

LOST CHILDREN

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EXT. A BUSY STREET - DAY

A young teenage girl, BLESSING, is walking along the road, balancing squarely on her head a tray containing oranges, which she is hawking.

She is walking playfully, unaware of the neat sport car following her.

BLESSING
(hawking)
Orange! Sweet orange!

The sport car pulls over slowly, cutting her off the road. The car horns and Blessing, walks up to the car.

The car window rolls down, to reveal a sturdy man behind the wheel. This is OBINNA. He is in his mid thirties, tall, and well built. He is on low cut, clean shaved and he is putting on a dark suit.

OBINNA
How do you sell your orange?

He is soft spoken, talking like he is afraid to talk. Blessing brings down the tray from her head and balances it on the car's window pane.

BLESSING
Three for hundred naira.

OBINNA
Sell me two hundred naira.

The young hawker quickly packages the oranges in a black nylon bag and offers it to Obinna.

Obinna brings out his wallet, and start going through the money inside. Even though there are smaller denominations in the wallet, he brings out a thousand naira note and points it at the girl.

BLESSING
Oga, I no get change o. I never
sell since morning.

OBINNA
But this is all I've got. What do
we do?

BLESSING
(firmly)
I no get change.

She returns the orange back to her tray, lifts up her tray and starts to walk away.

Obinna horns twice and she returns.

BLESSING (CONT'D)

I don't tell you na, I no get change.

OBINNA

Tell you what? Why don't you come to my office and sell to my colleagues?

(pause)

In this hot afternoon, I'm sure they will devour all the oranges.

Blessing's face becomes perplexed; she is considering the offer carefully while trying so hard to avoid Obinna's gaze.

OBINNA (CONT'D)

If your orange is sweet, you can be coming regularly to sell for us at the office instead of stressing yourself roaming around the town aimlessly.

Awkward silence. They are both staring at each other's eyes.

BLESSING

Where your office dey?

OBINNA

Not too far from here. Get in the car and let's go.

Blessing is looking undecided.

OBINNA (CONT'D)

If you know the office now - you can always be coming every afternoon, no need for hawking inside this hot sun -

(he stares at his wrist watch)

I'm already late. I should have been back from lunch about an hour ago.

He unlocks the car and opens the back door for her. She drops her tray at the back and enters the car.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE CELL - EVENING

The room is dingy. There is no visible window. The only source of light is a single yellow bulb hanging very low in the middle of the room.

There is a table at the centre of the room, with two chairs.

Obinna is sitting on one of the chairs. His face is bruised and swollen. His hands are cuffed behind his back. Dried blood stains are visible on his lips and his right eyelid. He is looking dreamily, like he is on drugs.

Sitting in the other chair is a thick man, with a slight pot belly. His shirt is immaculate white; clean without any stain and neatly tucked in his police khaki trousers. This is DETECTIVE.

The Detective slaps Obinna awake. He becomes alert.

DETECTIVE

So, what happen next? What next?

OBINNA

I normally take them to the warehouse.

CUT TO:

EXT. A SECLUDED HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Obinna is dragging Blessing along a path towards the house with one hand, while using the other hand to lick an orange. She is wailing, crying, trying to set herself free. But she's no match for Obinna who is barely bothered by her resistance.

OBINNA

No one will hear you from here.
Please save your energy. Save it
for what's coming later.

Blessing let out another dry, long and croaky cry.

BLESSING

I beg you in the name of God.
Please let me go. Please!

Obinna, whistling, continues to drag her to the house.

When he gets to the door, two burly men come out of the house. Obinna signals to one of them to take Blessing.

OBINNA

Take her to the general holdings.
She might join batch B later -
we'll sort it out after I'm done
here.

One of the burly men lifts Blessing and hauls her off into the house.

The other guy taps Obinna on his shoulder. He is tall, dark and heavy. His face is strong, too strong and there are many scars on his face. This is SAGE.

SAGE
 (fearfully)
 There is a little problem, sir!

OBINNA
 What is it?

SAGE
 Um, sir, some of the goods - we are
 guessing - has ran off.

OBINNA
 What?!
 (angrily)
 How the hell did that happen? What
 were you doing?

He starts to walk fast across the room, heading for the
 general holding. Sage tails him.

SAGE
 One of the guards forgot to lock
 the door. We caught some of them in
 the -

OBINNA
 (cuts in)
 Just a simple task and it was too
 much for you to handle! You can't
 handle little children?!

SAGE
 I'm so sorry, sir.

They get to the holding room and Sage scurries to unlock the
 door.

INT. GENERAL HOLDING - CONTINUOUS

The room is dark and bleak. Twenty or more children are
 stuffed into the room. They are all looking terrified and
 scared.

Obinna and Sage are staring at them through the door.

OBINNA
 Search the whole forest inch to
 inch.

SAGE
 We've done that already...

OBINNA
 Then, do it again!

