

The Ram

By

Dr Wilson Orhiunu (Babawilly)

Skido had never bought a Ram in all his life. Each Christmas he watched with envy how his neighbours slit the throats of animals in preparation for the great feast. Such was his embarrassment at only being able to afford a mere chicken that he yearly insisted on frozen parts of poultry for his family.

'How can I look the neighbours in the face if I sharpen my knife to kill a mere chicken while they kill baby elephants, tuffia!' he thought to himself.

This Christmas will be different. He had been saving for two years now and his time had come. As he hung on to dear life on the back of a pick up truck with his Ram next to him, he could not wait to see the faces of his neighbours when he got home. He beamed with pride. Even if he didn't eat a morsel of food in the great feast, no one could take away his achievement. At last Sir Skido, the great electrician has slaughtered a Ram.

It went to plan. They entire compound came out to greet him. They spoke of the Ram as if it were a new car bought by one who had walked all their life. 'This is such a fat Ram' Tunde said as he slapped the back of the animal. 'Gently Tunde, don't kill it before its time' replied Skido. Everyone laughed. Skido's wife beamed with pride. She even brought out her second hand camera phone for a snap of the beast. Their 'small fight' this morning was all forgotten now.

THE FIGHT

She took exception to Skido announcing he was going on a long journey with his cousin Thomas in the early hours of that morning. How could he leave her with all the house work to do on this cold hamarttan morning she angrily enquired. They exchanged rude words which ignited her PMT and soon afterwards they traded blows in the centre of the compound . Skido's wife was strong and muscular giving as good as she got. She also fought dirty. Skido was soon begging her to release her strangle hold.

The whole compound came out to beg before she let go. Soon Skido limped off with Thomas repeating over and over again, 'that woman will kill me, Thomas, that woman will kill me'. Lady Skido did not at all seem embarrassed in the slightest. They had fought twice in the last week. She spoke loudly with her friend Fola from next door, 'I will make good stew eh, when you people smell it, you will all come and beg'. 'I trust you Lady Skido' Fola said giving her friend a high five.

The Skido children soon began to feed the Ram with fresh grass. It was a day of pride in the Skido household.

MISSING

Two weeks later Skido woke his wife in the early hours of the morning, 'my dear, the Ram's voice has changed'. He shook her again. She sat in bed rubbing her eyes. 'What time is it?' she asked. Skido struggled with his watch which glowed in the dark. 'Five thirty my dear' he said.

'So Skido, it has now come to this. You stay up all night listening to the noise from that Ram of yours. Perhaps I should be out there tied to the balcony eating grass while the Ram takes my place in your bed eh?' with that she turned and slept. Skido felt tempted to wake her up and tell her that she had just made sense for the first time in their long marriage. Who in their right senses will steal her. She was past her sell buy date and snored like a Hippopotamus. Surely it would make more sense to have the Ram in the bedroom, safe from envious neighbours. 'Let sleeping dogs lie' he muttered to himself as he watched her chest rise and fall with each noise breath. Skido could not sleep. He wondered how the Ram would taste. Dead, fried and lying on his plate of jollof rice surrounded

by dodo. He just couldn't wait for Christmas. But why did the Ram sing with such an unfamiliar voice? He tip toed out of the bed and gingerly made his way past his children who slept like land mines on mats on the floor. All ready to explode in a noisy cry should he miss a single step in the darkness. Lady Skido would surely run her mouth if she found out he was embarking on this journey.

Outside the front door the cold harmattan wind hit his face with unwelcomed familiarity. He looked where the Ram should have been but saw a black object. 'Chai, a witch has turned my Ram into a black cat o!' he screamed. The word witch has the power to pull the neighbours out from the deepest regions of sleep. Second only in invoking powers of the words 'armed robbers'. Tunde shot out of his room first, holding a cutlass in one hand and with the other hand he held onto the ends of his loin cloth. 'Where the witch, where the witch?' he screamed. Skido rubbed his face and eyes and focused hard. 'It is a CD player o' said Skido. Tunde's shouting had brought everyone out. 'Tunde raised his fingers to his lips indicating everyone should remain silent and listen. The winds brought in distant noises from the mosques and churches. The recorded bleating of the Ram resumed. Someone shone a torch light and it was indeed a CD of the Ram's noises locked on the repeat function. Tunde moved close. 'Skido, na bad thing don happun, bad belle people don sabotage your christmas' He switched the CD player off and Skido promptly fainted.

