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Urban Gorilla

OGECHI WATCHED THE gray-blue Peugeot from his hotel window. It crawled toward the back of a curving row of candy-colored buildings whose sides vanished into each other like the compact sections of a caterpillar. From here he could see the outdoor television antennas that bristled on the sloping roofs, pointing toward the nearby canal—through which flowed the Melaka River, the waterway that gave the town its nickname, “Venice of the East.”

He looked at his watch and grunted, rapping his knuckles against the brass-buttoned stool under him. The Indian Jamaican who drove the Peugeot had arrived later than usual. Ogechi trembled a little from the chilly air conditioning, always set at forty degrees. His dream was to travel to America, so he prepared for the experience by turning down the temperature of his air conditioner to mimic winter.

It usually took two hours to travel from Johor to Melaka, but the Indian Jamaican, Supercat—whose wage-chasing ancestors voyaged from India to Jamaica in the nineteenth century—had spent four hours. Ogechi wondered if there had been trouble with Singapore border police concerning the “urban gorilla” cargo. Had overzealous customs on the Malaysia side held up the car, searching for cocaine-filled dead cats and concealed immigrants? He grinned wickedly, then he reached for his cell phone as it began to ring. It was his Chinese Malaysian girlfriend. He sighed. He would call her later. She had flat feet, and his mother, who was half Yoruba, had warned him years ago to avoid plane-feet women—Nigerian Yoruba believed such women brought ruin to men. But far from bringing him ruin, to her credit, his girlfriend, Meijin, often gave him sound business advice, which he respected.

He watched Supercat get out of the Peugeot and walk to the back of the car with a toolbox. “Time to free my ‘gorilla,’” he hummed happily.

Supercat peered under the bumper, then opened up his toolbox.

Working quickly, he lay under the bumper and unscrewed an inside bolt with a wheel spanner, then stuck a bench chisel into the side of the bumper. As he pushed out with the tool, Ogechi—watching from high above in the hotel—made

a heaving sound in accompaniment, as though he, too, held the tool. The bumper sagged ponderously low.

Supercat grabbed the bumper with both hands and pushed down hard. Ogechi imagined hearing the crrrk.

Now in the corner of the hanging bumper, he could see the dark head of the smuggled man, whose squeezed-in body had fit into a roughly fashioned carriage under the car. He referred to the man as an “urban gorilla,” the name he gave all the desperate Nigerians he got into Singapore then smuggled into Malaysia. The name had deep, pelf-stained hooks in a part of his past—when evil sorcery might have brought him money. Ogechi beamed.

But he stopped smiling when Supercat grabbed the man by the shoulders and pulled him out, and the man’s legs folded under him like boiled noodles. Ogechi pressed his head against the window, waiting for the man—who was alive—to rise to his feet. The man just sat there, balanced on his haunches. When Supercat removed a wheelchair from the backseat, Ogechi stood up and cried out, “What nonsense? This man is a cripple! Why did a cripple answer an advertisement to come and play football in Malaysia?”

Ogechi ran a neat, nasty operation. He published a notice—as Chief Tony Touch—on a tacky Nigerian blog promising young men double-quick entry into Malaysian football clubs where they would earn salaries of USD \$5,000 per week. They paid him \$2,000 for the invitation letter they took to the embassy. In the beginning his dupes flew straight from Lagos to Malaysia, but after a disagreement over percentages with the “protection” policeman at the airport, Ogechi flew his gorillas into Singapore, then snuck them through the busy border into Malaysia.

He brought them to the hotel, Euro Emperors Sentral, where he had a permanent room. After he robbed them further, to obtain “resident papers with reference,” and once they could no longer pay their hotel bills, the fools were thrown into the streets. EOB. End of business.

A man who supported his body on two legs could carry himself out of the hotel and walk out of your life. But Ogechi did not know what to expect from a man who could not walk. He might start crying like a waterfowl on the day of eviction. He might even, God forbid, report what had happened to the local society of disabled people! Who needed that kind of visibility!

Ogechi turned from the window and went to sit on the double bed. He spotted his dark leather wallet on the bed and nudged it under a pillow to hide it. Supercat

would be coming up shortly to give him the score. He kicked off his slippers and waited.

“Why didn’t you abandon him with those *worm* legs?” Ogechi barked. “Why waste time waiting for his wheelchair to come on another flight?”

“Relax, bro,” protested Supercat. “I was shocked, too, when I saw his bad legs. Confusion make me say, ‘Bloodclat, man!’ instead of, ‘Welcome, mista.’”

