

# Valley of *Decisions*



KEMI OYEDEPO

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# Acknowledgements

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To everyone who has read, reread and given me constructive feedback, may the Lord reward you.

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Finally, to those who follow and have learnt a thing or two from Crisis-Proof Your Family (CPYF); I'm humbled.

I'm praying for you from the depth of my heart that in your life and in your family, the name of the Lord will be glorified!

If there is any crisis or storm in your life right now, I decree peace! Be still in Jesus name. Amen!

Peace & blessings,

~Kemi Oyedepo~



EQUIPPING YOU. EDUCATING YOU. ENRICHING YOUR FAMILY LIFE.

“Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision...” – Joel 3:14

This is dedicated to you, regardless of what stage of life you may be in. May the decisions you make concerning your relationships and other areas of your life, move your destiny forward.

# LAILA

It was a beautiful day in Baron and the weather smelled nice, engulfed in the bloom of flowers and the brightness of the shining sun. I had asked for a table outside but the café was full to the brim. There were people everywhere so we settled for a table in the middle of the café.

I was staring at the couple sitting beside us with their baby; they looked so in love, giggling and holding hands. I smiled wishing I was that lucky lady. The smile I had quickly faded as I turned back to continue my conversation with my boyfriend. I had asked him a very important question but he refused to give me the answer.

He looked up from his phone, stared at me for a few seconds and carried on with whatever he was doing on his phone. I wanted to grab the phone out of his hands and fling it as far away as possible. Instead, I banged my hands on the table and said, "I am getting so tired of you stringing me along Ben; enough of this. Do you want to marry me or not?"

Taken aback, he looked at me like I was crazy but still managed to catch the bottle of lemonade that almost fell off the table.

"Laila, look I have told you more than a thousand times that we will get married when the time is right," he said. "Stop putting pressure on me, okay?"

I stared at him blankly and began to think about my life. How did I get myself into this mess? This is not what I had in mind at all. I had done everything possible I knew to do. I had spoken up, poured out my heart, and even dragged Ben to every relationship seminar I heard of, just to get him to commit to me.

Nothing seemed to work!

In fact, we had just taken a one-day road trip out of town to Rockville, for yet another relationship seminar and decided to stop somewhere for a snack as we headed back home.

We had already eaten but I told him I wanted us to talk about something very important before we left. I needed to get this over and done with.

His voice and the snapping of his fingers brought me back to reality. "Laila! Hello! Did you hear me? I said are we good to go?"

I was upset at his utter disregard for my feelings, and before I knew it, I was yelling, totally ignoring the stares I was getting from the people around.

"I never put pressure on you! How many times do I have to remind you that you need to meet my parents? We have been in this thing you call a relationship for seven years and my parents don't know anything about you." I paused to catch my breath. "If they'd never spoken to you, I doubt that they'd believe you exist. Does that make any sense to you?"

Ben looked around the cafe embarrassed as he removed his wallet from his pocket.

He looked at me disapprovingly.



"I think it's time to leave," he said and sighed loudly as he opened his wallet and brought out a few bills.

"Look, I've told you I will meet them when I am ready to propose to you. You're being a drama queen." Ben folded his arms and leaned back in his chair. "If that's not good enough for you, too bad!"

I also leaned back as I let out a frustrated sigh, struggling to keep myself from slapping him hard, right across the face.

"I've had it, Ben!" I blurted out. "You're not going to keep playing me for a fool. What do you mean by when you're ready to propose? Exactly how much longer do you need to make up your mind?"

I didn't wait for his response.

I was close to tears and started talking loudly to myself as I placed both my hands on my head. "Laila, why are you doing this to yourself? Why would you allow anyone to treat you...?"

Ben stood up abruptly before I could finish my sentence, and just as he was about to grab his jacket, I stood up and shoved him back into his chair.

By this time, I could hear some murmuring and giggling around me, but I didn't care.

Not now.

He looked at me shocked and said, "You need to get yourself together and stop making a scene. If I didn't want to be with you, don't you think I would have gotten lost a long time ago?"

