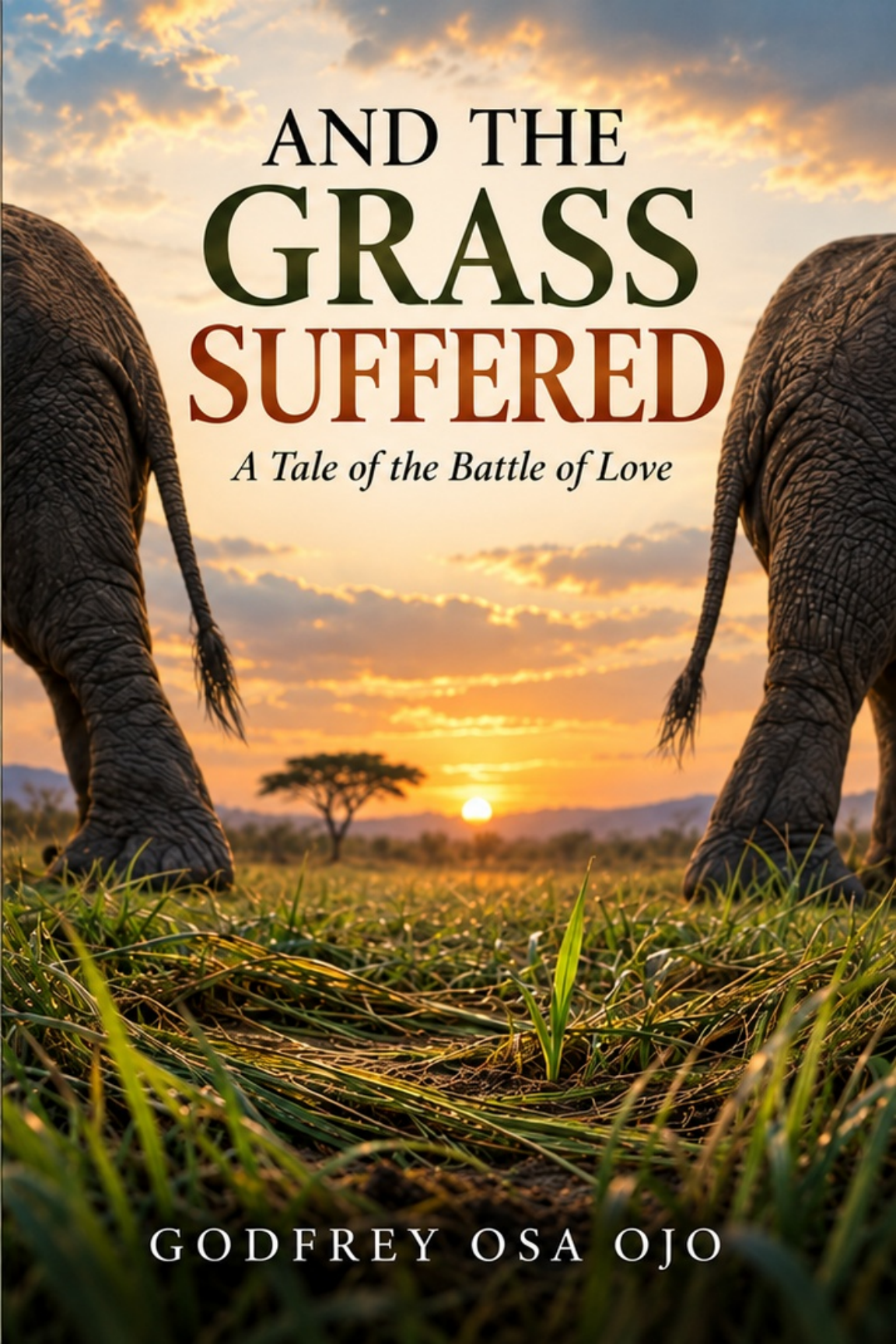


The background of the entire cover is a photograph of a savanna at sunset. Two elephants are visible from the back, their legs and tails framing the central text. The sun is a bright orange circle on the horizon, with long, golden rays of light filtering through the clouds. The foreground is filled with green and yellow grass, some of which is in sharp focus. In the distance, a single acacia tree stands against the horizon line.

