

Ikani's Homestead Short Stories

Kaduna SHADES

Locally manufactured super-heroes

ISMAILA IKANI SULE



Starring:

Pat

Ibrahim

Uche

www.ikanihomestead.com

Kaduna SHADES

by

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Back in the village. *Oh well, here we go again.*

He stepped out of the taxi, paid the driver and flung his bag over his shoulder. He looked to the left. He looked the right. He had been taught right from childhood to always look both ways before crossing any road. He knew now how important the 'road crossing' rule was. He knew too well. The gate was on the other side. All he had to do was cross the road, turn right, walk down past two guava trees, turn left and he would have made it. Safety first. He looked left and right again. Then he decided to risk it.

He began to cross the road.

"Ih-ih-ih! Ishule! Is that you?"

They had seen him! *What now?*, he wondered. *Run, you fool!* his brain answered. Quick! He had to make it to the gate, his normal life depended on it! *Pp-shhhwww!* His body shot forward through the cool evening air.

Slow motion.

He twisted his torso like a snake preparing to slither up the leg of an unsuspecting lad going about his daily business in some public toilet located in the bush. His heart pumped hard against his chest. His nose pushed upwards then pointed down leaving wrinkled skin between his eyes. His mouth was curved downwards and his lower lip protruded out in front of his teeth. Beads of sweat danced down all over his face and tickled his chest, arms and legs. His arms swung back and forth while his feet thudded heavily along the tarred road.

"Ishule! It's Ishule! See Ishule over there!"

"Ishule! Ishule! Ishule o!"

At last he crossed the road. He looked behind him. They were after him! Desperation drew lines all over his face. *Run, you fool!* his brain shouted at him once more. Away he went. One, two, one two. Mmm, those long legs moved through the air like they belonged to a puppet's body and were actually ropes. He flung them with all his might. He had to make it!

Then some more of them appeared in front of the guava trees. They smirked at him and prepared to grab him.

Slower motion.

He swung his bag at them twisting his face like some helpless schoolgirl trying to fight off bats attracted to her hair. "Uu-aaargh!" he cried out in torment as someone's kiss landed on his cheek causing him to throw his head sideways. *Badt!* He struck one in the face throwing that attacker aside. The other lurched forward for his belly.

"Nnnnyaaahhh!" he screamed, summoning all his might and taking off into the air. His lurching opponent watched his feet apparently walk right through the wind over his head and stooped back. He bounced back on to the earth, cleared the last guava tree and made his dash for freedom.

The gate! There it was! *Almost there, haha!*

He looked behind him. They were hopelessly trying to catch up with him.

Hahahaha! He was at the gate. Victory.

Then his eyes popped wide open.

"No-o-o-o-o!" He couldn't stop. He ran straight into the arms of one massive lady who jumped out before him from nowhere. She squeezed the life out of him in her wild version of a loving hug and proceeded to smother him with kisses.

"Welcome back, our son. Oh, welcome back!" went she.

"No-o-o-ho-ho-ho!" cried he, and tears did look like they would pour out.

"Yayh! Ishule! Ishule!"... The others had caught up.

“Yayh! Ishule! Ishule!”... The others had caught up.

It was the same thing every year when Sule travelled out of Kaduna city to the village to visit his grandmother. The village was actually a rather small place called Ojawa, somewhere in Kogi State which was somewhere in the so-called Middle Belt region of Nigeria. It was so small that everyone had to know everyone else. That meant whenever he came for a visit, everyone had to welcome him and everyone had change his name from *Sule* to *Ishule* as a result of pronunciation differences in the local dialect.

His grandmother laughed so hard when she saw him struggling with the small crowd at her gate, but she came to his rescue by letting him in and telling everyone else to let him be for now so he could get some rest from his six-hour journey to the village. The crowd dispersed leaving a trail of excited chatter behind it.

She reached to help him with his bag.

“Don't worry, Mama K. I can handle it,” he assured her, throwing the bag in through the front door of her home. He stopped for a while and admired her compound the way he had many times in the past. The first thing that came to your mind when you gazed at her surroundings was a feeling of warm, welcoming colours of light brown, orange, grey and luscious green. Pulchritude embraced and delighted the eye here. Her home was a small bungalow surrounded by guava and mango trees with an impressive variety of shrubs and herbs in her garden. A large oil palm tree stood on one side of the house with one end of a clothes line tied around its stem and the other end fixed to the fence. There was a tap with some buckets positioned close to the gate. Neighbours often came here to fetch water for her home was one of the few ones in the village which enjoyed the facility of clean pipe-borne water. At the back of the house was a tiny, wooden shed-like structure. That was his grandmother's favourite hangout. She called it her laboratory.

“Well, come into the house then,” the old lady beckoned to her grandson. She was in her eighties but still had a healthy glow on her hardly wrinkled face. Sule always noted how she never seemed to lose her agility all the years he had known her. She moved like a graceful lady half her age. He smiled. He was 183 centimetres tall (you could call that about six feet) at least 10 centimetres taller than the lady, younger and stronger yet, right now, he was the one walking around holding his aching back. What with all the bear-hugs he'd just received... He dusted his black Tommy Hilfiger jeans and followed her into the house.

“Home sweet home,” he smiled.

Ever since his father died, two years ago, Mama K (as he liked to call her) was practically all the family he had left. Of course he had several uncles, aunts and cousins whom he had met occasionally, but they were all scattered around the country and didn't share the close relationship he enjoyed with his grandmother. Khadija Base Juice (stories had it that the Base Juice family name had evolved from the nickname of an ancestor long ago who had encountered lost British explorers who kept chattering the words “looking for base” and “thirsty good juice” at him; Sule's great grandfather being drafted into the army by the British colonial masters to fight in Burma during World War 2 made the name official) was a jolly old lady, widowed for eleven years. She enjoyed the company of her only grandchild who came visiting her twice each year from the city far away. Sule Base Juice's father had been the only child she ever conceived and fate seemed to have deemed the same path for him as Sule's mother died shortly after he had been born. With her only son gone back to the earth to join his father, Sule was the one person she loved dearly in her old age.