I sat down abruptly and picked up my fork, ready to throw it at him.

I was too slow. He almost knocked the table over trying to dodge my pitch.

“Stop asking me silly questions,” I yelled. “What about me? Are you thinking about how all this makes me feel?” I laughed. “No! Of course, you’re not. It’s all about Ben. It’s all about Benjamin Manda. As long as everything is working out for you, his royal highness, no one else matters. Not even me; the woman you claim to love,” I said as I rolled my eyes dramatically.

I started to calm down as I noticed the puzzled stares from around the cafe. I admit I shouldn’t have been so dramatic but I had taken more than enough of this. I can be a drama queen sometimes but anyone who knows Ben won’t blame me. He hardly takes anything seriously. I could feel a migraine coming and my tears were getting closer to the surface but I was not going to let this man make me cry so I guess I felt yelling was a better option.

The baby beside us suddenly burst out screaming. That was my cue to end this drama I was playing out in front of all these strangers. As much as I didn't want to, I finally succumbed to the irritated and disapproving stares shot my way, so I lowered my voice.

I leaned forward and began to whisper. "Don't call me a drama queen, Ben. I just want to be sure of this path that we've been on since Noah started building the ark."

He suddenly burst out laughing like he had heard the joke of the century. His laughter was aggravating my migraine and I seriously reconsidered holding back that slap. He took a sip from his glass of lemonade and looked straight at me. "I am done talking about this," he said. "Since you're obviously not in a hurry to get back home, let's talk about something else. How's that employment discrimination case you're handling?"

I couldn't believe him. He dismissed me just like that! I waved him off. "I don't want to discuss that with you," I said. "We are not done with this conversation. You think I don't see that you are brushing me off again?"

Ben knew I loved my job as a lawyer and I could talk about it even in my sleep. Anytime he wants to change the conversation – which is often, he begins with my cases at work. Many times, I fell for it but I made up my mind that not this time. I was done with him treating me like a little child he could wind around his little finger.

I looked him straight in his eyes, channelling every emotion I felt in that moment to him, and said, "I am giving you this ultimatum for the final time, Ben. My parents will be here in 2 months and I expect you to do right by me or..."

He slammed his glass on the table and pointed his finger at me. "I would advise you not to finish that statement, Laila Ocheng. I won't take that from you."

I was about to respond when my eye caught a waitress storming towards our table. At that moment, Ben stood up, grabbed his jacket, flung the cash on the table and stormed out without saying a word to me.

I called out to this man who had chosen to make a complete fool out of me.

"Ben! Don't walk out on me! Let's end this conversation here. Ben! Ben Manda..."

I felt a tap on my shoulder. "Excuse me, ma'am. It's time for you to leave. You are being a nuisance to the customers here." She stood there with a scowl on her face and her hands on her hips.

I began to pack my things together. "Me? Leave? A nuisance? How?" I asked. "I was just trying to have a conversation with my boy..."

She cut me off with the wave of her hand. "Yes, we all heard. You have spent seven years with him and you have nothing to show for it." She said this while rolling her eyes and shaking her ring finger in my face. I didn't miss the laughter that erupted from the two ladies on the other side of my table. I wanted to shrink.

I stood up. "I won't dignify that with a response; otherwise I may end up in jail tonight," I said. "Excuse me," I angrily muttered as I intentionally brushed past her, and scurried through the café, towards the door.

I stepped outside and began to walk to where we had parked the car, Bay 7. I remember because that is how long I have wasted on Ben. 7 years of my adult life; and just like the waitress said, I have nothing to show for it!

I was fuming so much on the inside that I didn't realize I was at bay 13. I walked back to bay 7 and I was greeted by an empty parking bay. "Where is the car?" I screamed to no one in particular. I refused to believe that Ben left me here, over two hours away from home.

I paced back and forth between the bays in disbelief and looked around, hoping the car would magically appear with Ben in it. There was no sign of him.

