

IN BLACK AND WHITE

by MaryAnn Diorio

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1959

The bold-print newspaper announcement of a Ghanaian art exhibit at the nearby Philadelphia Museum of Art caught Tori Pendola's eye. Anything related to art always caught her eye. Art had a unique way of soothing the deep-seated feelings of rejection that had haunted her life ever since, as a twelve-year-old child, she'd overheard her father complain to his best friend that she had been an accident.

An accident?

The word had thrown her heart into a tailspin. The angry tone of voice with which Pop had spoken it still blared in her ears, like the scraping of fingernails across a chalkboard. He might as well have said unwanted. It would have been more truthful.

She stifled the searing memory and, as always in times of emotional pain, she turned to art. It was her solace. Her refuge.

An escape from suffering.

Immersing herself in art helped her forget the dull ache that constantly gnawed at her heart. The dread-filled feeling that no one would ever want her. That rejection and loneliness would be her lot in life. How she longed—needed—to know she was worth something to someone! That she was accepted despite her flaws and loved without condition.

She picked up the newspaper from the coffee table and turned toward her younger sister.

“Anna, look at this! We have to go!”

Anna raised her eyes from her copy of *Cry the Beloved Country*, the novel that was still shaking the post-World War II world eleven years after its publication. “Go where?”

Newspaper in hand, Tori approached her sister and pointed to the advertisement. “It’s an exhibit of Ghanaian art, right here in Philadelphia at the Museum of Art.”

Anna scanned the newspaper. “Looks interesting.”

“Only ‘interesting’? It’s fascinating!”

Anna chuckled. “Well, of course it’s fascinating to you. You’re the artist. But, to me?”

Well, let’s just say I have other things that interest me more.”

Tori gave Anna a charming smile. “Am I one of them?”

Anna laughed. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, will you go with me to the exhibit?”

Anna put her book down on the sofa. “Yes, dear sister. I will go with you.” She smiled. “If I decide to pay attention instead of dozing off, I might even learn something.”

Tori bent over and gave Anna a kiss on the head. “You’re such a lovely little sister.”

“Yes.” Anna sighed. “I always let you have your own way.”

Tori slapped her playfully on the arm.

Anna picked up her book. “So, when is this exhibit?”

“Actually, it launches tomorrow evening in celebration of Veterans Day with a lecture by a famous expert on Ghanaian art. My professor mentioned it in class yesterday and suggested we attend.”

“Oh, so I’ve signed up for a lecture as well?”

Tori sat down next to Anna. “Only if you want to, of course.”

Anna leveled her eyes with Tori’s. “Tori, you have always been the persuasive older sister. But, I must confess, going along with your crazy ideas has always improved my life in some way in the long run.”

“Why is this a crazy idea?”

“Because Ghanaian art is probably the most random thing you could have asked me about.” She laughed before sobering. “In any case, it’s ‘crazy’ because it has nothing to do with my more immediate concerns—like helping Pop. Mom suggested I help relieve him of some of the pressures of running the business. I’d been thinking of getting some extra work done tomorrow evening, but I think it can wait for another day.”

Tori pondered Anna’s words. Their father was getting up in years. He would be approaching his sixty-eighth birthday in a few short months, having fathered both of them late in life. He would have retired long ago but for the recession that had struck the American economy in the mid-fifties. Now that things were looking up economically in the country, he might reconsider retiring if he had someone to take over the family business.

Anna seemed to be that someone. At twenty-two, she had an acute business sense, was highly organized, and competent beyond her years. She’d taken after their father and was perfectly suited to run the business.

Tori, on the other hand, was allergic to what she considered the boring life of the business world. To working in an office and doing the same thing day in and day out. She wanted adventure. Excitement.

True love.

A love that was not conditional. A love that accepted her for who she was, flaws and all.

A love that didn’t require her to perform in order to be worthy of it.

Not Pop’s kind of love.

She sighed. Would she ever be good enough for him? Would she ever measure up to his standards of excellence?