Supercat sat shivering (because of the A/C) in one of the upholstered cane chairs before a cube-shaped cane table. Under his straight brown nose, the dark blot of a Hitler moustache gleamed with sweat, despite the cool air. He faced the bed where Ogechi, one arm hanging across his vast belly, perched magisterially on a pillow.

“Did you ask him how he intends to play football without working legs?” Ogechi asked. “Even though we know there’s no football to be played.”

“I did. He said, ‘Put me in the club first. I can play soccer, you will see.’”

“He can play soccer?” Ogechi said in disdain. “Who knows if there’s any money in his luggage?”

“He had one very big plastic bag with a shiny zipper and one smaller bag, like a student’s bag. Bags can hide anything.”

“That’s true. What kind of client is he, sharp like us?”

“Chatty chatty,” replied Supercat, switching to patois and scowling. “Chat too fucking much. Never shut up. Bombaclat!”

Ogechi laughed. He hoped his henchman would not ask for a raise, claiming field hazard. He had hidden his wallet because Supercat—who played drums part-time in a Chinese-Malay wedding band—always asked to borrow money when he saw the wallet.

The Jamaican brought out a packet of L.A. Menthol Lights, called *geh boh hong ki*, prostitute’s cigarettes, because they were favored among call girls. He gave Ogechi an apprehensive look, half seeking permission, half-defiant, before he lit a stick. He waved the burning cigarette at the air conditioner to indicate that he was simply battling the cold. Ogechi ignored him and went to stare out of the window. He intended to be very mean to the crippled man. To scare him like Idi Amin Dada—get all his money quick, and leave him too paralyzed to act. He would complete the deal in one week, instead of the usual three. Outside, the clouds were blinding white. They floated, horse-shaped, toward the street.

“I’ll catch pneumonia one day,” complained Supercat. “And you will pay for my hospital visit.”

Ogechi quickly looked back to the bed. The corner of his wallet showed under the pillow. He knew his companion had seen it.

He glared at Supercat. The man blew smoke sideways at a lamp and grinned.

“No time for jokes,” said Ogechi sharply. “We must be vigilant. Better go make sure one of your neighbors’ nasty children isn’t scratching the car with a coconut.”

In the morning, Ogechi wore a tight sports cap that shadowed his face, and took the elevator down to the first floor. The gorilla, whose eyes were the yellow of rotting corn, sat at the bar talking to the American housekeeping manager. Ogechi first stopped—to steady his nerves—by the large statue of the sleepy-eyed Buddha that stood very close to the water-blue directory on the wall; the Buddha waited there as if to assure visiting tourists that although the plaque listed the floors without including a fourth floor—to dodge the dreadful luck evoked by the number four—the Buddha would absorb whatever bad energy made it past the front doors.

Guests sat in scattered groups around the polished tables, eating the free brownie dates the bar handed out. The lamps above glowed with an incandescent whiteness that often made Ogechi imagine himself on a strange and distant planet with mad abundant moons.

He found an unoccupied table not far from the bowed counter where the gorilla was in loud conversation with the American, who was expertly twisting a lager nozzle onto a keg tubing. The gorilla wore a billowy *baba riga* robe that fell over his rather long arms and covered part of his heavy, plank-like legs. Buried in fabric like a masquerade, thought Ogechi dryly. The American caught Ogechi’s eye and touched his Ed Hardy Surf or Die sunglasses, always pushed back on his head, in greeting.

“Sir,” said the gorilla to the American, eyeing the nozzle carefully, as though studying it to decide how to best avoid it. “I have some words for this man, Chief Tony Touch, who brought me here: ‘You have done well. What am I even saying? You’re Lazarus. Sorry, Jesus, for giving me a second chance at life.’”

“Good men don’t shout too much, sir,” he continued in a matter-of-fact tone. “Only a local man will compare World Cup to backyard, work-and-eat football. Ride on, boss!” If the gorilla had turned toward Ogechi now, he would not have known he was the chief he had e-mailed for months. Ogechi was careful never to send a photograph. This way he did not become tangled in the puppet strings of his operation.

What struck Ogechi about the Nigerian’s speech was his almost unformed

sense of the world, like a mewling infant. But at the same time, something about the man's long, solid arms gave him pause. The tight-wound grace with which he reached across the table to grab a lighter; the purposeful way he tossed the lighter from hand to hand without looking.

