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# *God of the Mind*

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The lights hanging over Dorothy's face were bright; she tried to open her eyes wider but couldn't because the LED lamps directly above her face emitted blinding white light.

Dorothy felt the soothing warm radiant rays of light bounce off her face. Still in a lucid state she heard what sounded like a metal door clank open; almost immediately a rush of cool sterile air swept into the room. The cool air that swept past her skin made her aware that she was completely naked and lying on her back on some kind of operating table. She was barely conscious although she could pick up the faint smell of astringents and other disinfectants in the air. She had lost track of time, with no idea where she was or how long she had been kept in that state.

Admitted under quarantine, the only way to slow the spread of the deadly virus within her blood was to keep her heavily sedated.

Gasping to breathe in the cool air, she felt a needle penetrate her right forearm. The sudden sharp pain was excruciating almost as if the needle point found its way to her ulna and penetrated her bone. She tilted her head in the direction of the pain, her vision was blurry but she managed to visualize a figure in white clothing; she looked carefully but couldn't identify the person that had just given her an injection because it was clad in full protective gear from head to toe.

'Calm down sweetness everything will be alright I have good news for you; today we received supplies of the experimental cure from a pharmaceutical company, Chimerix. I hope it's not too late to save you,' The suit said with a crude masculine voice while fondling her exposed breast. The unidentified man was using his protective biohazard suit to his cynical advantage. He pinched and twisted her nipple aggressively and bent low over her torso as if to examine her bust more carefully.

Despite it all, Dorothy felt a glimmer of hope and assurance knowing that the experimental drug was her only chance of survival.

'Where is my husband... where is my family?' Dorothy muttered.

She got no response from the unidentified man; he ignored her and maneuvered around the operating room collecting vials of drugs and

prepping what seemed to be unusually long syringes.

The silence made her fears more vivid; could my loved ones have died while I was sleeping? At the time when she was being quarantined. If my family is dead, it is better for me to die and join them in paradise.

She tried to sit up but her neck and back felt numb; her entire body felt like a heavy stone, unable to move she tried to wiggle her toes but to no avail. The sedatives used to keep Dorothy in a vegetative state since her arrival at this place had rendered her immobile. Only her tongue seemed able to move around although with much difficulty.

In a moment the drug begun to run its course. Dorothy suddenly felt light headed and very faint. Being a trained pharmacist; Dorothy's professional experience with medicine and chemicals gave her an intuitive awareness that she was experiencing the effects of propofol or serax, both local but powerful anesthetics.

The drug in her body had strong psychotropic effects, she felt herself float out of consciousness back into a lucid state, she felt like she was dying and muttered a prayer under her breath,

'Father in Heaven... Please watch over me... Please save my life...'

But before she could conclude her prayer, she recalled all that had happened to her. With contempt and resentment in her weak voice she muttered;

'Ah... To hell with you... God.'

Dorothy wanted nothing to do with religion; she felt betrayed by His negligence. His abandonment was too much to bear. God was nothing but a stale lie that was taught to ignorant people.

Her husband of thirteen years and her two beautiful children lost their lives because of God, she chose to believe in God and instead he took everything from her and continued to ignore her cries. A warm tear rolled out of her left eye onto her cold skin.

Why has God forsaken me?

The drug slowly worked its way around Dorothy's body, initially she welcomed its sedative effects which gave her a much needed calmness, she felt a blissful euphoria and wished she could be in that state forever.

Without warning her body became active, suddenly Dorothy begun to convulse and jerk violently atop the operating table, the sudden burst of energy surprised her.

The reaction was unexpected.

The man in the biohazard suit used all his might to restrain her. This time his hands were fidgeting around her bust but she didn't feel disrespected.

She knew he was only trying to help her.

'She's reacting to the anesthetic, get that experimental drug ready right now. The window period lasts less than half an hour. We must not hesitate or we will lose her!' He yelled orders to the next room.

Dorothy lost control, not only of her body but of her mind; she could no longer control her own thoughts. She had begun to hallucinate. Vivid old memories surfaced without invitation, disconnected from everything happening to her on the operating table.

Like a lucid dream, the hallucination quickly swallowed her consciousness. She was taken back to the dreadful night; the night when all hell broke loose.