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - CONTINUOUS

Sage and some other guards are scampering around the forest.

Not too far from there, a little boy of about fourteen is lying down, shaking with fright. His eyes are moist with tears.

Suddenly, he pushes himself up and starts to sprint as fast as his legs can carry him.

EXT. A DESERTED STREET - CONTINUOUS

The boy is still running. He is almost out of breath. His legs are wobbly, but he keeps running.

He keeps pushing on till his legs give way, hit a stone, and he falls with a loud THUD.

A man wearing khaki trouser runs to him to help him up. The boy grabs his legs and burst into cry.

The boy looks up to see the Detective dusting the scrubs and dirt off his clothes.

DETECTIVE

What is it, boy?

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE CELL - EVENING

DETECTIVE

What is it, boy?

Obinna tries to speak, but he starts to cough.

The Detective brings out a bottled water and a glass cup from under the table. He pours a small amount of water into the glass cup and covers the bottle. He gauges the cup and pour some of the water away until it remains a ridiculously tiny amount of water left in the cup. He offers the glass cup to Obinna.

Obinna grabs it and gulps down the water. He starts to dab the cup on his tongue insatiably.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)

Now speak up! Who is this Madam Kofo?

CUT TO:

INT. SITTING ROOM - DAY

The sitting room is very large. Highly decorated and fancy.

A woman, dressed heavily in a native attire, is sitting on a cushion chair. She is in her early fifties and she is putting on too much make up. This is MADAM KOFO.

Obinna walks into the room with five thin girls filing behind him. The girls are all looking scared and frightened. One of them, the youngest, has tears on her face. MARY, the oldest of the girls, is fourteen years old.

All of the girls are made up in what appears to be a rushed make over session.

MADAM KOFO

What took you so long? I have other places I have to go. I don't have time.

OBINNA

Mama no vex. I took my time to prepare them for you.

Madame Kofo, rolling her eyes, hiss at him.

MADAM KOFO

Which kind yeye preparation be that?

(eyeing the girls)

What is the meaning of the yeye make up you put on their faces?

OBINNA

I just want them to look the part.

(pause)

What's wrong with that?

MADAM KOFO

What part? My customers don't want all these - my customers want innocent little virgin.

OBINNA

So, they should wipe it off their faces?

MADAM KOFO

Yes.

The girls start to cleanup their faces; some using the back of their hands, other using their shirts.

Madam Kofo drags Mary nearer to herself and she starts to inspect her.

MADAM KOFO (CONT'D)
 (to Mary)
 Open your mouth.

Mary complies.

She inspects her mouth continues to poke the little girl.

MADAM KOFO (CONT'D)
 How old are you?

MARY
 Fourteen years old, ma

MADAM KOFO
 (to Obinna)
 Look at them - they are so thin.
 With the kind of money you are
 making, you can't even afford to
 feed them properly?

OBINNA
 Hunger calms them and make them a
 lot more easier to control. They
 eat only once in day.

(pause)
 So, what do you say? You see
 anything you like?

MADAM KOFO
 I want the five of them!

OBINNA
 (excitedly)
 Mama mama. Business is moving, I
 see. So the same amount?

MADAM KOFO
 (cuts him short)
 Shhhhhh...Not in front of them.

OBINNA
 (shrugs)
 Alright!
 (to the children)
 Go back to your room, I'll be with
 you very soon.

The girls file out of the room.

OBINNA (CONT'D)
 Yes. Mama, you know how we do this.
 Fifty thousand naira per head.

MADAM KOFO
 I want discount!

OBINNA

Discount? In this our business? You want discount?

MADAM KOFO

One of the girls you sent to me last time killed herself. Another one got very sick and died -

OBINNA

(angrily)

And that's my business, how? Those are not my concern. You should learn to take care of your goods. I can't do that for you. Do you know how many I've lost myself?

(pause)

Mama, pay up, and stop wasting my time. You are not the only one that has things to do.

Just then, Sage walks into the room.

OBINNA (CONT'D)

What is it, Sage? As you can see - I'm in the middle of something. Is it the Chief again?

SAGE

No. The director needs your attention. The girl no wan cooperate.

Obinna muses over the new information for a few seconds and signals for Sage to wait.

OBINNA

(standing up)

Mama, how is it going to be? Do we have a deal?

Madam Kofo stands up too.

MADAM KOFO

I will get you the money tomorrow. Prepare the girls for me.

Obinna, smiling, offers his hand to the woman. They shake hands.

OBINNA

No problem, Mama. Don't forget, come around eight to nine pm.

(to Sage)

Sage, see mama to the gate. I'll be in the studio.

Sage nods and escorts Madam Kofo out of the room while Obinna makes his way to another room.

CUT TO:

INT. STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

The room is a normal bedroom, but it has been converted to a make shift studio.

There are several studio lights on their different stands scattered around the room. Most of them are turned on; while some are not.

