

Issue 07: Ecstasy <https://librettong.com/2022/06/26/what-happened-tika-ibrahim-oga/>

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What Happened, Tika?

2010 was the year of BBM craze in the neighborhood. Everyone was pinging, especially Tika's circle. All they did was chat online and throw house parties while they idly await admissions into universities. Tika had to get a BlackBerry device, he must not be left behind. It was a vital lifestyle of his peers and he was missing out. So he turned to the only guy close to being a friend outside his circle, Slay, a 22 years old who some suspected to be a petty hustler though no one actually proved it. Slay had a day job washing cars. He never did anything big enough to draw the attention of the authorities or the gangs. He was your regular guy until he had a mission. Tika sold his stuff like wristwatches, designer clothes, and shoes to Slay when he needed money. The family of Okah found it difficult to adjust their lifestyle to their current financial situation and this was especially harder on their teenage son, Tika. His father started a grocery store with his life savings after losing his job. And his mother, a housewife, started teaching in a primary school to chip in.

He met Slay at his apartment, a single room with a small kitchen and a bathroom. He had shoes he wanted to sell to raise money for the gadget. There was nothing personal about the room, which was surprisingly tidy. It was like he'd just moved in. Tika felt Slay must have another apartment somewhere but shrugged off the thought. His Timberland boots were worth only half of what he needed.

"How much more do you need?" Slay asked, still inspecting the boots.

"40k"

"Tika, that's a lot. Your pops can get you the money if it's an emergency... but since you're here, it's not. Why do you need the money?" Slay always liked Tika, he felt the willingness to help.

"It's none of your business," Tika replied, standing up from his chair.

"I get it. You're trying to be a man and meet your needs, right?"

Tika nodded. Slay sensed his desperation and thus an opportunity. He had operations that needed extra hands. He thought of offering Tika the watchman position but he had to be sure he was desperate enough to accept it.

“You be schoolboy, you no dey hustle... if not there are ways I could show you to make the money,” Slay began. *“Ways dey but you just no get liver.”*

“What ways... I’m not gonna sell drugs if that’s what you’re saying” Tika said, disgusted.

“That’s for the gangs,” Slay replied laughing.

“What then?”

“Nothing to draw attention to me, I just move stuff sometimes,” Slay answered, still grinning.

“You mean you steal things from people?” Tika asked, surprised.

“Don’t make it sound like that,” Slay began in a serious tone, pacing the room. “Everybody is doing it. You don’t think your pops was robbed by the bank for laying him off without compensation? Or the union leaders, who squandered union dues and refused to fight for your pops to get a little gratitude from the bank for his years of service? And the politicians... my God, don’t get me started on the politicians. And your friends, most of them are doing it, maybe only to their parents but still... They just wouldn’t tell you.”

“What if you get caught? You don’t think about that?” Tika asked. Slay has a point, he thought, but getting caught is not pretty.

“Greed gets you caught,” Slay said holding Tika’s shoulder. “I’m not greedy. I smartly run my things with a small number of guys. I’m not just smart with cops, but with the gangs too. They don’t know me and I can never join a gang, you’ll just waste your life with them.”

“I don’t know... Slay...”

“Look, I don’t go taking stuff from people in need,” Slay interrupted him. “I take from the rich and I don’t take more than what they can afford. I’m telling you how I run things because I like you. You’re a smart guy just like me. So I want you to go home and think about my offer, I promise you’ll be just a watchman, nothing more, and if you don’t like the job then we’ll never talk about it again. Alright?”

“Alright,” Tika nodded.

“And don’t tell anyone about this little talk. I mean absolutely no one.”

“Of course. I understand”

Tika left convinced Slay was smart but he was undecided. Two days later, he called Slay to tell him he was in. what finally gave him the push to do it was Ruth. Ruth, 18, was not from the neighborhood. She comes only once in a while to visit her friend. Tika got friendly with her. Ruth was on every guy's lips. Many have tried but only he got close to her. Everyone was rooting for him to get her. She was a big girl, tall, great complexion, an oval face, and big eyes. The neighborhood guys were glad one of them could pull such a classy thing. Ruth had a Blackberry. Tika felt that to complete the mission of having her as his girl, he would also need to have a BlackBerry. He had to get one.

The target for Slay's impromptu operation was a man with an ostentatious yellow Honda Crosstour. The man, on his way out of the Klean Car Wash, was talking on the phone. Slay was late to work as usual. At the car wash, he was paid according to the number of cars he washed in a day. He didn't care how much he made. Slay, dragging his legs lazily, eavesdropped on the man's phone conversation.

