

# LIKITA

By

MUNACHI MBONU



*Munachi Mbonu*

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### **Published by**

Munachi Mbonu

E: Ifeomambonu84@gmail.com

T: 08039231808

### **Layout**

Cgnature Creativemedia

+234 (0) 708 684 2032 (WhatsApp)

### **Cover Illustration:**

John Adesanya

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# Chapter One

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“

Oyo yo yo, Adulrahaman. Oyo yo yo, Adulrahaman!”

My younger sister Rasheedat started singing spontaneously as she rushed to wrap her arms around my waist in excitement. I have just opened the little bamboo gate leading to our compound.

“Inna, inna! Baba, baba! Adulrahaman. Adulrahaman.”

She can't stop her music, flowing at the top of her voice. Now she's turning her head towards the house....

“Likita, likita!”

My mum soon ran off the corridor of our house to join the party with a bear hug.

“Barka de zuwa.”

“Come inside the house my dearest son. You will have to bend kwo, you have grown really tall now. Toh.”

I walked into the newly built Zaure. Father erected this lounge for male visitors who are restricted from the main court. In some way, the rule affected the male adult child too. You were only allowed into your mother’s hut, especially when your father had a harem.

This was the common place. Everyone converged here.

Looking around the hut, I was sufficiently impressed at the artistry of father’s design. He had wrought a marvel with fresh bamboo and solid mud he personally fetched from a river down the road.

A quarter of my luggage was still in my hand. My mother and Rasheedat had the rest.

It didn't take long before the announcement came, landing right in the middle of my fascination for the hut I had just been ushered into.

"Abdulrahman ne, baba has also built your own hut for you, a beautiful one that is befitting for a bachelor and a likita like you."

I didn't even know when I cut in.

"My own hut? Liki-"

I hadn't finished the sentence when mother continued, "Adulrahman, we have to find a wife for you as soon as possible. In fact, I have lined up a number of fine ladies for you. I know you'll make a good choice. Do you remember your friends? Mariam, Aisha, Fatima, Amina..."

She was going on with the names when I cut in.

"Ah ah, inna. Don't worry. I will

not become *yaya na zaure*." I protested weakly. *Yaya na zaure* are men who are still single when they're old enough to be married.

I could now see the hut from the window of the *Zaure*. As my eyes caught it, I turned to my mum to find hers waiting for me. She nodded in affirmation.

"Haba, inna, baba should have waited for me to come back and build it myself. How else am I supposed to show that I have come of age, that I'm now a full grown. I don't want my peers to ridicule me."

I started thinking. Soon my head was full. I had planned for this moment since I was a child. Building one's hut by oneself was how one showed that one had come of age. It was a boy's rite of passage once he turned 18. His age grade usually came around to join hands with him. All that was needed was a bowl of hot *tuwo*, *miyan kuka* and *kunu saki*,

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to energize the young men. They would gladly show up every day in high spirits, sharing jokes and gossip, every now and then, till the job was finished.

But now baba had gone ahead of me. I still can't tell why he did what he did. But there it stood. My hut. The monument that now welcomed me to a new world. The world of men. My pride actually sunk but I wouldn't admit it. I knew that a hundred of my age grade could not have built a quarter of this massive beauty that became mine without a single effort. Baba had gone to hire Azeez, a master builder two villages away, to come and build it. Who would have a likita for a son and not go out of his way to do something special like this for him?

It was now all clear to me. He even had it erected close to his own hut. I was his first son after all, and he wanted me to realize that I was well out of childhood.



My siblings had to realize early that I was the next in authority in our family after father. There was a total of eight huts in the compound for his two wives and children. Apart from his personal hut which was rebuilt by Azeez the master builder, all the rest were built by his age grade. To have had mine built by Azeez surely was his way of sending out a message to everyone in the family.

