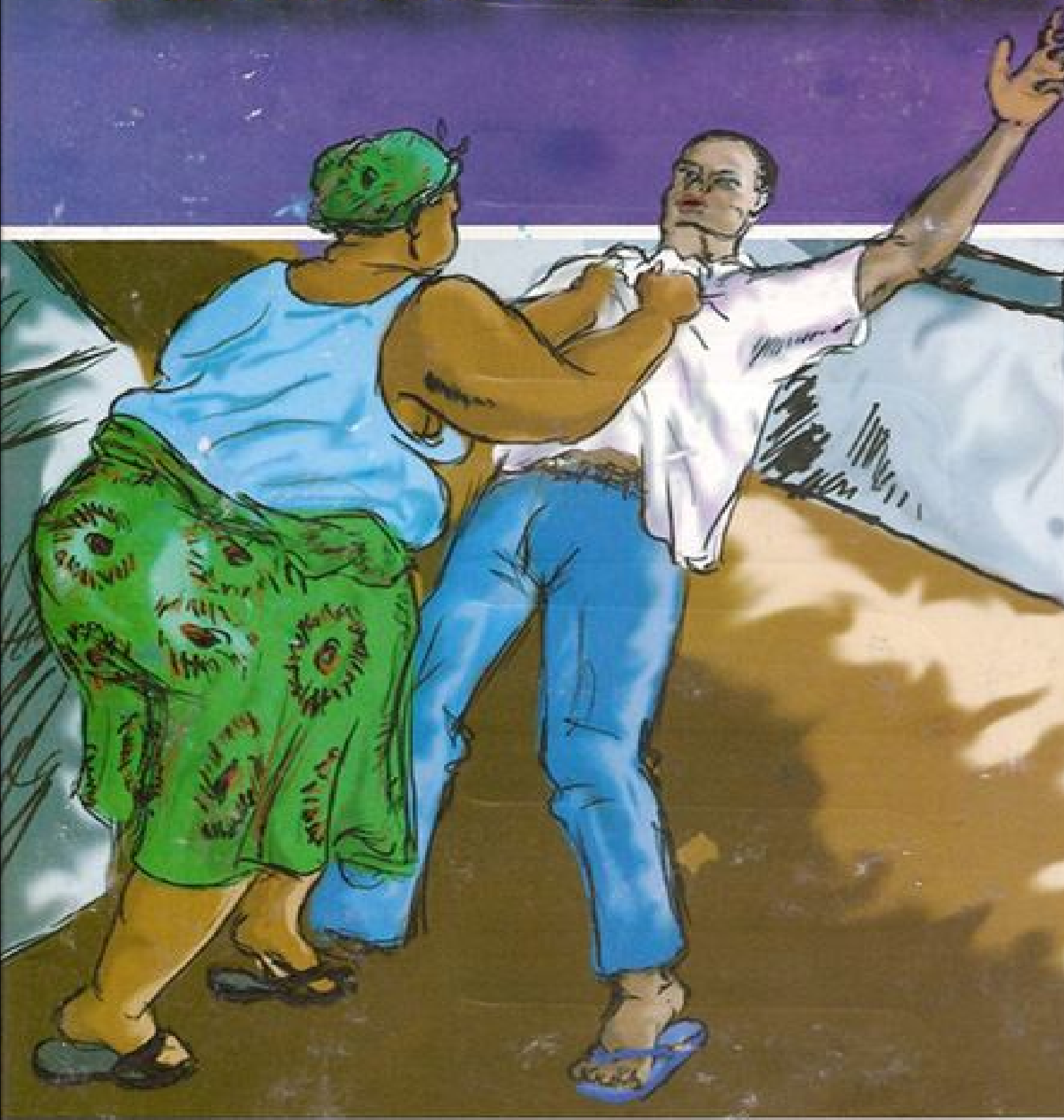


DEADLY AMBITION



NAAH YEMEH

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By

Dr. Naah Yemeh

**Doctorate degree from
University of Kentukey, Lexington, U.S.A**

**M.A TESOL from
Institute of Education, University of London**

**B.A. from:
University of Ghana, Legon**

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CHAPTER ONE

A FUTILE CHASE

The drums came from a great distance on the wings of a strong wind:

Tinkirin tinkirin Katin katin

Tinkirin tinkirin Katin katin

Tinkirin Katakan

Tinkirin Katakan

Poet was among the numerous people who heard the drums of death. He threw down a piece of meat he had been eating to a dog that had been looking mournfully while the man finished the fufu and then proceeded with the meat.

The dog eagerly dashed at the meat, pounding on it with both fore-feet and mouth as if the meat was something alive that might run away. Finding the whole thing pure flesh and not bone as it had expected the dog looked at Poet in shock. But as he was already standing up and looking towards the direction of the drums of death, the animal settled down to feast on its God-sent fortune.

Poet looked towards the East, the direction from which the talking drums were announcing the death of

one more member of mankind. The sun was just showing its face at the horizon after having gone into hiding for the whole night. Poet looked at the sun of that stormy morning as if it was to blame for the bad news that would soon be brought.

He said, "Why, oh why? Why do we have to hear yet another death? We have seen a thousand young and old deaths these days. We have seen wicked deeds of man to man. We have seen food removed from the mouths of naked babies who then starve and are buried amidst laughter. We have witnessed men and women swimming in red streams of human blood. We have stretched our burnt hands to the cloudless skies and shrieked in vain for the redeeming rains. Why then should we wake up in a brand new day into this old tune of misery?"

Poet's speech was cut short by the heavy pounding of somebody's feet on the ground. The person was running. Presently he understood why the feet were so heavy. They were the heavy feet of Anti Makola. Anti Makola was a real heavy-weight. She was so fat that she could have easily been mistaken for a giant spider. The only difference was that she had four limbs.

Anti Makola's round and massive arms rolled forwards and backwards on her ball-like belly as she raised and thundered her short and heavy legs in her energy-consuming dash. She breathed noisily in short quick gasps, breathing through both her nose and her

open mouth. Anti Makola had apparently ignored her clothes, which got loose through the violent shaking of her massive flesh and were blown about by the wind till eventually they got torn off her body by some thorn. Her body from the waist upwards was naked. Her waist's vicinity still enjoyed the scanty cover of a firmly secured cloth that reached just above her knees.

A woman with such a build and running towards the direction of horrible news at such lightening speed was the first sight of its kind to be seen by Poet. Her bare face and body were glittering with sweat and oil. Poet attempted stopping her to make sure it was not the devil himself that was after her dear life.

"Hey woman what's the matter?" Poet asked. She flashed by without a word. He realized that she would not stop and since he was determined to know the cause of her flight, he jumped and gave her a hot chase. He was to learn that there were times a fat and heavy woman could out-run a slim and agile man.

The woman was increasing the gap between them, and no matter how fast Poet ran she just slipped further and away from him like a car that over took a loaded articulated truck.

It occurred to Poet that he would never catch up with the fleeing lady. He decided to shout. But realizing it would be much wiser to try to secure just one-word answers from the woman he said, "Is something chasing you?"