He had a narrow, anguished face that reminded Ogechi of the winded athlete on the cover of the Olympic-themed notebook he took to school as a child. The stove-black man, whose open mouth formed an O, stood with legs spread atop a fat horizontal Olympic torch pointed at one end like a witch's finger. The image had terrified him then, and it hadn't helped that his impish older sister told him the portrait was that of a crucified thief—that this was what happened to nabbed stealers. Ogechi had been a speculative thief then, always eyeing his mother's purse. He wondered now if he was going to hate the gorilla.

He watched the American hand over a pair of Adidas football boots to the man, as Ogechi had instructed him on the phone beforehand. Usually, this presentation happened on the third day, but he was speeding up things. The gorilla was sent back to his room to "train" wearing the cleats. Sometimes Ogechi came down to the second floor and listened outside the gorilla's door, hearing the thump of running feet and hearty puffs of breath, as the person inside did sprint bursts, lizard crawls. He would shake his head and walk away in disgust. How could people be so easily deceived?

The new gorilla laughed nervously and remarked that the lager nozzle on the table reminded him of a gun. A baby AK-47. No! Not for shooting babies! That came out wrong, he apologized.

Ogechi thought, How provincial. The man placed one hand on the curved handle of his wheelchair, which was next to his stool, and, with the American's help, lowered himself into it and rolled away. A group of Malaysian businessmen in the corner, tan faces glowing, raised bottles of Sapporo at the man, who waved at the early drinkers with a proprietary smile. Ogechi wondered how they knew the gorilla. If he and Meijin were married he would have interrogated these men now with impunity, as a fellow Malaysian. But she freelanced for an artsy local magazine and was covering a foot-binding photo exhibition as it traveled around the country. She called him from every city, and he often emphasized that if her bosses were making her look at many "unlucky" feet, shouldn't they pay her extra for that risk? Ogechi approached the bar.

"Why did those men greet my client?" he asked the American, who was placing bottles of wine on the shelves behind the bar.

“Your client stood them drinks,” the American said, leaning forward on the counter, a mischievous glint in his boyish eyes.

“How could you let him?” Ogechi said with soft vehemence. “What if he spends all his money, and there’s nothing for me? *You* and *I* have an understanding.”

The accord he referred to, a handwritten contract, allowed the American to use Ogechi’s gorillas as busboys. But it was something else that truly bonded them, a mutual recognition of youth and boldness, so far away from home.

After the American apologized, and Ogechi reluctantly shook hands with the man, he went to the empty reception area, rolling up one sleeve of his shirt as though about to enter a brawl. He sat at one of the hotel’s computers and began to write to the gorilla:

Dear Orji Oba Pharaoh,

I’m now in Trinidad and Tobago, for important business. I hope you’re settling down in Malaysia. Have my boys given you your boots? I hope they are not too tight. Your club is expecting you. Your jersey is number 11.

I have good news! I said before that it will take about one week before we begin to process your resident permit, but I have just received news from the home minister that it will take just mere hours from your arrival! Bravo!

So, now-now, just give the sum of \$2,000 (two thousand American dollars) to my Jamaican guy to commence paper work. I will send him to you.

I have to return to my business meeting now. *Selamat datang*, as we say in Malaysia! Welcome!

Yours,
Chief Tony Touch

He called Supercat, then ate breakfast, surprising himself by carrying the remainder of his pancakes to the waiter at the dining room counter. “I don’t need this,” he carped.

He had never been this unsubtle, and now, as he walked back to his room, he wondered what had gotten into him. He felt as though he had rubbed against a thing of immense, shapeless energy. Like that time in his childhood his parents had taken him to a hyena handler to cure his bed-wetting. Before the sunbaked old handler lifted him on the hyena’s back—so he would ride the beast three times around the neem tree—there was a flickering moment when he and the fan-eared hyena looked in each other’s shiny eyes and acknowledged the indignity of their

plight, each showing the other his heart. As Ogechi entered his room, he glanced toward the window and whispered curiously, “Hyena-friend, wherever you are. This thing I just felt, did you feel it, too?”

The next evening he sat eating blue rice in the dining room, humming lightheartedly as he chewed his fried coconut and brittle fish.

Supercat had reached out to the urban gorilla yesterday. The gorilla, having earlier rolled his wheelchair down to the bank of computers at the reception and read Ogechi’s mail, told the Jamaican about a sheaf of traveler’s checks he wanted to cash. Supercat asked to see, but, raising his brows, the gorilla advised Supercat to *coffin* all doubts. He told the Jamaican to return the following day for the two thousand.

Ogechi had high-fived Supercat when the Jamaican brought him this news, giving the man twenty ringgit to buy himself some jubilation beer. Now, as he swallowed blue rice and waited eagerly for the Jamaican to walk in with the bundle of cash, he imagined Supercat had bought jubilation cigarettes instead of jubilation beer, and wondered, if that were true, would it mean he was a weak boss?