In our village, everyone knew everyone. There was a lot we shared in common. We were yet to have modern electricity which I enjoyed before I returned here. Once, I described my village to my best friend in the city who was a foreigner from Niger. He said we were yet to catch up with modern civilization.

We had only one market and the only time we saw vehicles were the trucks that came to trade for the Juma'a. The rest were those used by the local government authorities. This was the closest we came

to city life.

As we eventually wanted to leave the hut, I heard another scream. "Likita. Adulrahaman. Likita. Adulrahaman!" These voices sounded different. My aged father was picking whatever little pace he could towards us.

"My first son. Adulrahaman is a Likita." His was an emphatic, assertive joy. He placed his palm on my shoulder. A father's pride couldn't be stronger.

"My first born is a likita! Alhamdulillah." He asserted with fatherly bloodlessness, stamping his cane on the earth. I would try now not to disappoint him. Nothing I say should be contrary to their faith in their "likita." Soon the whole village would be drawn into this sea of illusion but I had to act the part...



## Chapter Two

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Who even started this whole thing? My mind was a whirlwind of guesses. Does it then mean that the letters I wrote to my parents about working as an apprentice at a patent medicine shop never got home or were misinterpreted? I was confused. How do I explain it to my parents and the village? All I learnt in the city were basic medication for common illnesses like headache, malaria and typhoid fever. No more.

And I felt even more disturbed on the inside of me. Medicine was the course of my dreams. I had wanted to go to the University of Maiduguri to earn my degree. But my poor performance in my senior secondary exams meant that dream either had to be deferred or abandoned. The latter seemed more realistic because my failure had been more than woeful. English was particularly my undoing. How could I have made any headway when I was taught English in Hausa. The same thing actually applied to all the other subjects.

But I had graduated from secondary school and become confused about what to do with my life. I didn't want to remain in the village and farm or rare cattle just like the other youths in the village. I woke up one fateful Friday morning and decided that I would follow the truck that would come to pick local farm produce at the Juma'a market that day back to

the city. I had the phone number and address of my biology teacher Ibrahim who was sent to my school to serve as a youth corps member a year earlier.

He was my favourite teacher. He had seen my willingness to learn and decided to pay extra attention to my studies. When he was leaving, he gave me his home address and phone number.

“If you ever find yourself in Lafia, do well give me a call.” He had told me confidently.

That day, I quickly picked up the few clothes and little money I had and lied to my parents that I was going to the university. Without question, and because they were illiterate, they prayed for my success and said I must return as a doctor, reminding me that Guma village had yet to get its own doctor.

I was lucky on arrival in Lafia. I was able to quickly trace Mr. Ibrahim. He had started running a patent medicine

outlet. It was a city by Guma's standards but remote in general terms - he didn't need a licence to start his small drug dispensing store. He was so happy to see me and accommodated me. That's how I joined him in his trade and quickly learnt basic dosage administration and a few other elementary things. After a while, I started treating minor wounds and gained mastery in administering painkillers, malaria and typhoid medication.

Returning to Guma was something that had somehow gotten out of hand. I had not planned for it to turn out the way it did - a grandiose event. My aim was to see family and friends that I hadn't seen in a long time. The rousing reception in honour of a village hero had not been part of my plans. The mistake I made was that I came donning a lab coat.

All the while, I had to keep my smile, as a man of manners would, publicly. News soon went round the whole village.

I couldn't hear the last felicitations.

The sound of tricycles now took over the air in our compound. The gate to greatness had been flung open.

“Likita. See, they've come”

I had nearly forgotten where I was. But the milling crowd reminded me at once.

They wanted to take out of my bag. The one in which I brought back some goodies for everyone.

As I unzipped it to reveal its content, my mum started singing for joy and danced uncontrollably.

There was a lot. Noodles. Biscuits. Milk. Beverages. Sweets. I was truly an older brother. It is not for nothing that I'm the first son of this house, I thought. The pride was so real, it felt like an eagle rested on my shoulders and spread an aura of a dignified persona with immaculate effulgence. And for a moment, an entire village was arrested by this glitter that



was nowhere near gold.