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It was a rainy night in October; at the junction of Chilimbulu road and Mosi-o-tunya road, the stage was set and the Woodlands Stadium in the densely populated suburb of Woodlands was bursting at the seams with ecstatic crowds that gathered for the themed Zambia Miracle Healing Night. Large crowds thronged the stadium as people clamored for the tight space not wanting to miss a touch from God. Amid the euphoria, prophet Sylvester Chishimba trotted up the stage, raising the dynamic microphone he shouted, 'Zambia you are blessed!'

In response to the prophet; shouts of "Amen, Yes Lord... Hallelujah" echoed through the humid stadium as people raised their hands. A few minutes after taking stage, the prophet, also fondly known as Bwana briskly came down and walked among the people preaching and prophesying to his followers about how they will find lasting marriages or good paying jobs from the Government.

Bwana was renowned for healing miracles. As he ministered; the prophet encouraged everyone to look to the sky and chant prayers to God instead of looking at him.

'It is only God who will transform your lives and heal your diseases, it is not me. So keep your eyes to the skies and pray he answers you.' He said.

Throughout the night there were testimonies and miracles performed by the prophet.

The crowd was amused and energetic.

Suddenly a galling scream echoed as a man burst forward sprinting towards the stage screaming for help!

'Speak to me what bothers you my child?' said the Bwana while the visibly agitated stranger climbed the stage.

'I have Ebola man of God; my family and I are infected. Please Bwana lay your righteous hand on us and heal us. I don't want to die!

The dire statement sent the crowd into frenzy.

More people screamed and complained bitterly.

'Ah I thought they said no Ebola victims will be allowed in the stadium, now we are all doomed.' Said an obese dark woman, the woman had just testified to have been cured of AIDS symptoms a few hours before when the prophet laid his hand on her head.

'Run for your life, Ebola is here. We are going to die in here tonight. Run as fast as you can!' the screams of a smartly dressed gentleman as he made haste for the exit with frightening agility.

The prophet was awe struck, prior to the prayer night he made sure to pay a lot of money on security to keep all Ebola victims out, he wondered how they managed to get in. But it was too late; even he realized that not even his miracles or supernatural powers could save him once he contracted the deadly virus.

The crowd panicked, it was almost as if the Woodlands Stadium had been set ablaze, people of all ages were running and screaming. Some children were trampled and those that came under the guise of seeking physical healing had abandoned their wheelchairs and crutches taking to their feet.

Prophet Chishimba decided to end the night of prayer abruptly after trying to calm the crowds that were getting riotous by the minute, his appeals were in vain and without saying anything else; he pushed the infected man aside and jumped off the stage.

Sprinting towards the stadium exit, agitated and desperately looking out for his security personnel to cover his unceremonious escape.

Without warning a firm hand grasped his ankle, the grip was so tight it sent a pang of pain up his entire leg all the way up to the pelvis.

'Man of God please heal us, my name is Dorothy and that is my husband Henry, we have Ebola and our children are dying too. Please have mercy on us Bwana.'

'Get away from me you witch! How dare you come here tonight? Who sent you to sabotage my prophetic night? Get out and let go of me!' The prophet yelled while violently jerking his foot from Dorothy's grip.

Dorothy felt a heavy thump on the back of her neck. She looked up to see a security guard holding a metal pipe.

Dorothy held on tightly to the prophet and begged him to heal her.

'Man of God be merciful on me and my family, please heal us we are dying.'

The prophet felt relief when he saw his security guard arrive; without thinking twice he raised his free foot as high as he could and made sure that the heel of his brown leather shoe landed on Dorothy's forehead. He raised his foot several more times and stomped on the defenseless woman's head as hard as he could until he was certain she had let his ankle loose.

Dorothy was confused and sobbing, thick mucus oozed out of her mouth and nostrils, her forehead was bleeding; she was in shock and could hardly believe the words she heard pour from the prophet's mouth, she felt entirely alone and knew with certainty that she was going to die. The blood kept pouring and finally made its way into her mouth. Dorothy was disgusted at the taste and smell of her warm blood.

At age thirty-seven; a qualified pharmacist, Dorothy was married to a Pentecostal Pastor; Henry Mufwidakule seven years her senior. Together with their children they lived a peaceful life in the serene suburbs of Woodlands Extension. Their peace was broken in the winter month of July when the Ministry of Information through the state owned media Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation announced to the nation the grave news that government hospitals in Lusaka had confirmed reports of Ebola.

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It was a busy Monday morning like always; the children were getting ready for school while Dorothy packed their afternoon meal. Henry walked into the lounge and turned on the television set.

Dorothy paused from her routine activity to attentively listen to the news.