I stood in the middle of the parking lot, looking helpless. I couldn't hold back the tears anymore. I lowered myself to the ground, leaned on a car and let the tears flow.

Every. Last. Drop.

I don't know how long I sobbed uncontrollably for but I didn't stop until I was interrupted.

"Excuse me. Are you alright?" I looked up and saw a gentleman standing in front of me, handing me some tissue.

I stood up and began to dust myself off. "Uhm. Yes, I am just fine. Thank you for this," I said as I reached for the tissue.

I was too embarrassed to say anything more so I walked away from him as quickly as I could. He called out to me but I ignored him.

I suddenly stopped and frantically searched through my handbag for my cell phone. I called Ben, and it rang for what seemed like an eternity before he bothered to pick up.

"Hello!" he said hastily.

"Ben! You have got to be kidding me," I said in disbelief.

He let out a frustrated sigh. "Laila, what do you want?" he asked.

If I could grab his throat through the phone, I would have. "Are you serious?" I yelled. "Ben, you left me here in the middle of nowhere. Are you insane? How do you expect me to get home?" I asked.

He had the nerve to laugh. "Okay, I will come back for you if you promise not to nag me over this again."

I dropped my shoulders. "Ben, I wasn't nagging you. I only asked you the same question I've been asking for a long time. If you are no longer interested, just tell me and we can break up. Isn't that part of what we learnt today?"

He sighed. "I need more time, Laila. I don't want to rush into marriage."

More time, after 7 long years? I thought to myself. However, I didn't have the energy to get into another pointless row with Ben. At this point, all I wanted was to get home. I just needed him to come back and pick me up. "I hear you, Ben. Can you please come and pick me up?" I dryly asked.

He took his time to respond. "I need you to promise me that we won't have this conversation again for some time, Laila." Hesitantly, I said, "Whatever Ben, it's a deal."

Ben's black Nissan Altima appeared behind me in what seemed like less than a minute. He parked the car beside me and unlocked the car. I was still very upset and it showed in the way I opened the passenger door, jumped in and slammed the door shut.

He had a wide grin on his face, which I found very irritating but he didn't seem to care. He reached behind my seat and gave me a bouquet of red roses - my favourite! "I'm sorry for driving off. Please forgive me," he said.

I took the flowers, leaned back and closed my eyes. "It's fine. Let's go," I said. Remember I have my dentist appointment and I need to make it to church in time for the service this evening."

I looked at him. "I promised Rachel that I'll sit with her twin babies while she joins the choir."

His grin turned into a frown. "Yeah, yeah! I know you have to get to church," he said as he reached for his sunglasses. "You do know that once we get married, you will have to slow down on all your church duties, right?"

Oh no, I thought! We're not about to start another round on this long journey home!

I couldn't help but laugh out loud. I wouldn't let him push my buttons for a second time today. With all the calmness I could muster, I said, "Look, Ben. As I have told you time and again, not even you can separate me from some things."

"We'll see about that, Laila Ocheng," he said.

He put on his sunglasses, increased the volume of the song on the radio, and sped off before I could respond.

# LAILA

“I don't know why you keep investing your time and energy into that waste of space, Laila. You deserve so much better.”

“Kiki, I won't take that from you. I know you don't approve of this relationship, but please don't talk about Ben that way.”

My best friend, Kiki and I were spending some time together at her place before heading out to dinner. We were in her bedroom rearranging her closet, as I gave her an update on my journey back from the seminar with Ben. She didn't like Ben, and she never could hide it, even when he was around her.

She rolled her eyes. “Whatever! I hope that for your sake, this relationship is worth it in the end. You both are in completely different worlds. You are a Christian, he claims to be one. You are doing well as a lawyer; he is still playing games, claiming to be a media mogul. Both of you are just not on the same level.” She flung some clothes into her laundry basket. “You keep acting as though he is the last man on earth. You need to make the decision to kick him to the curb before he does it to you.”

