

THE FATHER'S BLESSING

By Mbofung Carlang Ndubuisi (Nigeria)

He was David to my Goliath.

Towering over his 5ft 5 frame, I could see the faint spattering of grey on his almost bald head. His body was visibly tensed with anger—Veins threaded on his bare arms. If I had any doubt as to his emotions his eyes put those asides. In them I could see the truth. Black pools of anger lying in whites of firm resolve.

And in his hand he held a gun.

It wasn't the gun that had me standing helplessly. I knew when a gun still had its safety on and this one did. No. What stopped me so effectively was standing beside him.

His 26 year old daughter.

The woman I wanted to marry.

"Daddy No." She said softly.

"Please Sir." I began. I took a step forward. Between us was a line drawn in the sand. It hadn't always been there.

He glanced sharply at me and his expression became even more hardened.

"Do not push your luck. If you step over that line into my compound I *will* shoot you."

"Daddy." She gasped. "This is the person I want to marry."

He gave a snort and followed it with short laughter.

"Don't be ridiculous Amina. This person? *This* person isn't even *Igbo*."

I stood miserably in front of them as he announced his hate for my tribe.

She glared at him. "We are all Nigerians aren't we?"

He looked at her like she had said the dumbest thing in the world. With his attention distracted, I considered leaping across and quickly wrestling away the gun.

"Do not be ridiculous Amina. Why would you marry elsewhere when there are millions of Hausa men to choose from."

"Because of love." She said quietly.

"Love?" He scoffed. "Love? What has love got to do with what you are proposing? You are asking to marry out of your tribe. Out of your Muslim faith!"

He said the last with a lot of fury. I could sense his anger rising. I took a step closer to him.

The sound of the gun click was audible in the quiet air of late Harmattan.

We all stood in silence. The Father, the daughter and I who would dare separate them.

"Daddy." She whispered—the silence of the evening lending strength to her words. Sibilant echoes.

I stood behind the line, staring into the eyes of the man who held my cards. We stared for half a minute.

"I will not permit this marriage." He repeated centering the gun on my chest. "Leave my compound or I *will* shoot you."

There was firm resolve in his tone.

I had lost.

A quick flurry of peripheral movement warned me of what was happening before it did.

Suddenly she was there. *Here*. By my side. She reached lower and held my palms. I hadn't realized I was trembling until then. My nails dug into her palm.

She looked at her father sadly and said.

"Then you will just have to shoot us both because I *will* marry her."

We stood together—both our breasts heaving in the faint light of the evening. I watched the man crumble.

He stared at his daughter. Her eyes were filled with the same level of resolve his had contained moments before. His arm shook.

"Amina!" He gasped.

I stared sadly at him. He was a man faced with a hard truth—Victory had just been snatched from him. The tables had just been mercilessly turned.

Between us was the line.

He looked at me and we both knew.

I was *now* Delilah to his Samson.