoko’s skin tone was like shea butter, and even the most beautiful women wondered how a man could have such lovely skin. With a face sculpted to tempt goddesses; mortal women stood no chance. Whenever he entered a room, women looked at him with desire and men with envy mixed with admiration. When he turned his charm on Adufe, every other suitor paled into nonexistence.

She stirred again.

How could she sleep through all that was going on around her?

Just then, an idea flew into his mind.

“General,” he said, turning around.

“My Prince,” Oshodi replied. In the instant their eyes met, it became clear without words that Kosoko meant to cause some trouble.

They had been together since their father, King Oshinlokun, saved Oshodi from being taken to a slave ship when he escaped the Ijebu trader who had brought him from his homeland. Afterward, the king had handed him to the care of Kosoko, a move which he was sure that the former warrior who had guarded kings would have found disappointing. Now, after many years together and his brother's ascension, it was a settled matter and the wisdom behind late king's actions became clear. While his brother sat on the throne, with the full arsenal of royal protection, it was the spare prince who needed Oshodi's discreet skills, and loyalty, the most.

"Since that decrepit Eletu Odibo has refused to accept the inevitable, we might as well let him get what he wants. Let him come in and see with his eyes," Kosoko said.

Oshodi Tapa sighed. "My Prince, I do not think that will be the best course of action. Let us not fan this small flame into a raging fire. If Eletu Odibo sees this," he motioned towards Adufe, "he may..."

Kosoko waved dismissively. "Perhaps his heart will give out and he will leave this world for the young to enjoy themselves. Make sure he comes in with one of his followers. And have your men with him as well, so he doesn't get any ideas."

Oshodi Tapa stood for some time, clearly searching for some response that might deter the prince from his chosen course of action.

Kosoko glared at him.

"General?" he growled.

Oshodi Tapa backed out of the room and disappeared into the darkness beyond. Kosoko shook Adufe. She opened her eyes and blinked as if unsure of where she was. When her gaze locked with Kosoko's, her lips parted in a smile.

"Your betrothed is here, looking for you," he said.

The smile disappeared from her face.