



BENITA

A POWERFUL CHRISTIAN
NOVEL SERIES

SEASON 3

— ✧ — WRITTEN BY — ✧ —

ANTHONY IJERE

SEASON 3 · EPISODE TWO

The Land of Witches



“

These people can kill our bodies, but they cannot kill our souls.

— JOHN, FORMERLY KNOWN AS TIGER

Didi had almost stopped believing that she would ever see another human being again. For days she had wandered through the thick forest with no clear direction, her clothes torn in several places and scratches covering her arms and legs. Hunger had weakened her body while fear had made every sound in the forest seem like the footsteps of the men who had been chasing her.

She was resting beneath a large tree when she suddenly heard footsteps, and she immediately became alert. Someone was coming, so she moved behind the tree and held her breath as the footsteps became louder. Then a familiar voice came through the trees.

“Didi!”

Her eyes widened because she knew that voice.

“Didi!”

She stepped out from behind the tree and a man

appeared among the trees. Didi stared at him in disbelief, and for several seconds she could not speak because it was the young man who had stood between her and the gang leader, the same man she had believed was dead.

“Is that you?” she finally asked.

The young man stopped when he saw her.

“Didi?”

She rushed towards him.

“I thought you were dead!”

The young man looked exhausted, for his clothes were dirty, his face was covered with sweat and dust, and his legs were trembling from days of walking through the forest.

“So did I think you had been captured,” he replied.

Didi looked at him carefully.

“But I heard the gunshots.”

“I know.”

“What happened?”

The young man sat down beneath the tree.

“I will tell you.”

Didi sat beside him, and for a moment neither of them spoke because they were both too exhausted to continue walking. The young man finally began his story.

“When the leader pointed the gun at me, you ran into the forest.”

Didi nodded.

“I thought they had killed you.”

“They tried to.”

He looked down at his hands.

“The leader cocked the gun and pointed it directly at me. He pulled the trigger, but something strange happened.” He paused. “He pulled it again, but the gun did not fire.”

“What?”

“Yes. He became confused. He checked the gun and tried again. Nothing happened.”

Didi stared at him.

“What did he do?”

“He became angry. He pointed the gun at the sky and fired.”

Didi's eyes widened.

“It worked?”

“Yes. The gun fired immediately.”

They both became silent, and then the young man continued.

“He pointed it at me again and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened.”

Didi slowly shook her head.

“Then he pointed it away from me and fired again. The gun worked.”

A strange fear came over Didi.

“He tried several times?”

“Yes.”

The young man nodded.

“By that time, all of them were confused. They began shouting at one another. I did not understand what was happening, but something inside me told me to run.”

He paused and looked towards the thick forest.

“I did not wait for another opportunity. I jumped into the bush and ran.”

“All of them were confused. Something inside me told me to run.”

Didi listened as he explained how the gang members pursued him, shooting into the forest in an attempt to frighten him out of hiding, but the young man kept running. He told her that they followed him for a long time, and sometimes he heard them behind him and sometimes he heard them firing, but eventually he could no longer hear them.

“Did they find you?”

“No.”

“How did you survive?”

“I kept running.”

Didi looked at him.

“Where were you going?”

“I did not know.”

He gave a tired smile.

“I was only trying to stay alive.”

The two of them remained under the tree for some time, for they had no food and no water except the little they occasionally found from streams and natural sources, and they had no idea where they were. They began moving again, and as they travelled deeper into the forest they encountered dangers they had never imagined.

THE ANIMAL IN THE BUSH

One afternoon they heard a strange sound coming from the bushes, and the young man stopped to listen. The sound became louder as something moved through the vegetation, and they looked at each other before they saw the animal.

Didi screamed.

“Run!”

They both hurried towards a nearby tree and climbed as quickly as they could while the animal moved

beneath them. They remained completely silent, and for a while they thought it would leave, but it did not and instead settled beneath the tree.

Didi looked down.

“It is still there.”

The young man nodded.

“Do not come down.”

They remained on the tree as an hour passed and then another, while the sun gradually began to disappear and Didi's legs were aching.

