

Prologue

CORA SAT TENSED UP behind the steering wheel of the old van. Dam's van. One of Dam's vehicles. Dam. So much in love with Randa. So giving; so generous.

Cora's blouse was damp from her tears. Cora, the second of the three of them; three years younger than Kweku, the oldest and only male; and thirteen years older than Randa, the youngest. Cora was perceived as an old maid who did not deserve to end up as such. She was a trained teacher, pretty and well groomed. At thirty-five, she should have been someone's wife and mother to a couple of yelling kids. But a greedy hand from years gone by, had twisted Cora's fate. Now, seated behind the steering wheel with her blouse completely wet, having given up the will to fight the tears, Cora was convinced. They are right.

For a long while they thought they could simply ignore the words of Ma, their mother. They deemed them to have come from the lips of a woman who was slowly failing in spirit.

"I have something for her!" was what Ma said to them. "And it must depart from my own hands into hers. Find her. She must understand the price. So that when I look into her eyes, what I see in there should be deep and sincere and complete. Because only then can I give it to her. And only then can she redeem herself and find her peace. Then when I depart this earth to be with my Maker, you, my children will also be free of any fear of having a funeral like the world has come to know it for me."

They knew what Ma meant. Yet they continued to ignore it

and pretend she never uttered those words. It was most convenient. Each of them had their own lives to live. Kweku, now a top executive, had a wife and kids of his own. Cora taught part-time at a private school and ran Ma's shop, built into the front wall of their home where she still lived. And Randa had just entered the university and was looking forward to completing and becoming Dam's wife. Then Cora began having a strange recurring dream. When Cora told Kweku about it, he knew they had to find her. They could no longer ignore Ma's words. Randa had Dam. He had Elsie, his wife, and their children. Of the three of them, Cora paid the heaviest price. Being nearest to Ma as she was living in the house with her and running her shop, Ma's spirit seemed to have chosen to make contact with Cora, to communicate. They couldn't ignore it.

They found her. That was not so difficult. Now the look that Ma was seeking had to be brought into her eyes.

Randa was in the back seat of the van. Her face reflected impassiveness. It was completely dry. She was known to be very sparse with tears when they were most expected. Dam was said to have once confessed that what he found most attractive about Randa was her seeming lack of emotion. Asked why, Dam simply replied that it enabled him to tolerate and contain his own self.

What could be the reason for a man to be attracted to a woman who almost never shed tears, Elsie once wondered, and added of Randa, "It is like she gathered up every piece of her emotions like moss one morning, placed it neat and compact into an iron safe, locked up the safe and threw the key into the deep blue sea."

A light pink student mattress was laid out on the floor of the van. Four double seats had been dismantled to make room for it.

A crisply ironed blue bed sheet covered the mattress with two soft pillows in matching cases at its head. A carefully folded men's cloth lay on Randa's lap. With her right palm she continually brushed and caressed it as she would a baby's back. Cora stole a glance at her younger sister in the driving mirror. Randa's harmattan face goaded Cora into more tears; her ducts letting out more to compensate for Randa's absent tears. Cora's heart always grieved for her younger sister. No little sister deserved to see so much in her early years and live with it for the rest of her life. Fate had snatched the innocence of childhood from under Randa's feet before she could understand the rules of any game. Now twenty-two, Randa appeared not to know how to laugh for laughter's sake or howl to purge inner pain.

Cora cast aside her thoughts and firmed her back against the seat. Randa looked up at the back of her older sister's head.

"Can you see them?" she asked, neither agitated nor anxious.

Contrarily, consumed with anxiety, Cora strained her neck to keep in sight, the gradually disappearing backs of the four men up the hill, at the foot of which the old van was parked. The leader, was the sixty-two year old farmer to whom the surrounding maize farm belonged. It was the second time he was leading such an expedition. He prayed it would be his last. They walked in a straight row. The closest behind the old farmer was Kweku. And behind Kweku, a thirty-something year old investigative reporter. The fourth man was the old farmer's son. He was a car mechanic by profession but could easily pass for a body builder. He was the main contact man and facilitator and the one who assured them that his father, as leader, was absolutely trustworthy and well-versed in the terrain. The old man, when he was told the story of Kweku and his two sisters, was deeply moved. The method they

were employing was not legitimate. But after listening to how all normal and regular avenues had yielded no positive result, the old man felt obliged to right a wrong being committed in the Almighty God's name. He had turned down the money that Kweku and his sisters offered him and his son; but on one condition: that the amount be used to inform the public about what was going on at the top of the hill. That was how Beam came to be a part of the group. But Beam underestimated the forewarning to him to come along with only his own self, a sharp eye and a healthy memory. In gross violation of this, Beam brought along a mobile phone and a small camera. Then in an ironic twist, Beam got more agitated by the farmer's son's stance that at the prices Beam claimed to have bought both the phone and the camera for, they could only have been smuggled into the country.

