PROLOGUE

The sky was just starting to lighten with the first hints of dawn as a hooded figure sneaked through the quiet grounds of Bluegate High School. The school was silent, the hallways empty and still. It was the perfect time for someone who didn't want to be seen.

Dressed in all black, the figure moved quickly and quietly, blending into the shadows. They carried a small backpack and seemed to know exactly where they were going. Reaching a side entrance, the figure used a key to unlock the door and slipped inside without making a sound.

Inside the school, the figure moved with purpose, avoiding the security cameras and heading straight for the art room. The air was still and cool, the only sound the faint echo of their footsteps.

PROLOGUE

The figure paused at the door of the art room, listening for any sign of movement. Satisfied they were alone, they pushed the door open and slipped inside. In the middle of the room stood a large painting of a white horse running free, a beautiful burst of colour and life.

The hooded figure pulled a small flashlight from their backpack, its narrow beam lighting up the painting. With gloved hands, they took out a jar of black paint and a brush. Opening the jar, they dipped the brush into the thick, dark liquid and began to smear it across the canvas.

The black paint spread over the vibrant colours, turning the once beautiful painting into a mess of dark streaks. The figure worked quickly, covering every inch of the painting except for the head of the horse. When they were done, they carefully inserted a small note into the corner of the painting and used a different colour of paint to secure it in place, making sure it blended in yet remained distinguishable upon close inspection. Stepping back, the flashlight beam revealed the ruined masterpiece with only the horse's head left untouched.

Satisfied, the figure capped the paint jar and returned it to the backpack. They noticed a few white hairs on the floor near the painting and muddy footprints trailing in from the door but decided to leave them. With one last look around, they turned off the flashlight and left the art room, closing the door quietly behind them.

As they stepped into the hallway, a noise startled the figure—a door opening at the far end. The janitor, Mr. Williams, stepped out, heading towards the art room. The figure froze, heart pounding, as Mr. Williams looked up and noticed the shadowy form.

"Hey! Who's there?" Mr Williams called out, starting to walk faster towards the figure.

Panicking, the figure turned and bolted down the hallway, Mr Williams shouting after them. The figure rounded a corner, running as fast as they could, the sound of footsteps echoing behind them. They reached the side entrance and threw it open, slipping outside just as Mr. Williams turned the corner.

"Stop! Come back here!" Mr. Williams shouted, but it was too late. The figure was already disappearing into the early morning shadows, the door swinging shut behind them.

Breathing heavily, the figure ran down the street, not stopping until they were well out of sight. They paused to catch their breath, glancing back at the school. The adrenaline was still pumping, but they had made it.

In their rush, they hadn't noticed a book falling out of their backpack, now lying on the floor of the art room. The cover read, "How to Care for a Hamster," and inside was a name: "Cody B."

CHAPTER 1

THE CHICKEN DANCE FIESTA

Asabe Zobo couldn't contain her excitement as she walked onto the grounds of Bluegate High School that morning. Her curly afro bounced with every step, and her jacket, a vibrant mix of bold patterns, seemed to reflect her joyful mood. In her hand, she clutched the city newspaper featuring her very first published article. The thin paper crinkled under her grip, but she didn't care; she couldn't stop smiling. Writing had always been her passion, and seeing her work in print made her feel like her dream of becoming a journalist was finally starting to

come true.

"Asabe, why are you grinning like that?" asked her best friend, Viola Martins, jogging to catch up. Viola brushed a curl from her face as she looked at Asabe with her usual curious expression, her light skin glowing in the morning sun.

"I got published, Viola! Look!" Asabe proudly waved the newspaper in front of her friend's face.

"That's amazing, Asabe!" Viola hugged her, sharing in her excitement. The two friends continued to chat excitedly as they walked towards the school building.

Bluegate High School, in the bustling city of Lagos, Nigeria, was not only a great place to learn but also an exciting place to be. The walls were covered with bright, colourful murals, and the big campus was filled with trees and flowers. Known for its friendly community and enthusiastic students, the school was always buzzing with activity. There were fun clubs, interesting classes, and lots of cool events that made every day an adventure.

As they neared the school entrance, they noticed a crowd gathered around someone's phone, giggling and whispering. The students of Bluegate High School were always in the loop about the latest gossip and news. Asabe's curiosity got the

better of her, and she nudged her way through the crowd of students to see what was happening.

"Please welcome the star of the hour, Ms. Asabe Zobo!" Hiro shouted, stepping forward with a dramatic bow.

Asabe's cheeks flushed a deep shade of red despite her brown skin. She had no idea what Hiro was talking about, but the mention of her name made her think they had discovered her article. Her heart swelled with pride—until she caught a glimpse of the phone screen.

There she was, doing a ridiculous chicken dance outside the school gate. She remembered that moment vividly, thinking she was alone and safe from prying eyes. But clearly, she was wrong.

"Oh no," Asabe whispered, her embarrassment turning into a burning desire to disappear.