In one of the other bags, I had a whole collection of drugs I got from Ibrahim's shop. Mr. Ibrahim was kind enough to cover more than half of the bill and allow me pay for just a third of the whole. The drugs were not so much but were enough to cover about three or four months for my family to be taken care of.

My father couldn't hold back his admiration for the scene that had become our house.

"Well-done Adulrahaman."

My father came over to pat my back.

"You have made the village so proud already as the youngest Likita to ever come from among us. You have become so great at an age younger than your grandfather was when he came here to settle. His grin spread so wide it covered all of his face. He pulled me closer to himself and hugged me fully.

“Youngest Likita to step in the village.”

I couldn't keep my head in a place that night. Sleep was far way. I spent the whole time wandering in my thoughts and desperately wished that this was all a dream. Our homestead was expansive and I was alone my hut. Yet my spacious room could not keep the yet that produced large beads of sweat on my body. My heart raced. My breathed heavily. It seemed as if the whole world had come upon my head. How could I come back home and then begin to live a lie. How long could I keep the act? Shouldn't I just go out at once and announce that I had only been a shop assistant in the city. My name had already become lore of some kind. They sang with it. They talked about it. In days, my father would be turbaned. I couldn't stop thinking.

Perhaps this could end in a good way, if the situation is managed well. After all, I already knew how to treat

basic ailments and as far as I thought, the cases in this village won't be more than the same basic sicknesses. Somehow, my face produced a laughter. And who'll ever know? I couldn't say. In my speechlessness, sleep rolled in.

It took a knock on my door to wake me up. I slept usually deep that night.

"Likita. Likita."

I couldn't tell whose voice it was. It sounded distant, even if I knew sleep was gone. It was a new day now. I freshened up and got dressed. Then I took a look at myself in the broken mirror that hung down on my wall. I thought I looked the part very well. From my small black fedora hat to the borrowed stethoscope that hung around my neck, to the stainless white lab coat and pointed leather shoe, there was a confidence that I felt unshakably. I was clearly in character. By the time I moved over to the main house, my mother announced that she had invited a few of

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our important neighbours to greet me. I already looked the part, anyway.

She had a bowl of kuli kuli ready to place on the table. "Likita, likita ina kwa na."

My mother motioned to me. It was an old tradition whenever she set up in the morning. She never did it alone. One of us was always on hand to support her. We placed a jar of water with bamboo cups along with some tigernut milk and the bowl of kuli kuli. When I was younger, I used to help my mother and sister set up every time special visitors like the ones who were coming in this morning came around. I could never stand up straight to look visitors in the face because I suffered from inferiority complex and even more because I had to demonstrate the courtesies of homely reception when they arrived.

But now is different. Likita I am. In a different world. They themselves must

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be jealous of me, I thought. No more my boyish self. Those days are long gone. If anything, the honour was now to flow more from them to me than the other way round. Why have they even come visiting? I nodded to myself.

There's a knock on the door. And somehow it feels like my heartbeat dropped in heavy thuds. My nerves too, jump a bit. But my mother is already calling Rasheedat and my little cousin to rush to the welcome party. The door had barely opened when they announced their entry by calling the name that had found a home on many lips. "Adulrahaman! Adulrahaman! The only likita in this village."

# Chapter Three

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**T**his man was one of the wealthiest in Guma. He knew just how to make a spectacle anywhere he went. Although he came along with his first wife, we could barely hear anything she said. He walked in with his trademark flamboyance, wearing a navy blue babaringa. His wife was dressed in an abaya with matching colours. Their local perfume flew into the room as the wind gushed in ahead of them.

We gestured to them to the seating

area while my mum and dad who had come out of his room by now, sat on the mat. I stood at the side, where I usually stand during meetings like this till I'm dismissed. But I knew it won't be long.

"Abdulrahman seat down you are a big boy."