I chuckled. “I hear ya, Pastor Kiki,” I said. “I see no ring on your finger and you don't have a man but you know how to dish out relationship advice like an expert.”



Kiki dramatically held her stomach and bent over like she had just been punched. "Ouch. That was a low blow sis, but I'll let it slide," she said.

I playfully blew her a kiss and laughed. "I didn't mean it," I said. "Anyway, what do you think I should do?"

She rolled her eyes again. "You know what you should do Laila, I don't need to tell you. At this point, you need to do what you need to do and make room for your heavenly baked hubby."

Kiki smiled sheepishly, which made me look at her strangely.

"What's with that smile, Kiki?" I asked.

She giggled. "Can't a girl smile sheepishly for the fun of it?" she asked, as she playfully shoved me.

"Uhm, no you can't," I said. "And did I just hear you say heavenly baked hubby? Really, Kiki?"

We stared at each other for a few seconds and burst into laughter.

"You are something else," I said as I sat down on her bed. "Anyway, I want to say you're right but at the same time, I've put way too much into this relationship. Breaking it off is easier said than done."

Kiki walked into the bathroom, shaking her head like she had some kind of revelation. She popped her head out of the door and said, "It's fear that's stopping you, my friend."

I smirked. "Really Kiki, Fear? I am not afraid of anything."

She walked out of the bathroom, shaking a nail clipper in her hand.

"You are afraid of being alone, Laila," she said. "You have been with him since you were 23. You don't want to be above 30 and single. You have also invested so much into him, and you want your dividends, girl."

I walked to her bedroom window and stared blankly. "Kiki, I have been with him for so long; I've given him so much, I've even graciously saved myself for him. Do you know how hard that has been? He has been good to wait for me."

Kiki walked over to her bed and sat down. "He has been good to wait? Laila, do you hear yourself?" She smirked. "Okay friend, if you say so."

Right from the day Kiki met Ben, she told me, "Sis, he's not yours." Of course, I didn't appreciate that because I thought she was being judgmental. While we were in law school, all I heard from her was 'let him go. He'll only do you more harm than good'. And he really has, if I am being honest with myself. In the past 7 years, Ben has been no stranger to getting into some kind of trouble. Each time, he apologized and seemed remorseful but within weeks or months, something came up again. According to Kiki, being with him has made me age faster than I should; she says I look 10 years older than I am!

"Hello! Earth to Laila Ocheng. Are you listening to me at all? You look lost in space," Kiki called.

I chuckled. "Oh, I'm sorry, Kiki. What did you say?"

"I said enough about Ben," Kiki said. "So, I met this guy a few days ago who asked me to go to lunch with him on Sunday. I agreed but I made him promise to attend the 9 am service with me, first." My best friend suddenly jumped up began to dance in front of her mirror, grinning from ear to ear. I couldn't believe it!

"A ha!" I said. That's why that silly smile was on your face earlier."

She stopped dancing and chuckled. "Maybe," she said.

"Wow! I don't think I've ever seen you blush like this, Kiki," I said excitedly. "This must be something serious. How come you're just telling me about him?"

She looked at me in disbelief. "Uhm let's see Laila, maybe because you're always going on and on about that loser... sorry, Ben. There was no way I could tell you about... drumroll, please... Timothy."

"Oh la la, Timothy," I teased. "So, tell me all about him. I want to know what he looks like and what he does. Oh wait, how did you meet him?"

Kiki laughed. "Okay, Miss Lawyer. Slow down. I didn't hear you ask if he is born again. Shouldn't that be one of your first concerns?" she asked.

I took a sip of my drink on her dresser and rolled my eyes. "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Men will always bring some kind of drama with them."

Her smile faded as she stared at herself in the mirror. "No. Not this one Laila," she said. "I've been praying about him and watching him and this looking good. Very promising."

I walked over to her. "Praying about it? What for? That's over the top. Start the relationship first, girl."

She kept her gaze in the mirror and said, "Oh no, missy. I would rather be sure before stepping into a relationship that could lead to marriage."