How had he spent his own money in his fledgling days? Memphis burgers at Tony Roma’s and sizzling chicken at TGI Fridays. In the evenings he would drink Milo with a friendly Malaysian widow who jokingly referred to the prayer beads used by ethnic Indian Hindus as dog leashes. At that time, he flung his fleeced gorillas into a windowless room at the back of the hotel and abandoned them there. A blabbermouth had warned police about the presence of the “illegals,” and one day men wearing gas masks and waving Berettas had charged the room, arresting everybody. Ogechi fled to Kuala Lumpur, where there was a sizable Nigerian population. Half students, half street-jackals. For three months he hid at the deluxe condo of a Nigerian student whose rich father was the former minister of petroleum, listening to tales of phony marriages contracted with Malaysians by Nigerians stalking easy loans. Sometimes Ogechi missed K.L. and the Nigerians there.

He set down his fork and ate with his hand, nodding pleasantly. Like his victims, he, too, could look back on a scarred life. He had been a small cocoa trader in Ilesa, Nigeria, until a rise in the cost of pesticides ruined his business. He had gone to a medicine man in Ogbagba, seeking juju that would turn the ripped pages of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* into American dollars, and had been told the sacrifice would require two *inaki-igboro*, urban-dwelling gorillas.

This meant two human beings. Killed.

“Surely, I will bring you these two *inaki*,” Ogechi had promised the medicine man, trembling. Then he fled far, far, away. Around this time a secondary school classmate, Zico, returned from Malaysia wealthy, and Ogechi had gone to his village to meet him.

Ogechi was halfway through a bite of the brittle fish when, through the front window, he saw Supercat wheeling the gorilla across the street. The pair appeared to be laughing at some joke. He almost choked on his food in surprise. He had warned the Jamaican not to mix business with pleasure. Where were they heading, with \$2,000 probably wedged in Supercat’s back pocket? This was not BYOI, bring your own infringement! BYOI was calling up your independent psychological resources to nourish a scam. How could you bring your own infringement if you were necking with the enemy? Hadn’t he taught Supercat better? Ogechi felt a small existential terror when trusted companions let him down. He would scold the Jamaican roundly.

He saw them speed off in the Peugeot and made plans to follow in a taxi. He suspected they were going to Jonker Night Market, where first-time visitors to Melaka exhausted money at open stalls selling hot dim sum and trinkets. There tourists drooled before phony Toraja shamans who brought actor-corpses back to life by pinching their foreheads. He would find them and use his *boss* skills to forestall any misfortune.

But using boss skills didn’t help. He had spotted Supercat and the gorilla at a shaman performance, where the gorilla whispered fervently to the shaman who wore peacock feathers in his ears. Just as Ogechi made to discreetly signal Supercat in the crowd, Ogechi’s girlfriend had called his cell. He hid behind a parked car and muffled the ringing under his shirt until it stopped; when he turned around, Supercat and the gorilla had left.

Now it was the midday following, and Ogechi questioned Supercat in his room. He was livid. Supercat, who swilled a bottle of vodka he had taken from the fridge without asking, told him he did not have the \$2,000 because the gorilla had “forgotten” to bring it to the night market. It was the gorilla’s idea to go to the shaman, not his; the man had overheard talk in the hotel’s elevator about the shamans’ shows and their esoteric arts and had told the Jamaican he wanted to see them. He was looking for his son, who had come to Malaysia years ago.

“Since when did someone invited to play football end up on a quest to find a son?” Ogechi asked, shutting his laptop angrily. “What am I going to do?”

“Dis vodka ah cool, mon,” mumbled Supercat, examining the bottle. Ogechi side-eyed him.

He went to the bathroom to pee. As he watched the swirling toilet water, he had a fantasy that the reason his girlfriend had called the night before was to tell him she had decided to deform her feet to meet his “arched” expectations. It was not unlike the way Ogechi had deformed himself—by going to the frightening urban gorilla medicine man—to meet the world’s expectations. The medicine man. This memory often burst through to sour the back of his throat. And his phobia of the medicine man almost killed him one rainy night. He had come out of sleep, here in his hotel room, and opened his eyes to see, on TV, a gorilla dancing in a crowded nightclub. He had watched transfixed, as the swaying gorilla pulled off its furry dark hands, to reveal smooth white arms (later he learned this was Marlene Dietrich). He had jumped out of bed in horror, thinking the medicine man had come for him through voodoo, and, in the shadowy room, mistook the window for the door. Two legs went over the windowsill before his head cleared and he realized he was hanging above certain death. Now he wondered if the medicine man had planted something inside of him that was slowly transforming him into a luckless beast. Was the real Ogechi—blessed with the golden touch, even now—buried deep under a disguise?