*"In other news related to Ebola, The West African country Sierra Leone has recorded 315 deaths from Ebola and scores of new infections in one of the deadliest days since the infectious disease appeared in West Africa more than seven months ago. The figure, which covered the period through Saturday, has put the total*

*number of deaths at 1680, up from 1365 the day before. The daily statistics compiled by Sierra Leone's Emergency Operations Centre also showed 191 new cases of the hemorrhagic fever."*

Dorothy picked up the remote and increased the volume a few decibels.

'Hmmm Henry my love; are you listening to this news broadcast? This outbreak is wreaking havoc.'

The news caster continued to disseminate the disheartening information with such a calm and indifferent steadiness of tone.

*"...And a family of six has died in Kabwe's Makululu township after an outbreak of Marburg, a highly infectious hemorrhagic fever similar to Ebola, Central Province authorities said on Sunday, adding that a total of 150 people who came into contact with members of the family had been put under quarantine. There is no vaccine or specific treatment for the Marburg virus which is transmitted through bodily fluids such as saliva and blood. Marburg starts with a severe headache followed by hemorrhaging and leads to death in 70% or more of cases in about five days, it is from the same family of virus as Ebola which has killed thousands throughout Africa in recent months."*

Dorothy clasped Henry's hand.

'Marburg? What is going on? These are surely the last days, Africa is overrun with disease and infection, when will our savior return from the Heavens to take us home?

Now we have confirmed cases in Zambia? May God deliver us!'

Henry took the remote control device from his wife and pulled her closer to himself, 'Honey, all these diseases are just a way of being tested, God is coming to take us to Heaven soon and He is testing our faith. Stay strong and be steadfast in prayer. Those with faith will not only avoid being infected but we will cast out the demons that are causing these diseases.'

Dorothy shrugged.

'Lushomo! Come here son.' Henry summoned his son.

In a moment the energetic young lad came rushing into the room.

'Yes papa.'

'Lusho; when you are of age, I want you to be a preacher. I want you to deliver our people from Satan our great enemy. The bible says that a child must honor his parents for his days on the earth to be plenty. If you disobey my wishes your days on earth will be short. Do you want to die young?'

The boy gave no answer, he was shy. However, he enjoyed having

scripture and biblical discussions with his father.

'Answer your father Lushomo! Do you want to die young?'

'No mummy. I want to live long like you and daddy.'

'Good boy! So if you want to live long like us, make sure to obey what the bible says and honor our wishes Ok?' Henry chipped in.

'Yes daddy.'

'You are going to become a pastor when you grow older. Just like your father.' Dorothy added.

A few days later it was reported on the newspapers that three victims in the outskirts of Lusaka city were reported to have succumbed to an unknown infectious disease and died before any medical personnel could reach them. The entire nation was in panic but Henry was indifferent to the crisis, he was always insisting that Ebola was just a test of faith from God to discern his true followers; he would constantly say to Dorothy and the children, 'Ebola will do us no harm, it has come to devour the sinners and only those of strong faith will withstand it and be able to cast out the demon that cause the sickness.'

Henry allowed infected people to attend their church, he charged them a fee when he accommodated the infected in their family home for prayers, and some would stay for as long as one entire week.

After several weeks he eventually realized his prayers did little to cure the victims. A young woman died while in his home and soon after that Henry was exhibiting the symptoms. In a matter of days his wife Dorothy and his daughter Grace were showing signs of fever and sickness.

It was then that Henry's decided to bring his entire family to the Woodlands Stadium seeking miracle healing from a famed miracle healer hosting a healing night.

That fateful evening, Henry and Dorothy purposefully overdosed themselves and their two children with ibuprofen tablets so as to lower their feverish body temperatures so they could be allowed in the stadium. The stadium security was equipped with laser thermometers and refused to admit anybody that had a body temperature above 38degrees Celsius.

After hours of being inside the stadium. Henry left his family in an attempt to get the prophets attention.

'Dorothy stay here with the children. I have to run up there or else he will not notice our agony.'

He gathered his strength; took a deep breath; let out a loud galling

scream and darted for the center of the stage screaming for help!

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Dorothy snapped out of her nostalgic trance and spotted her mourning husband atop the stage in the middle of the stadium; she slowly walked to him, evading the escaping people with serpentine movement until she got to where he lay.

'Henry please take us home. Yahweh has rejected us my love. Let us go and die very far from this place.'