He could be crazy at times, but she loved him. He was her own flesh and blood.

“Mm-mm-mm, what's that delightful aroma, Mama K,” Sule licked his lips.

“I prepared some fried plantain with tomato stew and fish.”

“Oh, nyeah baby,” he hugged her lovingly and she smiled.

“I was so hungry I ate everything up,” she added “But I left a loaf of bread with some raw onions for you in the kitchen.”

He recoiled away from her in terror, hunching his shoulders and shielding his face with his hands.

“Bread and onions? Ah-ah, wetin dis mama dey talk again?” *What was this mama talking about?* “It can't be. It just can't be.” Sule hurried into the kitchen. He came back wearing a new sullen look with his hands in his pockets.

“Haha, fooled you!” she laughed and waded past him into the kitchen.

“This is one sick little village,” he shook his head and followed her, “Sick.”

After the delicious meal and a warm bath, he joined Mama K in her laboratory. A fluorescent tube lit up the interior of the wooden structure. It smelt of the different herbs and chemicals she often dabbled with in her so-called 'experiments'. Several clay pots, jugs and metal pans were neatly arranged along one wall of the lab while a table occupied most of the adjoining wall. Mama K had stacks of papers with quire drawings and scribbling on them as well as thick books bound in leather all over the table next to several other smaller containers. She even had a small fireplace in here in case she needed to boil or heat up something. She was sitting on a stool with her body hunched over a book. She had her reading glasses on.

Sule noticed something else - there were three other eyeglasses on the table next to her.

Mama K was known as the village's eye specialist. There was hardly an ailment or problem of the eye she couldn't diagnose and treat. If she couldn't treat it, she would refer you the village doctor with her advice on the kind of treatment she thought was necessary. She won several acclaimed awards nationally and internationally for her research work on the human eye.

Such great honour and prestige for a lady who never went beyond Secondary School, in terms of formal education.

“My family comes from a distinguished line of scholars and scientists,” she had told Sule when he was little, “Give us the basic information we need and we start performing wonders.”

One thing she despised, however, was being referred to as a 'native doctor' or worse 'witch doctor'.

“I'll have you note my family never made use of magic in our work. We learnt a long time ago, from the different visitors to our land, to write down our knowledge on bones, leaves and then on paper. Complete works from our ancestors were passed down from generation to generation this way thereby keeping our knowledge as fresh as possible while we proceed to acquire more. It took me over twenty years to collect my information on the human eye and someday my work will be passed on to your father and you to continue or preserve while you develop your ideas.

“Magic came into the scheme of things for other people when they failed to preserve the original information gathered by their ancestors. The death of a learned person in each generation meant the loss of an important portion of the knowledge leaving his or her descendants to use magic as the explanation behind the feats and marvels performed by those before them.

“I am a doctor of science, boy! Remember that!”

Sule always remembered that. His father had been an excellent biochemist and he himself was a graduate of Computer Science, the top of his class at University, now working as a programmer with a Nigerian software company. He had hopes of starting his software company someday soon. Hmm, he had certainly gotten this *intelligence* thing from his late father who had definitely inherited from Mama K.

“What, Mama K, you're going into the production of sunglasses production now?”

He picked up the glasses. The lenses were tinted in different colours - red, blue and yellow. They were of different brand names. One pair with the yellow lenses had a feminine design. He pretended to put them on.

“Ah, those are part of my latest experiment. Want to try one on?” his grandmother turned to face

him, smiling as she took her glasses off.

“Mm-mm,” he put them back, “Specs don't fit my face.”

“How do you know that?”

“Just call it my instincts. Are you busy or can we go and visit the older people in this village who were unable to attack me earlier on today?”

“Yes, why not? It's only being respectful and perhaps we could even find a girl for you in some home somewhere.”

“Eh-eh, Mama K! Come, stop joking like that I'm still trying to recover from one incident. I don't need mothers ambushing me with daughters everywhere I go.”

She smiled and got off her stool.

The rest of the day went on just beautifully and come nightfall, it was time to settle down for one last meal. Quite a scrumptious meal! Mama K's dining table was laden with a variety of culinary tantalizers from at least five different households. It was customary for the villagers to play the good hosts by making visitors feel welcome with a place to rest and delicious meal to enjoy. And when the visitor was one of their sons or daughters back from their stay in a big city or some distant lands, well, a really lavish welcome was in order.

Nyeah, now this was more like it!

“Ehem, mademoiselle,” Sule approached the table wearing a long kaftan with his tongue almost sticking out like a cartoon character, “We are well aware that the Aduku family lineage you belong to are well known for their scientific prowess, however, the Base Juice men are world renown for being shy in public, but fantastic when it comes to charming their wives in private.”

“You can say that again, your grandfather was an underwear salesman.”

“Okay, so finding good jobs isn't always easy. But remember, mademoiselle, that his job afforded him being sent all around the world by his company to advertise their products. By taking you with him he was able to charm the living daylights out of you at different locations. Hohoho. Since Grand papa's no longer with us, the heavy burden of such a task of charming falls upon my humble shoulders.”

“Right, now we can get you married!”

“*Non, non, non!* I've got you haven't I? Now then, prepare yourself! Last year, I reenacted your trip to Morocco in 1972 and this year it's Belgium, 1968. Hohoho, remember ze hotel *Cheap Visitor*, 9pm with Frank Sinatra on the radio. Yes, well, since I don't have that on tape we'll have to make do with Michael Jackson. Mademoiselle, I give you *Rock My World*.”

“What, no native Zulu dancing this year?”

Sule threw off his kaftan and the music began. He had been wearing Grand papa's old Chinese jacket under the long garment. His trousers had been pulled up high enough to reveal his sparkling white socks something essential when you need to go “*ha-ow!*” while dancing. The instrumentals poured out from the radio hidden underneath the dining table, adequate enough for Sule to sing by himself changing a few words here and there whenever he so desired.

