



# Eyo

She was leaving behind  
all she'd ever known.  
They said she was lucky.  
*They lied...*

**ABIDEMI SANUSI**

# Eyo

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**WordAlive**  
P U B L I S H E R S  
*Feeding the Mind, Inspiring the Soul*  
[www.wordalivepublishers.com](http://www.wordalivepublishers.com)

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First published 2009 by

**WordAlive Publishers Limited**

PO Box 4547 GPO-00100

Nairobi, Kenya

Website: [www.wordalivepublishers.com](http://www.wordalivepublishers.com)

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ISBN 978 9966 805 26 3

Printed and bound in India by Thomson Press (I) Limited

*For Parakletos  
for the journey*



Don't you see that children are GOD's  
best gift? the fruit of the womb, his generous legacy?  
Like a warrior's fistful of arrows are the children of a  
vigorous youth. Oh, how blessed are you parents,  
with your quivers full of children!

Psalms 127:3-4 (*The Message*)



## **A word from the author**

*Eyo* is my attempt to draw attention to the twin issues of child trafficking and sex slavery in the United Kingdom (UK). Whilst it is true that this is a work of fiction, any African child trafficked to the UK will encounter, at some point or the other, some or all of *Eyo's* experiences.

There are thousands of *Eyos* in Europe. It may be that in your country there are children's charities working to safeguard the lives of children like *Eyo*, by campaigning against child trafficking and sex slavery. For the most part, they work on limited funds and need all the help they can get. You might not be able to support them but please, keep an eye out. For every *Eyo* that is rescued from human traffickers, scores more are trafficked out of Africa and into Europe.

Do something. Keep an eye out.



*African  
Flower*



# One

“Iced water! Iced water! Don’t let the heat of the day take you down! Buy iced water!”

The girl calling out her wares walked carefully and purposely, with the confidence of someone used to negotiating her way around plastic bags of human waste on the road. She held on to a boy walking next to her. The boy looked about eight and was carrying a tray filled with melting ice as well.

The girl couldn’t have been more than ten years old although it was hard to tell. Her eyes were brown, “clear”—the girl’s mother said—fringed with rather long lashes. Her nose wasn’t anything special, rather snub, if truth be told, hovering above full lips. If she was indeed ten, then she was rather small in size for someone of her age, thin, as opposed to underweight, with even thinner arms that looked like reeds. There was strength in those arms; you could tell by the way one hand held on to the tray on her head and the other held on to the boy’s hand with the tenacity of a warrior queen from days past.

“Iced water!” The girl called out again in a nasal singsong. Her voice rang out clear at first before it was drowned out by other hawkers.

“Slippers! Buy fine slippers!”

“Fresh bread! Buy tasty fresh bread!”

Not to be outdone, the boy and the girl cried out again in perfect nasal symphony.

“Iced water! Fresh! Let our iced water cool you in the sun!”

On the roadside, stalls were lined up cheek by jowl against each other, their brightly coloured cornucopia weighing down the rickety tables. They offered many wares from meat and biscuits, to car parts, watches and other unidentifiable items. The road itself belched with cars, lorries, vans, motorcycles and herds of animals stuck in tedious traffic. The incessant din of car horns, bus conductors, traders and buyers haggling all rose up to the ears of the sun which responded by beating down its merciless rays on the seething mass of humanity below, as if to remind them that they were its captive. Like they needed reminding.

The girl and the boy were in Ajegunle—a seething, sprawling slum on the swampy marshes of the Lagos lagoon, west of Lagos Island. It was separated from the opulence of Apapa and TinCan ports by a canal, with a reputation for being the most violent, notorious and criminal ghetto in Nigeria. Called AJ City by its residents and aptly named Jungle City by others—which the residents preferred to Ajegunle—with its narrow, untarred streets, winding alleys and shanty settlements, Ajegunle stands defiant on reclaimed marshes, surrounded by decomposing garbage, burning wood and rotting animal carcasses, a relic from the abattoir on the aptly named *Malu* (cow) Road, the entryway into Jungle City.

The boy that the girl was holding attempted to break free from her hold. The girl looked around for what prompted this action. She didn’t have to look far before she spotted it, a punctured ball, black with dirt, a few feet away from them.

“No, Lanre,” the girl said firmly.

“Eyo, let me,” the boy said twisting his arms, wriggling to break free.

“Lanre, I said ‘no’. We’re almost done. We’re going home soon,” Eyo said.

Lanre didn’t answer. He jerked his arm with determined force and freed it from Eyo’s hand.

“Lanre, no!” Eyo called out.

Lanre half-ran towards the ball, one hand balancing the tray on his head. He stopped short when he came against a dark brown shirt, stained with grease. He looked up and encountered a cruel face.

“Give me your money,” the face said, pushing him. Lanre went back a few steps, with his hand still on his tray. He looked back at his sister in fear. She held out her free hand towards him. Lanre walked back quickly and grabbed it.