“Please learn to decipher white from black,” he warned Supercat as he returned to the room. “BYOI to us is like the Four-Way Test is to the Rotaract Club. Forewarned!”

“Forearmed,” grumbled the Jamaican, getting up to leave. He weaved. “Mi wi guh an collect di funds now,” he announced, belching.

“Sit back down, my friend,” scolded Ogechi. “Collect which funds? Can’t you see you’re drunk? Go and look in the mirror—you’re drunk as a mermaid.”

Before he went to bed Ogechi attended to business correspondence on his laptop. Prince Secundus from Port Harcourt wanted to know if one could study and play football at the same time. The proprietor of The Lord Is Good Supermarket in Lagos, asking on behalf of his son and wanting to be clever, planned to pay half the cost of obtaining the invitation letter, the balance to be provided upon entry into Malaysia. Ogechi snorted and shook an admonishing finger at the screen.

There was an e-mail from the current urban gorilla. He wrote to say he could not give money to Supercat because he did not trust the man. He wanted to hand the money to Chief Tony Touch when the chief returned from the Caribbean.

“Stubborn man,” Ogechi said peevishly. “I’ll deal with you.” He imagined the gorilla surrounded by bottles of Sapporo beer on his bed, emboldened by alcohol to challenge simple directives.

Things happened quickly. The first time he went BYOI in the gorilla’s room, the gorilla was watching high school swimming trials being held at the hotel pool. The American manager tipped off Ogechi and gave him the key.

Ogechi was struck by how the pillows and extra blankets were completely buried under the bedclothes. He picked up a magazine on the coffee table opened to an image of a young man walking into a river flanked by the gray slopes of rocky mountains. He wondered if the gorilla was missing home.

He rubbed his fingerprints off the magazine and spread it back on the table. When he turned, he saw that there were no beer bottles on the floor or under the table, but he spotted the covered bags on the far side of the window, and, suddenly nervous, he fled the room.

The second time he entered, Ogechi walked in with an impatient purpose and went straight to the big plastic bag and opened it. The Adidas cleats were carefully packed to one side, and inside one shoe Ogechi found a wad of bills, hidden in the toe. He nodded, counted the money (one thousand), and put it back. He might be a con man, but a thief he was not. Thieves were *crude* and eager, like first-time lovers, lacking the refined control of con men, who moved like chess pieces.

He ran his hand inquisitively under the folded shirts and underwear and touched a smooth pile of what felt like a dozen or more photos, held together by a rubber band. Why did this man like *concealing* things?

He snapped off the worn band and frowned. He was staring at a chubby-faced, long-handed man in a goalkeeper’s outfit, suspended in midair as he attempted to punch a ball with a gloved fist. The gorilla. In distant youth.

Ogechi went to sit on the bed and spread out the photos.

There was one of the young gorilla raising a trophy, standing, surrounded by clapping teammates. A camel squatted in the background.

Another. This must be his family on their farm, Ogechi thought. The gorilla’s hand scraping grass from a small watermelon. That must be Mrs. Wife. Very tight head scarf. Firm thighs. And there’s the son, maybe ten or eleven, side turned to the camera. Ogechi liked the child immediately. Something pleasing about his profile. The missing son.

The sun came in through the window and struck the wall; he glanced up at the bright spot.

He wondered if the gorilla had been a gentleman goalkeeper like Peter Rufai, who favored honest tackles that avoided the shins. Or had he been like West Germany's lawless Harald Schumacher, elbowing forwards in the teeth and karate kicking others in the belly? Schumacher had written an autobiography in which he described the people in his hometown as sluts and drunks. Ogechi wondered what the gorilla might tell the world about him in a book one day.

The other pictures shocked him. A village ruined, roofless mud walls with burnt sides and bullet holes. A white Boko Haram flag hoisted on an AK-47 tied to a Tata truck. Scores of bloated cattle drowned in a pond, horns poking through the still water. A photo of the gorilla in a hospital with rolls of bloody cotton wool massed on his stomach and chest, tubes filled with reddish-brown fluid snaking out of his legs. A folded picture at the bottom of the pile showed a corpse wrapped in white linen, boldly contoured at the breasts and hips. Mrs. Wife.