So they remained there until eventually the animal moved away, and they waited even longer before climbing down. By then both of them were exhausted, yet their journey continued through nights when they slept under trees and other nights when they remained awake because they were afraid of wild animals, until their bodies became weaker and their hope became smaller.

Then one night while walking through the forest, exhaustion finally overcame them and they sat beneath a tree to rest. Neither of them realised when sleep

came, and they were awakened by voices.

Didi opened her eyes to see men standing around them, several of them holding guns, and she screamed in terror.

“Please! We are not criminals!”

The young man immediately raised his hands.

“We are not criminals. Please.”

One of the men stepped forward.

“What are you doing here?”

“We are lost,” the young man explained.

“Why did you enter this forest?”

“We were running from people who wanted to kill us.”

The men exchanged suspicious looks and one of them pointed his gun at the young man.

“Who are you?”

The young man explained everything, but the hunters did not believe them.

“You expect us to believe that story?”

“It is the truth.”

Didi pleaded with them.

“Please believe us. We have been walking for days.”

The men searched them, and when they found nothing that could prove their story, they tied their hands and told them they would explain everything when they got to the community. Didi began crying as they were taken away.

“Please, we have done nothing wrong.”

Nobody listened, and after a long journey they arrived at a secluded community. Didi immediately noticed that something was different about the place because the people stared at them without smiling or welcoming them, and they were taken to a small prison structure and locked inside. The door was shut and Didi sat on the floor. She looked at the young man.

“What are we going to do?”

He looked at the door.

“I don't know.”

They were given food once a day, but it was barely

enough to keep them alive, and days passed in that condition. Then they were told something that frightened them when a hunter came to the prison one afternoon and said they would remain there until the day of the sacrifice.

Didi's heart sank.

“What sacrifice?”

The man looked at her without emotion.

“You will know when the time comes.”

Then he walked away, and Didi turned towards the young man in fear.

“What did he mean?”

The young man was silent, but later they learned that the community intended to sacrifice them to an idol. They were being fed and kept alive because the people wanted them to remain strong until the day of the ritual, and Didi became overwhelmed by the news.

She sat against the wall and began to cry.

“I have suffered too much.”

The young man looked at her.

“I know.”

“I have been running for days. I have been hungry. I have slept in the forest. I nearly died several times. Now they have brought us here to kill us.”

She wiped her tears.

“Sometimes I think it would have been better if I had just allowed those men to kill me.”

The young man looked at her carefully.

“No.”

Didi looked at him.

“No?”

“You must not say that.”

“What else can I say?”

He moved closer.

“Listen to me, Didi. We may be in a prison, but this is not the end.”

She shook her head.

“How can you say that?”

“Because I have discovered something.”

“What?”

“Jesus Christ.”

THE NAME JOHN

Didi became silent and the young man continued.

“You remember what happened when we went to attack Benita?”

Didi lowered her head.

“Yes.”

“We saw something that we could not explain.”

“The armed men?”

“Yes.”

He looked at her.

“I believe they were not ordinary men.”

Didi stared at him.

“Then what were they?”

“I believe God sent them.”

Didi remained silent while the young man explained

everything that had happened after the attack on Benita. He told her how he had met Benita after escaping from the gang, how she had spoken to him about Jesus, and how she had led him to surrender his life to Christ.

“I had been called Tiger for years,” he said. “That was the name they gave me in the cult. But I no longer want that name.”

Didi looked at him.

“What should I call you?”

He smiled.

“My name is John.”

“John?”

“Yes.”

She nodded.

“Okay, Brother John.”

He smiled.

“Yes. Brother John.”

Didi looked down.

“How did you leave them?”

John explained that after his encounter with Benita he had decided that he would never return to the gang, and that they wanted to kill him because he left. Didi realized that the gang was probably still looking for them, and John nodded in agreement.

“That is why I believe we cannot return to our former lives.”

Didi's eyes filled with tears and John placed his hand gently on her shoulder.

“

*Didi, these people can kill our bodies, but they cannot kill
our souls.*

— JOHN

She looked at him.

“Jesus can save your soul.”

Didi began crying.