“You have to kill me first,” Eyo said to the man, and she meant it. The thought of going home empty handed and facing her father gave her the strength of Samson. She tightened her grip on her brother with one hand and on her tray with the other.

“*Ole!* Thief! *Gbomogbomo*, child stealer!” she screamed, pointing at the man.

Heads turned. The splitting din of the traffic, frayed tempers and even the heat seemed to be suspended temporarily. The smell of blood stirred the crowd. The man tried to walk away without drawing attention to himself. But it was too late.

“*Ole!* Where? Get him!”

Eyo pointed to the man who by now had started running. The crowd gave chase.

“Somebody get a tyre!” She heard someone call out.

“Let’s get him first!” Somebody else said.

“Are you alright?” A woman stopped by Eyo and Lanre. They both nodded.

“Don’t worry, they’ll catch him and he’ll get a tyre,” the woman said.

Eyo and her brother nodded again. ‘The tyre’ was a particular trademark of the Lagos street mob justice. It was handed out to people who had been caught breaking the law and unfortunate enough to be caught by the mob and not the police. Victims of this mob justice had car tyres thrown around their neck, were doused in petrol and set alight. Afterwards, their charred bodies were left on the street for the wild dogs to feast on and at other times, to rot in the scorching sun, the smell a reminder to passersby of the rules of the street and what happened to those who broke them.

“Iced water! Drink! Fresh from the tap! Iced water!” Eyo called out.

Nobody paid her any attention, all eyes and running feet were turned in the direction of the man who was now surrounded by a jeering crowd. Eyo and Lanre could hear him begging.

“Please, have mercy. They’re lying. I’m no child stealer. Have mercy...” They heard a dull thud and then a searing gasp of pain. Eyo and Lanre turned to the direction of the crowd. They could just about make out the man, a lone figure in the middle. He was on his knees, crying and pleading, his clothes now mere shreds. The mob surged towards him. Eyo and Lanre could see some people holding batons, poised above their heads. Someone with a tyre was making his way through the mob.

Eyo turned her brother's face away and started in the opposite direction.

"Can we go home now?" Lanre asked, his voice subdued.

"No. We haven't sold all the ice. Papa will be mad," Eyo replied. "Don't worry, the man is gone now. He wouldn't trouble us again," she said, shaking his hand reassuringly.

"Iced water!" she called out.

"Iced water!" Lanre repeated after her.

They both disappeared into the heaving humanity of Jungle City. Behind them, someone lit a match. It was followed by a blood-curdling scream, and the jeers of scores of onlookers.

\* \* \*

Eyo turned into the corner of her street, her hand still holding Lanre's. Her tray was empty and so was Lanre's. Papa would be pleased. It was dark, the darkness alleviated by the timid candle light of the roadside stalls. She navigated the crater sized potholed road with ease, each crater and its location committed to memory. Her feet danced over the plastic bags and the open drains overflowing with effluent. Her brother's steps matched hers, his mind filled with thoughts of what he would do once he got home.

Sounds of highlife music boomed from a neighbourhood beer parlour, an edifice of four concrete pillars supporting a corrugated steel roof that gave shelter to the plastic chairs and rusty tables underneath. Eyo stole a look at the beer parlour. Sure enough, her father was there. She walked on, quickly.

Suddenly, from the dark recesses of the street corner, a shadow stepped out and stood in front of them. It was an *area boy*, a local gangster. His teenage eyes were red.

“Eyo, Eyo,” he said, his voice high. Eyo could tell he had been sniffing glue.

“Leave me alone,” she said. She held on to her brother and tried to sidestep the area boy but he blocked her.

“Would you like me to show you something?” he said, his hands going into his bulk of his trousers.

“No, just leave me alone,” she answered. She pushed past him, dragging her brother with her. Behind her, she heard his high-pitched cackle.

“Eyo! I’ll catch you one day and show you a good time!” he called after her.

Eyo ignored him. Inwardly she hoped that he wouldn’t chase after her as he was wont to do sometimes. He was like all the other addicts in Jungle City; unpredictable. She waited, then breathed easier when she didn’t hear his running footsteps behind them.

They soon approached their house, a building locally known as *face-me-I-face-you*. These were rectangular houses, sometimes uncompleted, with rows of single rooms facing each other divided by a corridor with an open doorway at either end. There were ten rooms in Eyo’s building, each with at least 10 people living there. All but Eyo’s family and the landlord’s rooms measured 10 by 8 feet.

Eyo’s family had the smallest room so they paid slightly lower rent. Like most of the houses in Jungle City their building lacked electricity, running water, and a bathroom; hence the tenants bathed very early in the morning or late at night in the ‘backyard’, the outback. The pit latrine, the *shalanga*, was

in a windowless hut, also in the backyard; hence people didn't hang about too long in there. The smell of the latrine only eased during the harmattan season when the cold winds of the Sahara Desert rolled across West Africa leaving a fine mesh of red dust in its wake.

