

THE OFFER

A village in Nigeria. The courtyard of JUDITH's house in the country. JUDITH, timid and anxious, is in a conversation with 'MA' her neighbour, a confident, older woman. Both women wear traditional dress and elaborate head wraps. JUDITH's dress has a plainer print and her head wrap is smaller denoting their social standing.

MA: I cannot believe my ears! I cannot believe that you can say these things to a frail old woman like me

JUDITH: Ma?

MA: Do you think I am such a nasty piece of work?

JUDITH: I did not say that, Ma—

MA: *(interrupts)*.—That I could put the girl in harm's way?

JUDITH: I didn't mean it like that—

MA: You know that I see Abigail as my own flesh and blood

JUDITH: I only asked for some facts, some information

MA: And the neighbours' ears fly up like dogs with your ugly questions! They add two and two together and make five!

JUDITH: I didn't mean to offend you

MA takes out a fruit knife and puts it in Judith's hand.

You have butchered my reputation, Judith – so you may as well finish me off!
(offers her neck). There! Strike me, now!

THE OFFER

JUDITH: *(gives the knife back)*. Please, put it away, Ma!

MA: What is a woman without her reputation!

Pause

(grudgingly). And if you must know, Yes! I was at the DEPOT yesterday

JUDITH: What?

MA: I did not know that you used spies to spy on me, Judith!

But yes, I did speak ...to the people at the DEPOT.

JUDITH: My neighbour saw you and happened to tell me. He is not a spy.

MA: I was only asking the DEPOT people for directions to the new Government Buildings—that was all

JUDITH: So you did not go inside the DEPOT?

MA: *(demonstrates with 'walking fingers')* Look! There's the DEPOT. I was in the vicinity...but then I went THIS way to the Government Buildings...AWAY from the DEPOT...far far away!

JUDITH: *(closes eyes)*. I am so thankful! That DEPOT is a den of iniquity!

MA: I was in the Government Buildings. Now there's a den of iniquity. You won't believe the interest rate for the loan I took out with them.

JUDITH: A loan?

MA: For Abigail

JUDITH: *(aghast)*. For Abigail? My Abigail?

THE OFFER

MA: I leapt on that loan offer as a lion on a gazelle!

JUDITH's mouth hangs open, speechless

In matters of business, Judith –you have to act fast!

JUDITH: But, Ma— I haven't even given my—(permission)

MA: —But this is England we're talking about! The land of milk and honey!

JUDITH: The world is a big place, Ma...it is full of strangers who walk in the shadows of the tall trees.

MA: (*astonished*). What foolishness are you talking about? Are you a poet or something? The father had his medical training in London!

JUDITH: (*quotes Bible*). 'Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light'

MA: Let me tell you! There is no Satan here! Dr Babatunde Awolowo is a respectable man! His wife is an NHS midwife. They have a huge house in the province of Barking.

JUDITH: But I don't know any of them.

MA: (*sales-talking*). But think of the offer, Judith! Abigail will be going to school during the day and looking after the good doctor's children in the evenings.

JUDITH: But will she have her own room?

MA: What kind of question is that?

JUDITH: She is still a child ...on the cusp of womanhood. I want her bedroom door to have a big lock on it.

THE OFFER

MA: —Of course she will have her own room! And because Abigail's a child of modesty and self-control she'll be able to send money to this bereft little household of yours!

JUDITH: We are not bereft, Ma! We have everything we need here—

MA: Oh? Is that right? Look at your mother! She's nothing but a big bag of bones! Think how her face will light up at the sight of a piece of cow-foot in gravy! And how long is it since little Babatunde stopped having his cough medicine because you don't have the money? (*sucks teeth*)

JUDITH: (*thoughtfully*). Yes, Ma. These are important considerations, indeed

MA takes out a Tupperware box from her bag

MA: (*taps box*). Do you know what I have in this box?

JUDITH shakes her head. MA opens it. Both women recoil at the stench emanating from it.

Look at it! The entrails of the one-legged chicken. Think of it, Judith! What they lack in leg, they make up for in the most beautiful fortune-readings!

She holds the box under Judith's nose

Do you know what this magnificent one-legged chicken shows us? It shows us that this is a chance in a million—that you will not get an offer like this again!

JUDITH takes the Tupperware box and closes it firmly.

JUDITH: (*shaking her head*). It all just seems... too good to be true!

MA: (*imitates*). 'Too good to be true?' What is that?

JUDITH: I've heard so many things, Ma....about these 'trips abroad'

THE OFFER

MA: *(scoffs)*. Ah! For a religious woman, you always think the worst of people
Judith!

JUDITH: *(hushed)*. I have heard that Lola from the Scorched Plains has returned home
after travelling. With a belly the size of a watermelon—!

MA: —Ah! You are so quick to condemn!

JUDITH: She doesn't even know the name of the baby's father—

MA: *(quotes the Bible)*. "Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a
reward from him"

JUDITH: But she was a child having a child! And I only have one girl-child, Ma. It is
my duty to protect Abigail...

MA: Ah! Alright, Judith! Let Abigail continue selling tomatoes in the market
square! See if I care. I withdraw the offer! No more offer for you!

JUDITH: Ma?

MA: There are thousands of girls here in Nigeria begging to have the chance to fly,
ready to go and make a life in England! I shall give the offer to one of them.

JUDITH: *(changing mind)*. No, Ma! I - I would like to accept the offer. Please, give the
offer to my Abigail

MA: Ah! I am tired of looking at your miserable face! I'm just a humble tobacco
seller eking out a miserable existence in the market square. I am not some
international slave master lurking in shadows as you have implied with your
godless, wicked words!

THE OFFER

JUDITH: That is not true, Ma. Please, take my Abigail. I entrust her to you!

MA: It's too late!

JUDITH: (*desperate*). Please, Ma. I'm sorry! Very sorry! Please forgive me.

MA: (*bristling*). Alright, then. Sign this.

JUDITH: What is it?

MA: Abigail's passport.

JUDITH: A passport?

MA: Well, I can't ask her father, can I? He crept out of here a long time ago

MA indicates where she is to sign

There...and there! (*sucks teeth*) This is a fine business opportunity.

If there's a hole in the market Abigail will fill it.

JUDITH: (*She signs the passport*). One moment...

MA: Now what?

JUDITH: The date of birth is wrong. Abigail is thirteen, Ma

MA: (*snatches passport*). No, it's all fine, Judith. Trust me!

JUDITH: But—but the passport says she's eighteen!

MA: And she can be thirteen again when she gets to England

Now! How much money have you got?

JUDITH: Money? What money?

THE OFFER

MA: *(as if to a child)*. I need to buy a plane ticket for Abigail to get to England!

JUDITH: But you know I don't have any savings, Ma

MA: *(interrupts)*.—Give me your jewellery set...the one that you wore on your
wedding day

JUDITH: But I was saving it for Abigail's wedding.

MA: *(scoffs)*. She'll be able to buy a hundred jewellery sets when she gets to
England...Where is she? Fetch the girl! I want to take her to the village priest
for a blessing....**ABIGAIL!** Abigail! Look sharp! Abigail!
You are in sole possession of the offer, you lucky girl!

END