By the time Skido was revived the whole compound was in mourning. 'Who could have done this?' they inquired of the old harmattan winds. Skido knew it was an inside job that had stolen away his dream. His beloved Ram. He was inconsolable. He went back to bed and refused to see or speak to anyone. Tunde whispered to Lady Skido to keep a watchful eye on her grieving husband so that 'nothing foolish would happen'.

FIGHT AGAIN

The next morning the Skidos took the limelight again. This time it was a vicious fight. Not the usual quarrels the neighbours were used to. Skido had gone mad and was beating Lady Skido. They had started in their room and spilled out into the compound. When the men intervened and pinned down the now berserk Skido, his wife ran swiftly into the house. She returned moments later with his beloved City and Guilds diploma. She poured kerosine all over it and set it on fire. The men held Skido tighter. There was no need. He went completely flaccid.

Suddenly Lady Skido's was on fire. The kerosene has soaked into her cloth which burnt ferociously. Sir Skido moved with lightening speed to save his wife. He grabbed a bucket of water and doused the flames before putting a loving arm around her. As they went into their room the compound watched dumbfounded. 'Do these people love or hate each other?' Tunde asked out loud. 'Love ke, Lady Skido give am juju chop o' came a reply from Mama Ngozi; a sworn enemy of Lady Skido. No one could ignore her unusually jovial mood since the Ram went missing.

Later that day while Lady Skido went off to the local police station, Sir Skido was planning his master stroke. He had enlisted the help of the most dreaded Juju priest in the area in the search for the missing Ram. By evening the whole of Lagos had heard about the Ram. Mainly because Lady Skido has erected a poster bearing the face of her Christmas Ram which had been stored on her camera phone. The poster drew great crowds. The caption- HAVE YOU SEEN THIS RAM? REWARD AVAILABLE FOR INFORMATION LEADING TO ITS RECOVERY- sent the crowds into raptures of mirth. A welcome distraction from the problems of Lagos life.

K-TV were soon on the scene snooping for anything newsworthy for –Tonight with BBJ. Within two hours a camera crew was setting up in the Skido compound. Ben Benito Junior, alias BBJ, the TV star, was interviewing the neighbours. The CD player, which had now acquired the status of *Exhibit One* at the local police station was brought back by the Police under armed escort and the CD of the Ram's bleating was played.

Lady Skido now wearing her *Sunday best* and spoke of a wrecked Christmas between sobs and copious nose blowing. She lapsed into the cliché- I wish to appeal to all well meaning Nigerians to come to our aid- a standard in all emergencies in Nigeria.

JUJU MAN

The arrival of the Juju man brought pandemonium. He seemed to materialise out of thin air. Women grabbed their children and ran behind closed doors. The men took slow backward steps. The juju man reached into the front of his trousers and pulled out a live rat. In one deft movement he bit off the head of the rat and threw the rest of the body in the air.

He chewed on the head as he spoke. 'So will the thief die! The thief must die!' Shame and pride was forgotten as men moved hastily into their rooms.

Ben Benito Junior walked over to the Juju man and thrust the K-TV microphone in his face. The lighting engineer moved into position, extracting a squint from the Juju man. Without prompting the Juju man performed for the camera. He told of his family's illustrious history in the field of crime fighting. The police officers guarding *Exhibit One* gave each other knowing looks. 'Crime fighting my smelly armpits' they seemed to say with their eyes. The Juju man looked impressive. He wore a bright red cap studded with cowries and a tight black sleeveless shirt which gave the impression that he was showing off his figure. He definitely had breasts and a pot belly to match. Both quivered as he moved uncontrollably like one who had a Viper and its off springs spending Christmas in their underpants. His baggy red trousers had not been washed for years. It looked and smelt like it.

Extracting what looked like bones of a medium sized primate from his black bag which he held under his left shoulder he began to sing off key. 'I smell the thief is near and he is about to meet his ancestors. I will shout fire four times. He will die on the third fire! I do not waste time. Fire!'

From the safety of his window Tunde offered words of advise 'If na you, better confess o! My motor no go carry dead body go mortuary lai lai!' Tunde was the only car owner in the compound.

'Fire!' the Juju man screamed. 'I say Holy Ghost fire burn you!' It was Pastor Jimoh returning from his prayer meeting. The Juju man ran to Pastor Jimoh and they almost clashed heads. K-TV cameras moved over to where the action was unfolding.