“C'mon, *mehn!* That mama's dangerous!”

Mama K joined in the fun. She was in a long dark brown gown with a shiny yellow veil around her head. It was true her late husband used to amuse her this way and the old lady really did enjoy watching Sule trying to act like him. Sule had now thrown a broad-brimmed hat on his head, drawing it down over his face to cover his eyes as he twisted himself like this and like that, pointing and doing some backslides.

“Ha - ow!” He threw one leg up and his shoe went flying across the room. Mama K laughed and he began to backslide slowly towards his shoe. His belly and backside moved inwards and outwards as he did so like an old man trying to reorganize the bulges on his body.

His put his shoe back on and together they danced the waltz the way she had taught him years ago.

Finally, that was over. Their appetites had been worked up and it was time to guzzle down all the *gwaz* on the table. *Gwaz*, food.

Ha-ow!

Three weeks had passed since Sule's last visit. He was back in Kaduna city. He had been looking forward to the next visit when news reached him at work one day. Mama K had passed on. Sule was devastated.

His family was all gone.

He got a week off from work to attend her funeral in the village. His distant relatives were all present at the sad occasion comforting him and each other. Three days after the burial it was agreed that Mama K's property be shared out equitably amongst her relatives. It was also agreed that her home be donated to a local orphanage.

Sule wanted nothing more than her books and papers containing her life's work. And the sunglasses in her lab.

He had to see to it that her family's legacy to learning and science was continued. That was his job now.

Another four months later, however, and so much work at the office had caused him to forget about the books and glasses. They lay safe in a box under his bed.

It was early one Saturday morning and Sule was in his little kitchen preparing breakfast. The flat he occupied was one of three others sharing the same compound. It wasn't easy owning a house in Kaduna. Many people had to rent rooms or flats and pray hard each day the landlord or landlady came by that it was just to say "How you *duwen*?" and not "Yah, times are hard and with the present electricity bills and my daughter getting married next week, I had to add a little more to the rent". That was life in the working class for you. You could own a house if you wanted, it was just that there was this little requirement that you had to be quite wealthy. Sule knew he was making good money as a computer programmer but he wise enough to realize that he had to cut his kaftan according to his size. The flat was good enough far better than what most of his peers could afford. Two bedrooms, one sitting room complete with furniture, a beautiful kitchen, one bathroom and toilet, plus his own little backyard and garden. The walls were painted bright white with cream-coloured doors leading to the rooms. The sitting room and bedrooms were all air-conditioned, the former also offering the option of a ceiling fan. The sitting room was the part of his home he paid most attention to. He had his Persian rug on the floor; one huge sofa that could probably take two adults lying side by side; a cabinet against the wall facing the sofa housing his wide-screen Sony television set, a VCR and DVD player set, surround sound speakers, a rack of video cassettes, CDs and DVDs, magazines and his laptop (the desktop was in his bedroom). Poufs were positioned away from the sofa so you could stretch out on the rug, reclining against them. He had a bookshelf against another wall stacked full of all sorts of books.

The kitchen was just what a bachelor wished for- well stocked with foodstuff.

Breakfast this morning was going to be fried plantains with some tomato sauce. The golden slices of plantain with tempting crusts of dark orange and black lay ready in a dish on one side of the cooker while Sule busied himself at the sink chopping up tomatoes. He put a little vegetable oil in his frying pan, lit up the gas stove and set the pan down on the blues flames. When the oil began to bubble he chucked in the chopped tomato pieces. There was some popping and sizzling. He added some sliced onions and jumped back as some hot oil was spat out of the pan towards his face. He bent over

backwards and pretended to watch the droplets of oil shoot past him in slow motion as he swung his arms about to avoid being hit. *Mmm!* The sauce was beginning to smell good, but, *oops!*, he'd nearly forgotten to add the salt, pepper, curry and a bit of thyme.

“Kai, no, no, no! *Maggi Kitchen* and *BBC Food* spies are going to be drawn in here by this awesome, powerful aroma,” he stopped, dipped a plantain slice into the sauce and put it in his mouth, “Mmmmm!”

There was a knock at the door.

“Come in!”

“Nna, how now?”

It was Kanayo Udi. *Nna* was his way of saying *dude*. Sule's tall, fair-complexioned neighbour walked into the sitting room, pausing at the doorway to take off his outrageous boots (all sorts of shiny metallic designs and buckles on them). Kanayo always complained he couldn't find decent shoes in the local market because of his very long feet. Only boots and leather slippers fit. Sule guessed he was dressed in his usual green, short-sleeved shirt and jeans. He was wrong. Kanayo had on an orange, long-sleeved shirt today.

“Nna, I'm in the kitchen o! Don't come in here if you're uncontrollably ravenous!” Sule called out. His neighbour and friend made his way into the kitchen.

“Mm-mm, Sule! What's happening here?! Damn it, I'm not leaving this place anytime soon!”

Sule swung round.

“*Mehn*, when are you going to cut your hair?!”

“Nna, this is latest fashion,” Kanayo guffawed. Sule knew very well he was being serious. Kanayo's hairstyle seemed to change each year. 'Flat top' one year, 'low cut' the next year, 'skin cut' another, and this year the 'mini Afro' was in along with a little beard. Whatever next 'blondie dreadlocks'? Sule shuddered at that thought.

“Yah, breaki-fasti is ready!” he announced and Kanayo began to serve himself.

An hour and a satisfying meal later, the twenty-six year old bachelors lay sprawled across the Persian rug.

“Nna, what do we do today?”

“I'd like to go check my emails at a cyber café a little later on.”

“Ehe, Sule, did you find that information on dandruff for me?”

“Mm,” Sule slapped his head, “I knew there was something I'd been meaning to give you for three weeks now! Quick help me look in the bedroom, I have the information stored on a diskette somewhere.”

