SYNOPISIS (Back Page)

IT WAS A CASE OF

CONVOLUTED CONSPIRACY!

At midnight of April 14th, 2014, over 200 school girls of the Chibok Secondary School of Borno State, North East Nigeria, is abducted by the Boko Haram terrorist group. The intrigues that follow after that night is improbable. From Cameroon, Mey Ali is bedraggled into the sinister international conspiracy. A brilliant Nigerian general has orchestrated the menace to swoop power at the presidency. But for the girls’ sakes Ali must convince the inscrutable Sekav Knudowan to find the daring covert agent Ikenna Okonkwo of the DSS to help infiltrate the terrorists plot before it engulfed the region in chaos. But what happens when the list of suspects begin to grow in very startling direction as Ikenna discovers his wife at the center of the whole madness? Is she the mole he must eliminate now, or the pointer in the right direction─ a brawl between two ruling political parties and their quest for national caliphate? No! A more convoluted nexus they must all retire from now or wind up as victims of a distressed cartel’s final fury.

**CHAPTER ONE**

**MOKOLO, THE REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON**

**SATURDAY EVENING**

It was a mission most private executioners will prefer not to accept. And on this day, Mey Ali chose to be counted among the *most*.

***8:05PM, now***.

A mid-April storm had pounded the small town of Mokolo all day and was set to play a violent encore into the night. Lightning seared and thunders roared as Ali sat huddled beside the driver of his black, Talbotville ‘90s Lincoln Crown Vic, which prodding along the eastern borders of Gare de Mvolyé, wondering what was wrong with him.

Away from the two-lane county-maintained roads to the single-lane blacktop that twisted and climbed four miles through the pass to the Quodvultdeus graveyard, the trees looked as if they had been tinted from the same smut that covered the back of most African cooking pots. The rain beat and clouted against the car roof in rhythm with the beats which are thumping loudly inside Ali’s chest. He was terrified, more frightened than he had ever been in the thirty-nine years of his grisly life. The mission before him tonight was impossible, worse than his black ops with the North Field Custom Group in Centre Ville, North of Garoua. But the instruction had come from the Divisional Préfet, General Gervais Mesumbe, directing him to man the mission, the abduction of some school children from the North-East Nigeria border into their country, Cameroon.

Actually, it was against Ali’s will.

He sat back quietly with his head bowed, muttering his favourite country-western song by French vocalist, Michaël Raitner. *“Sometimes you have to smile when we want to cry. Between us, there are too many memories. Sometimes you have to go when we want to stay…”*

From the onset, Ali had kicked against the mission. But, it had been unimaginable for him to refuse instructions from a guerrilla like Divisional Préfet, General Gervais Mesumbe (‘General,’ because besides being the political head of North Region, he was also the Military Commander of the North Field Customs Group), the man who literally ran Ali’s life and controlled the international border-arms cult— the *Grens Misdaad*.

Two years before, Mesumbe had been appointed by the president as a divisional officer (*préfet*) in the North Region with jurisdiction over all felonies and state-wide crimes, and what that meant was that a corrupt General Gervais Mesumbe could himself pioneer a statewide crime and go scot-free. And for several of those crimes he pioneered, Ali was always a part of. He belonged to Mesumbe and Mesumbe had his way of reminding him of that.

Like tonight.

This was the latest, the worst of his political maneuverings, and in most instances shortsighted reasoning, radiating from his insatiable ambition and need to control. He had coerced Ali to move Extreme North to pioneer this mission, saying that getting involved in the ongoing crisis in the North-East region of Nigeria would go a long way to prove his prominence and the strength of the Cameroonian armed forces in the West-East region of Africa where Nigeria was already a powerhouse. But getting involved in the politically convoluted dilemma inside her territory could re-position Cameroon in the sub-region. It was Mesumbe’s typical way of reasoning. But Ali hated the choice of bargain.

“Mere innocent school children!” He groaned as the car took the last turn on Leighton, firing a fist on the dash board. He was a private courier, but never in his horrible life had he been involved with children and mothers. He sighed, rolling down the window and snuffled a deep breath.

The car drove into the vast acre of burial ground and Ali tried to shut his mind.

The intricacies of the ongoing crisis in the faraway northern Nigeria was one he’d never be able to decipher. But Ali was sure, for whatever it was, it was far beyond the Bakassi scuffles with Cameroon a decade before, beyond the grudges of possession of territorial borders and lands; of ammunitions and money and crude oil. This one had to do with the total control of power and wealth and the people. Else, Mesumbe was not a part of it, Ali could tell. He had been part of a similar mission in the Er Rahab region of North Sudan last year where he failed to successfully move the crushed al-Maqdis military-grade weapons from Libya into Sudan. And Mesumbe had decided to punish him with this mission, pairing him up with the dreaded Boko Haram terrorist group from Nigeria to carry out the operation, against Ali’s will.

Ali shook his head and clipped open his side door and began to move in the direction of the only tiny light in the groping darkness, taking in his surrounding, making judgments about what must have been an abandoned government controlled cemetery for some wealthy aristocrats more than a century ago. He surveyed Doric tomb houses covered with broken pine trees and springtime tulips, collapsed Victorian headstones, statues and green yeast infested walls of the only existing church building on the expanse of land. Faded oil portraits dabbed on the walls as he followed the broken cobblestones to the front door, running a fatigued palm across his thick drenched hair. There were several men at the entrance, heavily armed, yelling at his men to now file in queue.

Ali stopped, resting his weary mind and mustering strength for the meeting. He braced himself and entered inside the decrepit church building; a replica of the ancient Sudan Gnostic temples. The place stank from very putrefying reek of dead animals. The walls were damp, flustered with cobwebs and green mildew like substances in which a myriad of insects crawled. The only electric bulb dangled from a splintered ceiling flickering between amber and a total blackout. Ali squinted as the darkness lifted off his eyelids, dusting his hairs. He took on all five men inside the building. They were loutishly dressed, but one. He was pristinely bedecked─ *Matakam by the Fulbés,* Ali thought. He shook hands with them.

