

OBRONI TALES- BOOK 1

SLAVES OF MEN & GODS

JACQUELINE SMITH



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Reader Reviews

“I really enjoyed the book...Krisi is a good mix of feisty and vulnerable. There was intrigue from the start...I was kept guessing...interesting twist and reprise of danger towards the end.” Carol McKay, author of ‘Incunabulum’

“Smith carefully weaves similar issues across continents.”
Grace Rhoomes

“Smith’s writing is smooth, flawless...captivating...caught my attention in the first few lines and ends brilliantly... I really liked it.” Brian Luigi author of ‘Time for Sale’

“A gripping story with beautiful interweaving of Ghanaian culture and homeopathy anecdotes” Louise Ainsworth

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Author's Note

A glossary of the varied language words and expressions used in the writing of the novel has been provided at the end of the book.

Some activities, customs and practices depicted in the novel have long been under much controversial debate and those outlawed are disparaged by the Ghanaian government. Some places may have had name changes or been relocated for the purposes of the narrative.

All and any errors are my sole responsibility.

PART ONE



Nkyinkyin (Twists and Turns)

'We may not be aware of life's impending challenges, but let us not resign them to fate, but to seek help to use one's own will and sheer determination to succeed.'

- Akan proverb

CHAPTER 1

Krisi didn't think she would ever get used to the bars on the windows. Now that she was presently tied up waiting for her captors to return they would probably stay even longer in her mind--if she got out of here alive. A thought that made her tremble from head to toe. Krisi could feel dust in the back of her throat making it difficult to swallow over the dryness. There was a nearby whine of hovering mosquitoes, an odour of stale urine and lizards skittered up and down in the corners of walls that bore humid tidemarks.

Although she could hear cocks crowing outside she'd come to learn that that didn't only mean it was dawn breaking like they told you in stories when you were a wee kid. In Ghana they seemed to crow anytime day or night. The gap in the window coverings showed darkness now but neither did that mean it was particularly late. Night dropped like a curtain here from six every evening without fail. No twilight, no warning. So now she had the gloom and only small illumination from a security light outside seeping between the rips in the window coverings.

Neither the day's stifling heat nor its stunning heaviness had abated when the sun went down and she could feel a trickle of sweat soaking into the back of her blouse and prickling in her armpits. One drop of sweat was running from her forehead into her eyes and she shook her head to clear it.

Her breath caught with a jump of fear in her throat as she struggled with the rope that held her. Krisi heard drums pounding in the distance; though in the dark closeness of the walls it was as if they surrounded her, thrummed though her. Drums-another everyday happening here in Ghana, but she needed to listen closely. There were different reasons for the sound of drums and she needed to suss out if, in this case, she could be the reason. She'd learned that Ewe drummers adjusted their drum strings to pitch the sound of their message good or bad, so that through the high or low pitch, the beat and the pluck; you'd know if it was meant only for you. Knowing what had happened to her friend she heard the warning there and felt a wave of grief; tears threatening in its wake with a creep of underlying terror making her shudder again.

Krisi tried to turn her head to look around the hot shack she was in but she was stuck, unable to see much now that the light had gone and unable to move. Her arms were aching from the tension in the rope pulling them behind her back. She was sure the mosquitoes had been making a meal of her too, since she was itching in a few places she had no way of reaching to scratch. How was she going to get out of this? Anxiety flared again making her pulse thrum and jitter. In fact how did she get herself into this in the first place? She was only trying to help a friend and look what had happened.

CHAPTER 2

There were so many changes she'd had to get her mind around in the last couple of months. Krisi had arrived with her father Samuel, on a late flight from Glasgow into Accra's Kotaka Airport in a haze of confusion, apprehension and sadness. After she said goodbye with lots of hugs and tears in Glasgow she'd pictured her mum's distraught face for the whole of the first flight to Amsterdam, before finally managing to sleep during most of the six hour flight from Schipol. She wakened feeling groggy and irritable for the food provided by the airline to Ghana, though that didn't go down too well either.

'What's this?' Kri'si's face twisted in a grimace of dislike at the tray in front of her crammed with assorted plastic containers holding food.

'You were sleeping so I ordered the chicken for you.'

'I don't eat chicken, dad. I'm vegetarian.' She couldn't push the tray away as she wanted to since it was balanced on a small table attached to the seat in front of her.

'Since when?' Samuel immediately sounded exasperated as he blew out a sigh.