Would he ever love her just because she was his daughter?

Tori’s gaze fell on her sister. Anna was the favored one. Their father had wanted Anna. Not that Tori was jealous of her sister. No, Tori was only sad Pop didn’t love her in the same unconditional way he loved Anna. To Pop, Anna could do no wrong. Anna was the compliant one, never opposing him. Always agreeing with him. No wonder Anna had a better relationship with their father than Tori had.

Anna interrupted Tori’s thoughts. “So, tell me more about this exhibit.”

“Well, I don’t know much more than you, except that African art is increasing in popularity.”

“Why?”

“It has something to do with the growing realization that the art of non-Western cultures should not be judged by the values of Western art.”

Anna yawned. “Well, I’ll leave the philosophizing to you, my dear sister. It’s time for me to fix dinner. Mom will be home soon from her ladies’ club meeting and asked me to have the meal ready by the time she gets here.”

While Tori deeply loved her sister, Anna was the pragmatist of the two of them, and Tori was ever the idealist. This difference in personality had made for some sharp arguments between

them over the years, but it was also the glue that cemented their relationship. In the long run, opposites did attract. Tori and Anna were proof of that.

While Anna prepared dinner, Tori headed to her desk to get in a few more minutes of study for her midterm exams. The end of the semester was fast approaching, and she had to do well if she wanted to graduate with the rest of her class and please Pop at the same time. He continually reminded her he'd paid a pretty penny to send her to an Ivy League school, so she'd better produce a good return on his investment. After all, it wasn't every daughter of a small businessman who got to go to Penn. Talk about pressure!

She was competing with students from all over the world. Penn's Master of Arts program in Art History was considered one of the finest anywhere, and she was privileged to be a part of it. Yet, the stress of it all sometimes overwhelmed her. If only her father weren't hovering over her, measuring her success. If only she could rest in the knowledge that she didn't have to earn his approval by getting good grades.

If only Pop loved her unconditionally.

Tori sat down in the straight-backed chair at her bedroom desk and gazed out the window. Large drops of rain splattered against the pane, while dark-gray clouds melted into night. Here and there, house lights in her Italian neighborhood turned on as families prepared for another cold, rainy November evening. She sighed. The demands of her studies were getting to her. She needed the break that tomorrow night's lecture would bring.

Redirecting her focus to the notes before her, she renewed her resolve to do something great with her life. She'd make a difference in the world. She'd touch people's lives with her art. If for no other reason than to prove to Pop that even an "accident" could be worthy of his love.

* * * *

Jebuni Kalitsi exited the shuttle bus that ran from his University of Pennsylvania classroom building to the dormitory that housed foreign graduate students. At twenty-six, he was one of a handful of African exchange students who'd been admitted to Penn's prestigious School of Economics. Son of a tribal chieftain, he'd been sent to the United States by his father to learn the principles of Western capitalism that would help free his beloved Ghana from economic and social bondage upon his succession to the chieftaincy.

A succession of which he didn't feel at all worthy.

Large drops of rain fell on Jebuni's head while lightning flashed through the gray evening sky. The distant rumbling of thunder and the rising wind sent chills through his veins. He tensed. The same signs had preceded that fateful day. The day that had changed the course of his entire life ten years earlier.

Lightning. Thunder.

Wind.

He shuddered, stifling the tormenting guilt that had plagued him ever since. Eating at his soul. Ripping it to shreds.

Maybe if he could bury the guilt, it would go away. But, after ten years, it still hadn't faded. Instead, it had only intensified. Would it ever leave him?

A blast of wind blew across his face, sending a chill through his bones. The Philadelphia

climate was a far cry from the hot, tropical temperatures of his native Ghana. He lifted his coat collar close around his neck and blew into his hands in a vain attempt to warm them. Even leather gloves didn't dissipate the chill.

He braced himself against the threatening storm. Just as the downpour began, he reached his dorm building. The lounge at the main entrance was nearly empty, except for a few students from South Africa and India who chatted excitedly while the evening news blared on a TV set in the background: "In a tragic turn of events, a fishing boat sank off the coast of Maine today, resulting in the death of twelve passengers."