Hiro, always one for theatrics, jumped in front of her and began mimicking the chicken dance, flapping his arms and clucking like a hen. "How do you like my video upload, Asabe?" he asked with a smirk.

Asabe felt tears welling up in her eyes, but before she could respond, Viola stepped in front of her. "That was pretty impressive, Hiro, but you missed a step." She then performed

her own exaggerated chicken dance, ending with a flourish. "And look, my video has gone viral too!" Viola held up her phone, showing a mock video she had just made.

The crowd burst into laughter, and soon, everyone was doing their own versions of the chicken dance. Hiro, seemingly losing his audience, slunk away, muttering something under his breath.

Viola grabbed Asabe's hand and led her away from the crowd. "Don't worry about it, Asabe. It all worked out, didn't it?"

Asabe sighed, trying to let go of her embarrassment. "I know, but I still want to get back at Hiro for this. Maybe I can come up with a plan to teach him a lesson. What if we... oh, I know! What if we put itching powder in his gym clothes?"

Viola's eyes widened, and then she burst into laughter. "Asabe, that's so mean! Can you imagine Hiro itching all through gym class?"

Asabe grinned mischievously. "Exactly! He'd be so embarrassed, and it would serve him right."

Viola's laughter faded, and she shook her head. "But think about it, Asabe. If Hiro finds out it was you, he'll want to get back at you even worse. And what if the itching powder gets

on someone else by accident? You could end up in a lot of trouble."

Asabe's smile faltered. "I guess you're right. It could blow up in my face, couldn't it?"

Viola nodded. "Yeah, and it's not worth it. Besides, you're better than that."

Before Asabe could answer, their friends Tami and Obi joined them. "What's going on? Why is everyone doing the chicken dance?" Tami asked, her tall, athletic frame making her stand out. Her dark skin and braided hair complemented her sporty outfit and favourite smartwatch.

Obi, calm and thoughtful, adjusted his glasses—a habit of his when thinking deeply. He looked at Asabe with concern. "Did something happen?"

Asabe quickly explained the situation. Tami burst into laughter, "That's hilarious! The way Viola turned the tables on Hiro was so cool! But what Hiro did was really mean."

Obi nodded in agreement. "Yeah, that wasn't right. But instead of focusing on that, let's talk about the awesome news. Asabe, how did you feel when you saw your article published?"

Asabe's face lit up. "It was amazing! It was hard to believe it at first."

Viola, Tami, and Obi listened eagerly as Asabe shared her excitement. Just then, the bell rang, and simultaneously, an alarm on Tami's smartwatch beeped.

"Whoa! Class is starting already?" Asabe exclaimed, glancing at her watch.

Viola adjusted her backpack and grinned. "Time flies when you're having fun."

Tami smiled and nodded. "Totally," she said, turning off the alarm on her smartwatch. "Guess we better get going."

They hurried to their classroom, chatting and laughing, grateful to have awesome friends and an exciting day ahead.



History was their first class of the day. Mr. Layiwola, their teacher, decided to have a little fun with the students. The classroom, with its large windows letting in the bright Lagos sunlight, was decorated with colourful posters, educational charts, and a few plants on the windowsills. "Alright, everyone. I have a puzzle for you," he announced, holding up a small wooden box with detailed carvings. "This box contains a clue

related to today's lesson."

Asabe's ears perked up, and she leaned forward expectantly. She loved solving puzzles and mysteries, which often got her into adventures. So, this was a welcome distraction from her earlier embarrassment. Knowing Asabe's love for puzzles, Mr. Layiwola smiled and walked over to her desk. "Asabe, I think you'll enjoy this," he said, handing her the box.

She examined the box carefully, noticing a series of symbols etched along the sides.

"We'll solve this together," Mr. Layiwola continued, handing out small pieces of paper to the students. "Each piece of paper has a riddle on it. Solve your riddle, and you'll get the first letter of the answer, which corresponds to a symbol on the box. Once we have all the symbols, we can figure out the combination to open the box."

Asabe quickly jotted down the symbols in her notebook and began deciphering them.

Viola leaned over. "Any ideas?"

"I think it's some sort of combination lock," Asabe whispered back. "Look, these symbols correspond to letters in the alphabet."

Viola nodded, understanding. Asabe smiled, then turned

her attention back to her notebook, carefully writing down the corresponding symbols.

The room buzzed with excitement as everyone got to work. Some students whispered to each other, trying to figure out the riddles. Others scribbled furiously on their papers.

"Hey, what's the answer to this one?" Tami asked, nudging Viola with her elbow. "I speak without a mouth and hear without ears. I have no body, but I come alive with the wind. What am I?"

Viola grinned. "I think it's 'echo.'"

"That means my first letter will be E," Tami replied, jotting it down.

Obi, sitting nearby, overheard and joined in. "Mine's 'amplify.' So that's an 'A.'"