Ogechi stood up and stretched. It had probably been too heartbreaking to photograph the dead child, he thought. Hard for anyone to bury. He was moved to look down at the bed. The mournful foreheads of the hidden pillows and blankets lifted into the covering bedclothes. Was this arrangement the gorilla's attempt to confine joyless memories?

Ogechi forced up hurtful images from his own past, that business with Zico, aware of their inadequacy, knowing that he attempted to justify his next move to an imaginary witness.

He had met Zico at Christmas, and Zico had given him a soft, cassel yellow towel as a present, telling Ogechi he was an importer of Apple accessories in Malaysia. He was sure Ogechi could make USD \$500,000 *in one month*, selling pirated CDs in Malay. Ogechi begged his friend to take him to Malaysia.

Zico traveled back and asked Ogechi to send \$3,000 to "process" papers for a permanent resident permit. Ogechi assembled the funds after eight months. When he arrived in Malaysia, Zico checked him into Number Nine Guesthouse, a seedy inn whose bathrooms bred cockroaches. Then Zico disappeared. Classic con. Ogechi found his way to a church after the hotel threw him out. Soon he began working on the crew of a porn production company owned by a drunken Dutchman who bragged about his seventeenth-century forebears who had slyly seized Malacca from the Johore sultans. Ogechi's first thoughts of the urban gorilla

business flared one morning as he drove the actors to their monthly STD testing. They were in the middle of a chat about the border smuggling of Rohingya Muslim refugees into Malaysia, and Ogechi thought that he could do that, too.

Now Ogechi knew it was time to use his boss skills, again. He searched for the purest truth inside him.

He tied up the photos and returned them to the bag. He zipped the bag closed.

Social idealism, he decided calmly, could never unite with empirical commerce.

He began to trash the room as planned. He knocked lamps forcefully to the floor, pulled bedclothes and flung them across the room, and threw pillows at the wall. He pitched the coffee table on the bed. He opened the bathroom and hurled the plastic bag into the tub.

Ogechi called the American manager from his own room and said, "OK, tell him." He composed an e-mail to the gorilla saying he had just heard that immigration bosses came to the gorilla's room to search for him because the gorilla had no legitimate papers; all the gorilla had to do was pay the Jamaican, and everything would be forgotten.

In the evening he called Supercat and brought him up to speed. He told the Jamaican about the letter the gorilla had written, saying Supercat could not be trusted.

"Fada fucker!" raged Supercat. "Bad leg man fi dead bullet in a dem mullet! Mi want go for dem his teeth!"

"What's wrong with you?" Ogechi snapped. "You want your thirty percent reduced?"

The urban gorilla—terror-ridden, companionless, bewildered as a salt-stung earthworm—had been silent when the American informed him of the havoc in his room, and when he had gone up to check, he asked if the immigration "attackers" were coming back. The American shrugged.

Then the gorilla heaved up his two bags onto his lap and asked if he could temporarily live in the barroom. The American manager said, "No. You have a room." Still, the gorilla abandoned his lodging on the second floor.

Over the next days, Ogechi got regular updates from the American. News that the gorilla was camped near the bank of computers, in the elevator, by the pool deck, in the waiting room, in the dining room. Always hawk-eyed. Easily startled. When Supercat approached him for the money outside the elevator, he said, "Bring

Chief Tony Touch to me.” Spittle ran down his chin. His eyes twitched. Supercat flared, “Why ya so stiff for? Wi no want no gaga roun’ here!”

Ogechi thought the Jamaican had become a loose cannon. And the gorilla? What if that one found him out? He began fearing that the gorilla was going through his trash brought down by housekeeping, trying to piece together the workings of his mind, in order to stage counterplots. He had seen this happen in a James Bond movie. Then he told himself this could not be true. The gorilla was a ground-floor vagrant, and that was that.

The American came to Ogechi’s room, dressed in his faded Von Zipper Tanning Team shirt, and told him the gorilla had asked, in confidence, if he knew anybody who could help him get resident papers for under one hundred dollars. He appeared to have become mistrustful of Ogechi’s arrangement. He wanted to reach his football club. He wanted aspirin, too. And he spoke of a lost wife and son, who were somewhere in Malaysia.

“Effects of PTSD,” said Ogechi hotly. “Maybe three years ago, Boko Haram shot him, and killed all his family. I saw photos in his bag. His wife. His son. They both died in Nigeria. I think the problem is,” he said, waving his arm like an expert, “football is the mosquito that brought him here. The mixed-up search for a dead son is the malaria inside the mosquito. Either way, he’s sick, I think. With PTSD.”