The leadsman on the Nigerian side, Mustafa Tamer al-Madqa, noticed Ali’s lingering stare and went on to introduce the men, beginning with the one finely dressed. "Yes, meet the senator Shekau told Mesumbe about. Senator—"

"No names!" Ali raised a finger, dazed. *A senator?*

"Ohhh, really," Mustafa nodded. "But to attest—"

“Could we just get to the part of getting started?” Ali blathered as he continued to eye-probe the man finely dressed in brocade *agbada*, well-polished shoes and a customary cap, probably in his late fifties or early sixties, wondering what impunity. *A senator of the country to come this far, this low?* But that was none of his business, he sighed inwardly, bringing himself to the present.

Mustafa smiled and laid out the atlas map on the only decaying table between them, giving directives. Ali studied it. His business tomorrow night was—

"Simple. Get the—"

"Parcel across the border into my country, precisely the Domaine de la Torve, North-East of Waza and be gone. No meddling in your business.”

 "Wow," Mustafa straightened and cracked a laugh. “A parcel indeed, not just mere school children." He laughed. "And exactly, no meddling in our business," He turned to the men behind him and said something in a local dialect, Hausa perhaps, and they both laughed. Ali kept his eyes glued on the well-dressed man and watched the man's lips broaden with Mustafa's derision, if ever there was anything to laugh about in that anyway.

They worked on the directives, arguing along, until Mustafa straightened at last.

"Okay, my friend,” he said, rubbing his palms together. “The mission begins in the late hours of tomorrow,", he said with an elongated neck and a deep accent.

"And we'd be at the brinks of the forest half an hour before then," Ali replied him.

"Five hours before then,” Mustafa insisted. “It's a trek journey from the school to the forest borders and we’d be done just in time. Your camps and latchet houses are set."

Ali paused, refusing to argue anymore. He turned behind to look at his men. They shrugged. He turned.

"Five hours,", he said to the Nigerians.

The man pristinely bedecked lurched forward and took Ali’s hands with broad smiles. "Jazak Allahu Khair,” he exalted. “May the mercies of Allah bequeath you,", he praised, smiling breathlessly, almost in adulation before Ali, even as the men behind him began to recede.

When he finally let go, Ali was left… flabbergasted.

"What colossal madness!" he wept.

Like he'd thought through those sleepless nights before, when Mesumbe began to push him, when he began to hold talks with old friends at the maréchaussée and border offices, bribing his way through. The whole thing just didn't make any sense. And for many days to come, would never make an iota of sense in his head. Not even to the unwary people of the country. That on the brink of tomorrow night, over two hundred school children of the Government Secondary School in the Chibok Community of Borno State, North-East province of the country were about to be abducted by the hideous Boko Haram terrorist group for a no plausible reason, not one Ali could think of, he sighed, trembling in frustration.

*What a mission!*

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**THE ZULU SOFOLA MEMORIAL SHOW**

**GARKI, ABUJA, NIGERIA.**

 ***Nigeria was at war!***

It was the only conclusion Senior Special Agent Ikenna Okonkwo of the Directorate of State Security (DSS) could dredge. An ethnic-sectarian war in the far North-East region of the country, a persistent socio-religious feud perpetrated by the Islamic Fundamentalist sect, Boko Haram, claiming the lives of thousands of innocent women and children in the sub-region in the recent years, igniting Ikenna’s ferocity and goading his hunch of an unholy political nexus behind the feud. Seated irately in the back row of the in-house theatre with a puzzled expression on his face, he studied a repugnant metro column of the *Nigerian Pilot* of two days before by the notorious Mylo Adama. The journalist’s sordid story about one of his men involved in a gang rape of an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) minor in the far away Maiduguri, center of the war. It was vile, which is making his stomach sick.

 Ikenna had never met Mylo Adama before, but knew the journalist from reputation. She was a co-creator of the USAID pioneered Prohibition of Child Trafficking and Sexual Molestation Charity who is now being in charged with investigating war crimes and repressive measures by the Nigerian army in the North-East Boko Haram Islamic-terrorists feud. Ikenna wondered how such line of duty crisscrossed into persecuting and hounding down the most trusted man he’d engrafted into the army intelligence to investigate who was behind the national ethnic-religious feud, following a possible leak in the army. He’d trailed her to this event, following his best lead, to buzz her off.

The musical/stage-play show of the distinguished matriarch of the Nigerian theatre, Professor Zulu Sofola was coming to a close. For Ikenna, it was boring enough, but worse still was attending solely in pursuit of a scribbler out to discredit his tip in ending the North-East crisis. Ikenna wondered if this was all it was, or if there was more, because in her story, she’d stated that Chude Floyd had been the sole conspirator of the crime, labelling the others as, ‘mere accomplices’, stating that the young secret agent could have been on a sequestered mission privy to the army, not having been listed for the field job from base. Ikenna didn’t think either of these incriminations could be linked to him, but he couldn’t be positive there wasn’t a leak somewhere. It’d seemed impossible that Mylo from the blue could nail the young secret agent with these rare revelations without a single benefit for the army or individual from the young agent’s prior Port Harcourt and Maiduguri persona non grata base.

And this was a dangerous situation for Ikenna. He was sure Chude’s arrest had to be followed by interrogation, trial and possible expulsion. He would have to find a way to deal with this journalist now, or Ikenna’s mission—so carefully construed with the DSS and the Nigerian army—would come crashing down.

#proofreadingdonebyValerieI.C.