

THE BOSS



FUNMI ANU BANKOLE

*“The Literary Queen
of Domestic Fiction”*

Reader's Digest

THE BOSS

BY

FUNMI ANU BANKOLE

Copyright © 2021 Funmi Anu Bankole

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author, except by reviewers, who may quote brief passages in a review.

Visit www.funmianubankole.com

Chapter 1

Trouble Brewing

Belinda woke up to the screeching sound of a rolling fan. She flung the duvet away from her body, strutting towards the window to find a helicopter descending on her yard.

Belinda looked askance. It appeared to her like a scene from a movie. The door to the helicopter opened and she saw her first son, Peter Balonget Thorley, climb down the passenger seat and stroll towards the door. She tied her robe firmer together and walked down to meet him. From the balcony upstairs, she saw her firstborn son grabbing his brother, John, by the neck, his words muffled and incomprehensible. Michael, the last of her four children, was trying to pull both men apart.

“I could tear you apart with my hands, John. You traitor. Stay away from me and my fucking business, man,” Peter was heard yelling.

Peter’s grip was firm on John’s neck, causing the latter to choke under it. When Michael tried hitting Peter’s hand to release his hold on their brother, Peter yelled at him offensively.

“Get the fuck off, Michael.”

“Can you both tell me what is going on?” Belinda screamed amidst the chaos. On seeing their mother’s reaction, Peter released John, straightening his shirt.

“It’s okay, Mama. There is nothing to worry about,” Peter said, walking towards her. He kissed her on the head. “How are you doing, Mama?”

“I am well, Son. You looked so angry with your brother, and that is a gun tucked into the waist of your pants. Is there something you are not telling me, Peter?”

“I am not a child, Ma. I can carry this around to protect myself. There is no joy in the world, for a boy, Ma. A boy is gon’ find joy anywhere it’s at,” he said, as he began walking across the entrance door. Belinda could not tell who this son of hers was. One minute he was clutching his brother’s neck so firmly, the next minute he was kissing her forehead. The event had shaken her. Peter’s coming to warn his brother with a gun. She called both her sons in an effort to restore peace between them. After having a bath later that morning, she slipped into her tracksuit and walked to the riverside to clear her head.

When she reaches the riverside, the memory of her life tumbled like the tides of the sea. She had met her husband in high school. They were both young, innocent and in love. At first they never guessed that what started as an ordinary friendship would metamorphose into a love relationship. It progressed freely into an inseparable union. Belinda hadn't been doing well at school but got grades enough to secure admission into college. Before long, she qualified as a beauty therapist. She was supported by her parents to open a beauty salon. Her boyfriend, who was into construction, was before long handling big projects and, although her parents had earlier objected to the relationship, their individual successes convinced both parents that they could make good as a couple.

After the wedding, the couple lived with Peter's parents and before long they had saved enough to move into a house of their own. Life went on and so did the family. Business went well and they bore four children in quick succession: Peter junior, John, Rosa and Michael.

Together, Peter and Belinda raised their children. Little did they know that the troubles of life would assail their idyllic union. Peter senior fell off a scaffold at work which fractured some bones in his legs and hands. He was dismissed to go home and take care of himself. Being unable to work put a strain on their finances as a family but with her business, Belinda was able to hold the home front.

As Peter's stay at home lengthened, the visitors who frequented the house increased. Initially, the visits seemed harmless and when Belinda asked her husband about the increasing number of visitors, he said that the visitors were neighbours showing their concern for his welfare as a result of his accident. He complained that he was bored of staying at home and the visitors coming cheered him. He worried about his financial incapacitation. His words made her sober and she left bothering about the increasing visitors until the police came to knock on her door. Their neighbours must have reported it, she thought. But she welcomed them with an open heart, knowing that all she allowed was for her husband's health and her family's wellbeing.

The policemen showed her a warrant for a search, to which she obliged. On searching the house, some packs of cannabis were found in their home. Belinda was stupefied. She told the men she had no idea how the items got into her house. Many visitors frequented their home and the thought that her husband could be privy to some information made her

feel betrayed. She was angry that the sacrifices she made for her family were of no value. She asked for some time to speak with Peter.

