

No Mercy.

The story of a soldier girl

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The Forecast forum.

The protest that started timidly in 2016 has turned into a civil war between the military and armed separatist. The villages along the roads have become deserted with the smell of burnt houses lingering the air. Muyuka was once a peaceful village, okay not totally, certainly not the safest place on earth but it was made of people who hustled their day out and in to provide for their loved ones. But nothing ever prepared this vibrantly hot village for what visited them in 2018. A mishap that would change the life of a young girl called Blessing.

Agatha had just returned from the farm, all her thoughts were on peeling the cassava she had just harvested and steeping it in the basin she had asked her children to fill. She was emptying the cassava peelings in the nearby bush when she noticed her shadow was indicating the time to be 5pm as per usual to her, She looked left, then right and far ahead, putting her hand on her forehead to shadow from the scorching sun heating the town of Muyuka this early may. She put her thumb in her mouth and raised it to the sky, she spat out realizing the dirt she has just put in her mouth. That made her laugh recollecting how her mother always said ‘dirty no di kill black man” In doing that, she was trying to determine if she had to ask her children to remove the laundry from the lining or just let it dry out through the night. Who will steal it? These days no one wandered out of the house in the night. No one wanted to cross the path of the dragons, talk less the army. She spat again, rinsing her mouth with water that was remaining in the basin. “So this children did not fill this basin?” She was planning already what she will do to them. That nyango who likes walking like her brother, she has forgotten that she is a girl. I wonder who will cook for her in her husband’s house when all she does is play- play.

I have warned this child time without number about completing the house chores before anything else. Hey gods of our land, gods of my ancestors!

Blessing! Bleeessssiiiiing!!!

Ahan..! Ble, ble did I not tell you not to follow me? That’s my twin brother Paul, pulling out his tongue and visibly happy at the sound of mamas voice. Scared cat a proper one he was.

Maaaaammaaaaa! I am coomiing! I squirmed. As if to prove to Paul how boldness was my nickname.

Hmm, mama is going to beat you, he was nodding like a gecko, as we were both trying to remove the sticking grass that had formed green and brown patterns all over my Cinderella dress which had been bought for Christmas 3 years ago. The bright yellow dress progressively turned into a church dress and eventually into a house dress. It was a process all my dresses went through. I can barely breathe as it hugged me so tight it could explode like a parachute. Well counting the holes under my armpit and pockets... mama always said, I was too tall for my age, hands on her waist, she will ask the skies what I was eating as if she wasn't the one cooking the food.

Mama had a kitchen broom in her hand, she had turned it the other way round, holding from the head to form a wipe. I knew what was waiting for me. Swaying herself back with one foot in front and the other one behind, she used to launch at me barely missing my head. "How many times have I told you not to do like your brother hein Blessing? You dis pikin," she said in broken English trying to catch me. But I have always been too fast for her, I dutched her and went into the living room where my dad was watching the mid-day news. He was sitting on his chair, no one else had the right to sit on it. Just as he had his special plat, folk, bucket. Everything special for papa.

Good evening Paapaah! In my sing song gay voice.

"Shhhh... No noise please." He said, turning his head just enough to ensure I was the one besides him.

My dad, I liked him more, he will never beat you. All he would say is "never do that again, have you heard?" He was so cool.

My father was a keen follower of the news, he always reminded us how important it is to know what is going on around us amidst the civil unrest in our region. I hated the news and even though I loved my dad so much, I actually preferred when he was going to work. That was before the ghost towns led to the closing of the school papa worked in. Now he spends his time with the remote control.

I took a broom and started swiping the corridor while my brother went feeding the dogs. We had two, Jack and Jill. I gave them the names, after one of my favorite poems. You know the one they thought us in primary school.

Today is ghost town Monday, declared by the restoration forces whose commander was based far off in America papa said. It is announced from ear to ear that we all had to show our support to the cause because people are sacrificing for our liberation from those on the French side who have been marginalizing us since, since 1961. Suddenly I heard papa calling mama.

Agatha come, come, hurry nah! I and Paul answered present even before my mother. Is your name Agatha, pass there! My dad rebuked us before continuing...

Agatha-

These boys will put someone in trouble oh! You know the check point at mille 14?

Mom nodded, adjusting her eyes on the screen. His hand was pointing to the television set. My father is talking about the separatist forces known as the dragons. He said they were out to liberate us from the deadly grip of Atango who was appointed to silence the resistance. My dad was born just after independence in 1962. He always told us how the French Cameroon cheated us into merging with them instead of Nigeria and how ever since then the Anglophones have been playing second fiddle to the francophone regime. He made it a passion to inform us how all this started, I mean the fighting that is going on. He made it clear to us to fear the military with all our heart. They cannot be trusted he affirmed!

“Yes, talk nah Monono” my mom answered impatiently, wiping her hands on her already dirty apron. Pacing as if she wanted to urinate on herself.