'No my wife, God will punish this thief for using his name in vain, how could he refuse to heal me? I paid money for the tickets. I welcomed the sick to my own home in the name of God, but why has my family been rejected?' he said amid sobs.

Dorothy lay next to her sobbing husband and put her arm around his torso, she had no words to console him, she knew he was in pain not just because of the infection but because he had realized with bitterness that he had been living a complete lie, he was serving a God of the mind, a mighty God that existed only in the mind of a believer.

Henry was agonizing at losing his faith in God.

That night, scores of people lost their lives in the stampede that ensued. Dorothy was in pain, her husband was equally in pain despite. Desperately they searched for their two children. After many hours of calling and wading through corpses there was still no sign of either Lushomo or Grace.

The Zambia Police arrived late and instead of aiding the wounded, the cops swung into action detaining anyone on site, they proudly lamented that their mission was to detain everyone for riotous conduct rather than transport the bodies or the injured to hospital.

Dorothy and Henry were apprehended on site and transported to Lusaka central police station in the back of an overloaded Toyota Land Cruiser. They were incarcerated in the same holding cell for two days during which Henry's condition went from bad to worse.

On the third day he was very feverish and could not talk. Dorothy pleaded with the police officers to get medical help.

In a matter of hours a medical team arrived at the police post, they took Henry who was unconscious by then.

'Please don't leave me here, I'm his wife... we have lost our children at the stadium,'

Dorothy said amid sobs.

'You are his wife? You have been in contact with the infected, you are a risk to other cell mates. You are coming with us.'

Dorothy was grabbed and thrown in a vehicle different from the one that carried Henry. 'Where are they going?'

'They are taking the body to the crematorium,' a medical worker covered in bio gear responded.

'No he is still alive!' she screamed while trying to open the door. 'Where are you taking me? Let me out!'

Dorothy was restrained and tranquilized.

The world became a blur and slowly faded.

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The hallucinogenic dream came to an abrupt end and Dorothy once again awoke to bright lights over her face. This time she felt cloth around her body and was able to make slight movements with her index finger. She was surrounded by four figures dressed in white protective gear.

'She's awake, quickly withdraw the drip.' Said a woman's gentle voice with what sounded like a lenient foreign accent.

The woman gave instructions to another unidentifiable figure in white, the second figure seemed reluctant to comply; Dorothy interpreted the hesitation to comply as a sign rebellion; her feminine intuition told her it must have been the pervert.

'Hello, you have been asleep for a long time'. Congratulations, your body has responded positively to treatment and you are recovering.'

'Where is Henry? Where are my family members?'

'Calm down, get some strength first. We will all try to help you find your family.'

Dorothy stayed in the hospital ward for twelve more days. She was in agony. Nobody knew anything about her family. It was as if they were suddenly erased from the face of the earth and blotted from existence.

She recovered remarkably well, her progress was quick she expected to be let out as soon as possible. The thought of surviving a deadly viral disease gave her strength and motivated her; but the thought of going out to start life on her own with nothing and nobody by her side crushed her resolve. Tears poured out of her eyes.

She missed her beloved husband and her two children, she wept especially for her youngest child; Lushomo.

A nurse walked into the ward.

'How are you today?' I have good news for you.'

Dorothy was in no mood for jubilation; she remained silent, she wiped her tearful face with the unclean hospital bed sheet.

'Dorothy you have to be stronger than that. Many have died even with the experimental drug, you are extremely lucky, God really favored you.'

'God? Do you know what God has put me and my family through? Can I not escape God even for one day in my life?'

'The good news is that your body is fighting off the virus and you are getting better as we speak, you will be discharged in two days.'

'You people promised you would help me find my family. What happened since the night at the stadium? How could they just disappear? Please help me I'm begging you.'

'Please my sister, you must understand. It's been many months since Lusaka was locked down, that's too long and we are nowhere near accounting for the dead. Unless these poor souls are dealt with soon, another serious epidemic is likely to break out. We are only volunteers but we are the first line of defense against infectious disaster. We'll grieve the fallen after we've done our jobs. Do you understand?'

'Please... Help me... Please help me find my...'

'Ok, wait. Let me go and see if the doctor in charge can help, he has a list of people who are in the shelters, maybe your family could be there.'

'What do you mean shelters?'

The nurse sighed. 'The government ordered that shelters be erected to accommodate those who are running from the infected.'

'Please... Check for my husband Pastor Henry Mufwidakule, and my children Lushomo and Grace Mufwidakule.'

'Spell your last name please.' The nurse enquired with a pen in hand.