Finding the diskette was something easier said than done. Within a space of twenty minutes, Sule's bedroom had been transformed from a tidy, cool-looking room to a disorganized disaster zone. They looked in his wardrobe, pulled clothes out. Nothing. They rummaged through the chest of drawers with his collection of CDs and diskettes. Nothing. He disappeared into the toilet and Kanayo tried to follow with a torch light but Sule bellowed “Do you mind?! Private business here!” So, the Nna guy with the 'mini Afro' continued the search in the bedroom alone. He stuck his hand under the bed and it struck something. A box. Carefully he pulled it out and checked out the contents.

“Hmm, books, papers... Ah-ah, this is a really detailed picture of the eye showing the cornea, retina...” He understood these kinds of things very well. Six years of medical school and owning his own pharmacy was not something everyone could boast of. He flipped through the papers and a smaller container dropped on to the bed he was sitting on. He picked it up carefully, almost expecting to find some jewelry inside so he could *yab* (tease) Sule about his hidden agenda to find a wife. He opened it. Nothing inside but three pairs of sunglasses.

“Ah, ah, this boy's a mean guy o! I like this red one,” and he tried it on. There was a mirror on the wall just above the chest of drawers and he struck a pose to see if the glasses fit. “Oh nyeah, mehn!”

He liked the look of the red shades on his face, he really did! The red colour seemed to swirl round and round focusing on his iris for a minute or so before spreading back evenly across the lenses. There was a flushing sound. Kanayo swung round as Sule entered the room.

“Wuu-uu-uuf!” the computer programmer puffed, “Where is my air freshener? Kanayo, what do you have on your face?”

“I look cool, abi? I was looking for the diskette and found these glasses in a box under your bed.”

“Yeyh, Mama K's things. I'd totally forgotten about them.”

A sudden feeling of remorse and guilt washed over Sule. He remembered his late grandmother.

“I'm sorry, I didn't mean to...” Kanayo started to take off the glasses, but Sule waved his hand.

“It's okay. They look good on you. I was just reminiscing. Those glasses were part of my grandmother's experiments before she died. She was quite an eye expert, you know”

“Ehe, no wonder there are all these drawings of the eye in here with lots of writing. What d'you mean experiment?” Kanayo took the glasses off.

“Don't worry, nothing will happen to your eyes. Mama K was known for treating eye problems and the like so whatever she did with those glasses were probably meant to correct the wearer's vision or something.”

“They are not medicated.”

“Well then perhaps they were designed to look better than regular shades.”

Kanayo put them back on. He spotted a mosquito crawling up his friend's neck slowly preparing to strike upon some juicy blood. He quickly scooped a pillow from the bed and hurled it at Sule's neck.

“Got it!” he cried out triumphantly.

“What's your problem, Kanayo?”

“Nna, I just got rid of a mosquito about to suck up the liquids running through your jugular vein.”

“Oh.”

They continued their search for the missing diskette. Finally, after a couple of hours searching the entire flat they found it. Sule had wrapped it in paper and forgotten it in the toilet.

“Nna, I told you...”

“Okay, okay, we know!”

That done, Kanayo had a drink of juice from the refrigerator and proceeded to strap his boots on. He had another two hours to open his store (it was the weekend after all), but he wanted to make sure he had taken care of all his other activities for the morning first.

“Can I keep the glasses?”

“Well,” Sule wasn't too sure, “Okay, but if anything weird happens to your eyes, let me know because I haven't really studied Mama K's writings on them yet.”

“Yo-okay, catch you later.”

Sule looked at his watch. It was exactly 10am, he decided he might as well start preparing for his trip to the cyber café. This was really turning out to be a fun weekend.

The silver Nissan Micra turned into the Independent Shopping Complex, swerved to the left and slowly came to a stop. *Welcome to CyberKlin Cyber Café*. Those were the words on the signboard which greeted Sule and the countless other souls who came this way to escape into the vast world of the Internet.

He pulled open the sliding doors and stepped into the cool, air-conditioned environment, which reminded him of the days his father used to take him shopping at the then popular *Leventis Superstores*. Everything smelt new and clean. He patted his pockets. Good, he hadn't forgotten his

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"Aha!
That's just what I've been
searching for!
Now what was it again?..."

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wallet. He looked around for one of the café attendants. The floor had shiny orange tiles and the cream-coloured walls were covered with posters of computer-related products and web sites. On the wall facing the doorway was a round wall clock. The building housed a total of twelve computer systems all connected to a central server in a separate room, which provided the access on to the Internet. All the systems were taken and a couple of customers were already seated patiently waiting for their chance to use one of the computers.

“Sule, Sule, sannu da zuwa,” someone welcomed him in Hausa.

“Oga Isa,” Sule turned to shake hands with the well-built figure approaching him. Isa represented the café's management. It was his job to see things went smoothly and everyone was happy. His jolly face with a neatly trimmed beard and brightly coloured kaftans he always had on provided a very comforting sight for customers especially when they were having any problems finding their way around the World Wide Web. This fellow was a genius when it came to finding sites and using search engines. The CyberKlin café was fortunate indeed to have someone like Isa AbdulRauf working with them.

“Ah-ah, haba, haba, you're the *Oga*. I'm just a little man,” Isa smiled as they shook hands.

“Kai,” Sule threw his head to one side, “You look fresher than me and the title of *Oga* sounds sweeter with your own name. Are we safe today, why are you wearing a shirt and jeans today?”

“Mm, all my kaftans are dirty so I've had to wash them this morning and hang them out to dry. You came to check your mails?”

“Yah, but this place of yours is looking packed today.”

“That's how the weekends are. Just grab a seat and someone ought vacate a system soon enough for you to use. A kawo maka gyeda?”

“No gyeda, thank you,” Sule declined the offer of groundnuts, “I'll just sit here and read a paper then.”

