

AFRICAN FOLKLORE FICTION



13 MOONS

ISSUE 012

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William Ifeanyi Moore and Medevor Jarell Obor have been childhood best friends since 1999 when they met in boarding school in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. Over the years they traded fictional stories with each other aspiring to one day share their passion for narratives with the world. In their young adult years, they would find themselves in England where they started working on the concept of socially conscious narrative series inspired by African folklore storytelling techniques. 13 Moons is their first project and they hope you enjoy reading it as much as they have enjoyed creating it.

ILLUSTRATION BY Ochuko Michael Obor



Chapter Eleven: Some Rains Ago

After the incident with the Prince, the Little Girl had grown somewhat withdrawn from the world around her. Often she would find herself wishing her mother were still with her. A listening ear and a shoulder to cry on always went a long way towards easing internal pains. Once she considered telling her master, but then she decided against it. Even if he believed her, there wasn't much he could do about it. Not to mention, if the Prince felt like denying the truth, it was the prince's word against hers. Even if he admitted to it, no good would come out of it. He was the Prince and she was a slave.

She stood no chance regardless of how apparent her sincerity seemed. There was also the problem of stigmatization. For the most part, people wanted to be treated normal. It could be just as equally upsetting to be constantly treated with pity, as it could be to be constantly shamed. As much as the Little Girl wished for at least one outlet to vent the demons that tore her up inside, she was faced with a society that offered only stones for bread. The people of Eyanka were more likely to find a way to blame her for what had happened to her rather than take any action against the Prince. The best she could do was to cry herself to sleep, feeling used and dirty as she went through the motions in her head, over and over again. And then it got worse, a lot worse.





It started in the morning. Lying somewhere between sleep and wakefulness, she could feel her stomach contracting, her throat expanding. At first she thought it was the fever, but she wasn't running a temperature and didn't particularly feel weak. Before she could comprehend what was happening, she was on her feet running outside to ease her nauseating body. As she eased herself of the strain, she could only hope no one else was watching. When she was done, she wiped her mouth and then went back into the cooking hut where she slept on the clay floor without as much as a mat between her and the ground. Unable to go back to sleep, she sat silently by the wall trying to imagine what was going to become of her.



For a few moons now, she had not bled. At first she thought it was nothing. Perhaps a negligible side effect from what had transpired between her and the Prince. Now she was certain this was more than that. She knew she was with child. If ever there were a curse from the gods, this was it. Just when she thought her life couldn't get any worse. At first she thought of ending it all by herself—to leave on her own terms. But at just over twelve rains the decision to end it all was met with far too much fear. She was left with the option to tell her master immediately or to wait it out until it was impossible to hide. She chose the latter, more so out of fear than anything else. More moons passed and as nature demanded, the Little Girl's body began to take the shape of a vessel—a vessel the content of which could no longer be hidden.



“You little whore! What have you been doing in my house?” Her master dragged her by the ear to his children’s room.

“Which of you is responsible for this?” He asked his sons. The boys looked at each other in shock and bewilderment before shaking their heads in unison. Before the Little Girl was given the opportunity to speak for herself, her master’s fist came crashing down on her.

“Master, it was the prince! It was the prince! I did not want to! He made me! They were all there the first time!”