Bassey, a college of education lecturer came out of his room with a chewing stick in his mouth. 'Pastor Jimoh, you wan die? You and your White man's religion. Was it not the Portuguese that brought Christianity to us in the 15 th century, meanwhile na cover up for trading. Go Portugal today go see weda dem carry Bible for head like you. You go die o'. Bassey was cheered for his wisdom People began to come out of their rooms. This was the only kind of entertainment available in this part of Lagos; quarrelling and fighting. The action was too good to be missed. The initial fear the Juju man evoked was waning. Standing eye ball to eye ball Pastor Jimoh and the Juju man looked deep into each other's eyes. The tension was building. Both men were breathing heavily and the crowd expected a fight. 'If I shout fire now, how I sure say no be you go fall and die?' asked the Juju man. Jimoh backed off, picked his Bible which he had dropped to the floor and started off on his Christmas preaching.

SERMON IN THE COMPOUND

'Not again Jimoh, you wan kill us with your Bible?' said Tunde. 'If your Bible waters down this medicine and the thief is not caught, Jimoh you will pay me compensation' said Skido speaking for the first time. 'Tuffia! Nothing can water down my Juju. Preach and pray well well. When you finish, I will shout the third fire and we shall have a corpse!'

'Good will to all men and Glory to God in the highest is the message of Christmas. If Christ died for us while we were yet sinners what gives us the right to kill a sinner for stealing a Ram. Forgiveness and love is my message. Skido forgive' said Pastor Jimoh who had now walked over to where Skido sat. 'You pray- forgive me my trespasses as I forgive those who sin against me- and yet attempt to take a life just one week to Christmas. I rest my case'. Everyone went silent as Pastor Jimoh walked off to his room. Everyone except Bassey. 'All the picture of Jesus na Oyinbo. Pope sef Oyinbo.' 'Shut your mouth, you- on- leave historian' replied Pastor Jimoh. Everyone knew that the college of Education where Bassey taught had been closed down for five months following student riots. During this time Bassey had not received a salary.

'Oh, so the holy Pastor get yabis for mouth eh? If you yab me, you dey yab my God. Na so Bible talk' was Bassey's weak reply. 'On leave Historian!' cajoled Tunde. 'No mind dem Ojare. Even the Bishop title wey dem give Ajayi Crowther na sake of say Malaria don kill Oyinbo missionaries finish and dem want Dudu man jaki to go dey work for dem. Jimoh, abi I lie. At least you go CMS grammar school. You suppose know that one' said Bassey.

FORGIVENESS

'So long as the gospel is preached, I no care' replied Pastor Jimoh as he vanished into his room. While all this was going on, Junior, Sir Skido's sixteen year old son had convinced his mother on the merits of Christmas forgiveness as propounded by Jimoh. The wife whispered in his ear and the case was closed. As Sir Skido saw the Juju man off the members of the compound discussed the unsatisfactory end to the evenings happenings. In these parts, forgiveness was low on the agenda. It was more like- an eye for an eye and a life for a life.

The Skido household soon came to terms with their loss. A chicken was bought by Pastor Jimoh's congregation as they felt immensely proud of Sir Skido's Christmas spirit. Skido himself had lost his shame of slaughtering a mere chicken. He killed his chicken happily two days to the great day. 'At least everybody here knows I can afford a Ram' he said to himself in consolation.

The Christmas play at church filled Skido with great pride as his daughter was selected to read out a poem she had written especially for the occasion entitled –The Ram.

*The Ram sings a carol
For it's that time of year
The butcher sharpens his knife
A happy Christmas is near*

*The ram was bought by Daddy
Has been fed well each day
Now feels part of the family
Will be eaten on Christmas day*

*The ram will give it's life
For us to enjoy our Jollof rice
With delicious moin moin and Dodo
Coca Cola and crushed ice*

Pastor Jimoh made reference to the poem during his sermon. Christ was the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world, giving away his life for others. In passing he also warned against using Juju to solve problems that should be prayed about. Sir Skido shifted nervously in his seat at that point.

Christmas day came quickly. Skido was the happiest he had been in years. Just before lunch however he had visitors. Pastor Jimoh and some elderly neighbours. He silently prayed none of his relatives had died.

'What is it' he asked. No one replied. Lady Skido served the drinks and from the conspiratorial looks she gave Pastor Jimoh, Skido knew she was in on the secret. Thirty minutes later in came Junior looking solemn. 'Go on, tell him what you told me. He is your father. Tell him' said Pastor Jimoh.

Junior knelt before his father. 'Papa please forgive me. I sold the Ram to buy a pair of new trainers for Christmas'.

The End