Jebuni's blood turned to ice. The horrific, recurring memory flashed across the screen of his mind, as it had countless times during the past ten years. Why had he insisted that Kofi go on that fishing trip when his best friend had been reluctant to go? Could Jebuni have done more to save him?

Why had Jebuni survived while Kofi hadn't?

Pushing down the painful memory yet again, Jebuni waved at the students and made his way up to the third-floor apartment he shared with his roommate from Nigeria, Kelechi Adebayo, a student in Penn's School of Law.

Kelechi greeted him warmly. "Hey, man! It's about time you got home. I'm starving."

Jebuni laughed. "So, why didn't you cook for both of us?"

"Are you crazy, man? You know I can't even boil water."

"Then learn, my friend. Learn! Otherwise, one day when I've returned to Ghana, you will starve to death."

"When you leave, I will find myself a good wife to cook for me." He winked.

"But until then?"

"Until then, I will depend on you to be my personal chef."

Jebuni slapped Kelechi on the back and then proceeded to the table where the day's newspaper lay open. "What's in the news today?"

"Not much. The usual concern about communism's encroachment on the world."

"So, what else is new?" Jebuni drew the newspaper toward himself and scanned the two-page spread. The word Ghanaian in large print caught his eye: Ghanaian Art Exhibit and Lecture at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Wednesday night, November 11th, 7:00 p.m. Free admission.

His eyes widened. "Hey, roomie! Do you want to go to a lecture on Ghanaian art?"

"If it were Nigerian art, I might say 'yes.' But I'd better study for my midterm exams. They're coming up in a week's time."

Jebuni feigned surprise. "You mean you refuse to support Mother Africa?"

"I need to support Law Student Kelechi right now, or Papa Kelechi will revoke my stipend."

"Fine, then. I'll go myself. I'm so homesick that even an exhibit on Ghanaian art will encourage me."

"Or make you even more homesick."

Kelechi had a point. But missing Ghana as much as he did, Jebuni pushed the comment aside. Any connection with his homeland was better than no connection at all. Nearly two years had passed since he'd left his native land to study in the States. With a bachelor's degree in history under his belt from Oxford University, he'd opted to spend another two years earning his master's degree in economics. Upon graduation at the end of the current academic year, he'd take himself and his degrees back to Ghana to spend the rest of his life there.

Jebuni folded the newspaper and went into the kitchen to cook up a meal. The refrigerator revealed a dozen eggs, a half loaf of bread, and a few apples.

He shouted to Kelechi. "How about a fried egg sandwich with an apple for dessert?"
"I've had better, but it will do."

As he fried the eggs, Jebuni's mind rushed back to the days of his childhood when his mother would make him hausa koko, a millet porridge flavored with sugar, milk, and ground nuts. How he loved it! And how he loved even more his mama who made it! He missed her. She was his staunchest supporter, his greatest fan. In her eyes, Jebuni could do no wrong. It had been Mama who'd tried to comfort him during the tormenting days after Kofi's drowning. During those sleepless nights when he'd tossed and turned, weeping and railing with guilt and remorse, she'd sat beside him for hours, praying for peace to come upon him. It was Mama who'd encouraged him to go abroad, hoping that distance would bring healing to his wounded soul.

But distance had not obliged. It had only buried the guilt more deeply.

"Dinner's ready," he called to Kelechi.

"That was quick." Kelechi sat down at the table, rubbing his stomach with anticipation.

Jebuni closed his eyes in prayer. "Father God, we thank You for this food. Bless it so it will nourish our bodies and sustain us. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen."

Kelechi picked up his sandwich. "Do you really think praying over your food makes a difference?"

"Absolutely. Praying always makes a difference, as long as one prays to the only true God."