Two –two; two separatist two military on the ground and you know what that means Agatha, more military to be deployed for revenge, sweat was tripling from his forehead down to his beard. On the spur of the moment, I thought the military had already surrounded and barricaded us. As I looked left and right outside the door. My mom looked at my brother and stuttered, “No school or playing out of the compound for you tomorrow.”

I and Paul were in form 4 preparing for our GCE exams next year. I can count with my fingers how many times we have been in class this whole school year. Not that I have a problem with that but Paul he loves school. With that big head he always took first in class. Paul!! We are not going to school tomorrow I said in a sing song voice pulling my tongue at him. Extemporaneously mama folded her knuckle and gave me a knock on my head. Ouch!

“Stop laying your hands on this child nah Agatha! One day you will leave a hole on her head.” My father frowned going back to his news.

Later that evening we ate pounded cocoyam and vegetable soup, of course I and my brother preferred rice and beans. But following my mom’s timetable, it is Fufu day. Just a little drizzle and Eneo had cut lights, so we rushed to bed as early as 8pm. No news for daddy this night Paul giggled under the bed cover. We would rather a telenovelas everyone was talking of in school but dad has banned us from ever touching his remote control to put that ‘nonsense’ if we had a swear box for fear we became mama Ngassa who nearly burnt down her house because she forgot cooking oil on the fire.

I was awakened by vigorous barking sounds that came from outside then followed by the sounds of hustling and bustling, voices screaming and running feet , the room was pitch black, I roped my eyes with my hands in an attempt to understand what was happening, the lantern my father had lit had gone off. I could smell smoke, it made me to cough. Paul is sleeping like a log of wood. Orr Paul, get up, quick Paul. Smoke is in the house.

Mama! Papa! The house looked as if they had built a burn fire inside. Paul follow me! Reaching the parlor, the smell was even suffocating and I and Paul started choking, then just there, I saw fire in my mama and papas room. The door was open and the

bed was aflame. Papa! Mama! Hands from nowhere held our mouths. Omg? My heart stopped!

Don't panic, said an ever familiar voice, it was Ngassa papa's friend son.

Stay quiet, we need to leave this place now, the military are burning down houses. Follow me run, run, Paul, run fast. Pushing us out of the house but papa and mama, I refused to follow him... Ngassa stopped running, they are all dead, all of them my father, my mother too." Flashbacks of what papa warning us about the military sped through my head. No, this can't be true! Surely, I am dreaming and I swamped back to sleep.

Blessing, blessing..! Paul and Ngassa were shaking me fervently. Get off me! When last did you take a bath Ngassa; phew!?

You fainted Paul said wiping his eyes. I thought you decided to leave me too. Then it all came back, the fire, my parents: Jesus!!! Paul held me and we cried, even Ngassa sat down and joined us and we cried. The sound of fire arms was coming closer and that set us off running deeper into the bushes. That was our only refuge from the wicked military. We kept running, Paul was tired he wanted to rest but the sound of gun shots reminded him why he was running. Ngassa said we were in Ekona Mbenge not far from kumba. But we needed to rest our legs couldn't anymore, our breath had shortened; we were thirsty and hungry too after running, the sun was steaming through the trees and it formed some mesmerizing light patterns. It was like a dream all that was happening, it was so sudden I had to pinch myself to ensure it was true. My mind was blurred-

Mum, dad, gone just like that, no I can't believe it! Ngassa brought us some water in a leave, he said it came from a tree nearby. Ngassa is 22 years old, he is tall and very strong, and he was training as a boxer and drove a taxi to make money. He always bragged about going to America to become like Francis Nganou the ring fighter from Cameroon. He has a very modern phone where he showed us videos of the man's fights.

Take this, he shoved something brown in Paul's hand, eat this up, fast. We need strength to continue this journey to kumba. We shall be safe at my auntie's house. Monkey cola, Paul used his teeth to tear it open, removed the white interior which we ate. Its sweetness gave us energy to continue our journey. The bush was becoming thicker with the sounds of animals over our heads. Ngassa made us stick hooks which we used to create paths by pathing the bush. There were some very itchy plants and some with thorns which left us with bruises on our legs and arms. My pajamas was all wet from the morning dew on the leaves. Paul had a pull over and long pajamas pant, thank god for that. Paul wasn't strong like me, I did not want him to catch a cold.

"Paul are you okay," I touched him to look at me. His eyes had darkened as he looked at me and said, "Yes Ble, I am fine, I am fine.

Sshhh! Ngassa turned around putting his finger to his lips, pausing in his steps.

I heard it then, voices coming towards us but from where..? Quickly, Ngassa dragged us behind the tree. The rustling feet and voices got closer. We were spying behind the tree. My heart was beating so fast, I thought it would alert those people. Oh god, let it not be the military, I prayed.