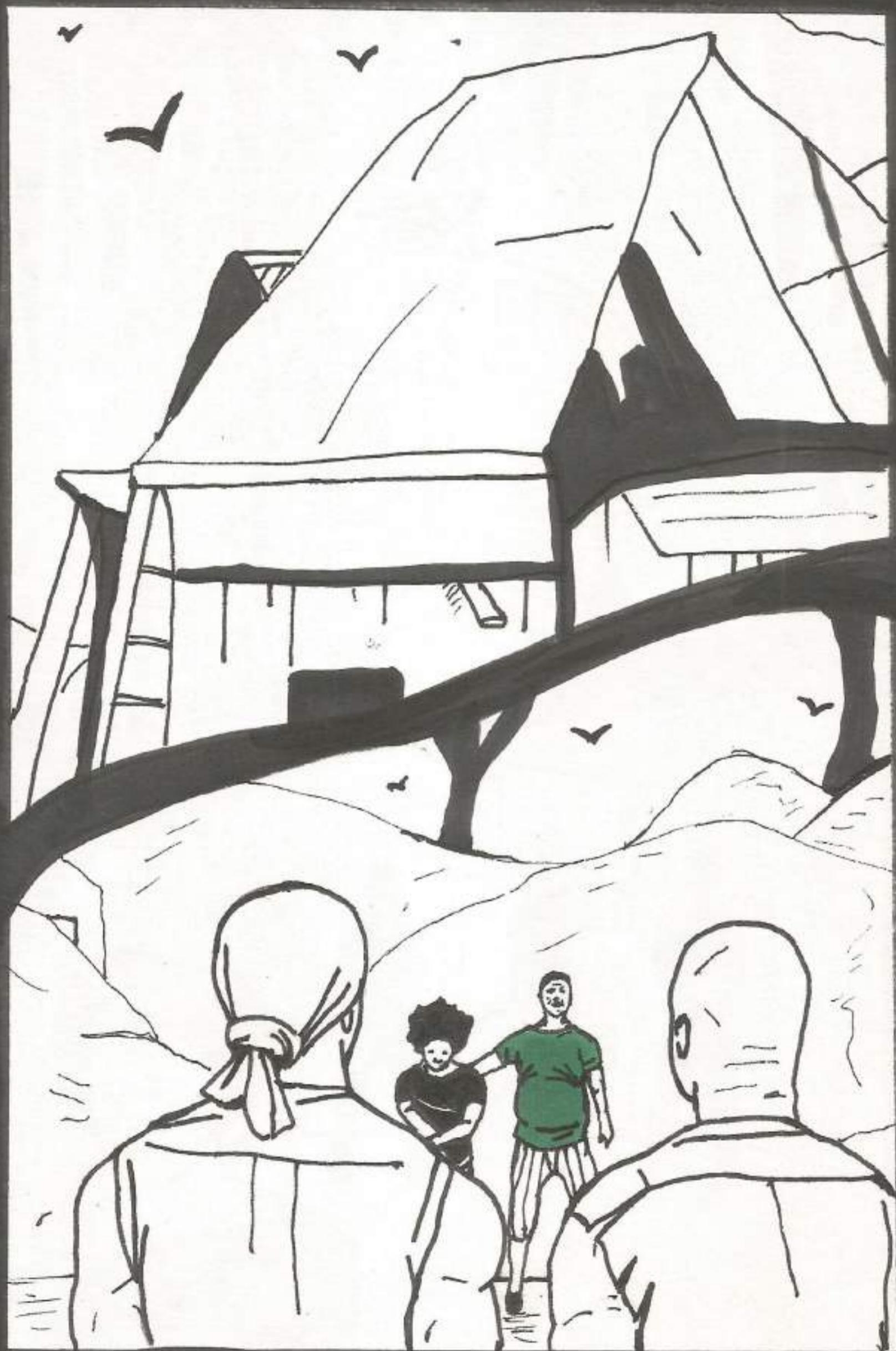
He paused, his fist hanging in the air about to strike.

“Who were all there?” He enquired.

“All the other slaves. I swear it, you can ask them. It was in the yam barn where we stay; on the last New Moon festival.”



Now she was sobbing uncontrollably making her voice less audible.
“I will take you to the palace and you shall swear this in front of the Old King and the court. They will be the judge of your fate.”
“Please don’t, please! I beg you.” She reached for his feet but was met with a kick to the face.
“Don’t touch me with your soiled hands, slave!” He left to put on something more befitting for a trip to the palace. At the very least, he didn’t want to smell like a Fisherman.



The truth was that the Little Girl's master already knew how things were going to turn out. What prince was going to accept his bastard child from a slave girl? Royalty and slavery just could not co-exist, like oil and water. And it wasn't like the Prince would beg his father for the girl's freedom, certainly not after raping her before an on-looking crowd as the girl had explained.

At the entrance gate he instructed a messenger to tell the Old King that he demanded an audience on a very urgent matter of a delicate nature. "If he presses further, tell him I say it has to do with the Prince." The messenger nodded and ran along.