“Sule, how now?”

“Oh, Sule's here?”

“Ey, Lami. Kemi. How are you girls doing today?” he greeted the two café attendants who waved at him from different corners of the room. Lami Pam Tuk was the darker one with her over-sized yet stylish head scarves she tied around her head the way rap-artists and the *yo-yo-yo* guys did with their bandanas. She was in her big black sweater and long skirt today. Kemi Joan Adeniji on the other hand, was the fair-complexioned one with her happy spectacled face. She had a habit of turning up at work dressed in corporate suits. Light brown was her choice of colour today, matching her brown moccasins.

It was another twenty minutes before Sule got to do his work. Satisfied he paid Isa for the time spent browsing and headed out towards his car. Time to go see Kanayo. He had decided to check on the pharmacist and if he wasn't too busy, perhaps they could study Mama K's glasses together and see what (if anything at all) made them special. Kanayo found the box. Kanayo reminded him of the glasses and writings he had hidden under his bed. Kanayo was going to help him solve the puzzle and get some understanding of Mama K's last experiments once and for all. He brought the box along with him in the car and...

“Yeyh!” he slapped his head. He had also brought his company's calendars for the friendly CyberKlin staff. He opened the door to his car and reached out for the calendars on the backseat. Suddenly there was a low humming sound. He lifted his head and banged it on the car's roof.

“Gnnnn!” he gritted his teeth. The humming got louder as he produced a cell phone from the side pocket of the old jacket he had on. At that moment, Isa stepped out of the café for a breath of fresh air. Sule answered his phone and waved Isa over with his free hand.

“Hello. Hello?” The reception was a bit noisy so he backed away from his car and turned about as if that would clear things up. When the 'fresh' young man approached him, he pointed into the car

indicating he was to take something out. Isa got the message and proceeded to take the item out, not bothering to ask any questions seeing how preoccupied Sule was with his phone. By the time he was done with his call, he jumped into his car and started the engine only to look back and see the calendars still lying there on the backseat. What had Isa...?

“The box!”

He grabbed the calendars, left the engine running and charged back into the café. He almost felt like laughing. It was so funny.

“Eyyy, Sule!”

Lami had the yellow shades on; Isa went with blue. Kemi was rummaging through the box to find hers, but soon gave up and returned to her customers. She saw him and her eyes asked *where are mine then?*

“Help,” he sighed and rolled his eyes.

“Sule, why is the colour moving around. These are hi-tech specs, ko?” Ibrahim sounded really impressed.

“Mine's stopped moving,” Lami added.

What were they talking about? Sule was really puzzled.

“Thanks, man,” Isa shrugged his shoulders and began to bounce slowly around the café like a 'mean guy'. “Yah, I know I look hot, baby!”

He stopped for a 'mean guy' pose, legs apart and arms crossed over his chest as he stroked his beard. Sule was about to giggle when he noticed the bright blue glow on Isa's glasses. The next sequence of events happened so fast that it took Sule a little while afterwards to think slowly and fully comprehend what he had seen. The glasses shone bright with some florescence of their own. There was a soft crackle and some faint blue beam of light burst out of the lenses, leaping from Isa's eyes... and landing on a surfing customer's behind. There was a sharp cry of pain and the young lad using computer number 5 to send *I luv, luv you* ecards screamed and took off for the ceiling with smoke coming out of his rear. Isa looked frightened as he snatched the sunglasses off his face. Luckily no one but he and Sule had seen the beam from his eyes. The customer was hopping about in pain and clutching his smoking trousers while his neighbours on other computers covered their noses and stared at him with disgusted looks. Mama K's experiment! Sule rushed forward to warn Lami to take off her glasses. She had gotten taller.

That was because her feet were hovering above the floor. She hovered back down failing to notice the stunt she had just pulled off.

“Kanayo-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!!!” Sule screamed and all eyes were turned on him.

Luckily, the little episode at the café ended peacefully without any further incidents. Sule promised to explain things to Isa later and he collected the glasses and box back. Kemi was relieved when she got her calendar - she hadn't been forgotten. At least she had her own spectacles. Sule had narrated the morning's events at Kanayo's pharmacy and they had agreed to meet back at his place that night to ponder over Mama K's inventions. They spent virtually the whole night trying to make sense of her books and papers. Every now and then Kanayo would burst out laughing when he imagined the young boy at the café hopping about clutching his trousers. His neighbour had to hit him several times with a pillow to get him to stop. They made progress though.

Her records were a combination of writings and drawings, which sometimes had to be carefully deciphered. Mama K's work were all based on some ancient knowledge passed down to her. All things in the world were seen as being in one state of 'dance' or the other. Nothing was actually in a stable state - even rocks were split asunder and crumbled when the 'dancing' within their structures got faster and wilder. To make use of the vast assortment of tools and material available to the scholar, he or she had to first understand the patterns of each 'dance'. Then, like an artist skillfully

mixing colours and shapes to produce beautiful and complex designs, the scholar or scientist (as the case may be) needed to master the mixture of these dance patterns into different more complex ones as desired. He or she had to become another form of artist. It took skill, and at times, a lot of talent, to produce the patterned designs. It was a discipline which took years to master. The tiniest ant could be composed of billions of microscopic parts 'dancing' together in the distinct pattern resulting in the ant's form. On Mama K's part, she had concentrated on the countless 'dance' patterns which made up the human eye and she had been able to produce substitute patterns to add to those eyes with damage patterns that had been brought to her. She had noted in one of her books that “the substitute art from humans was still a very poor imitation of that given to nature”.

Her glasses were somehow different from her usual work. Rather than simply trying to repair the damaged human eye, she had begun experimenting on ways of complementing its abilities. Humans are imperfect and her best efforts resulted in the spectacles, as she couldn't recreate the human eye on her own. She listed all sorts of plants, chemicals and microorganisms she said possessed the different 'dance' patterns, which she sought. She could combine them all together in a design which worked with sunlight to cause spectacular responses in the other 'dance' patterns which made up the environment around a person. It was a design she had tinkered with for decades of her life. Sule realized the enormity of importance he was going to attach to his late grandmother's work. Dear old Mama K had stumbled on to her own form of nanotechnology - technology on a molecular scale scientists around the world today believed was attainable.

