The Girl With the Louding Voice
To my mother, Professor Teju Somorin, not just because you are smart and beautiful and became the first female professor of taxation in Nigeria in 2019, but also because you made me see the importance of education, and sacrificed so much for me to get the best of it.
Prologue

Nigeria is a country located in West Africa. With a population of just under 180 million people, it is the 7th most populous country in the world, which means that 1 in 7 Africans is a Nigerian. As the 6th largest crude oil exporter in the world, and with a GDP of $568.5 billion, Nigeria is the richest country in Africa. Sadly, over a 100 million Nigerians live in poverty, surviving on less than $1 a day.

Chapter 1

This morning, Papa call me inside the parlour.

He was sitting inside the sofa with no cushion and looking me. Papa have this way of looking me one kind. As if he wants to be flogging me for no reason, as if I am carrying shit inside my cheeks and when I open mouth to talk, the whole place be smelling of it.

‘Sah?’ I say, kneeling down and putting my hand in my back. ‘You call me?’

‘Come close,’ Papa say.

I know he want to tell me something bad. I can see it inside his eyes; his eyeballs have the dull of a brown stone that been sitting inside hot sun for too long. He have the same eyes when he was telling me, three years ago, that I must stop my educations. That time, I was the most old of all in my class and all the children was always calling me ‘Aunty’. I tell you true, the day I stop school and the day my mama was dead is the worst day of my life.

When Papa ask me to move closer, I am not answering him because our parlour is the small of a Mazda car. Did he want me to move closer and be kneeling inside his mouth? So, I kneel in the same place and wait for him to be talking his mind.

Papa make a noise with his throat and lean on the wood back of the sofa with no cushion. The cushion have spoil because our last born, Kayus, he have done too many piss inside it. Since the boy was a baby, he been pissing as if it is a curse. The piss mess the cushion, so Mama make Kayus to be sleeping on it for pillow.

We have a tee-vee in our parlour; it didn’t work. Born-boy, our first born, he find the tee-vee inside dustbin two years back
when he was working a job as dustbin-collector officer in

the next village. We are only putting it there for fashion. It is looking
good, sitting like a handsome prince inside our parlour, in the
corner beside the front door. We are even putting a small flower
vase on top it; be like a crown on the prince head. When we have
a visitor, Papa will be doing as if it is working and be saying,
‘Adunni, come and put evening news for Mr Bada to watch.’
And me, I will be responding, ‘Papa, the remote-controlling is
missing.’ Then Papa will shake his head and say to Mr Bada,
‘Those useless children, they have lost the remote controlling
again. Come, let us sit outside, drink and forget the sorrows of
our country, Nigeria.’

Mr Bada must be a big fool if he didn’t know that it is a lie.

We have one standing fan too, two of the fan-blade is missing
so it is always blowing air which is making the whole parlour too
hot. Papa like to be sitting in front of the fan in the evening,
crossing his feet at his ankles and drinking from the bottle that
have become his wife since Mama have dead.

‘Adunni, your Mama have dead,’ Papa say after a moment. I
can smell the drink on his body as he is talking. Even when Papa
didn’t drink, his skin and sweat still smell.

‘Yes Papa. I know,’ I say. Why is he telling me something I
have already know? Something that have cause a hole inside
my heart and fill it with block of pain that I am dragging with
me to everywhere? How can I ever be forgetting how my mama
was coughing blood, red and thick with spit bubbles, inside my
hand every day for three months? When I am closing my eyes
to sleep at night, I still see the blood, sometimes I taste the salt
of it.

‘I know Papa,’ I say again. ‘Have another something bad
happen?’

Papa sigh. ‘They have told us to be going.’

‘To be going to where?’ Sometimes I have worry for Papa.
Since Mama have dead, he keep saying things that didn’t make
sense and sometimes he talk to hisself, cry to hisself too when
he think nobody is hearing.
'You want me to fetch water for your morning bath?' I ask. 'There is morning food too, fresh bread with sweet groundnut.'

'Community rent is thirty thousand naira,' Papa say. 'If we cannot pay the money, we must find another place to live.' Thirty thousand naira is very plenty money. I know Papa cannot find that money even if he is searching the whole of the Nigeria because even my school fees money of seven thousand, Papa didn't have. It was Mama who was paying for school fees and rent money and feeding money and everything money before she was dead.

'Where we will find that kind money?' I ask.

'Morufu,' Papa say. 'You know him? He come here yesterday. To see me.'

'Morufu the taxi driver?' Morufu is a old man taxi driver in our village with the face of a he-goat. Apart from his two wives, Morufu is having four childrens that didn't go to school. They just be running around the village stream in their dirty pant, pulling sugar cartons with string, playing sueke and clapping their hand until the skin about to peel off. Why was Morufu visiting our house? What was he finding?

'Yes,' Papa say with a tight smile. 'He is a good man, that Morufu. He surprise me yesterday when he say he will pay community rent for us. All the thirty thousand.'

'That is good?' I ask the question because it didn't make sense. Because I know that no man will be paying for another somebody's rent unless he is wanting something. Why will Morufu pay our community rent? What was he wanting? Or is he owing Papa money from before in the past? I look my papa, my eyes filling with hope that it is not the thing I am thinking. 'Papa?'

'Yes.' Papa wait, swallow spit and wipe his front head sweat. 'The rent money is . . . is among your owo-ori.'

'My owo-ori? You mean my bride price?' My heart is starting to break because I am only fourteen years going fifteen and I am not marrying any foolish stupid old man because I am wanting to go back to school and learn teacher work and become a adult woman and have moneys to be driving car and living in fine
house with cushion sofa and be helping my papa and my two
brothers. I don’t want to marry any mens or any boys or any
another person forever so I ask Papa again, talking real slow so
he will be catching every word I am saying and not mistaking
me in his answer: ‘Papa, is this bride price for me or for another
person?’

And my papa, he nod his head slowly slow, not minding the
tears standing in my eyes or the opening wide of my mouth, as
he is saying: ‘The bride price is for you, Adunni. You will be
marrying Morufu next week.’