AND THE GRASS SUFFERED

A Tale of the Battle of Love

GODFREY OSA OJO

A LOOK INTO THE BOOK

AND THE GRASS SUFFERED

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Godfrey Osa Ojo

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Pseudonyms are used for private individuals. Certain dates, chronology and identifying circumstances have been compressed or generalised to protect privacy without altering the essential substance of the experiences described.

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Dedication

To every child who has stood beneath a conflict they did not create,
and to every adult who has chosen responsibility over retaliation for
the sake of those children.

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Acknowledgements

About the Author

Author's Note

This book began with a message about hunger. The message came from a teenager I had never met. I came into contact with her only through her friendship with another teenager with whom my own acquaintance was limited. What began as an indirect connection soon placed before me circumstances I had neither expected nor sought. She told me that there was nothing for her and the younger children in her household to eat. Their parents were no longer living together, and the situation around the children was becoming increasingly difficult. At first, my concern was practical. If children were hungry, they needed food. When illness subsequently entered the situation, the need became more urgent. Yet beneath the immediate questions of food, health and responsible adult involvement, another question began to trouble me: how could children find themselves carrying the consequences of a relationship they had neither created nor broken?

My contact with the second teenager, whom I call Itohan in these pages, was also very limited. She later reminded me of an occasion when our paths had apparently crossed at a hospital, an encounter I could only faintly recall. Apart from that distant encounter, we had no prior personal acquaintance of any significance. Our subsequent communication arose entirely from the circumstances that later brought us into contact. It was through Itohan that I first became aware of Amara and subsequently began receiving information about circumstances unfolding far from me and affecting children whose family history and domestic situation were previously unknown to me.

I did not know the complete history of the family involved, and I make no claim in these pages to know it now. A family cannot responsibly be reduced to fragments of communication received during a period of distress. There may be wounds, explanations and circumstances known only to those who lived through them. This book is therefore not an attempt to put two parents on trial. The originating experience belongs here because of the questions it raised, not because private suffering should be converted into public spectacle.

The names Amara and Itohan are pseudonyms. Certain dates, sequences, quantities, family particulars and other identifying circumstances have also

been compressed or generalised. These changes are intended to protect privacy without altering the essential substance of the experience or the moral questions that arose from it. The detailed communications remain part of the private source record rather than the public narrative.

As I reflected upon the children's need, an old African proverb pressed itself upon my mind: when elephants fight, the grass suffers. The situation before me gave the proverb another dimension. These particular elephants, figuratively speaking, had not always been opponents. They had once been joined by a relationship, and children had emerged within the family their union created. How do people once united by love reach a point where the consequences of their conflict fall upon the innocent?

This book begins from the conviction that marriage is a covenant to be honoured and preserved. Marital difficulty should not make separation an easy or ordinary answer. Where a marriage is wounded, the proper hope is truth, repentance, responsible help, forgiveness and, wherever genuinely possible, reconciliation. At the same time, the sanctity of marriage should never be invoked to require a spouse or child to remain exposed to violence, abuse or immediate danger. In grave circumstances, protective distance may become necessary while safety, accountability and the future of the relationship are responsibly addressed. The concern of this book is therefore not to normalise departure, but to ask what covenant, conscience and parental responsibility require when love is wounded and marriage is under pressure.

The book will examine the battle without joining it. Abuse should not be disguised as ordinary marital disagreement, neglect should not be romanticised, and safety should never be sacrificed merely to preserve the appearance of marriage. At the same time, protecting the vulnerable does not require inventing certainty about every aspect of an adult conflict. We can remain cautious about judging the elephants while being unequivocal about protecting the grass.

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This complimentary preview ends before Chapter One.

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