'M...U...F...W...I...D...A...K...U...L...E'

After anxiously waiting, Dorothy was stimulated when the nurse returned.

'Dorothy I have exciting news, your son Lushomo was registered at a shelter in Avondale, he is alive.

Dorothy couldn't roll back her tears.

'Lushomo is alive? My baby boy is alive? Iyee nurse please what about my husband?'

Ba pastor Henry Mufwidakule. Is there anyone with that name on your list? Grace

Mufwidakule? Is she there?’

‘I knew the news would cheer you up, but unfortunately no there is only Lushomo on the doctors list. But there are other shelters in Kanyama and Matero. I advise you to look up the rest of your family there.’

The next two days were the best and the worst for Dorothy. She could not eat nor sleep; occasionally she wept for her husband but consoled herself knowing that Lushomo was alive. She desired to embrace him. I am coming my son don’t give up hope.

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On the day she was scheduled to be discharged, Dorothy awoke very early and was the first to use the communal bathroom; she felt glad to be leaving the hospital despite being eternally grateful for being brought here. She quickly got dressed and packed a few sanitation towels and a bottle of drinking water.

There wasn’t much to pack.

‘I can see you are ready and excited. God be with you Dorothy; you are living proof that he looks down on us.’

Dorothy frowned. ‘Science is the reason I am still alive nurse, please believe me when I say God had nothing to do with it.’

‘Your faith has been shaken; you’ll soon realize you are speaking out of anger and...’ ‘I have realized I believed God out of ignorance. It is better to be angry and wise than to be calm and stupid.’ Dorothy sharply interjected.

‘Mhmm please listen carefully, much has changed since you were hospitalized. When you leave this place please take only the main roads and avoid the outskirts. There are some bodies in the streets, avoid getting close even if it may be someone you know, soldiers have been deployed to patrol the city. If you come across them please don’t run or try to evade them; be calm and let them screen you. If they find you healthy they will set you free, if you are deemed sick they will apprehend you.’

‘Apprehend me? What exactly do you mean apprehend me? Then take me where exactly?’

‘Dorothy things have changed. The government ordered all suspected Ebola victims to be taken to the crematorium for incineration if they are deemed heavily infected. The military is equipped with field testing gear. Once they find a heavily infected person they will either kill or arrest him to be incinerated.’ The nurse continued.

Dorothy gasped, unable to believe her ears.

'Henry was driven to the Crematorium. Nurse I have to go now can you help me with transport money?

The nurse chuckled. 'Transport money? What good will it do if there is no public transport on the street?'

'Ah... in that case I'll walk to the shelter where my son is.'

It took Dorothy approximately five hours to walk from the University Teaching Hospital in Ridgeway to the shelter in Avondale. Lusaka city was deserted fortunately no military patrols crossed her path.

The shelter was situated at the old Zambia Air Force Officers Mess off Gardenia road. Additional security measures had been taken to protect the dome. Armed guards stood at the main gate to the entrance. Upon reaching the gate, Dorothy dropped to her knees.

'What is your business here?' a guard asked.

'Please sir, I'm Dorothy from Ridgeway. I am looking for my son. The nurses there said his name is on the Avondale list so I came straight here.'

'Follow me; keep your hands above your head at all times. We have to screen you first'

The guard instructed.

Dorothy was led inside the shelter. Her hands raised high. What if I am not fully cured and they find signs of sickness? They will kill me before I see my boy. Dorothy was horrified at her thoughts.

She was led to a small room where she was subjected to intense medical examinations. After two hours of waiting for results she heard her name being called. She got nervous but before she could stand up; the door burst wide open but instead of the medical examiner; right at the door stood her son Lushomo.

'Mama! You came for me'

Dorothy could not hold back her tears! She felt a sudden urge to break down and cry.

'Lushomo my baby boy I have come for you.'

Mother and son embraced.

When they got outside the facility; Dorothy knelt beside her son, maintaining stern eye contact.

'Lushomo, I want you to become a doctor when you grow older. Do you understand me son?'

'Mama, but you said I should become a preacher so God can use me to deliver mankind from the devil'

'No my son, you should become a scientist, a doctor. So you can deliver our people from the ignorance of God. Where our religion has failed us; I know that knowledge and education will redeem us. Let's move we need to find a place to settle before the sun sets.'

'Are we going to look for daddy and Grace?'

Dorothy couldn't hold back her tears, 'No my little man, it is just the two of us now.'

They walked away slowly, hand in hand.