The American suggested he send the man back to Nigeria. There would be other gorillas to take his place.

“That’s BLT,” said Ogechi coldly. “Business loss transaction. I’m going to collect. Soon, he’ll be begging to give the money to Supercat.”

After their conversation, Ogechi brought out an old battered notebook, and began drawing imagined circuit diagrams of the gorilla’s mind. Tirelessly he drew pages and pages of zigzags and boxes, which he ripped out and taped on the bathroom mirror. He tracked one arrowed line and thought, Heavy voltage from stress is overcharging his brain. So the gorilla is in a higher biological state, like a super-battery, and this is why he doubts me and is trying to outsmart me. Ogechi wished he could cut that circuit and let the brain waste. He peeled off the pages and threw them into the trash; then, on second thought, he retrieved the papers and hid them in his wallet.

Guests began to complain: Somebody threw hair shaving into the swimming pool. Someone peed in the elevator. Yellow-brown doo-doo in a pizza box, on the hallway carpet. Who did it?

“Gorilla, just stop this nonsense,” Ogechi scribbled in his notebook when he heard news of the misdemeanors, which he attributed to his difficult client. “PAY THE MONEY.” Supercat called. Why didn’t Ogechi do the obvious thing and send the gorilla back? Was not the crippled man suffering from trauma? “Use your head, boss.”

Soon Ogechi began regularly placing his ear against the carpet, the cold wall, the doorframe gap, hoping to catch stray gossip about the gorilla from other lodgers. But he felt a draining unease, as if these measures were futile, and some dogged catastrophe hurtled toward him.

He wondered if the gorilla might have yielded through less forceful means. If he hadn’t gone to the man’s room and flung things about. But he hadn’t stolen anything. No money. Nothing. He had only frightened the gorilla because the man refused to cooperate. Had he stolen any secret? No. He had found out he was battling an ex-goalkeeper, wounded by Boko Haram, who kept good money hidden. What was wrong in learning that?

In a mad moment, he imagined he was the biblical Jonah in a storm, told to jump off the boat into the water, to propitiate the gorilla, in order to calm the world and gain never-ending success. But where could he find this water? Inside him or inside the gorilla?

He recalled a failed-pacification nightmare that made him hit his foot against the table as he woke in the chair one Sunday. In it, the urban gorilla medicine man forced him in front of two tied men, who made gorilla grunts, and handed him an ax to kill them—to “pay his debt to wealth.” As Ogechi swung the ax at one man’s head, he lashed out his foot at the coffee table, and woke up, conflicted. Was he comfortable with snapping out of a dream like this—unfulfilled? He didn’t know.

In a new dream he escaped out of a hole in a wall and floated. He beat his arms like wings. He woke up and lay in bed for a long time, knowing that he had loved that soaring feeling. He wanted more. He got up and paced around. He ate a banana and drank a Coke.

In the morning he worked on his laptop, and called housekeeping to come and get his trash. Then he put on his cap and went down to the swimming pool area where the gorilla now passed most of his time. Behind the shower stall, the man was bending with difficulty over the side of his wheelchair, trying to pin a napkin with a straw and draw the napkin to his leg. He mumbled.

Ogechi walked up to him stiffly and picked up the napkin. He placed it on the handle of the wheelchair. The man jumped.

“God took them?” he gasped at Ogechi. His bloated eyes looked about to burst from meager sleep. His teeth were sulfur colored.

Ogechi placed his hand on the crippled man’s shoulder. “Are you OK?” he asked.

“Thank you, chief,” croaked the man.

“I am not a chief,” said Ogechi.

Ogechi found a dirt cheap flight to Nigeria on Travelzoo. Stops in Bangkok, Addis Ababa, Dar es Salaam. Libreville. Abuja, then Lagos. Rough, but doable. The American drove the unhappy man to the airport in the Peugeot. The gorilla had tried to talk his way out of returning to Nigeria, but the American had been insistent. Ogechi sat in the back, one arm resting on the folded wheelchair.

“Safe flight,” Ogechi told the gorilla as the car stopped under the airport’s light-splashed awning. The gorilla turned around in the front seat and gave Ogechi a long, direct look. “You, too,” he grumbled.

Eighteen months later, Ogechi stopped his Peugeot at a light and saw the crippled man looking out of the window of a Coaster bus that carried the glossy image of a running footballer on its side.

“Ha! Hey!” he managed to shout through the window. “You!” he pointed at the man, wondering if he was seeing a ghost. In the back of a neighboring Melaka Zoo & Night Safari truck, reddish orangutans and long-lashed giraffes gazed at him and nudged each other in their padlocked cages.