"I can't pick it up today. Even my car is at the car wash. I'm trying to get a taxi now," the man said, standing by the roadside. "I'll come and collect it tomorrow and I'll share it immediately."

That was enough information for Slay to set up an operation. The man was a regular, everyone knew his car. Slay went to it, searched, and found his complimentary card. He found out where the man worked. The man came back later on, got into his car, and drove straight home. Slay had him followed, now he also got his home address. With these two known locations, keeping tabs on anyone's movement was easier.

"The job is set for tomorrow. Meet me in front of the Sunshine store at 5 pm sharp. Don't be late." Slay hung up the phone before Tika could say anything.

The quietest part of the man's route home was some two hundred meters off the main road. The rugged road had tall grasses on both sides, stretching into the underdeveloped plots. Few cars and pedestrians followed it. Tika was stationed a few meters from its juncture. He was

to signal them with a torchlight if anyone was coming. Long flash for pedestrians, long pauses and brief flashes for motorcycles, rapid flashes, and pauses for cars.

The sun had set when the unmistakable yellow car approached. Visibility depended only on the reddish illumination of the sky from the west. Tika announced its arrival by simply crossing the road. A plank with protruding nails was thrown into the road by one of Slay's guys hiding among the tall bushes. The car's left-front tire stepped on it and leaked out all its air within a rotation. The man came out to check what had happened.

He felt a hand around his neck then a pointy knife before he could get to the tire.

"Don't move!" a voice behind him commanded.

Two guys immediately came out and began searching the car. They found a duffle bag in the trunk and pulled it out.

"Hey stop, that is not mine... Please, don't take it," said the man, fidgeting.

"Shut up. Don't make us hurt you," said Slay, holding the man tight. "We're gonna take that bag and tie you up here for someone to come and find you. Don't be a wise arse."

The man remained still just long enough for Slay to loosen his grip a bit and elbow him in the stomach.

The hit was enough to make Slay lose his grip but he poked the man's neck without premeditation. Slay pushed him to the hood of the car and they ran with the bag. The man followed the masked robbers. They scattered in different directions, Tika simply walked away from afar. The man chased them a few meters into the grasses and collapsed.

The man laid on his back; his hand covering the wound, blood slipping out between his fingers. The man felt a swift drop in temperature and shivered to the unexplainable and unbearable cold. Perhaps he prayed for a passerby to come but only the cold came. The last stream of his blood was flowing out. He looked straight to the reddish sky and beyond. He smelled the green grass as he drew his last breath—his mouth and eyes wide opened.

Slay, Tika, and the other two guys in the group met at their safe location and shared the prize. One million Naira. A quarter-million each. Tika was ecstatic, he had far more than he needed.

"He'll be alright," Slay said, when Tika asked about the injured victim. Tika didn't ask any more questions. He was too rich to press further.

“We must not be seen together till things cool off. If you have an emergency, make contact and we’ll meet at the spot,” Slay addressed the group.

Tika bought the latest BlackBerry Bold in the market. Chats never felt better. He texted Ruth his pin and waited for her to add him. Nothing happened after three days, not even a text back. He decided to call.

“Hello.”

“Hey, how are you? It’s been a while,” Tika began, sounding anxious.

“I’m fine, thank you. I saw your text, I’m sorry... I’ll switch on my BB now and add you.” She sounded sad.

“Ok, I’ll be looking forward to that. Take care of yourself,” he said, trying to end the conversation. He sensed it was not a good time for her.

“You too. Thank you, T.”

She added him a few minutes later. The anxious Tika quickly dropped her a message.

King T (Tika): Hey what’s up?

Queen Cutie (Ruth): I’m good. How are you?

King T: I’m gr8.

Queen: Sorry again. I’ve been offline. I lost my dad 5 days ago.

King T: I’m so sorry for your loss. I didn’t know. That’s serious.

My condolence

Was he sick before?

Queen: Thank you.

My world is so torn apart right now

No, he wasn’t sick. He was killed. I still can’t believe he’s gone.

King T: My God... That’s really sad. I’m sorry you have to go through such pain, my dear.

Was it a robbery or what?

Queen: They tried to steal his car. The incident made the local news.

<https://buttynewschannel.com/car-theft-gone-wrong-one-man-killed/>

I have to go. Visitors.

Brb. thanks

King T: That's really sad.

Ok, talk later.

All Tika's fears were confirmed when he saw the picture of the car.

Car Theft Gone Wrong, One Man Killed

A man was killed last night in what authorities believe to be an attempted carjack along Nok Road. The man, yet to be identified, is believed to be the owner of a driverless yellow Honda Crosstour. His body was found some meters away from the crime scene.

The police division's Public Relations Officer said it was too early to confirm anything at the moment and that pending further investigation, there are no suspects yet. He also asked anyone with vital information to...