Our neighbour literally could not hide the pride he felt. It almost felt like he was my father. He took me so close to him made sure to cover most of me with the flap of his babariga. Never have I been this honoured in all the 25 years of my life. We he inspected my fingers and carefully observed my frame to see what had really changed or rather whether anything had to change for me to become likita. He asked me several questions about my time at the university and bemoaned how his only son had not showed any interest in education. Thrice he had used his connections to secure a spot at the university for his son

and thrice the boy had turned it down for inexplicable reasons. Eventually, the conversation delved into the economy, family and work.

Then he finally came around the very subject he had been trying to bring up.

“Doctor, please, can you take my wife to your mother’s room so you can examine amariya for me. She’s been complaining about a growth. I hid my cluelessness with my fixed stare in his face and the liberal nods I produced to keep his complain warm. Then I consciously turned to my mum as soon as he was done and bent my head in the direction of her room, as if to say, shall we?”

The two women have a little conversation about whether to go directly to my mother room while our neighbour and I shake hands as I rise from the mat.

In my mother’s room, all was set for the examination. My mum was ready to serve me as chaperon.



“Amariya, how may I help you?”

She takes off a layer of her flowing garment to reveal a swollen ankle.

“For the past five days, I have been massaging it since and resting. It still hasn’t come down. I need help.”

She looked desperate. I knew immediately that any intervention must be urgent and specific. But I had not the faintest idea what to do.

My mum turned to me. It was now my moment to work the magic. I had more distress than the woman who needed my help.

“Hold on, let me get something from my room.” I excused myself.

I calm myself as I pace back and forth my room thinking of what I was exactly going to do. So many thoughts were flowing. What if this doesn’t work? What if that doesn’t fit. What the other one makes things worse? I emptied the bag containing the medical bag I had

brought back and joyfully found a first aid kit. Panadol. Heat spray. Bandage gauze. I stepped out confidently and quickly headed back to my mother's room. I immediately gave her the Panadol and wrapped her feet with bandage after applying the heat spray. That was it. It was too much for them.

Even when my wrapping was not top-notch, my confidence made up for it. My mother started clapping even before I was done.

Amariya couldn't contain herself. And for the first time, I picked her voice clearly.

"Likita, like this now, we can be coming over with our problems instead of going to the city health centre. May Allah bless you."

My ego became bloated.

"You should always answer when we call on you. There are many who cannot make it to the city for care." She

thought I had used a golden cloth to cover the skin.

In the parlour, her husband looked on like a man who had been truly impressed.

“What are your fees?” I couldn’t think of anything at that time. “Please give me whatever you feel is a worthy pay.”

Her husband dipped his hand in his broad dress and pulled out two wads of cash. N200 was all it was. That was so hilarious. I collected it with a fake smile. I seemed to be saying I don’t blame you, a whole doctor like me is collecting artisan’s fees.

“Thank you, sir. Nagode.”

# Chapter Four

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A month had passed since amariya came. Her treatment was a huge success. Many heard. Word went out fast. More than 60 persons have now come to ask for my services. I was making considerable money. I was happy. Business was good. Many cases usually came as emergencies. They come when all else have failed to work.

“Likita, my head aches.”

“Likita, this stomach has been running for weeks.”

I was used to their cries when they came to our compound in frantic need of help for help. Sometimes I went over to their houses, wearing my white lab coat to give the appearance of a doctor and to command respect, indirectly.

Sometimes, I got complaints from pregnant women who were first time mothers and had become confused and scared when they felt baby kicks. I had to explain to them that it was normal for that to happen. Even though I had no idea what it meant most of the time.

In some cases where I had no idea what to give or prescribe, I gave paracetamol to kill pain. Drug names perplexed me when I tried to pronounce them. I couldn't pronounce half the drugs I dished out but I administered them nonetheless. I improvised by calling them multisyllabic big names. The villagers, knowing no better, celebrated me even more.