Dad, always warned us “better the Dragons, than those hillocks”

Ngassa took off his kaki jacket and handed it over to me. I didn't want it but he insisted saying I had better cover up and only then did I notice my nipples traced out through my nighty. I was embarrassed and angry. The jacket was warm but smelled like armpits.

We waited behind the tree until the voices faded. Let's go Ngassa said, wondering what will happen if the guys who just passed by were the red dragons. He was worried because Blessing was very pretty and could easily be molested by sex starving fighters. He had to protect them, it is because the military couldn't find him that the burnt the houses in their compound. He has known these two ever since they were born. I have to get them to the camp in Kumba, there they are going to be safe.

“Ngassa, I am so tired, please can we rest a little bit”, Paul drooped on the grass, stopping Ngassa in his tracks. “What is he doing bringing his face to my face like that.” Paul curled up towards blessing. “Look young man, man up, we are not playing here. We are almost there.” He hissed and I almost puked, gush Ngassas breathe could kill a fly. Taking my courage with both hands “Why is your mouth smelling like this Ngassa?” I asked him, blocking my face with my hands. Instead of a blow, he chuckled, I ate Ekwang yesterday and you know how spicy it is. Look Paul if you ask such a question again I will throw you to the animals.” I ran and stood in the middle of him and Blessing. Scary cat! Blessing chuckled out loud but stopped immediately in fear of bringing the wild animals towards them. Look at them! Ngassa thought, shaking his head in pity.

We were startled by some sounds echoing in the air, it was like a wolf brawling and a cow meowing. Ngassa seemed unperturbed, Paul had bent double in fear.

Blessing, Paul! I have this under control okay? Stay behind me. Okay, so that got us even more scared and we both held Ngassa by the waist.

“Water na water! “

Ngassa shouted from the top of his voice. He saw how fear gripped Blessing, but he couldn't have told them before, it would have made it difficult for them to follow him. How else could he protect them?

Two men jumped from the trees and pointed their guns at us. Stop there, hands up! They had riffles like the one in grand Pa's house in the village with red cloths tied around it. They were all dressed in black and red as if it were a uniform. One of them said; “it's the blue dragon. Brotha, is it you.” they both did some signs in the air before hugging.

“Who are these Blue dragon? A disgruntled voice asked? Ngassa lied through his teeth “my brother and sister. They are tired please take us in.” we arrived in front of a

barrier made with long bamboo sticks. Some substance wrapped in plantain leaf was administered into our eyes and behold the fence has given place for a community of people, women children, men. I looked out, hoping to see mama and papa. IT LOOKED LIKE A JUNGLE VILLAGE, dresses were lined up on the grass, tents were erected, there was a woman frying puff-puff and another making pap. It was the bivouac people have been gossiping about. Straight from an enchanting tale, it looked to me.

Ngassa knew they were starving, so he took them to mama Mbone. She is a bubbly woman who had ran from Mabanda a neighbourhood in kumba into the bush when she heard more military were deployed into kumba. She like others here hadn't anyone in the city nor did she want her name to be read in the obituary news. She is everyone's mama here, Ngassa comforted us during the introductions. Ma Mbone asked for Water to be pulled from the well and we showered and slept. The beds were the biggest mattresses I have ever seen, covered with a large mosquito net. Everything was clean and I and Paul slept until we heard sounds of guns. Don't be afraid they are practicing, mama Mbone shouted across to us. She was cooking. Is she always cooking Ble, paul nudged at me.

"What is the time mama Mbone?" Paul asked her approaching strategically to see what she was cooking, we had swift the aroma of Rice, Jollof maybe. She rustled into her pocket, then the other, she looked everywhere at the same time. This happens to me all the time she said, don't worry, I will find it and then she seemed to remember and her eyes glittered with joy. Here it is, she took it from under where she was sitting. Mama Mbone is fat, very fat, her buttocks has covered it. Ma Mbone started laughing, certain that they would join her in the laughter but no, they just stood there looking at her as if she were deranged. "Na woa ho! Which kind pikin them this. Whona no sabi laugh? Wonna come sidon here." I sat on a mortar and Paul on a big log of wood which had blackened from warming the fire. The fire was divine. Ma Ngassa sent a girl about my age to cut us corn in the garden. I wanted to do it myself but Ma Mbone insisted that the girl did, she had an impressively big stomach. She was pregnant! I have never seen a pregnant girl before. "Let her go and get it, she needs exercise. When it is to open her legs for boys to enter she knows."

Mama! Warned the embarrassed young girl, stop it oh! She said holding her ears. When she was out of eaves drop, mama Mbone, hedged towards me and said, blessing there are many predators here in this camp, let no one fool you to open your Vagina, you hear me so? I will give you books, Mr. Robben will teach in the morning.