Tika also dropped his phone to the floor. Suddenly he was confused, clueless, and scared.

"He's dead?" he caught himself asking out loud. Who had time for news when you have the latest device with all new features? Besides, no one listens to the news in the neighborhood, except a few old men. Tika only wished he'd somehow heard about the demise earlier. His heart was racing and his head was clouded with questions. The news was from four days ago. What had the police found out since then? Are the gangs also looking for those who did it? Was he exposed? Tika's mind couldn't stop. He set up a meeting with Slay.

"Where you going to?" asked a voice inside a parked car.

"Hey, K-Dogg. What's up" Tika said, bending by the driver's side. "I'm going to see Slay." K Dogg was one of his rich friends. One of the coolest guys Tika knew.

"Who's Slay?"

"Nah, you wouldn't know him. Hey, you heard about Ruth's father?"

"Yeah, shit is sad... cops think they wanted his car, but word on the streets is, he had three mil. with him. And that's what they took," said K-Dogg.

"Three million!"

"Confirm," K-Dogg replied. "Here comes my girl... Talk to you later, Bro." K-Dogg was into chasing women more rigorously than his peers. Guys called him the player.

"I'll ping you later," Tika said, moving away from the car.

Tika was mad, not because Slay had cheated him on the money, he didn't care. He was mad because everyone now knew about the money. Three million naira! Everyone will be looking for them.

Their meeting point, The Spot, was at the abandoned warehouse of an old British company. The company has been abandoned a long time ago, most teenagers don't even know its name. That part of the neighborhood was too ghetto to interest anyone to buy it. What's left of it anyway, after years of stealing and decay? Tika waited restlessly for Slay.

"The man died and you didn't tell me?" he said on sighting Slay.

"Hey T! How're you doing?" Slay said, obviously pretending not to have heard the question.

"I don't have time for your shit today. You had better start talking," Tika said, walking up to him.

"I didn't want to bother you with it. It was a terrible accident," Slay said, as calm as ever.

"And the money? It's three mil. My God, everybody will be looking for us!"

"Hey, hey, hey... relax. Can't you see this is what the cops want? They shoot up the amount to cause enough confusion to flush us out?" Slay said, holding Tika's shoulders. "Listen, listen, you need to trust me right now. If it'll make you feel better, I can bring the other guys and they'll tell you how much the money is. They searched the car and I trust them. Plus, where are they going to hide the remaining two mil? In their pockets? Coz I was with them till the money was shared," Slay concluded with a smile.

Tika was cooling off and Slay was impressed by his persuasion skills. Tika slowly sat on the ground. He looked up to his partner, taking his time before talking.

"It's not the money that worries me. The man... he was Ruth's father, Slay. We can't just kill her father, take their money, and expect to get away with it. We can't...we shouldn't."

Slay sensed a problem when he realized it was Ruth's father. But hearing Tika's words, he pictured a disaster waiting to happen.

"What are you going to do, T?" Slay asked curiously.

"I don't know... I just don't know," Tika said, getting up and preparing to leave.

"Listen, don't do anything. Don't say anything. The night is still young, I can find more information tonight. Tomorrow I'll come to meet you and we can talk all about it," Slay said, desperately trying to convince him.

"I don't know, Slay... I don't know," Tika shrugged and started walking away.

On his way out of the old warehouse, Tika was busy with his phone trying to reach out to K-Dogg. He didn't know who to trust, or how to ask those he trusted for advice. He needed to

talk to someone, his parents, K-Dogg, anyone. He walked paying little attention to the footsteps behind him. His eyes were on his phone's screen.

Tika felt the piercing of a knife into the right side of his torso. He felt a hand covering his mouth, the knife going out of him and coming back in again, and again. He collapsed to the ground and saw Slay standing over him. Slay had dreams of ruling the neighborhood and the entire city. He was not ready to let some idiot ruin his dreams before they even began. He wouldn't take that chance.

Tika lay in the pool of his blood and felt his vital organs failing. Fear, regrets, fleeting hope, and pain clustered at the surface of his consciousness like flies on an open wound. The confusion denied his soul any chance of a peaceful passing. He closed his eyes for the last time without closure.

For family members and loved ones, what's worse than the dead body of their beloved is a missing beloved. The unanswered questions of what happened, the denial of the beloved's demise, later the miserable acceptance which comes with the mystery of where and what happened to the body. All Tika's family had was an elusive hope. Hope was lost through time, though not willingly. They were tortured with the guilt of negligence and not doing enough to find him. They were stuck in a moment of sorrow and uncertainty. Slay had denied them the grace of a closure.