‘Since two years ago. Though you were at home for meals so little you probably wouldn’t know that. But you could have asked.’ Krisi’s voice had a bitter edge.

‘Okay, okay. Why don’t you just eat the salad and roll? There are some crackers and cheese too. Or don’t you eat cheese either?’ Samuel had known this wasn’t going to be easy and Krisi had made sure at every step that he wouldn’t forget it.

‘I said vegetarian not vegan, so I suppose those will have to do.’

‘There’s a nice chocolate dessert too,’ he offered, hoping his daughter would be appeased even a little. It hadn’t stop Krisi harrumphing audibly but she refrained from commenting. She huffed and puffed, shifting constantly with restlessness as the heat on the plane increased while they got closer to their final destination. That was nothing to the shock on landing, having to trudge down the steps in the stifling muggy darkness, the air perfumed with smoke or at least Krisi thought it smelled like smoke, though there was none to be seen.

Inside the airport there were long queues of people, most of them black she noticed and wondered how that was making her feel. When she stopped to look around and take it all in she decided it was unusual but okay, just different. Her dad hurried her along to join the end of the queue so they’d get through passport control to collect their baggage. Another long wait as the empty carousel went round and round sending Krisi into a sweaty droop as she became mesmerised, only catching notice of her case when her dad nudged her saying, ‘That’s yours isn’t it?’

She lunged forward making a grab for the pink flowery case, her balance teetering as she tried to pull it back before the carousel took it round again. Her dad caught the back of her, in this heat, needless jacket-except for him using it to save her at that moment from landing face first on the machine and joining her case as it trundled along behind the other luggage.

When they reached the exit they were assailed by crowds of people waiting for friends or relatives, and taxi drivers all competing to be hired at the same time. She felt claustrophobic, her breath catching with the immediate crowds and hustle of it all. She still noticed that burnt aroma as they got in their chosen taxi. It reminded her of fireworks on bonfire night. That thought immediately igniting a sudden rising memory of a previously very scary bonfire night years before with her mum Shona, its effect at the time having stopped Krisi speaking for a couple of weeks.

She'd been shocked into speechlessness again several times more recently in the last six months. First, when the BIG ANNOUNCEMENT had been made that Friday evening just as she was getting ready to go round to her pal Morrigan's house.

Her mum Shona, was in the kitchen sitting at the table, head lowered and long auburn hair hiding the glass of wine she was cradling between her hands. Her dad was sitting opposite: hands clasped on the tabletop wearing his stubborn look of thinned lips and knotty frown. When Krisi entered the kitchen a wall of tension hit her producing the urge to turn right round and walk back out the door again. As she was mid-turn her father cleared his throat.

'Krisi, come and sit down. Your mother and I have something to discuss with you.' His voice was clipped, giving no opportunity for challenge. She slid the chair from under the table, its scraping sound making her mother startle and lift her head, her hair falling back to reveal a face swollen and red from crying. Krisi reacted immediately the way she always did when her mother was in a state, reaching out to clasp her shoulder.

'Mum? What's happened? Are you okay?' she asked, her voice sounding shrill while glancing towards her father.

'She's fine.'

'I was asking mum, not you.' A definite wrong move since it ran the risk of Krisi being grounded. Her father's face reddened as he quickly lost his temper.

‘You see that’s half the problem, isn’t it? Your mother just can’t keep you in line, can she? You can never hold your tongue and show any respect. That’s one of the reasons I’ve made the decision to take you to Ghana.’

‘What!?! Ghana? Are we going on holiday? Isn’t mum coming?’ Krisi’s eyes widened. A tremor of excitement rippled in her belly. He’d mention that they might go sometime to Ghana in passing when he’d rave every once in a while about a previous six month visit he’d spent on a placement there years ago before she was even born. But why all the heavy drama? Her mother stifled a groan and sniffed, making her cough as Krisi saw her tears overflow. ‘It will only be for a couple of weeks, mum. Won’t it dad?’ She watched as her father’s head lowered and he slowly shook it from side to side. ‘Why are you shaking your head? How long then and why can’t mum come?’

Her mother got up; staggering as she tore some tissue from the kitchen roll on top of the fridge behind her then wiped the tears and mucus from her face. She dropped heavily back onto the chair, turning to Krisi but unable to meet her gaze.