Beam didn't want to be seen as having patronized smuggled goods. After all, he was Beam, a nickname he earned for his expertise in shedding light on delicately hidden and secret issues. It wouldn't do for him to be seen to be indirectly encouraging tax evasion. This irritated the old farmer greatly. His concern was that Beam was given some basic rules, which Beam did not adhere to. If Beam couldn't do his job without his mobile phone and camera, he should not have agreed to join the group putting all of them at risk. So he gave Beam the option to either leave the items and join them, or return to where he came from. Beam's attempts to persuade the old man that the gadgets would pose no risk, was met with a swollen silence that spoke more volumes than words. So Beam gave in; strode back to the van and handed them over to Cora. When they set off again, they were armed with only the devices that were prescribed by the old farmer. His son carried a small pair of sharp shears and a ladies' hairpin. And in Kweku's pocket, was a tiny torch.

Till now the moon had lit the skies, but dawn was yet to break fully. The old farmer knew the terrain like the back of his hand. His father before him had farmed there too. It was family land. And as a young lad, he had worked there as a young farm hand. As a grown-up, he chose to remain in the village. He married from the extended family and had taken over the farm from his old father. When he also became a father, he dreamt and hoped that at least one of his three sons would not migrate to the city or any nearby town in search of greener pastures, but remain behind and take over from him when he, like his father before him, grew too old for the farm. Two of the sons migrated to the city. One chose to settle in a town nearby and remained close to home. He became a car mechanic and opened a big car workshop there. It broke the old man's heart. It was still mending as they headed up the hill. They ascended it in silence, still led by the rather agile old farmer. When he slowed down, they slowed down. When he walked fast, they walked fast. Then they arrived at a spot where the old man stopped suddenly and stretched out a hand for Kweku's torch. He knew exactly what he was looking for and why; because when he shone the light onto the spot, a barbed wire fence came into view. Without prompting, his son brought out the shears; and in one swift stride, moved to the fence near his father. Then as his father indicated, he snipped one point after the other. When he was done, he had made a gap of about four feet square in the fence. Without warning, the old man dropped onto his knees and proceeded to crawl through the gap. The son signalled for Kweku to follow. Beam crawled through next. Finally, the son followed. With all four of them on the other side of the fence, the old farmer resumed his leadership, trailed by the others. And just as he did, the rest also trod slowly. About a hundred meters away, what could best be described as a shabby

compound came into view. All around was dead quiet. The old man took to the left. The others followed. A little distance away, they spotted three brick and thatched huts. In front of these was a signboard. Its outline stood out clearly in the moonlight. The old farmer shone the torchlight onto its surface. “WCS Prayer Camp” was lettered in red paint against a white background. Beneath it in smaller blue letters, was the name written in full. It wasn’t clear enough for them to read and time was not on their side. So they moved on as Beam cursed under his breath. That would have made a good shot.

The old farmer proceeded toward one of the huts, faithfully followed by the three. Then he halted before the wooden door of one hut. It was always firmly closed but never locked, and the old farmer knew this. He beckoned to his son who moved to the door. He held the knob firmly and turned it slowly and gently without a sound. It gave way. He pushed. The door stood ajar. The old farmer and his son exchanged knowing looks, communicating without words. The son went through the door, cast a brief look around and beckoned to Kweku to also enter. By now, Beam was boiling at his inability to capture anything on film. The story could be told more effectively with photos. The van; the farm; the hill; the wire fence; with and without the square gap; the signboard; the brick hut; the door, shut and unshut. All! It would have been sensational and probably won him a prize. What a wasted opportunity.