The man looked down and grinned. His teeth were very bright. The goalkeeper’s long arm waved. “Chief,” he greeted. His eyes zigzagged.

“Your . . . that flight,” Ogechi shouted, perplexed.

“What flight!” the man challenged, his voice hard. His head bobbed forward, like a duck’s. “I’m the goalkeeper trainer of this team.” Wow, thought Ogechi.

Then he saw the letters on the bus: “PANORAMA Melaka Eoo4.” He paused. So, this was an ordinary city bus shuttling ordinary people.

“What of the son you’re looking for?” Ogechi cried. A rhino roared at him from the truck ahead.

“Son?” the man repeated, confused. “I’m looking for my wife. My son. My cow, *nama mi*.” Other faces glanced down from the bus at Ogechi, inquiring. A woman with a red dot on her forehead. A child wearing funny eyeball glasses. The light changed. The animals in the truck began a ruckus as the vehicle moved forward.

“Good-bye, Chief Tony,” waved the man. The bus moved away. Ogechi parked

the car by the road's shoulder. His hairy hands were streaming sweat. It was clear that he probably needed a new name. He got out and walked around the car. He would think of a name tomorrow as he drove into Singapore for the pickup. He felt annoyingly unsettled at the reappearance of the addled, crippled man, who, he thought now, had probably bolted from the concourse minutes after Ogechi and the American handed him his boarding pass. He recalled googling the gorilla's name one night, recently, after he had one of his gorilla nightmares, and not finding anything interesting until he coupled the name with "Boko Haram kill village drown cows." The media had called it the "Baga Massacre." He saw pictures of the governor and a village ward head visiting the survivors in the hospital. In another article, Ogechi found the gorilla's name—referred to by members of his village as Goalie, because he used to keep goal for the Ranchers Bees' youth team—then he spotted the man in a corner of the last photo, bandaged and grinning painfully at the person in the next bed. A report cited the drowning of three hundred cattle in four ponds, and the slaughter of two thousand people, including babies, whose blood the insurgents drank from the infants' slashed throats. A year after, Al Jazeera noted that survivors had become brainsick, calling acquaintances by the names of deceased loved ones, screaming insults at random people on the street, wrecking tomato stalls at the market with machetes. Some had even turned evil, and grown into wild motor park con men who obtained favor and money by passionate deceit. Ogechi realized now, with shame, that the gorilla had deceived him during the ROB, run of business, first by not revealing he had bad legs when they e-mailed each other, then by using Supercat as a proxy to frustrate Ogechi, and finally by sneaking away from the airport with impunity. He had been *bossed*. He had thought he was puppeting a client but saw clearly now how *he* had been the puppet from beginning to end. How had *he* not detected the circuitous pattern he was so familiar with?

He got back in his car and drove up the road. The zoo truck had broken down. Passing drivers slowed to throw peanuts and rice into the animals' open mouths. An audience had formed near one cage, where a surprised driver, who had disembarked to feed a chimp, was being held prisoner by the pincer-like feet of the ape. Ogechi narrowed his eyes at the scene, seeing himself in the trapped man. Something burned in his chest. He turned away and floored the accelerator.

"You allowed an ordinary cripple to best you," he accused himself, disgusted. "This sicko running about Malaysia thinking he's still a goalkeeper, *giraffing* around for a family long dead . . ." He swept across an intersection and stared at himself

in the cracked rearview mirror. “Why did you think you were the boss, when you weren’t,” he said. “Why?” He did not know the answer. He knew he had begun to mistrust himself, and found his mind slipping readily into this shambling state without resistance. This was probably what it felt like to be an urban gorilla, he thought. To be pulled into a labyrinth outside your own power. Over a clump of roadside trees, he saw the city’s distant skyscrapers rise in a blur of light. For the first time in his life, Ogechi feared for the future of his business—it would be downhill from here if he continued along this path of self-doubt. He panicked. I have to reorganize, he thought now, leaning into the wheel. I’ll buy *The 48 Laws of Power* tomorrow and read it straightaway. I’ll read *Rich Dad Poor Dad*. *Who Moved My Cheese?*. *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership Workbook*. *You Are a Badass*. *Sunshine Little Kitchen*. I’ll heal myself.

“I’m just a gorilla,” he said moments later. He had arrived at the hotel. “And it’s a good thing to know. It’s good. It’s good for now.” He studied the hotel’s huge blinking yellow sign for a minute, then got out of the car.