Kanayo was also enthralled. This was magnificent. Gradually, the secrets of the coloured sunglasses became clear to them. She had bought them and treated each one with a combination of the extracts she had collected. Each colour was the result of a different combination of Mama K's patterns, which, together with sunlight, caused a different effect on the arrangement of molecular and sub-molecular structures. The rearrangement of these structures meant Isa's specs had the ability to change air temperature and that was what happened with the heat burst on his customer's behind. Lami's was able to produce energy countering the effects of gravity and moving objects in any direction. Kanayo's glasses, it seemed, could magnify and zoom on to images and objects being observed by the wearer. You also got to see things a lot faster than usual.

All this was very exciting, but one particular piece of information had Sule hissing in disappointment.

The wearer using his or her own eyes operated the glasses, almost mentally. The special coating on the lenses tracked the movements of the iris and retina to determine which kind of effect resulted from the combination of 'dance' patterns. Each of the glasses identified and worked with only one set of irises and retinas. Without that set, they were just ordinary sunglasses on a person's face.

“No wonder,” Kanayo now understood, “That's why the colours on the lenses were moving around. They were recording the properties of the eyes staring out through them.”

“Look what you guys have done,” Sule frowned, “Now I don't get to use any of the specs.”

“Don't worry. You've your grandmother's books. With time you should be able to manufacture your own specs.”

Sule knew that was a joke because it would probably take him all his life to study the collection of text and diagrams and acquire the knowledge. He had to start sometime though.

“All right,” he said, getting up from the dining table where they had been going through the information. He rubbed his tired eyes. “You guys put on the specs, that means I'm going to continue Mama K's experiments using you all as the guinea pigs. Right now, I need some sleep.”

Kanayo yawned in agreement. They bid each other good night and Sule locked his door when his companion had gone back to his own flat. He pulled the curtains but didn't close the windows. He switched off the lights and collapsed on to the sofa in the living room. Soon he was snoring the night

away.

All four of them spent the many weekends that followed experimenting on the sunglasses. Once free from any work, they met at a remote location just off the Kaduna-Zaria highway, safe from suspicious and superstitious wanderers. They could spend five hours a day doing this. Sule and Kanayo collected the results and studied them together at home during the nights. They matched their findings against the information from Mama K. Isa and Lami was just absolutely thrilled at any chance to try out *their* superpowers since Sule made sure he took back the sunglasses at the end of each day. Over time, the three *Kaduna Shadies*, as he liked to call them, mastered their skills and he let them keep the wonderful eyepieces. They needed to test out their skills out in practical, real life situations though.

They got their chance soon enough.

It happened while Sule was still scribbling piles of algorithms at the office. Yes, he missed the action. Tuesday, 9.30am - it was just another normal day at the CyberKlin café, no indications warning of the dynamic set events about to take place a few minutes into the future.

Mr. James Shine-Shine was beginning to give Kemi a headache.

“No, no, no,” he cried out as he rubbed his big round face with a handkerchief. Here was a classic example of the term 'overweight'. The big bald man sat with his handkerchief in one hand, a mound of fried yam chips and *suya* kebabs squeezed together on the pages of a newspaper grasped in the other hand. The plastic chair he sat on was making funny squeaky noises and the legs were bent at odd angles. He was in a checked two-piece suit, which looked like something he'd worn to a children's birthday party thirty years ago. *Body hung style* he used to joke when his wife tried to get him to burn the silly-looking clothes.

“Body hung style, baby.”

“Kai, this man! It's *body hug*! Get rid of that suit please, you're embarrassing your family!”

The under-sized clothes were strained trying to contain all the massive bulges of his body. Two buttons were missing on his jacket allowing his huge tummy to roll out over his belt buckle, covered only by the yellow shirt he wore underneath. When he sat his trousers jumped all the way up his calves close to his knees. That way you could see his bright red socks with *Shine-Shine* inscribed on them in yellow. His shoes, however, white with brown rubber soles.

“No,” he cried again, some spittle landing on Kemi's glasses. Oooh, she felt like stamping on his foot. She took off her glasses and wiped them with some tissue paper. He was squeaking about on the chair next to her as he dictated the messages he wanted sent by email. She wondered where all these people who wanted to use the Internet but refused to learn how to came from.

“Circle that word so they can notice it easily!”

“Mr. Shine-Shine, I'm typing using your plain-text-only email account - I can only underline words, I cannot draw a circle around anything as I've told you five hundred and seventeen times already!”

“Mmph, you people are just cheating us of our money! Your computers are not good and can't do anything!”

She was about to come back at him with a very harsh retort when there came a heart-wrenching shriek of rubber tyres against hard tarred road. There was a loud bang followed by shattering glass and the sickening sound of straining, twisted metal. People were running out of the café towards the shopping complex's exits. They headed out on to the busy dual carriageway carrying traffic through this commercial part of Kaduna city. Isa ran out of the server room looked out the door then urged the girls and remaining customers to remain calm while he investigated. He ran out after the gathering crowd of people heading on to the carriageway. A terrible sight befell his eyes. The driver of a fuel tanker coming from one side of the carriageway had lost control of his vehicle and swerved across on to traffic coming from the opposite direction. The tanker had collided with two oncoming

cars while others were screeching into each other in a bid to escape the disaster ahead of them. Motorcyclists veered off the road haphazardly in all directions. People rushed to the scene. The tanker driver managed to stumble out unhurt from his vehicle but the other motorists seemed to be in dire conditions. Good Samaritans wrenched off the twisted door of one car to pull out the unconscious driver who was bleeding all over his face. The second driver was a middle-aged lady trapped as her small Golf car bore the full brunt of the tanker's upturned front side. The woman was screaming frantically and some other people were trying desperately to pry her vehicle loose so they could rescue her. Then it happened. The petrol began to pour out of the now ruptured tanker. People screamed and began to take off in all directions abandoning the lady. Isa was running back to the café to get his glasses.