He entered the hut with a huge frown to join Kweku and the old farmer’s son. The old farmer remained stationed outside the door. Inside the hut, the son led the way, followed closely by Kweku and Beam, all tiptoeing carefully. Then the farmer’s son signaled to Kweku and stopped. He pointed down. Kweku looked and inhaled deeply to stifle a scream. He reflected briefly on how

the whole idea came to be.

It was during one of their many calls at the front gate of the camp. That was when they thought they could do business the normal regular way. This very smallish old woman approached them. She had apparently been watching and observing them for a while. She found out what they wanted and learnt of their frustration in getting it. She was a resident of the town and told them that no one from the town would send a relative to the camp even if the camp offered them money to do so. That was because everybody around knew what went on up there on the hill. She told them bluntly that their aim would not be accomplished through the regular means. She had been a regular observer of many similarly frustrated and helpless sons and daughters who had made the mistake of bringing their mothers, grandmothers and aunts there. They would have to either wait till they were granted the go ahead by the camp, or go about things the irregular way. Kweku and Cora told her that time was not on their side. They couldn't afford to wait till the camp decided. At which point the old woman told them about the old farmer and his son the mechanic.

Kweku knew what to expect inside the camp. The old woman gave him some information. But the reality offered its own blow. On the floor, where the farmer's son had pointed, was a figure. She was frail and huddled on a mat on the bare floor, fast asleep. There was no pillow for her head. Kweku shone the torchlight on her face. She was about sixty, with skeletal features, and completely bald, the hair on her head having been shaved off. Around each of her ankles, was an iron ring linked to a thick iron chain. Kweku's eyes followed the length of the chain to its opposite end. It was hooked through a hole in a huge blunt iron rod buried halfway into the concrete floor in the center of the hut. There were other

metal hooks in the hole from other chained ankles. No wonder the wooden door was never locked. There was no need to.

The frail old woman stank of stale urine. She must have wet herself several times while chained. Kweku's blood churned. The farmer's son cocked his head to one side. Kweku shook his head in response. They tiptoed to the next figure, also bald and huddled on a mat with no pillow. The ankle was also chained. Again Kweku shook his head. They moved on to the next figure, and the next, all women, all old and bald, all frail and chained, all haggard and stinking.

The ninth figure was asleep in a fetal position; as if subconsciously yearning for the warmth and security of a womb, having received too much lashing in the world. Kweku suffered a sudden violent bout of dizziness, and broke out in sweat. The farmer's son needed no telling. He placed an empathizing and assuring hand on Kweku's shoulder. Kweku touched a palm to his forehead to forestall the dizziness and knelt down close to the haggard figure. The stench dazed him. The farmer's son also got down on his knees beside Kweku. He signaled to Kweku to guide the torchlight to the keyhole of the padlock fastening the metal ring on the figure's ankle. Her kaba blouse, old and torn, hung loosely on her frail body. Kweku needed all his concentration not to be overcome by emotion and drop the torchlight and gather the weak figure in his arms. The farmer's son inserted one end of the hairpin into the lock's keyhole, his eyes intensely focused. A soft click sounded. Someone turned in her sleep. A chain rattled. All became quiet again. Then in the midst of the gloom, the farmer's son looked up and smiled at Kweku. Mission accomplished. He lifted the U-shaped bar and pivoted it to one side to remove the padlock. The figure's ankle came free from its iron bondage. Her eyes flicked open unexpectedly. Kweku and the farmer's son ex-

changed nervous looks. What if she failed to recognize Kweku and screamed. But she didn't. She simply searched their faces while hers remained bland, registering neither shock nor fear nor pleasure. Kweku brushed a hand against her hollowed cheeks. She didn't react. Her skin had become extremely coarse. Kweku began to cry. The farmer's son signaled Kweku to gain control of himself and pick up the figure. Kweku obeyed, still crying. She was so emaciated that she felt like a baby in his arms. They strode to the door no longer tiptoeing. Beam winced, replaying the images inside the hut over and over in his mind. They joined the old farmer at the door and together headed back to the wire fence. At the fence gap, the old farmer once again crawled out first. His son took the old figure from Kweku to enable Kweku also crawl out. Then Kweku knelt and received the old figure from the farmer's son through the gap. Then Beam also crawled out and finally the farmer's son. The old farmer led the way back down the hill, while Kweku held the frail old figure close to him as if a breath of space between them would let her be gone forever. They all remained quiet, until Beam, unable to hold his silence any longer, blurted, "I need some answers, pal, good answers. And since we will be parting company with the old farmer and his son soon, can I begin to ask my questions?"