Yet, why had praying not eased the pain of Jebuni's past? Why did the guilt still rage in his soul? Why could he not forgive himself for Kofi's death? He took a deep breath. He needed to stop blaming himself. This weather was negatively affecting him, bringing back unwelcome memories. He deliberately shook off his mood and began to eat.

"Where did you learn all of this stuff about prayer?" Kelechi bit into his sandwich.

"From American missionaries who came to Ghana. When I was just a lad, my mother started attending the church services of the missionaries and accepted Christ. She then started sending me to Sunday school where I, too, eventually accepted Jesus as my Savior and Lord." Kelechi scratched his head. "To each his own. As for me, I am content to worship the gods of my ancestors—if I worship them at all." He laughed.

Jebuni's heart grieved for his friend. Kelechi had no idea of the personal loss—in both this life and the next—that awaited one who chose not to follow Christ. Jebuni would continue to pray for Kelechi, trusting that one day he, too, would see the light of truth.

After their meal together, Kelechi cleared the table while Jebuni washed and dried the dishes and put them back in the cupboard. If his tribe in Ghana could see him now, they would be shocked. No future heir to the chieftaincy ever lifted a finger to do housework. Housework was the domain of women, not men. Especially not of royal men.

Jebuni put away the dishtowel and then made himself a cup of coffee to keep awake as he plunged into another long night of study. He would work extra tonight to make up for the time he would lose tomorrow evening to attend the art lecture. Perhaps there would be other Ghanaians present to comfort his heart. Perhaps, for a few hours, he would forget the guilt that gnawed at him, leaving him raw inside.

Perhaps one day he would be able to forgive himself for failing to rescue his friend from

the jaws of death.

* * * *

Tori's heart surged with excitement as she and Anna entered the large, ornate, high-ceilinged room at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Its mahogany-paneled walls provided a warm, inviting atmosphere for holding a lecture. Bronze wall sconces illuminated the room with a soft, yet bright, light. To the right of the entrance stood a mahogany table on which sat a large, engraved ceramic vase filled with white gardenias whose sweet fragrance floated through the air. All around her, the chattering of enthusiastic voices heralded an evening of good things to come.

Already the room had filled almost to capacity with people eager to enjoy the rare lecture on Ghanaian art.

Since admission was free, seating was on a first-come, first-served basis. Tori scanned the room. Two seats in the center section sat empty.

She turned to Anna and then pointed. "Look! Two seats in the middle section, near the end of the row. Let's grab them."

Tori led the way, pushing gently through the crowded aisle full of people intently engaged in conversation. With purse in hand and Anna following close behind, she excused herself as she made her way through the row to the empty seats. She took the next-to-last spot, while Anna settled in the seat to Tori's left. A young black man occupied the last seat in the row, right next to the aisle.

Tori took off her coat and laid her purse on her lap.

"Hello." The man on her right greeted her with a brilliant smile and an unusual English accent.

Tori reciprocated the smile. "Hello." The man's deep-brown eyes were kind and his demeanor, dignified. She liked him instantly.

He extended his hand. "My name is Jebuni Kalitsi, but people call me Jeb. I am from Ghana."

"Really? Then you must be especially excited about this lecture."

"Quite excited, indeed."

To her great embarrassment, Tori suddenly realized she had not accepted his extended hand. "Oh, I'm so sorry." She shook his hand. It felt warm as it touched her skin. "My name is Victoria Pendola, but you can call me Tori. I'm happy to meet you, Jeb." She turned toward Anna. "This is my sister Anna."

Jeb leaned over and shook Anna's hand as well.

Tori turned toward him. "Are you visiting from Ghana?"

"Actually, I am a graduate exchange student at the University of Pennsylvania. I'm enrolled in the School of Economics."

"What a coincidence! I'm a grad student at Penn, too. I'm majoring in Art History with a concentration in African art."

Jeb's eyes widened. "Fascinating! Then you, too, must be excited about tonight's lecture."

"Very much so."

Jeb turned more fully toward her. "What is it you like about African art?"