“You think Jesus can still forgive me?”

“Yes.”

“After everything I have done?”

“Yes.”

“Even after I knew the truth and still refused to do what was right?”

John looked at her.

“That is exactly why you need Him.”

Didi covered her face and cried as she remembered Benita, the lies, the people she had helped deceive, and the lives that had been affected by her decisions. She remembered how she had chosen the wrong path even when she knew it was wrong, and now she was sitting in a prison facing death and could no longer pretend that she was in control of her life.

“Jesus,” she whispered.

John looked at her.

“Talk to Him.”

Didi lifted her head.

“Jesus, have mercy on me.”

Her tears continued to flow.

“I have sinned against You. I have done many things that I should not have done. I have hurt people. I have

followed the wrong people. I have made terrible decisions. Please forgive me.”

John bowed his head as Didi continued.

“I surrender my life to You. Please save me. I don't want to continue living the way I have been living. I want You to be my Lord and my Saviour.”

John prayed with her, and when they finished, Didi remained silent for several moments before wiping her tears. She admitted that she did not know what would happen to them, and John smiled with the same uncertainty.

“I don't know what will happen to us.”

“Neither do I.”

“But I am no longer afraid.”

“Why?”

“Because I know where my soul belongs.”

John nodded, and they remained in that prison waiting for the day the villagers had chosen for their sacrifice. But something had changed because they were no longer waiting as two frightened prisoners, but as two

people who had placed their lives in the hands of God.

BENITA'S NEW ASSIGNMENT

Meanwhile, Benita had completed the three-week NYSC Orientation Course after spending the three weeks undergoing the various activities required at the orientation camp before being posted to her Place of Primary Assignment. When she received her posting details, she discovered that she had been posted to a rural community that was close to a township but surrounded by thick vegetation and far removed from the busy city environment she was used to.

Several corps members were travelling together in a bus, talking and laughing as the bus moved along the road. Benita looked through the window with excitement, but she was also praying silently.

“Lord, let me fulfil the purpose for which You sent me here.”

WELCOME TO NJABA

THE LAND OF WITCHES

The bus continued moving until they saw a sign that read WELCOME TO NJABA with another inscription beneath the name that said THE LAND OF

WITCHES. Benita stared at the sign and sat upright.

“Did you see that?”

One of the corps members looked outside.

“See what?”

“The sign.”

Another person looked.

“Land of witches?”

Everyone became quiet, and some laughed nervously while others became frightened. Benita stared at the sign until it disappeared behind them.

“God,” she whispered, “what have You brought me here to do?”

She looked through the window again.

“Is there a mission for me in this place, or have You sent me here for nothing?”

She remembered Benjamin's words about being the light in the darkness, and she closed her eyes in prayer.

“Lord, help me.”

The bus continued, and then somewhere in the middle

of nowhere the vehicle suddenly stopped. The driver tried to restart it but nothing happened, and he tried again with the same result.

One of the corps members sighed.

“What happened?”

“The vehicle has developed a fault.”

They all came down while the driver and another man checked the engine and tried several things, but nothing worked. They called people in nearby communities and someone promised to come, but they waited and nobody came. Another person answered the call and said he was on his way, but he never arrived.

Hours passed, for it was around ten in the morning when the bus broke down and by four in the afternoon they were still standing beside the road. The sun was beginning to move lower and the atmosphere around them felt strangely uncomfortable, though Benita could not explain it but sensed that something was wrong.

Then an elderly woman suddenly appeared from the

bush without anyone seeing her coming, and she walked towards them. They greeted her respectfully.

“Good evening, ma.”

The woman spoke rapidly in a language most of them could not understand, and everyone looked confused until a young lady named Constance stepped forward.

“My mother is from this village,” she said. “I understand the language.”

She listened to the woman carefully and then turned to the others.

“She is asking what we are doing here.”

Benita answered.

“Tell her that we are NYSC corps members. We have been posted here to serve.”

Constance translated and the woman responded immediately, causing Constance's expression to change.

“What did she say?” Benita asked.

“She asked whether we informed anyone before coming.”

Benita frowned.