No one responded.

Beam was not deterred. "What do the initials WCS stand for?"

"Whip to Conquer Satan!" the farmer's son replied straight-faced.

"What?" Beam yelled. "Whip? They whip those frail old women in there?"

"That is how they deal with Satan," the farmer's son replied.

"Kweku, you didn't talk about suspecting your old woman of

being a witch. Didn't you say she was mentally ill?"

Kweku couldn't reply.

The old farmer's son said, "Are you not versed in this kind of stuff? From the viewpoint of the people on the hill..."

"The prophets and prophetesses?"

"Whatever they deem themselves to be! To them, mental illness means possession by evil spirits."

"You mean they believe that it was when one was possessed by an evil spirit that one became mentally sick?"

"Yes."

"So in effect we haven't come far from the Stone Age at all, have we?" Beam blurted. "When holes were drilled into the skulls of the mentally sick to supposedly allow the evil spirit possessing the subject to depart?"

"Yes, pal. That is how close we still are to the Stone Age in the twenty-first century."

But Beam remained baffled. "I don't get it, pal. If it is a prayer camp, why don't they just pray for the inmates?"

"Oh, they do pray for them. They employ prayers and the recitation of verses to try to coax the evil spirit or talk it out of the person. Something like how the police might employ the strategy of talking a hijacker into freeing his hostages and giving himself up. It is when that fails that the police storm the place where the hostages are held."

"Which in this case, is the physical body of any of these women?"

"Yes."

Beam frowned and snorted, "It doesn't make sense!"

"It does to them!" the farmer's son went on, "To them, the evil spirit has sought refuge in the body of the supposed possessed person, who is probably only mentally sick. And the evil spirit is

in there because it feels comfortable...”

“Inside the person’s body?”

“Yes. So the idea of subjecting the person to the entire whipping is to make the physical body an uncomfortable abode for the evil spirit to continue its occupation. Which, it is hoped, will force it out.”

“An ‘if persuasion fails, force is applied kind of thing?’”

“Yes.”

Kweku hadn’t uttered a word all this while. He held on to the figure in his arms like an egg.

Beam snapped, “But if it is so obvious how Satan is dealt with there, I wonder why...I mean, why would any sane person want to take a relation there? They must have a signboard at the gate, don’t they? And Whip to Conquer Satan is too obvious to ignore, isn’t it?”

The old man spoke for the first time. “They have employed people who do a wonderful public relations job for them all over. Some operate around the psychiatric hospitals and target visitors seen to be well-to-do. They adopt all kinds of ways to convince these people that they are wasting their time and money at the hospital and recommend the camp.”

“Which brings me back to my point,” Beam exclaimed, “if after having been convinced, a sane targeted man, on arrival at the camp, sees a signboard proclaiming how Satan is conquered through whipping, shouldn’t something click in his mind?”

“If...” came in the old farmer, “But they don’t see that. Only the inner signboard reads that. All the signboards outside leading to the camp, and the one at the gate, has the same acronym WC S But beneath it, it reads, ‘We Conquer Satan.’”

Beam yelled astounded, “There are differing inner and outer signboards?”

“Yes.”

“What about visiting relations? Don’t they see it?”

“No, they don’t. They can’t. Once a patient is admitted, she is allowed no visitors until the alleged evil spirit vacates her body. Which is determined only by the prophets and prophetesses of WCS, and it sometimes takes forever.”

“Pal,” Beam turned and addressed Kweku, “Does it mean you were never allowed to see her when she was in there?”

“Never!” Kweku muttered.

“Relatives are often told that the sight of them would interfere and interrupt the exorcism process. Whatever food and money the relative brings along is collected at the reception with the promise to give everything to the patient. Of course the patient sees nothing of it. Especially not the cash. Meanwhile, for the period that a patient is there, the relations are expected to pay for their monthly upkeep.”

“What if the relations of a patient refuse to pay?”

“Normally the well to do relations pay. Many are sometimes just grateful that they had a place far away to deposit their mentally sick relative. But if the relations are poor and no money can be squeezed out of them, the patient is sometimes declared incurable and kicked out. In one such case, it was alleged that the evil spirits possessing the person could multiply and transfer to add to less harmful ones and exasperate the possessions of others previously possessed by milder evil spirits.”