As was expected, an immediate audience was granted. It would have been unwise of the Old King to delay matters relating to his successor. The messenger led the Little Girl's master through the palace grounds and finally into the throne room where the Old King was sat. He asked the Little Girl to wait outside the room while he interceded on her behalf. She did as she was told.

"My King, it appears my slave carries the unborn child of our prince." His voice trembled as he spoke. The last thing he wanted was for this to come off as an attempt at blackmail or extortion. Not with this Old King. He would have his entire family executed at the slightest threat.

The Old King said nothing.

"She claims he forced himself on her on the night of the last New Moon festival, and other night too. She says there were over a dozen slaves to bear witness. Left to me, I would have killed her already. But I thought perhaps it is not in my place to decide the fate of the seed she carries."

The Old King said nothing still.



“Of course I am aware of the sensitive nature of this problem, which is why I brought it directly to you. Whatever you command is my will. I have spoken to no one else about this. Not even my wife.”

Now he was sweating. This wasn't going nearly as easy as he imagined it would. The mere presence of the Old King on his throne was powerfully frightening. The Old King adjusted his crown.

“You are a good man. Your gesture of loyalty will not go unappreciated.”

The Little Girl's master smiled and bowed in great relief.

“Messenger!”

A small-framed man came running into the throne room.

“See to it that this man is treated with a handful of cowries and a fat cow from our stables.”

“Yes, my King.” The man nodded and ran along.

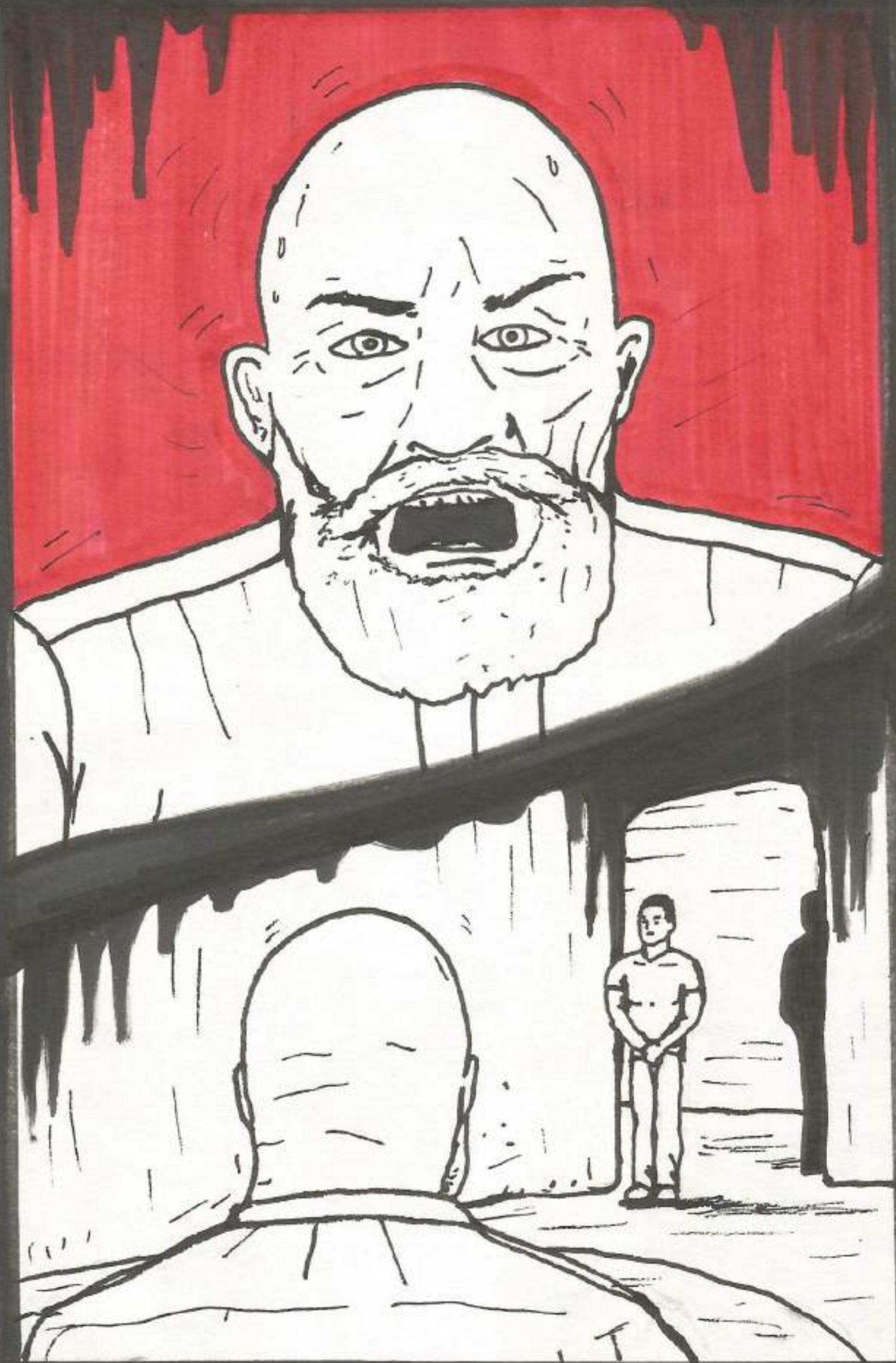
“Thank you my King. I don't deserve so much.”