Tori laughed. "Everything! I love its simplicity, its passion, its bright colors. I love its sense of youthfulness, balance, and proportion. One of my favorite artists is Amon Kotei."

Jeb nodded in approval, his gaze intent. "Kotei recently designed our Ghanaian coat of arms."

"Yes!" Tori smiled. "It's amazing!"

"You are right about the simplicity and passion of African art. In my homeland, we love the simple life with a passion. That love is expressed in our art."

A voice from the front of the room interrupted their conversation. "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. We are about to begin, so would everyone please take his seat?" Those few who remained standing quickly took their places as the speaker introduced the lecturer.

Trying hard to focus her attention, Tori listened to the expert art historian as he showed slides of the history of Ghanaian art. But the powerful presence of the man sitting beside her distracted her. Although they'd hardly spoken, she sensed there was something unique about him, something she'd never encountered in any other man. A quiet strength. A noble dignity.

A mysterious depth that begged to be explored.

She swallowed hard, half succeeding at reining in her roaming thoughts. As the evening progressed, every now and then she glanced over at Jeb. His eyes, more often than not, were on her rather than on the lecturer.

A pleasant shiver ran through her.

At the end of the lecture, the audience applauded with a standing ovation.

Tori turned toward Jeb and smiled at him. "That was wonderful, wasn't it?"

"Indeed." His medium-built, muscular frame exuded a gentle strength. Like velvet on steel. His intense gaze was upon her. "I have very much enjoyed meeting you, Tori."

"Likewise." Her heart caught in her throat.

"May I meet with you again some time to discuss Ghana and its art?"

Tori hesitated. She didn't even know this man. Yet, something inside her told her she could trust him. "Yes, I would enjoy meeting with you again to discuss Ghanaian art." She wanted to make clear that their meeting would be purely on the level of their shared interest in that topic. Secretly, however, her mind had already raced far ahead of that.

She reached into her purse for the little notebook and pencil she always carried and jotted down her phone number, and then tore out the page and handed it to Jeb with a smile. "The best time to reach me is in the late afternoon or early evening."

Jeb graciously took the note and gave her a little bow. "Very well, then. I will be in touch." He extended his hand again. "It was a pleasure to meet you, Tori." Then he reached over toward Anna. "It was a pleasure to meet you, Anna." With that, he exited the row and left. Anna nudged Tori in the elbow. "What was that all about?"

"I'm not quite sure. He asked if I would like to meet with him again to discuss Ghana and its art. I said I would."

"Are you sure he's interested only in discussing Ghana and its art?" Her sister's eyebrows arched.

"I'm not quite sure of that, either. The only thing of which I'm quite sure is that I felt something. An attraction between us."

"Yes, I noticed." Anna's voice was wry.

Tori looked at her sister. “Anna, were you eavesdropping?”

“Who, me? Eavesdropping? What do you mean?” Anna feigned innocence.

“Yes, you, my dear sister! You know exactly what I mean.” Tori burst into laughter, her heart filled with a new joy she’d never experienced before. Something had happened to her tonight. She’d received something she had not expected. A gift. A gift of a friendship that somehow she knew, in the depths of her being, would have a profound impact on her life.

Tori turned to Anna. “So, what did you think of him?”

Anna hesitated. “He seemed very nice, but—”

“But what?”

“But you know how Pop hates colored people. He’ll forbid you to befriend him.”

Tori’s muscles tensed. Anna was right. Pop had made his deeply ingrained prejudice against blacks audibly clear on several occasions throughout their lives. “Well, Pop doesn’t have to know. At least, not just yet.”

“Tori, you know as well as I do that if you end up dating this man, you can’t keep it from Pop forever. Sooner or later you’re going to have to tell him.”

Tori’s muscles tensed. “I guess I’ll just make it later than sooner.” She dismissed the alarming thought for now. “How about a cup of coffee before we go home?”

“That sounds like a good idea.”

Arm in arm, the sisters walked toward a nearby café. As Tori breathed in the brisk night air, all she could think about was the intriguing man from Ghana named Jeb.