I had my lines which I had come

to master.

“Phenolphthalein, this one is good for leg pain. Take it using shuwaka (bitterleaf juice). Make sure the juice is thick green when you use it. Panadol acid, this is a good fit for headache, stomach ache, leg ache and weight loss.”

“Loratidine, this one will help with sneezing and coughing. Even with eye problem”

Sometimes I'm right with the medication I prescribe, but more than half the time, I just say what comes to mind.

My confidence grew. After all, if my medications were wrong, I should have got feedback that something had gone wrong with one of them. Still, this was a yawning gap I knew was there. But I got so much praise it drowned all such fears. My trade grew to such a point the panegyric choir converged daily on our compound during work hours.

My father was turbaned and my

family was added to the royal line of Guma. The road to our house was soon cleared and neatly marked to reflect our new status.

One night, the cry was shrill. You'd think Guma was under attack by another village. But it was the words of the cry that somehow eased the tension.

"The neighbours are calling you! There is a situation!"

I slipped into my lab coat before I even realized it. I rushed into the cold breezy darkness rubbing sleep off my eyes as I went. It was past midnight.

In the living room, a woman lay virtually helpless in her daughter's arms. They're spread out on the mat. For a moment I thought she was dead.

"Likita! likita! You must save my mother. We won't leave until she can walk." I thought I hadn't heard her well. In my heart, the question rang. What did you say?

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Likita. There's trouble now. What doctor, even if a real doctor he was, could make the lame walk, just like that? I had been managing with the partial knowledge I had to do my best in the face of confusion. But to turn myself into a miracle worker, just like that, wasn't something I was prepared for. Who makes such things happen?

As I made to walk near them, the woman cried even the more, casting her arms in the air.

I am no Messiah madam. You don't know me. Likita this is trouble. I wanted to see if I could pick her face. As I went close to ask

While I tried to pick her face, to see if she's someone I'd seen before, the bombshell landed.

"Likita, it started since afternoon as soon as I took the medication you gave me. My stomach has been turning ever since. My head has not seized to spin.



My eyes just went shut as soon as I lay on the mat here. I don't know what will happen next to me."

Not only was I afraid. That I didn't faint was an actual miracle. Her husband whom I had not noticed was in the room raised his concern in a line: "Can you give her something to make her sleep?"

I wish I could see my face. I was troubled and I felt bad for whatever meds I had given her. And I had no recollection of what I might have given her that put her in that condition. I knew by now that my name was on the line and I was racing against time. In my room, I threw down my box. A patient was in critical condition and I need to administer a scattershot. What could it be?

"Midazolam"

This is the one drug I had not yet administered since I returned to Guma. I was not sure what I was meant to use it for. I hadn't the time to read instructions

for use. I picked up my needle and syringe and drew 5mls out. I thought I remembered how Mr. Ibrahim did it since I had never administered injections myself.

I gave a small poke, placing it horizontally to her arm and slowly pushing it into her bloodstream.

She silently squealed then started calming down.

“It’s going somehow,” she says, standing up slowly with her husband’s help.

“May Allah bless your heart,” he says before helping his wife out of the house. I go back into my room still sleepy but praying to Allah that whatever I gave that woman helped her.

I stared into the night and fixed my gaze on the moonlight. My thoughts were nowhere close to Guma

Should I stop and go back to working in the pharmacy or should I go and learn another trade and reinvent my life all

together. This lie has risks, the size of which can drown Guma as a whole.

A respectable title in the village. A family now in high honour. My personal prestige. The stakes were just too high. A large part of me really wished I was an actual doctor so I could help them genuinely. But... but...

# Chapter Five

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“

You are under arrest for operating as a fake doctor. Put your hand behind yourself and remain silent until you get to the station.”