A young man is standing behind a DSLR camera on a tripod, while another man is holding a boom pole; with a mic on it.

There is a large bed in the centre of the room with several fluffy pillows.

A young girl, not more than 12 years old, is sitting on the edge of the bed, with her hands on her face, sobbing softly. She is wearing a very skimpy white piece of costume, and an elastic band is holding a flowery bow on her head.

Another man, middle aged, also in white, is lying on the bed, close to the little girl.

Another man, holding some A4 papers, supposedly the Director, is pacing around the room restlessly.

And as Obinna enters the room...

DIRECTOR

(shouting; talking fast)

What's the meaning of this, Obi?
We've been here for the past thirty
minutes, without achieving
anything? The girl has been crying!
You said -

OBINNA

(gently and firmly)

Keep quiet!

Obinna walks to the bed, with calculated steps, pauses for a few seconds, then sits on the bed. He straightens the bed spread around him.

He gently lifts the girl to his knees. He adjust the bow on her head and wipes the tears off her face.

OBINNA (CONT'D)

(softly)

Listen to me. Do you know what
happen to disobedient child around
here?

The girl starts to cry.

OBINNA (CONT'D)
Don't cry now. Please, don't. Do
you want to see your father again?

She nods.

OBINNA (CONT'D)
Do you want to see your brothers
and your sisters and your mother
again?

She nods.

OBINNA (CONT'D)
Do as this man says -
(he points at the
director)
- and you will be returned to your
family safely.
(pause)
It's just a film. Something the
adults love. No one will hurt you,
they just want to play with you.

He places the girl on the bed gently and starts to walk out
of the room. When he gets to the door...

OBINNA (CONT'D)
(to the director)
Give her five minutes.

Obinna walks out of the room, drying his face with a
handkerchief.

Just then, Sage walks up to meet him with a worried look.

OBINNA (CONT'D)
What's the problem again this time,
Sage?

SAGE
It is Chief. His boys are around!

OBINNA
(waving it off)
That fetish old man. I'll deal with
him and his goons later.

SAGE
They are already here - what do you
want me to do with them?

OBINNA
I don't know. Do as you always do,
just think of something -

SAGE
This is the third time!

OBINNA
And so what, Sage? I have many
other people I'm dealing with.

He turns sharply to face Sage.

OBINNA (CONT'D)
You know how it is na, these things
don't just fall from heaven. They
are so many people that wants the
same thing - See, I still have to
deal with Madam Kofo and Alhaji.

SAGE
What should I tell them when they
come next?

Obinna looks at Sage for a few seconds, smiles and walks and
walks away.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE CELL - EVENING

DETECTIVE
What exactly does the Chief wants
from you?

OBINNA
You should ask him yourself. Is he
also not in custody?

DETECTIVE
I'm asking you!

CUT TO:

INT. SITTING ROOM - EVENING

Obinna is having a meeting with the Chief; a fifty something
years old man. He is richly dressed in Agbada. Two of his
henchmen are standing behind him.

Sage walks into the room with a young boy of about 15. The
boy is wearing only shorts, and he is trying hard not to cry.

OBINNA
Do you see how healthy he is,
Chief?
(to the boy)
(MORE)

OBINNA (CONT'D)

Come on boy, show Chief how strong
and healthy you are.

The boy looks confused.

CHIEF

Enough of your theatrics, Obinna, I
still have my sights. I can see he
is healthy.

(coughs)

But how that is important to me - I
don't know. I only need the head
and I need it yesterday!

Obinna gives Sage a signal. Sage nods his head twice and
walks up behind the little boy.

With all the force he could summons, Sage hits the boy at the
back of his neck. The boy goes limp and falls with a THUD.

Obinna signals to Sage. Sage lifts the boy and starts to walk
out of the room.

OBINNA

And as agreed, and I'm just
reminding you, I want the money in
dollars. It's easier for me to
transfer. You see, the market is
getting really -

Before he can finish his statement...

The door burst open and five police officers swarm into the
room. And the Detective joins them swiftly.

DETECTIVE

(screaming)

Stay where you are every body!
Don't move. If you move, we'll
shoot you dead!

Obinna sprints across the room, but he isn't fast enough for
one of the police officers who dives at him and wrestle him
to the floor.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)

I repeat; do not move! You are all
under arrest!

(to his team)

Secure them all. You and you, go
and check the rest of the house.

FADE TO:

INT. POLICE CELL - EVENING

OBINNA
That's everything. Now you have the whole story!

DETECTIVE
(laughing)
I'm sure!

OBINNA
What? Why are you laughing? You promised!

The Detective continues to laugh, while Obinna begins to struggle with his handcuffs and chair trying to get close to the detective.

OBINNA (CONT'D)
You promised! You said you would make things easier for me if I tell you everything.

DETECTIVE
(slowly)
In case the full extent of your crime has not occurred to you - let me break it down for you slowly.
(pause)
You are going to spend the rest of your life in jail.