

The Eboria

I've never stayed anywhere long enough to learn its name. Every city I've been to is just another sector, another faceless block of decaying buildings and forgotten people. My mom always says if we keep moving, they won't find us. But I don't even know who *they* are. We've run from so many sectors that I've given up on asking.

This time we're moving to sector twelve; honestly, I don't even know how many sectors there are before we run out of places to run to. I've heard lingering rumors about sector twelve, stories whispered in every alley of any city we've been to. Something about twelve just seems different. Darker.

As the Okada, a small yellow hovering motorcycle with back seats, approached the giant metal gate, I noticed the Nigerian flag carefully placed between two gold pillars drenched with water. Once we entered, a wave of silence fell over everyone in the Okada. Sector twelve was nothing like the others. The streets are narrower, and the buildings crumble like the sides of Egyptian pyramids. There's an eerie quiet that suffocates the air, and no one looks at you. Normally I would be grateful for not getting attention and weird stares, but this was different—like the whole city's holding its breath.

The apartment we're assigned is small, very small, and it smells like it's rotting. The walls are damp, and they leak every time it rains. But that's not even the worst of it. The silence is what stresses me. At night, I stay awake, listening to it pressure me from all sides of my room walls. No one speaks. No one laughs. No one looks up. Even the wind is afraid to move through this place.

"Don't go out at night," Mom warns me, her voice thick and clear, as she locks the door behind us. I hear the desperation in her voice—the same fear that clings to everyone's. I tried to argue, but there was no point; she just shut me down. "Just stay inside, Damilola!" she said. "We, we... we'll be safe if we keep to ourselves."

Safe. The word feels empty, without meaning. There's nothing safe about this place. I could feel eyes watching us from the moment we arrived. Not the people, but something unseen, deeper. Something in the walls.

I try to ignore it, but the feeling never leaves. Every time I'm awake, I feel it—a hundred eyes staring into me, tracking my every move. I want to ask someone, anyone, if they feel it too, but I wouldn't dare meet anyone's gaze.

It becomes much worse at night. That is when the real terror begins.

The first time I hear *them*, I'm half asleep, slowly drifting in the unsteady quiet of our cramped apartment. And then I hear it—a soft thud, like someone knocking at the door. My heart skips a

beat, but I remember to tell myself it's nothing. Just the wind or the neighbors. But then it comes again. Louder. Closer. Stronger.

I slip out of bed, creeping toward the door. My mom is already asleep; her breaths are shallow but loud. I don't wake her. She's been too tired to notice anything lately, too worn down by me and the constant moving.

I press my ear to the front door, listening.

Whispers. Low, but sharp voices just beyond the threshold of the stairs down the hall. They're close—too close. I back away, heart racing, and return to our bed, pulling the covers tight around me. I do not sleep. Not that night. Not the next. Or the one after.

Days pass, and I notice little things—the way the neighbors disappear without a word. The way whole apartments are suddenly vacant, like the people inside never existed. And always, that same knock. Every night, it grows louder. Closer. And more powerful.

One evening, as the sun sets behind the ruined market place below, I gather the courage to ask one of our few neighbors who are left. A girl who looks about my age, with haunted green eyes and a voice so quiet I must strain to hear the little words coming from her mouth.

"The Eboras," she says, her eyes sharply darting around like she's afraid *they* will hear. "They come at night. If they knock, don't answer. If you do, you will never be seen again." I stared at her, shocked and confused. "Who are they?"

She shakes her head, stepping away from me awkwardly. "Just don't answer the door." I try to ask more, but she's gone before I can get the words out, swallowed up by the darkness of the hallway.

That night, I lay awake, waiting. My pulse hammering in my ears and shivering with every sound. And then it happens. The knocks.

This time, it's different. It's not the faint, distant tap I've heard before. This is time, demanding, loud, and suffocating me like walls closing in.

I hold my breath, frozen in the dark. The knock comes again, harder now, like something's trying to break through. I glance toward Mom, but she doesn't twitch. It's as if she's frozen in place.

Then I hear it—a voice. Low and guttural, almost human but not quite. It's speaking to me; it sounds like my name, though I can't make out the words. My body trembles, every nerve on edge.

I should stay in bed. I should do what Mom said. But I can't. My feet move on their own, carrying me toward the door. The air around me grows heavy, pushing me almost with something unseen but undeniable.

They knock again, so loud it rattles the walls.

My sweaty hand reaches for the door. My fingers gently curl around the cold metal handle and open the door.

Nothing happens. Nothing?

Then, I hear something else: footsteps. Coming from behind me.

I whip around, my breath lodged as a lump in my throat. In the shadows, I see her—the girl from earlier. Only now her eyes weren't green and haunted. They're empty, whiter than pearls. And she's smiling. Her face painted with white and black Yoruba devil makeup from thousands of years ago. She floats towards me, and I step back.

"They've already let themselves in," she says, her voice lingering with malice.

I try to run back, but it is too late. The door bursts open behind me; they grab my arms, and I'm pulled into the darkness, into the arms of something cold and unescapable.

The last thing I hear is the knock again, echoing through the empty apartment as the door slams shut behind me.