“What if a relative wanted a patient discharged? Like how Kweku and his sisters wanted: a normal and regular discharge?” Beam probed further.

“That is not looked on kindly at all. Especially if the relatives seem quite well off and have been regular in the payment of the monthly upkeep fees,” the old farmer’s son replied, “The common

excuse given often is that the discharge ...what they normally describe as a premature discharge...is an interference in God's work and a sin."

"So once a relation commits the first blunder of bringing a 'patient' here, for spiritual healing, the patient is discharged only when the camp so permits?"

"Yes," the old farmer's son replied and asked his father, "Do you see the van?"

"Yes," the old farmer responded. "Hurry on ahead and have the back door opened and ready. One of the camp guards may go strolling along the fence and notice the intrusion and raise the alarm."

The farmer's son did as was directed and further advised Cora to turn on the ignition. The old man issued a final caution to Beam. "Just the story about the camp and the issue of the misconception about mental illness as possession by evil spirits. Nothing about the rescue and the involvement of my son and me."

Beam nodded obediently.

Randa and the farmer's son helped Kweku to place the haggard figure gently on the mattress in the van. Then Randa covered her with the cloth while Kweku shook hands and parted with the old farmer and his son. He got in the back of the van with Randa. Beam joined Cora in the front seat. Then Cora stepped on the clutch and put the gear into first and slammed her foot on the accelerator. The van screeched off along the rough dusty road. No one spoke till they hit the main tarred road, when the old woman, as if reacting to a telepathic message, opened her eyes which had remained shut till then. She scanned the faces above her, closed them again, and extended the corners of her lips into a beautiful, weak smile. That prompted Kweku to say to her, "We are all here, Ma. All three of us."

They rode on in silence as Ma drifted back to sleep. Probably the best and most comfortable sleep she had had in months. Soon, her light snoring filled the van. Then Beam, feverishly making notes on what was still vivid in his mind, lest he forgot anything, snapped, “I still don’t quite get it, pal,” turning to Kweku, “The whole scenario baffles me. I mean, the more I look at you three – you all seem to be sane and upright. Was bringing your mother to this camp the idea of your sisters? We do know that our women are more receptive to these prayer camps and ‘pray-for-me’ prophets. Was it them? You all seem to me to be solid, pal. Rational. What happened?”

If Beam was expecting a defensive reaction from the women, he was disappointed. Randa remained impassive; like a lump of clay.

Cora muttered, “That should tell you the extent of our despair. We were three extremely desperate siblings.”

Beam cast Randa another look. She was the only one who had still not spoken. Self-assured and somewhat mysterious, something about Randa scared him. Beam shuddered at the thought of falling on her wrong side. Her pretty face shielded a deep and collected mind. A master planner. He directed his next question to her, knowing she might not oblige him with an answer.

“Why didn’t you send her to the Psychiatric Hospital?”

As Beam had expected, it was rather Kweku who responded. “Oh, we did. She was well taken care of there. But there were complex complications, just too many. Her medication helped greatly, but we had to bring her home. Presently I am the only one not living at home. Cora and Randa still live there. And they ensured that she took her medicine religiously.”

“So how did she end up here?”

Kweku sighed. “She fell sick. Seriously sick. We thought she was

going to die. So we began preparing ourselves for the worst.”

“Her funeral?”

“Yes.”

“And?”

“The problems started.”

“With relatives?”

“No. Dreams.”

“Dreams?”

“Yes. Cora started having a haunting, vivid recurring dream, in which Ma had died and had been buried. We held a fine funeral for her but her spirit remained restless, hovering the earth and shedding tears because of what we, her children had done.”

Beam frowned. He was so bewildered by Kweku’s pronouncements that all he could do was stare agape, completely lost for words.

“In Cora’s dreams, we held a fine funeral for Ma, a funeral with flowers!”

Kweku went on.

“What?” Beam recovered instantly from his speechlessness.

“Yes. A fine funeral, with flowers at her bedside, flowers in church, wreaths on her grave.”

The strangest smile crossed Beam’s face. “Come again, pal! Please. I am not getting you at all. Flowers?”

“Yes. Flowers.”

Beam chuckled, too perplexed. “Pal, I am sorry but this doesn’t make sense. What is it with flowers? And in which part of this world is a funeral held without flowers?”