“Loyalty can never be rewarded enough. It is the rarest of traits in men these days. We will take it from here. If I need anything else from you, I will let you know.”



The Little Girl's master was not exactly sure what they were going to do with the slave girl, but he knew her days were numbered. He walked out of the throne room and past her without as much as a glance in her direction. It was at that moment that she realized she was truly alone in this. Staring blankly, she watched as the messenger handed him a small pouch no bigger than a clenched fist. He opened it and poked around briefly as if counting stones for an estimate. There was only one thing it could be and she knew it. He had sold her to the Old King.

The Old King deliberated on the issue and the solutions available to him. The easy option was to take her somewhere away from the rest of the village before slitting her throat. She was after all a slave girl. It's not like anyone would miss her or search for her. But the Old King was not one to miss an opportunity and here a perfect one had presented itself. He was a firm believer in the adage that as a ruler it was better to be feared than to be loved. Love was after all a feeble emotion controlled largely by the giver. It could be lost just as easily as it could be gained. Fear on the other hand was of a different nature, a more permanent nature. It did not ask for submission, it demanded it.



He was going to set a public example with this Little Girl— an example that would teach the people to fear the royal family. It didn't matter that the lesson would be derived from a lie. The people would only ever hear of the truth in rumours and they probably wouldn't care anyway. He had been a king long enough to understand that about people. For the most part no one cared about truth. People just wanted something to distract them from their miserable lives. The same thing applied to ruling. A king could easily be permitted to be as frivolous as a drunk or as corrupt as a thief. As long as the people were safe, fed, and entertained, they had no business planning any sort of a coup or rebellion. As his father before him so eloquently put it; "People don't care for good government, they only care for good governance." It was only when incidents that upset the balance of their normal livelihood occurred that they stopped to think about how the kingdom was being run. In a place like Eyanka where the status quo was already so low with the people rendered impotent before the ruling class, they would near enough have to be facing an existential threat of apocalyptic proportions before thoughts of any serious rebellion would emerge.

With this girl, he would drive the lesson home that a lie against the royals was a great offense. An offense so great it was punishable by death. It was a good way to silence people with fear. The Old King was under no illusion about the kind of man he had in a son. The Prince was going to need all the fear he could get to remain sat on the throne when his time finally came. "Messenger! Assemble the council for court. There is a matter of utmost importance we must discuss."

WORDS FROM THE CREATORS

The Deep Black

*Nothing will save you
No one will help you
Not your government that makes a feast of your suffering
Not your gods that turn deaf ears to your prayers and mutterings*

*Nothing will save you
No one will help you
Buy a noose and tighten it too
Stand on a stool and let your lips go blue*

*Nothing will save you
No one will help you
You will die and then you will be born again
You will live and then you will die again*

*Nothing will save you
No one will help you
This is the fate of the damned
What are we?*