The policeman handcuffed me, my face flat on the window of his car. My family is devastated, watching me enter the police car. Rasheedat and my mother were crying, begging the policemen on their knees. My father stood back. His eyes were dead with disappointment. Unlike my mother and Rasheedat, he

understands the gravity of what I had got myself into. Our neighbours came out to see things for themselves. They had heard the siren of the police vehicle which was unusual. They also heard the cries.

I docked my head in the car as I was taken down my street. This moment was always there. Only that, until now, it was only in my head. I'm not sure exactly why I'm being taken in. I just didn't know the specific offence but I thought there should be enough to keep me behind bars for five lifetimes.

Claiming to be likita when I'm no likita is enough weight to pull down the full might of the law on my head.

At the police station, I was taken straight to the DPO's office where I gave a written statement. But that didn't come without a fight.

"What am I writing a statement for?" I had queried. "Can someone explain to

me why I was brought here in the first place?" I continued.

"Fake likita. That's why you are here."

The information was not new but what evidence had they gathered?

"There is a woman in the health centre whom you have paralysed with your fake practice. We investigated you. The health office has no records you have a licence to practice."

The officer fumed with great anger. "You see your life, you can't even make out a good sentence and this is the doctor you have been?"

Actually, I wasn't allowed to finish my statement. What was I writing anyway.

I was dragged into the cell with lots of local criminals. I laid on a stinking uncemented floor. Apparently, my cell mate had been urinating in the corner of the small tiny room. They only have one pit toilet at the corner of the cell. It

was demarcated with iron.

Everywhere stunk. I couldn't breathe well. As I lay on the cold unplastered floor, I felt like I was going to take my last breath. Thoughts of what my fate was going to be were interrupted by the loud noise and cry from the crowd outside. Was that my name I just heard? May Allah be praised. My community members had camped in front of the police station. It was the irony that struck me deeply. They had come to defend a man who had pulled a wool over their eyes.

Their voices were grave.

"He has helped all of us in this village, better than the government" "Please allow him to go he's a good man"

"When I had a leg problem for two days, this man cured me once I met him. Haka kawai!"

"Release am now, Oga police. Na good man be that"

"Na this man tablet cure my stomach

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wey wan kill me.” “Who go be likita for our small village now”

“Dan Allah, release him. Dan Allah.”

As our neighbours swarmed the police station in protest, tears fill my eyes. They came to beg. They wanted me out.

The police chased them off every day, but they came back the next. One morning, as I was getting ready to shower, I heard my name. I was not sure what it was for. Part of me thought that the police had finally heard the cry of village.

Sergeant Musa, a mean police officer showed up. My cell mates call him the wicked wizard. He came to take me into the DPO’s office. Inviting me in, he called me international Likita. I knew this was intentional mockery.

He laughed hard.

“O boy, if only you know the trouble that awaits you in court, hahahahaha. Sharp guy, you think you dey wise



hahahhahahah. Now, get into the van. We are taking you to the court in Lafia were you will stand trial. Trust me, we will push for the maximum sentence.”

That was when I realized that my whole life was on the edge of crumbling. How could I be heading to prison in my prime?

I desperately wished I could turn back the hands of time and repent my ways.

I should have been honest from the get-go. I should have been fair to them and not exploited their ignorance. I should have said that I wasn't a doctor. I should have said I had only been a patent medicine apprentice. How did I sink so low to be dishing out medication when I couldn't even tell a tablet from a caplet? My thoughts flowed like a stream.

I lowered my head between my thighs where I sat in the van. I prayed again. “O Allah, have mercy upon my

life.”

As we began the journey to the courthouse, I saw my Guma townspeople still camping in front of the police station including my mother and my siblings. I pleaded to at least say goodbye to my family. Sergeant bluntly Musa refused.

“Abeg make we dey go, na DOP go invite Your village come court. Wait until then.”

I was wondering how my parents who had never been to Lafia before will be able to travel. There, in my tears, I learnt my lesson the hard way. Look at what my few months of fame would cost me - a lifetime behind bars. I should have done the right thing. I should have said the truth.