A year passed by and the bush became home. I wanted to do more than cooking and teaching the children, so I decided to join the Blue dragons. Mind you it wasn't easy because the dragons were all boys and no one wanted me onboard, not even Ngassa. One day I followed them unknowingly to the sacred bush were the soldiers were fortified. It was a scary but fascinating procedure, with a lot of goats and fowls beheaded. There were ten fighters who had to be prepared to attack the fake dragon camps that had been erected by Atango to terrorise the communities in Kumba. Ngassa said he was a big man in the city whose mission was to abort the mission of the dragons even if it meant killing everyone.

Paul had been ill several times, the bush life wasn't working for him. So they sent him to the hospital in kumba. Ngassa had a nurse friend at the general hospital who took care of the wounded dragons. Ma Mbone said it was his girlfriend but when I asked Ngassa he refused and said "when will this fat woman mind her business" Ngassa said it was the girl's way of supporting the cause for the liberation of the Dragons. She too had lost her fiancée in this thing. Paul lived with her for the time being. They said he was allergic to wild life.

A forth night after the first night I started spying on the fortification process something happened that changed the course of my life forever. This time I didn't follow them, I waited 20 Minuit's before sneaking to my sacred hiding place at the sacred place. The Dibia was glowing in white and even his eyes were overturned and he was stretching out a red cloth towards the dragons in trance. The Red cloth floated from the Dibia's, stopping in front of one dragon then to the other. It continued floating moving along with the Dibia... coming towards, oh no me! I ran towards the rope that separated the bush from the sacred place but the Dibia shouted, "Stop there!" as if by a spell, I froze. The red cloth stood there, in front of me. "It can't be!" Exclaimed the Dibia but the cloth had wrapped around me and electrocuted me leaving me panting on the grass. Is this how I am going to die? I thought, thinking of joining mom and dad. I woke up in a red circle with the men sitting around me, all with angry faces. The Dibia poked me with his stick, "take it and stand up, he ordered. "A woman, O base has chosen a woman, a child to lead valiant men" he hissed rubbing me with a smelly mixture. "Young woman, o Base says you have a heart for revenge. He has chosen you to lead over these, he pointed to the men. You shall be called Lame-me-sah meaning 'No mercy.' It is said you will bring down Atango, the fox who kills 2 birds with one stone. But you Lame-me-sah, you are filled with thunder, you will lead the road and bring the rebirth of the dragons. The next days were my worst at the bivouac, everyone was giving me the cold shoulder even ma Mbone. She kept on throwing jibs at me like "a woman should know her place, the curious fly followed the corpse into the grave" Ngassa decided to break the silence, "Blessing, you know what you've gotten yourself into? What were you doing at the sacred place? What if that thing in you kills you? He shook me as if to wake me up from a nightmare. Ngassa, ever since my parents died, I have wanted to be able to revenge their death, to save other people from dying in the hands of those thugs. I am prepared for this, the Dibia has initiated me for 6 days. I passed all the rituals. He has taught me how to use this powers to save my people. Ngassa fell on his knees and looked at her, his eyes like a poppy. Only then did she notice tears rolling down his cheeks. She couldn't control her heartbeat, it was beating too fast, she went on her knees, held his face and kissed him. He tasted like coconut sweet. Ngassa knew she was only 17 but he couldn't help his feelings, feelings he has been fighting ever since he gave her his jacket to cover up a year ago. She was warm and sweet like coco nut sweet. As his pulse raised, his heart beat doubled and his groins swell, he gripped her ever tighter and pressed his manhood oh her pelvic area, squeezing her like one would a peeled orange. Blessing's heart raised, fear took over her. No, she did not envisage it like this, it was too rough, he was being and she remembered ma Mbones advice. "I wanted a kiss not more Ngassa, let me go, leave me or I will shout." But he was blinded by passion, he thought only of satisfying his animal desire. Ngassa seemed

possessed, he grabbed her and threw her on the floor, ripped her pants off and just when he was penetrating her, he was stroke down by thunder. The red loin cloth had strangled him. My screaming brought people into the hut. They couldn't believe what they saw although everything was there to make them understand. The women wondered what prompted Ngassa considered as blessings big brother to want to rape her but the men knew that the devilish plan had failed. Just after the initiation ritual the dragons had planned to take away the powers given to Blessing, they coerced Ngassa because he was the one who brought Blessing into the camp to make her powers to disappear.

And that's how the story of her life changed, she became fearless, the power inhibiting her was merciless against the enemy. It was the soul of her parents, Ngassa's parents, Ma mbone's daughter and the thousand others in the bush that guided her. She was ready, she has always been ready. She had to liberate a people who have become her people. Barack after Barack she led the resistance and pushed away the enemy. The enemy shuddered at the mention of her name, they did not know if she was woman or spirit. All they knew was the one to dread was "No Mercy".