Eyo let go of Lanre's hand and they both walked over the open drain outside the building. She ignored the man lying down languidly on the rickety bench in front of the house, watching her and her brother with hooded eyes.

Lanre ran inside and turned right, to their front door. He opened it and came out a minute later with a battered ball in his hand. A lady came out of the room, wearing a *wrapa*, a wrapper tied across her chest. She was a large woman, with luminous skin and eyes that told anyone who dared look that they saw everything and missed nothing.

"Lanre, at least eat before you play ball!" the woman called out.

"Mama, you know what he's like. The landlord is outside, I'll just drop this and go and watch over Lanre," Eyo said, going into the room.

"That man should be ashamed of himself. No child is safe from him. No child!" Her mother spoke in a loud voice that carried outside to the ears of the man lounging on the bench, just as she intended.

"Yes, Mama," Eyo said. She stacked the tray against the wall and did likewise to Lanre's which was on the floor. She looked around.

"Where's Sade?" she asked.

"Mama Fola took her out. That's the only person you care for in this house. Your five year old sister," her mother replied, although she smiled when she said it.

Mama Fola occupied the room opposite theirs. She was also Mama's best friend.

"Somebody tried to take our money today," Eyo said.

"I hope you showed them," Mama said.

"I did the *gbomogbomo* thing," Eyo replied.

"Good," her mother said. "They wouldn't get a chance to steal from hardworking people again. Now go and watch your brother."

Eyo took an *apoti*, a wooden squat stool from behind the door and went back outside. She set up in front of the house, a few feet away from the landlord and focused her eyes on her brother playing street football with his friends. Not once did she acknowledge the landlord. A while later, the front windows of their room opened out to where she was sitting.

"Lanre! Eyo! Food is ready!" her mother called out.

Eyo called out to Lanre and they both went inside, Lanre dripping sweat, to his mother's irritation. "You think water grows on trees?" She grumbled.

\* \* \*

Everyone was asleep. Eyo could hear their rhythmic breathing. Mama was on the bare mattress. Eyo, Lanre and Sade were on the sleeping mat on the floor. Outside, the moon peeped through the slit in the thin curtains—two pieces of local *adire* cloth folded over the curtain rails and held together by wooden pegs—and cut the room in half with its sliver of grey light. It was humid, the closed windows did not keep out the dank smell of rotting garbage that permeated the house. Eyo wiped her forehead and turned to her left side. Sade's hot breath drove

her to turn to her right where she encountered Lanre's flailing arm. She turned on her back and looked up at the ceiling. Cobwebs dangled from the corners, and flies buzzed above her. She swatted a few and turned to her left again, deciding that Sade's sweet hot breath was better than being pummelled by Lanre's limbs. Eyo heard the room key turn in the lock and immediately shut her eyes.

A dark figure came inside the room. It waited at the foot of the mat. Eyo still kept her eyes shut, even when she could sense the figure's eyes boring into hers, willing them to open. After what seemed like an eternity, the figure made its way to the mattress and descended on Mama, fumbling clumsily with her wrapper.

"Wale, please, the children..." Mama's voice was sleepy.

"Olufunmi, it's nothing they wouldn't discover themselves," Papa's voice was slurred.

He hoisted himself on her and leveraged himself. Soon enough, a grunt of satisfaction escaped from his lips. Eyo kept her eyes steadfastly shut. She turned her face slightly towards Lanre—Sade's breath on her face was getting too hot—and her eyes opened for the barest moment. In that brief moment, she caught her father's eyes and he angled himself and Mama, just as she knew he would, in such a way that she could see what they were doing. The moon's silvery light illuminated their sweat slicked bodies as they both moved in rhythm with each other. Eyo shut her eyes. She heard Mama's oblivious pliant moans and then Papa's shuddering gasp as he collapsed on her.

Eyo turned over and Lanre's leg came thundering down on her arm. She moved it away gently.

# Eyo

An illiterate ten year old girl is trafficked to the UK by her father with promises of work, an education and a fortune. And thus begins her five-year ordeal, first as a domestic servant and then as a child sex slave. Eventually, she is rescued from slavery by a Catholic priest and nun and sent back home to Nigeria to rebuild her life. And then she finds out that even in freedom, society demands an exacting price from those it should protect...

## Praise for Abidemi Sanusi books:

*"Kemi's Journal... surprised me with its grittiness and realism. The loose ends, hard decisions and painful resolutions keep this real to the very end."*

—Christianity magazine

*"The light tone of her confessional diary turns sharply from light to dark..."*

—Reuters

**ABIDEMI SANUSI** was born in Nigeria. She is a former human rights worker and author of three other books including, *Kemi's Journal of Life, Love & Everything* which has been translated into Dutch and German. Abidemi lives in the UK and is currently working on her next novel.

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PUBLISHERS  
[www.wordalivepublishers.com](http://www.wordalivepublishers.com)

ISBN 978 9966 805 26 3