I put my hands on my best friend's shoulders. It was time to tell her the truth. "Look Kiki," I said. "I've invested 7 years of my life into my relationship, hoping it'll get somewhere. What makes you think that yours will be so straightforward?"

Kiki shoved me and walked back into the bathroom. "Where are all these low blows coming from, Laila?" she asked raising her voice. "I know you're hurting but please give me a break. I made the decision not to jump into any relationship until I am fully ready and I shouldn't be made to feel bad about that. Besides, I don't need to be in a relationship for 7 long years just to be sure." She sighed. "I didn't say I was getting married to him tomorrow. It's still the early stages and I want to be sure before every step. Please don't take your pain out on me."

"You're right, Kiki. I'm sorry," I said as I sat down on the bed. "So... when do I get to meet him?"

"I'd rather you wait," she answered. "I want to spend a bit of time getting to know him better before I start introducing him to everyone." Kiki walked out of the bathroom with some nail polish remover and cotton wool as she sat beside me.

I was staring at her in confusion. "Everyone?" I asked. "I didn't know I was in the category of 'everyone'. That's not right, Kiki. At least I should meet him and tell you what I think."

She took my right hand and began to clip my nails. "Laila, just relax. You will meet him when the time is right. Don't pressure me, okay?"

She looked at me. "Anyway, so where are we going for dinner? Can I choose the restaurant?"

I stared at my hands. "Okay that's fine; but what's all this for? I didn't ask for a manicure," I said while wriggling my free fingers.

Kiki released a hearty laugh. "First of all, because I'm a good friend, secondly, your nails look like claws and this nail polish is chipping off." She grinned. "Thirdly, it's time to change the subject, and fourthly, I recommend we go to that brand new expensive Italian restaurant downtown."

I furrowed my brows. "Okay, that still doesn't make sense. Why exactly have you decided to give me a manicure, Kiki?"

Kiki began to recoat my nails with the same beautiful bright pink colour already on them. "Well, because I also recommend that you foot the bill tonight and I'm hoping that my act of love and service to you will make it happen."

I laughed out loudly.

Kiki picked up her cell phone and began to make a call. "I'll take that as an 'okay'. It's a good thing I have their number on speed dial."

I shoved her lightly. "You, my friend are so sneaky," I said as she made a reservation for two.

# BEN

"Ben, You know you have to stop playing games with Laila at some point. Enough of stringing her along; just break it off with her, already."

Here we go again! I thought.

My friend, Matthew always has something to say when we get together. We just had lunch together and we were catching up. He never misses an opportunity to jump to Laila's defence as if she paid him.

"Matt, let's not do this now," I said as I stood up from the dining table. "I've told you I need to keep my options open. I have to be sure if I want Laila, if I want Lola or if I want Dee." I grinned. "Until I am sure, three of them remain my ladies. Besides, why are you always fighting for Laila and not the other two? They are also good women, you know."

Matthew took a bite of his apple. "Well, you have been with Laila the longest and she has not slept with you which by the way, I'm proud of her for being able to put you in your place concerning that. Secondly, she is the one who keeps bailing you out of trouble. She is a good woman, Ben." He paused. "Listen, brother, you are wrong and you know it. I'm still not sure what she sees in you. I never knew it was possible to be so accomplished yet so insecure."

I lifted up my hands and shook my head. "Please don't start with me on this again." As I cleared the dishes off the table, I paused and looked at Matthew. "Hey, and what do you mean by you're not sure what she sees in me?" I asked. "I don't appreciate that comment. I'll have you know I'm a pretty decent catch, Mr Smith."

Matthew smirked. "Tell that to the birds," he said as he followed me into the kitchen. "I cannot believe I used to think like you before. You sound ridiculous."

I tapped his shoulders, and said, "Stop acting like a saint. You were once a bad boy."

Matthew looked at me. "Exactly! The key word is 'were'. That's a thing of the past. Once I became born again, everything wrong about me got right. Remember that's why I broke up with Danielle? To start everything in my life afresh. My life has never been the same since then."