After a few minutes of intense concentration and teamwork, the class had all the symbols. Asabe, feeling the weight of responsibility, turned the small dials to the correct symbols corresponding to the letters they had deciphered.

"Hold on, let me see," said one of the boys, craning his neck to get a better view.

Asabe adjusted the final dial and held her breath. The box clicked open, revealing a rolled-up piece of parchment inside.

"We did it!" she exclaimed, beaming at her classmates.

Everyone gathered around, eager to see what was inside. Mr. Layiwola smiled, pleased with their teamwork. "Well done, class. Now, let's see what the clue is." He unrolled the scroll and read aloud," 'In eighteen eighty-four, the Berlin Conference divided Africa's shore.' Perfect timing, as we're discussing the impact of colonialism in Nigeria today."

Asabe felt a surge of pride. Despite the rough start to her day, she had helped her class solve the tricky puzzle. Things were looking up.



During snack time, Asabe, Viola, Tami, and Obi found a quiet spot in the schoolyard under a large mango tree to eat and talk. The yard was filled with laughter and chatter from other students enjoying their break.

"Viola, you were right earlier. Trying to get back at Hiro isn't the right thing to do. It's just really hard to forget how embarrassed I felt," Asabe admitted, nibbling on her fruit.

Viola nodded. "I get it. But remember what we talked

about in Sunday school? About forgiveness and rising above our challenges?"

Asabe sighed. "I know. I need to forgive Hiro, even if he was mean. It's just... hard."

Tami smiled and placed a comforting hand on Asabe's shoulder. "We're all learning and growing, Asabe. Nobody's perfect. But choosing to do the right thing makes us stronger. Remember Philippians 2:13 - 'For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.' With God's help, we can do what's right."

Obi added, "And we're here to support you, no matter what."

Asabe nodded, feeling a bit lighter. "Thanks, guys. You always know what to say."

As the bell rang to signal the end of snack time, Asabe felt encouraged. With the support of her friends and trusting in God's help, she knew she could face her challenges with determination and a forgiving heart.



Asabe, Viola, Tami, and Obi's next class was art, and they headed there together. The art room was filled with colourful canvases and the smell of fresh paint. It was a place where students could freely express their creativity and create beautiful works of art. Viola, in particular, loved this class. Her passion for art and DIY crafts often made her the first to dive into new projects. However, today was different.

As they entered the art room, a loud gasp echoed through the hall. Students were gathered around Sarah's painting, their faces filled with shock and horror.

"Sarah, what happened?" Asabe asked, genuinely concerned.

Sarah, standing near her ruined project, looked devastated. "Someone destroyed my project. It was supposed to be my best work, and now look at it."

Asabe felt a pang of empathy and shock. She had seen the painting before; it had been a beautiful picture of a white horse running free. Now, black paint was splashed across it, ruining the vibrant colours and lovely details.

Viola, who loves art deeply, was particularly affected. Her eyes welled up with tears as she took in the damage. "This is heartbreaking, Sarah," she said softly. "I know how much

effort you put into this."

"Oh no, Sarah," Tami added, her voice equally soft. "This is awful."

The murmurs among the students grew louder, and soon, the entire school was buzzing with the news. Teachers arrived, trying to calm the students and assess the situation.

Principal Okafor entered the room, her face stern. "Everyone, please settle down. We will get to the bottom of this matter," she assured. "Students who don't have art class right now, please head to your classrooms immediately. Teachers, ensure that all students are accounted for," she instructed. Then, turning to the art class students, she continued, "For those of you with art class, we will be having our lesson outside today. Please gather your supplies and follow Mr. Johnson, the art teacher, outside."

Asabe glanced at her friends, who gave her determined nods. They all knew what needed to be done. They were ready to uncover the truth behind the vandalism and bring the culprit to justice.

"Don't worry, Sarah. We'll help you figure out who did this," Asabe promised.

As the class gathered outside, they were surrounded by

fresh air and natural scenery. The schoolyard was filled with tall trees swaying gently in the breeze, colourful flowers blooming in neat rows, and the distant sound of birds chirping. The students, however, were too busy murmuring about what had happened to notice the peaceful surroundings.

Feeling the weight of the situation, Asabe quickly whispered a prayer for guidance. "God, please help us find out who ruined Sarah's painting. Give us the strength to do the right thing, even when it's tough."

She felt a sense of peace wash over her, knowing they weren't alone. With God's help, she and her friends were ready to face whatever came next.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did Asabe feel when she saw the embarrassing video of herself? Have you ever felt embarrassed like Asabe? How did you handle it?

2. What lesson did Asabe learn about seeking revenge? How can you apply this lesson in your own life?

3. Why is it important to forgive others, even when they hurt us? Can you think of a time when you forgave someone?
4. What qualities do Viola, Tami, and Obi show in this chapter that make them good friends?

5. How can you ask for God's guidance when you face a difficult situation? Have you ever experienced peace after praying for help?