‘I’m sorry love but your dad and me are separating and he insists on taking you to Ghana to live with him during his three year PhD research post and by then you’ll be eighteen and finished school too.’ The sobbing began again while Krisi’s mouth fell open. She tried to stand but slumped down and glared at her father. The excitement turned into a heavy jolt of fear fizzing round her body.

‘You can’t do that! I’m fifteen. I have a life here with school and all my friends. Why can’t you just go back on your own if it’s so important to you? I’ll stay here with mum. We never see you anyway. We can look after ourselves. You’re so busy looking after everyone else, you wouldn’t miss us. Why would you even think I’d agree to this?’ She’d swivelled her head back towards her mother. ‘Why would *you* even agree to this mum...Mum?’

There was a heartbreaking acknowledgement from her mum then about the continuing struggle she'd been having with controlling her drinking habit. Krisi had lived with this all her life and to her mind, and as embarrassing as it had been at times over the years, she'd learned to look after her mum and how to come up with ingenious explanations about why this or that incident had happened. But apparently her father had had enough. She felt a rage that clenched her fists and burned her insides at his amnesia for all the times he hadn't been there for them. His job as a medical doctor, a general practitioner, meant he worked long hours. After he'd completed the course on homeopathic medicine for doctors and nurses at the hospital over in the west end of Glasgow, he'd regularly gone off on International conferences for that too.

Shona had been his medical receptionist at the surgery where they'd met. After Krisi was born Samuel had discouraged her from returning to work saying he could provide for them; that she should focus on their daughter's well-being. As a result she hadn't returned to work and they were often left alone to rattle around in the big house on a leafy avenue on the south side of the city. Alcohol had begun as a panacea for Shona's boredom and loneliness after giving up work to have Krisi, then for the years of feeling left behind.

Over the following weeks Krisi had argued with her dad and begged her mum but Samuel had already applied for the assistant research post to complete his PhD in Accra with the strong probability he'd get it. Not that he'd tell her the details of course and mum had spent most of her time after THE BIG ANNOUNCEMENT lying down in their bedroom out of the way.

Krisi had just arrived home from one of the last days at her old school in Glasgow and heard her dad talking to someone on the phone in the lounge. Daring a glance round the door she saw her father sitting at the desk near the window, nodding and smiling into the phone.

‘Yes, sir. Thank you for considering my application. I look forward to meeting you too sir.’ Then there was another call to someone called ‘Gloria’.

‘Could you find out about any possible accommodation on or near the campus? ...Yes, well that sounds like it could work. Thanks Gloria.’ She watched as he replaced the receiver before making some notes, shuffling his papers into order with a satisfied smile. She then slipped upstairs feeling even more apprehensive about the coming trip, wondering with a nervous flutter in her stomach how she would manage with the languages. She’d picked up how to say ‘please’ and ‘thank-you’ from her dad in Ewe but he’d never taught her anything else. And now she was going to need it. Couldn’t they have practised or spoken together, even just for fun? Though, it was true, he definitely wasn’t much of a fun guy.

There seemed no way out then. Her dad had booked one-way flights even before THE BIG ANNOUNCEMENT at the kitchen table, which turned out to be his final pronouncement to end the conversation and seal her near future. What happened to the ‘discussion’ he’d mentioned? She’d had no say, no choice, and no voice. It didn’t sound encouraging. She had a few sleepless nights after that wondering how she was going to survive living with ‘The Dictator’, fit in at a new school and try to make new friends – never mind learn new languages. And it would be so weird living in a place where everyone was African.

Then there was Jack, her first ever boyfriend whom she’d only spent time with on a couple of occasions by that point. She felt the dip of disappointment in her stomach after she’d broken what she thought was the terrible news and his response had been brief and terminal. ‘Cool. No worries. Great chance tae travel though, eh?’ Morrigan, on the other hand, had been incensed at Krisi’s father on her behalf.

‘That’s so rubbish! How can he do that?’ Is that allowed? Doesn’t he have to go through court and everything?’

'My mum can't deal with all that right now. It's why she's agreed, I think. And I am ONLY fifteen, as dad keeps reminding me.'

'Can we catch up on Face book or Skype then, Krisi? Do they have internet there?'

'I hope so but dad did mention something called *Dumsor*, that he said means the electricity goes off quite a lot and the water can run out too. I won't know what's happening until I get there. I don't even know if I'll be able to use my mobile.'

'That's pants!' was Morrigan's response to that information.

'Definitely is,' Krisi agreed before she ended the call.