“Why would we inform them?”

Constance translated and the woman became visibly upset as she spoke for several moments. Constance listened and then turned to them with an uncomfortable message.

“She says we should go back.”

Benita stared at her.

“Go back?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

Constance translated again and the woman shook her head before saying something that made Constance become uncomfortable.

“What did she say?”

“She says we are not welcome here.”

Everyone became silent, and Benita stepped forward to explain.

“Please tell her that we are sorry if we have offended

them. We did not come here by our own decision. We were posted here.”

Constance translated, but the woman shook her head and did not accept the apology. She turned around and began walking back towards the bush while Benita watched her and then looked at the others.

“What do we do now?”

Nobody answered. Someone suggested they should find another means of transportation while another person said they should call the NYSC office, but the phone network was poor and they were stranded.

Benita finally spoke.

“Let's pray.”

Everyone looked at her.

“Pray?”

“Yes.”

She opened her Bible.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6

“In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.”

She looked at them.

“Jesus also said that whatever we ask in His name, He will do it. Let us ask God to make this vehicle work.”

They formed a small circle and Benita began praying while the others joined. They prayed for several minutes and then prayed again, and when they finished, the driver entered the bus and turned the key.

The engine came alive and everyone shouted with joy.

“Amen!”

“Thank You, Jesus!”

“Praise the Lord!”

“Hallelujah!”

The driver looked at them in amazement.

“I don't understand this vehicle again.”

They laughed with relief, but Benita did not laugh for long as she looked at Constance and Constance looked back at her. Neither of them spoke, but they were thinking the same thing, that they had entered a place where they would need more than ordinary courage. They needed power!

When they finally entered the community, Benita began looking around at the village that was unlike anywhere she had been before. There were traditional houses, thick vegetation, narrow paths, and people going about their daily activities, and then they saw something that shocked them.

Several people were playing with fire, throwing flames into the air and catching them again. One corps member stared through the window in confusion.

“What is happening here?”

Nobody answered, and a few minutes later they saw two boys fighting. One boy was older and stronger and he beat the younger boy repeatedly until the younger boy fell, but then the younger boy suddenly stood up and looked towards the sky.

He began speaking words none of the corps members could understand and then stretched his hand towards the older boy. A strange force appeared to strike the boy, throwing him backwards and causing him to fall heavily to the ground and begin vomiting, while the younger boy immediately ran away.

The corps members stared in shock.

“What did we just see?”

Benita looked around and could feel the atmosphere changing.

“This place is evil...”

They were eventually taken to meet the traditional ruler of the community, who welcomed them with a smile.

“Welcome to Njaba.”

He smiled.

“Welcome to the land of witches.”

The corps members exchanged nervous glances while the king laughed and reassured them.

“Do not be afraid. What you see here is our tradition. We are not bad people.”

He offered them food and palm wine, and most of them politely declined because they were unsure of what they were being offered. But one of the corps members, Evans, had no such hesitation because he

loved food.

He accepted the drink, ate the food, and drank the palm wine while the others watched him with concern.

“Evans, be careful.”

He laughed.

“Why are you people afraid? It is just food.”

He continued eating, and later they were taken to the accommodation that had been provided for them. It was a simple building that served as a corps members' lodge, not particularly comfortable but enough for them to stay during their service.

That evening everyone settled down, but Evans soon began complaining about his stomach. Benita looked at him with concern.

“What happened?”

“My stomach is hurting.”

His stomach had begun to swell, and within a short time it became unusually large with the skin appearing strangely stretched. Everyone became frightened and gathered around him.

“Evans!”

He groaned in pain as his stomach continued swelling, and Benita immediately began praying for help while Constance joined her and the others prayed as well. They anointed his stomach with oil and continued praying until gradually the swelling began to reduce and the pain eventually subsided.

Evans breathed heavily as Benita looked around the room with a deep understanding.

“We are in a serious spiritual battle.”

Nobody laughed and nobody disagreed because they had seen enough.

* * *

END OF EPISODE TWO

WATCH OUT FOR THE NEXT EPISODE

WRITTEN BY
ANTHONY IJERE