We walked out of the kitchen and headed to the patio. "How can I forget?" I asked. "It was around the same time you abruptly ended our friendship. It's a miracle that I get to see you these days. At first, I didn't see you for almost 3 whole years, Matt."

Matthew took a sip of his glass of water and sat down. "Well I needed to stay clear of a toxic environment and besides I told you why I gave it all up but you were not interested. Don't get it twisted; I'm still waiting for you to see the light."

I shook my head and said, "Not interested, Pastor Matthew Smith."

Matthew laughed a little too loudly and said, "Very funny. You don't have to be interested. Trust me, you'll come to a point when you wouldn't see it as an option. In fact, you'll be pushed to make that decision for your own good."

My facial expression was enough to let Matthew know how exhausted I was from his preaching to me. "Hold on, are you here to check up on me or preach to me?" I asked.

He looked at me un-phased and said, "Both, actually."

"Okay, preaching over," I said as I sat down across from him. "Now let's get back to the checking up on me. Actually, let me check up on you, Mr Smith. How's life?"

A huge grin appeared on his face. "Life is great. Thank God. Since the promotion at work, I have been stretched a whole lot more but I enjoy it and most importantly, lives are getting changed each day."

Matthew has always been ambitious. In fact, he has always been a go-getter. He was one of those guys who joked around all day with everyone and then at night while we were all asleep, he'd be in the library studying his way to the top. We all wondered how he excelled in school while we crawled our way to a pass mark until I caught him sneaking out to study one night.

He graduated with one of the highest grades in the entire Department of Engineering. He was one of the three fortunate Engineering graduates at our school to get a job at OXTEN, the largest chemical plant in the city, and he started out at the top. He never joked with his education and quest for knowledge. No wonder, it's paying off now.

I stared at him intently. "Every time I hear from you, you have either just been promoted or you got some type of award. There is just no stopping you, man."

Matthew looked up and said, "It is all God, Ben."



I couldn't help but laugh out loud. "Seriously, why can't you just say thank you? Everything is always about God."

He walked over to the edge of the deck. "Ben, I can't separate myself from my lifeline so what do you expect?"

Okay, that's deep, I thought.

"You need to quit your job and become a Pastor somewhere," I said.

He turned around and said, "I won't mind that but I won't do it unless God speaks to me Himself."

I jumped up and stood beside him. "Okay let's not start that conversation again. Moving on. Who's the lady in your life?"

Matthew chuckled. "None at the moment, Ben. I'm actually ready to settle down but I'm praying and watching before I make a move."

"So there is someone?" I grinned. "Do tell."

Matthew shook his head and lifted up his hands. "Oh no. No telling going on. Not yet, anyway. When the time is right, you'll be one of the first to know."

"So is this lady even aware? You're just watching her from afar?" I asked.

Matthew smiled. "Yes, I'm watching. But that's not all I'm doing. I'm praying, and I'm waiting. I want to be absolutely sure before approaching. I'm not interested in joking around, Ben."

I rubbed my hands together and grinned, ready to impart some wisdom. "Well, while you're doing all that, let me give you some tips, bro."

He waved me off and snickered. “Thanks. But no thanks.”

My eyes widened in disbelief. “Matthew! Come on. I’ve got 3 ladies in my life and they know nothing about each other. Won't you want some advice from someone like me?”

Matthew raised his eyebrows and placed his right hand on my shoulder. “I’m praying for you, Ben Manda,” he said as he laughed. “No offence, bro but unless I want to become like you, I would never accept any relationship advice from you. We both know I don't condone what you are doing one bit.”

I shook his hand off and walked over to sit down. “Okay, Mr preacher man. Let's see how this your praying works out.”

Matthew hummed a tune and laughed. “Trust me, my prayers don't fail. They never have. They never will.”

# MATTHEW

I once had the biggest crush on Laila.

Since the day I saw her 8 years ago, she has never left my mind. I met her in the Student Union and stared at her intensely. She was beautiful and carried herself with such dignity. I was young but I knew a mature lady when I saw one.