“See the insanity of it?” Kweku moaned, “Are you now beginning to understand why three... to borrow your own words... sane and solid adults did something so insane as bring their mother to this prayer camp?” His eyes watered. “Be it a single white rose,

a bunch of rich red roses, a carpet of bougainvilleas, a field of sunflowers, violets...whatever...our mother sets eyes on them, and she is sparked off.”

Beam’s shock tripled. “Your mother’s trigger element is flowers?”

Kweku looked into the fast disappearing distance from the moving van. “That is how sane and rational people can be drawn and driven to act insane and irrationally.”

“Or maybe no one is really ever completely sane.” Cora came in at last, “Maybe, each and every one of us has a little bit of insanity in us.”

“It was my wife’s sister who convinced us about this place,” Kweku resumed, “But we don’t blame her. Before we brought Ma there, we attended some of their miracle services. People testified so positively about the many healings that had occurred there. Our thought was to simply try it out there and see. If it worked, fine. If it didn’t, we would simply take her away. And we were given the impression there would be no complications. We decided unanimously. We may have also been driven by and blinded by our desperation. Or maybe too, deep down, we suspected and were afraid of some answers that might have come up if we probed too much. Answers that would have given us good cause not to bring her here. But we were at our wits end and unprepared for any reason not to try it out. Our options were too few for us to start cancelling some even before we had tried them out. How could we have a funeral without flowers for her when she died? Yet we couldn’t ignore the dreams Cora started having. Had we chosen to disregard them, it would have become a cross we would have had to carry for the rest of our lives. The cross of having offended Ma’s soul and wondering if her spirit had found eternal rest.”

“In other words, everything was arranged to enable you to

have a funeral with flowers for her one day?” Beam asked, and was given a shock by the voice that came in, Randa’s.

“You trivialize it the way you put it!” she accused. “Everything was geared toward having our Ma healed.”

Beam, taken completely off guard, stuttered, “Of course...of course.”

Randa sniped further, “Do you know that a whole lot of the world’s highly intelligent people end up in mental institutions? No! Let me put it the other way round. Do you know that many of the world’s geniuses were at a point in their lives known to have belonged to a mental institution?”

Beam could only stare at Randa and nod gravely. The very pretty young woman gave him the chills.

“If a crisis is triggered,” Randa went on, “and at the height of the mentally sick person’s insanity, she spells out in a very sane manner, what, to her insane mind, would free her of the triggering element of her insanity...”

“Randa!!!” Cora snapped.

Randa shut up immediately, like a child realizing she had already talked too much.

Beam knew when not to pursue a line of questioning.

Kweku said, “Pal, you were brought in to write about the camp and expose their deception. You have enough material, I think.”

Beam thought otherwise. He wasn’t into writing generalized stories. Specifics were his hallmark: he had no photos, his information was sketchy and inadequate and incomplete. His instincts fed him a strong message that the crux of the matter was yet to unfold. And he trusted that reporter’s instinct of his. He posed his last question. “Randa, I learnt that this van belongs to your boyfriend?”

Randa was clearly surprised at Beam’s interest in the owner of

the van. But Beam was being directed by his reporter's instinct, guiding with its longer reaching nose.

"Yes. Dam." Randa confirmed curtly.

"Dam? As in the barrier that holds back the flow of water?"

"No, as in Damian shortened."

"So he is a transport owner?"

"No, he works with his father. He assists in the running of his father's business."

"Do you know where it is located?"

"In their home."

"Do you know the home?"

Randa became defensive. "Why all these questions? What has Dam got to do with the camp?"

Beam smiled. "This van, his van, played a very important role in the rescue operation of your Ma. Don't you think he deserves to be mentioned and acknowledged? Can't you see the significance? That, but for the fact that Dam had a van suitable for this kind of operation, you may have been compelled to go and look for one elsewhere and bring in other people into the plan. Which could have endangered the whole rescue attempt."

He won Randa over. "I don't know their home."

Beam frowned.

Randa went on quickly to explain. "We are very much in love with each other, but at the moment, I am not welcome in their home. Dam is dependent on his father, and his father has been trying to get him interested in the daughter of a business associate. So he won't take kindly to our relationship. Dam is hoping to establish his own business soon. Then when he is no longer dependent on his father, he will take me home and damn the consequences."

Beam nodded and closed the chapter.

The rest of the ride continued in silence.