“How come you never told me you were a drug dealer?” she asked him in a voice filled with rage.

“Correction, Belinda, I am not a drug dealer. This is weed,” he told her. Her eyes were wet with sadness and shame. She felt like she had never known him. Peter was arrested and arraigned in court. He was sentenced to one year in prison.

Saddled with the responsibility of catering for the four children, Belinda’s parents took turns to support her financially and by babysitting the children. Peter served his jail term quickly and was soon released from prison. But while now well enough to go back to his job as a mason, he seemed disinterested. He was able to get a parcel of land behind the house on allotment. He built a shed and went about clearing the land in preparation for farming. Belinda didn’t know he had any expertise in farming and wondered why he would be given a share of land.

As Peter started out his farming business, the visitors resumed coming to the house—although now in an organised manner. He sometimes met them at the farm.

One day, Peter junior picked up a parcel on the ground and brought it to his mother. On opening it, Belinda found shreds of dried weed. She hurried to show it to her husband. Peter collected the parcel and poured its content into his pocket. Belinda became worried for the safety of the children. The situation was getting out of hand. She did not want her children to be exposed to drugs and Peter’s unrelenting involvement would open her children to the vice. When deals went wrong, there were moments of fighting and disagreements, and her valuables got stolen. She has had to take her children to live with her parents to shield them from witnessing the activities around the house. Police became regular visitors to the house as well.

The event of that morning resurfaced in her mind. She remembered the inscription on the helicopter that landed in her yard that morning, “THE BOSS”. She asked herself many times if history was not repeating itself. At the height of her husband’s rendezvous, he was so rich and powerful that all his friends called him ‘The Boss’. It was not long before the police came again. A surveillance team was set up to investigate Peter senior’s work at the farm. It was discovered that Peter was planting

cannabis on the allotment. The shed and his illegal farm were destroyed and Peter was taken away to serve a longer jail term. Belinda thought she had had enough. She put up the house for sale, moved to another part of the city and filed for divorce.

The day her husband was sentenced to this lengthy jail term was one of the best days—as well as the worst day—of her life. She was bitter that he had exposed the children to his life of crime. She also feared that, one day, something evil would happen. She had witnessed enough of fighting in her own house. She was tired of sending the children to live with her parents. So she was at peace with Peter being away. She knew that if he did not go to prison, one day he would be killed by irate clients.

Peter junior was a regular visitor to the prison and this took a toll on Belinda's business. She had to give him food and money for such visits but her husband, Peter, did not stay long in prison. He was diagnosed with cancer and died three years into his sentence.

She registered the children into new schools in the hope of starting life afresh in a new environment. The new environment encouraged the children to do menial jobs to help themselves. Many students took odd jobs like running errands and delivering local newspapers to help themselves. Belinda's second son, John, took up delivering newspapers before going to school. The income was meagre but he brought it home to support his mum.

Some children at the school had alternative means of earning. They ran an errand for a senior student in school called "BB". These students told other children how lucrative the job was on the grounds that it must be done stealthily. They said the more the sales, the more the commission. Other boys were interested, including Peter and John, but Michael refused to join in. He was much younger, frail and contended with the little their mother could afford.

John was not interested at first but Peter kept on pestering him. He got commissions for selling drugs as well as from recruiting new hands from other schools into the trade. BB headed the drug trade in high schools within their locality and, in a short time, he was interested in meeting Peter.

When John eventually gave in, he became Peter's competitor and the seed of jealousy was gradually sown. Upon graduation from high school, BB was killed. Peter and John organized some of their recruits to work with them and started out as individual drug cartels.

Belinda was grateful to God that her children were doing well for themselves. Michael was the only one of her four children who went to university. He became a lecturer upon graduation. Peter, she thought, had a successful accountancy company and had worked with an audit firm for years. John, for his part, had secured a license as a consultant to construction companies and had risen from his little beginnings as a mason through the ranks to own a consultancy firm. Her three eldest children had since moved her out of an old flat—where they had lived for over 20 years since her husband had died—into a bigger house on the outskirts of town. But she had now become sceptical about the bond between the brothers since Peter junior barged in threatening his brother.