I walked up to her and introduced myself. She was new in town to attend law school. I asked for her number, which I didn't get, but she insisted that I gave her mine. I never heard from her or saw her again until that day!

That fateful day!

Ben was so excited and wanted me to meet a law student whom he was so in love with even though he had met her just 3 weeks before. He brought her to meet a group of us at a restaurant uptown. As soon as they walked in, my heart stopped beating. There she was looking more beautiful than ever. She remembered me and gave me all the excuses in the world why she hadn't called. It didn't matter then; she was with my best friend and to me, that meant it was a closed chapter.

I was a little angry that Ben caught her attention but I was convinced that she'd see through him and the relationship would end as fast as it started. My mind changed with each passing year, and I concluded that she was drawn to the bad boy, heartbreaker type of guy. I knew she had made a mistake but it wasn't my place to get involved. Besides, my relationship with Ben was quite important to me back then. I knew all the things he was doing behind the scenes and I tried as much as possible never to be around her when they were together.

"Why do women always sell themselves short?" I asked no one in particular. I was in my office staring out of my window.

"Would you like me to answer that, sir?"

I turned around to see Donna, my secretary. She's worked for me since I joined OXTEN. She is effective but can be quite intrusive.

"Donna, I didn't realize you were there. Why didn't you call or knock?" I asked.

"I'm sorry," she said as I stood up and walked around my table.

"I called your phone several times but it had the Do Not Disturb sign on so it rang engaged. I actually have been knocking for a few minutes, sir," she said.

"That's alright," I said, stopping inches in front of her. "Is the boardroom set for my meeting?"

"Not quite sir," she said. "Mr Donjo will be late. He sends his apologies."

"Fine. Let me know when he gets here." I motioned for her to leave my office. "You may go Donna."

"Will do sir. Can I get you anything?" she asked as she made her way to the door.

"Some iced tea will be perfect. And please shut the door behind you," I answered. Once my door was shut, I began pacing around my office. "Matthew, get yourself together!" I said a little too loudly.

The sound of my cell phone vibrating on my table distracted me. It was Naomi, a lady my brother introduced me to. He thought we'd be perfect together so I took her out a few times but we never seemed to connect well. I'll return her call later, I thought.

Just about everyone, from my mother to my Pastor has the perfect lady for me. The pressure can be overwhelming! I sighed heavily and walked over to my window, staring blankly. "Holy Spirit, I need Your help. I'm trusting you to lead me," I said.

"Sir, the meeting is ready to begin." I turned around abruptly at the sound of Donna's voice. "Donna! Please learn to knock before you come in," I said frustratingly.

She sighed. "I did sir. Again, there was no response. I'm sorry to startle you."

"Fine. Please learn to wait for an answer before you come in," I said as I reached for a folder and a pen. Let them know I'll be with them shortly. Place the iced tea on my table," I said as I adjusted my tie and suit jacket in front of my full-length mirror. She placed an oval tray on the edge of my table and hurried out of my office, almost slamming the door shut. As I watched her leave, I couldn't help but laugh out loud.

I took a sip of my drink and made a beeline towards the door.

Note to self: I've really got to stop daydreaming in the office!

# LAILA

"Laila. How are you? I've been calling you all day."

"I'm alright Ben," I answered dryly. "I've been busy preparing for the meeting I told you about." I snickered. "As usual, I'm sure you forgot. I'm on my way to the office right now."

"Please don't start, Laila," Ben said. "Are we still on for dinner tonight?" He sounded frustrated.

"Sure," I said.

"Good. I'll pick you up at 8. See you later. I love you."

"Yeah, you too," I said offhandedly and hung up.

Lord knows Ben is starting to irk me! My parents will be here next month and he's still not assured me that he would meet them as my fiancé.

I'll deal with that later. I was already late for my meeting and my boss was very unhappy with me.

I was led down the hall and into a boardroom; the meeting was in progress.