"Call Kanayo quick, his pharmacy's close by!" he shouted as he dashed past Lami. He came speeding out again, blue specs on. There was confusion in the café now. Lami dialed frantically on the phone while Kemi made way for the frightened customers who ran out of the café. Mr. Shine-Shine was trying to get out the door with his chair stuck around his waist and thighs, and she pulled at the legs to get it off. The worst happened. The fuel on the carriageway somehow lit up and deadly flames were spreading out in all directions. There was panic now. Some policemen were already moving people off. The fire service still hadn't gotten here yet. That was bad. Isa managed to squeeze himself past the struggling bodies and police so he could see the trapped woman still screaming as flames encircled her pinned down car. The heat was terrible and stung his face, but he had to concentrate. His shades were glowing. He had to concentrate and get the temperature right. Slowly, ever slowly, the air in front of him began to cool down. He could already feel his fingers going numb from the cold. A patch of road before him about five metres ahead and two metres wide was showing signs of sudden frost. The flames seemed to have been pushed back a little.

"Ungh!" Isa groaned and dropped to his knees. He felt drained and no wonder - he hadn't had any breakfast this morning. The concentration had used up a considerable amount of energy. Someone grabbed him roughly by the shoulders. It was a policeman. The officer of the law barked angrily at Isa to get away from the area. Suddenly, something bowled the man over and he was thrown back towards his retreating comrades. The flames were coming closer again. Isa slowly looked over his shoulder to observe someone coming towards him with fiendish yellow eyes gleaming at him.

"Lami."

He stood up on to his feet. He faced the approaching flames again. The frost was coming back and he gritted his teeth. He wasn't going to down this time. He made his way forwards along the frozen opening through the flames. Lami followed closely helping push him ahead so he didn't use up all his energy. It felt like agonizing hours rather than the thirty minutes it took them to get near enough to the trapped woman. Two metres away from her. She was unconscious now. Isa squatted down on the frozen road facing the burning tanker.

"Try to help her," he told Lami, "I'll try to keep the flames off as long as I can. Hurry, I don't want to get tired again over here!"

They were right in the centre of the raging fire which was shooting flames so high up into the sky that world outside was no longer visible to them. Lami shivered and did as she was told. She couldn't stand this kind of cold but she had to hurry or they could all lose their lives here. She was a little scared now. Her shades flared up and her face strained as she fixed her gaze on the crushed Golf. There was a little space on the driver's side. If she could just bend the door back a little. She was sweating now.

Kanayo had gotten over to the café as fast as he could. He didn't have to be told what was going on, he could see the fire spreading across the carriageway and towards the buildings on either side. He shielded his face from the heat and put on his glasses. Where were they? He scanned the surroundings.

She could hear it groan. Yes. She had it now. She squeezed her face and there was a loud bang. A section of the trapped vehicle along with the door on the woman's side came flying out. Hurriedly she struggled to pull her out. She had to drag her along because the older lady was too heavy. She called out to Isa. He jumped up, swung round to see her with her burden and proceeded to give her a hand. He could see she was also getting tired now. They had to get out of here quick! He cleared another path through the fire and they slowly moved on back the way they had come. It took them another forty-five minutes to emerge out of the smouldering carnage with the woman between them. Once safely clear of any danger they collapsed to the ground. People were rushing over to their aid.

Kanayo spotted them immediately and made his way towards them. A small crowd of people had gathered around them sprinkling them with water and trying to organize a means of rushing them off to a hospital. A mini bus had been secured. He saw it. The Golf exploded and one of its tyres was thrown out of the fire straight at the unsuspecting crowd. He could see the flaming rubber missile clearly.

“Everybody down!” he screamed out. He could see where it was headed and knew he could deal with it. He threw himself on to the back of one of the many figures hurdled over his friends. He grabbed hold with his hands as his legs swung over his head. He felt his boots connect with the burning tyre. He felt it bounce off violently as his feet deflected it from the innocents whom had been its original target. It bounced harmlessly off the ground and landed in a gutter where it lay until it was reduced to a smouldering heap.

“He-ow!” a cheer broke out.

News spread far and wide about the heroic three's deeds. Isa and Lami got most of the praise and that was good news for CyberKlin. Everyone wanted to browse at the café for heroes, *mehn!*

“Mama K would have been very proud of you all,” said Sule when he took them out to lunch to celebrate, “You saved lives using the result of her labours.”

“Hmm, it was a good thing no one took notice of us using our glasses,” Lami was squeezing her hands, “They all thought we'd just braved the fire. It could become dangerous if people began to target us just to get their hands on the shades.”

“She's right,” Isa agreed, “We have to do something about that if we're to keep using the glasses like this.”

“It would be a shame to ditch them just because we thought they were placing our lives at risk, Sule. I mean, I would really like to get to use them some more.”

“I know, Kanayo. And we have to think up some solution to the problem.”

“If only people didn't know who the people using the magnificent specs were.”

“That is it, Lami!”

Sule rushed them back to his place where he disappeared into the bedroom and began throwing things around. He reemerged later carrying a bundle of clothes, which he handed over to them.

“These were Grandpapa and Mama K's clothes. We used to put them on when I was having those play dinners with Mama K. These are Chinese gowns - we can adjust one to your size Isa. All you have to do is throw them on over your regular clothes when it's time for some action. It would like like some kind of uniform.”

“What about our faces?” Kanayo asked.

“And we could leave fingerprints,” Lami was still concerned.

“Look at these guys talking like you're vigilantes. You still have your jobs, remember? This is just a 'helping out the community' thing,” Sule smirked at them, “Alright, alright, we'll get some gloves.”

Isa had an idea.

“Why don't we have something like bandanas sewn on to the collars here so we can pull them over our mouths and noses if we feel someone might recognize us?”

“Hmm, mehn!” Sule was pleased, “This guy is definitely an *Oga* o!”

Some weeks later another crowd gathered. This time outside the ten-storey Banana Nigeria Bank building. There had been gunshots earlier. An armed-robbery, something occasionally disturbing the blissful serenity of Kaduna city life. This one was in broad daylight, late in the evening at about 4.30pm. Unfortunately for the criminals, someone had raised the alarm and the police had arrived before they could make their getaway. They decided to take hostages instead - the bank manager since they'd scared everyone else off first. There were nine armed robbers in the building. They had kept the manager so he could open the bank vault for them. The robbers shouted out curses at the police and threatened to 'destroy everybody' if the bank was stormed. Sule was there with his camcorder to watch this time.

The bank had been quiet for a long while now and the police began to suspect the crooks were probably trying to make their way out somehow. It was getting late, the sun would be setting soon. A decision was reached. Storm the bank. They were about to move when there was a loud bang.

What seemed to be eight statues came flying out the bank's windows. They were actually human beings frozen stiff. Frozen armed robbers. The police moved in but a shot rang out and they dove back for cover. Sule was becoming worried. His camcorder was recording everything. Then he swung it upwards to the hooded figure in a flowing gown stealthily scaling the bank walls heading towards the roof against the backdrop of the large, orange setting sun.

“Lami,” he breathed softly to himself.

Atop the ten-storey building the last criminal stood with one arm around the bank manager's throat and his other hand tottering a pistol. He fired wildly into the air. He hadn't seen the young girl making her way up. She slipped and Sule cried out. Other spectators had noticed her now. They held their breath.

Lami felt herself falling. She quickly gazed at one the windowsills and broke her fall. She hovered and kept looking down at the windowsill until her outstretched hands grasped the walls again. She slowly slid down to the flat surface she kept staring at. She puffed and started to climb once more. She was right on the ledge behind the robber when she reached the top. He spun round at the sound of her climbing over. She saw his gun take aim at her and her glasses shone bright. The gun was knocked right out his hand and over the side of the building. He seemed terrified at the sight of the masked lady in a long, light yellow gown who was climbing up to meet him. Without waiting to think he hurled his hostage right at her. They toppled over the side and the robber was pleased. He didn't have long to rejoice as shots rang through the air and he felt bullets smashing into his legs and one arm. He fell on the rooftop and lay there groaning.

Sule puffed and wiped his forehead. He'd seen Lami and the bank manager go over the side but about half a metre from certain death her shades had flared up with such blinding intensity. The two bodies hovered for a while then came down to earth with a quiet thud. Lami quickly rolled away. She felt exhausted. Kanayo and Isa ran up to meet with her. Their gowns were dark brown.

She was alright.

The police were rushing up to the roof to apprehend the remaining robber. The few who waited downstairs reached for their guns when they sighted the three masked strangers coming, eyes aglow in various hues.

“Those are the people who helped capture the crooks,” Sule yelled atop his voice for all to hear, “It's the Kaduna Shadies!”

The entire crowd around the bank roared in applause and the police put back their guns. The masked three moved through the crowd, the evening wind blowing through their gowns and their brilliant eyepieces reflecting the flashlights from journalists' cameras. They smiled and waved.

“Kaduna Shades! Kaduna Shades! Kaduna Shades!” the people chorused and cheered.

“No, Kaduna Shadies,” Sule's voice was drowned out in all the noise.

The next day, 'Kaduna Shades' stories were all over the local and national papers.

“Dummies,” Sule hissed throwing one of such papers on to his sofa, “Jouranalists keep printing trash these days. You tell them *Shadies* and they go about spreading word about *Shades* instead.”

They were having breakfast at his place this cool Saturday morning.

“You have admit it's still a nice name,” Lami remarked.

“Yah,” Isa agreed.

“Nna, don't worry about the name. The good thing is we did very well yesterday.”

“Yah!” they all agreed with Kanayo.

“Okay, okay, you guys were brilliant, even though Lami tried to give me a heart attack,” he looked at her.

“Sorry, climbing seemed the safest way to get to the guy and save the bank manager.”

“Just be careful next time.”

“Yes, daddy.”

They laughed and Sule kicked them out of his flat. No, actually it was time for them to leave and continue with business for the day. Alone, he sat on his rug and crossed his legs. He picked one of Mama K's books.

“Thanks,” he smiled, “I hope to be able to add to your research work.”

And he did, some five months later. He discovered a way of producing special batteries for the super shades so they could still work for up to two hours in the absence of sunlight.

All went well.

Many more adventures lay ahead for the Sule Base Juice and the Kaduna Shades.

THE END

Kaduna SHADES



BRIEF INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR, IKANI

Q: So, I suppose congratulations are in order then on the completion of your latest production?

A: Yes, thanks. It certainly wasn't easy.

Q: I see you've incorporated quite a number of special effects and stunts in this story. We haven't been seeing much of that from you lately.

A: These things happen - you grow older, you get a bit lazy sometimes but finally, one day you wake up refreshed and it's time to get back to some serious work!

Q: How did it feel working with the likes of Uche Udeh, Pat Jan and Ibrahim Isah who starred in this story? Their performance was excellent.

A: Nna, those guys have talent. They make beautiful fictional characters. I wouldn't mind working with them. I was so pleased they could do all their own stunts which made things really cheap for me.

Q: Looking at the way the story ended, do you think you'll be making more *Kaduna Shades* stories?

A: We'll have to wait and see.

Q: I'm sure we'll be getting a lot of spin-off comic books and artwork from the fans out there.

A: Hah! You wish! Yes, it would be nice if that happened.

Q: Thank you for taking time out to grant this lovely interview.

A: You're welcome.