



On the Record: Girls for Sale

Issue 2: The Traffickers

Contents

- **One Who Got Away**
- **Why Edo State?**
- **The Family**
- **The School**
- **The Lawyer**
- **The Traditional Priest**
- **The Forger**
- **The Traffickers**
- **The Enforcer**
- **A Father's Lament**

One Who Got Away

She is fearless in front of our large visiting delegation and absolutely convinced that what happened to her was wrong. Her conviction shines through as she tells her story.

It cannot be easy. She must know that the association of prostitution clings to her like a bad odor.

But Berta banishes all doubts, and allows us to leave reassured. We all feel it. The Catholic sisters in our group are seeing evil overcome. The women among us are seeing one of their own who has resisted sexual violence. We are all thinking that as long as people like Berta are willing to tell their story, trafficking cannot win. "The girl has guts," says one of the sisters, under her breath. "I'm so proud of her."

She comes from the small town of Sapele in the Delta state, bordering on Edo, where she lives with her sister. Life is difficult in Sapele, she says. Anyone making a monthly income of 5,000 Naira (\$50) is considered wealthy.

Berta is a hairdresser by trade but has yet to finish her apprenticeship. That will take money -- lots of it -- so she was interested when a passing acquaintance named Onome approached her and asked if she would like to work with his sister, who owned a hairdressing shop in Germany. Berta would earn enough money to buy her apprenticeship (known as "freedom").

Berta asked her own sister, who advised her to take up the offer. Onome gave her a paper with an address in Ikeja, a suburb of Lagos, and told her to look out for a Volvo. She took a bus to Lagos and found the Volvo. Two other girls from Sapele accompanied her on the trip to Lagos.

They did not know the name of the driver, but he drove them to Ghana immediately, taking advantage of the free travel allowed under the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) agreement. They reached Accra at midnight and were introduced to "Mr. Shanti," who took the three young women under his wing.

Mr. Shanti acquired a passport for Berta. She never saw it but thinks it was a real passport with her photo. They slept in Accra. Berta then continued on with Mr. Shanti to Abidjan, capital of the Ivory Coast, leaving the other two girls to continue later. Mr. Shanti told Berta to pose as his daughter as they began their journey by air to Europe. Inside the terminal at Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris, they were able to breeze through two immigration police checks, which normally look with suspicion on any black face.

This was Berta's first travel abroad, and she still thought she was heading for Germany. They changed planes and headed for Milan. Only then did Berta realize that she was in the wrong country. "I said Milan is in Italy, not Germany." He replied that they needed to see someone but would then continue to Germany.

It was a lie, of course. They took a train to Florence where Onome's sister met them. In the parlance of trafficking she is a "Madam" -- a former prostitute who had paid off her own debt to the traffickers and graduated to a pimp. "Welcome to Italy!" she said. Berta replied stubbornly that she wanted to go to Germany.

The "Big Woman," as Berta calls her Madam, was tough. She told Berta that she was expected to work as a prostitute on the streets. Berta was given skimpy clothes -- hotpants and a revealing brassiere -- and told to get to work. Berta refused. She was put up in the house of an acquaintance, and the standoff began.

It might have been funny had it not been so frightening. Here was this 23-year-old woman, alone in Europe for the first time without papers, fighting jetlag, without even proper clothes. No one had told her to dress for a European winter.

There were about 20 Nigerian girls at the house, in varying states of emotion. Some were terrified, says Berta. Others were excited and acted "like mad people." Did she talk to them? No. "I wasn't interested in what they were doing. I didn't want to know how much money they made."

For eight days, Onome's sister tried to force Berta into prostitution, and for eight days Berta stubbornly refused. Then another girl who was living in the house (selling T-shirts, not her body) told Berta of a group in Florence that might help. She took Berta to the address and then left her. (The efforts of these and other groups on behalf of the girls will be examined in a later issue.)

Free from the Madam, Berta stayed for a month with her good Samaritans and then returned to Lagos with a ticket paid for the International Organization of Migration (IOM) with another young woman who we will call Sonia.

Even after her escape, Berta's adventure was not over. When they returned from Italy, Berta and

Sonja were met at Lagos airport by Sister Regina, a Catholic nun, and Bisi Olateru-Olagbegi from the Women's Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON). The two women were waiting for Berta and Sonia in the Arrivals Lounge, when a contact from immigration warned them that other visitors were also waiting for the two girls. Sure enough, they saw Berta and Sonia being approached by a strange man and woman.

Sister Regina and Olateru-Olagbegi rushed up, introduced themselves, and challenged the newcomers -- who were clearly from the trafficking ring. They then took the two girls into their care and drove them to a safe house in Lagos -- followed by the traffickers. It was not until four o'clock in the morning that the traffickers finally withdrew.

How the traffickers knew that Berta and Sonia were returning remains a mystery, but it was certainly unnerving for the two girls and for their rescuers. One of the girls, Sonia, was so terrified that she promptly disappeared, raising fears that she had been kidnapped or even killed. (She later turned up unharmed.)

For her part, Berta decided to return to her town of Sapele where she now lives openly. One of her first visitors was Onome, who had recruited her in the first place and whose fearsome sister had tried to press Berta into prostitution. By now the sister had phoned, and Onome wanted to know why Berta had returned. "I told him that I didn't like what they wanted me to do. They asked me to stand in the road."

Berta and Onome now circle each other warily in Sapele. Onome must know that Berta can identify him and the trafficking ring. She could be a key witness in any prosecution.

Berta is not yet ready for that. It would take months and expose her to all kinds of threats. For the moment, she is trying to pick up where she left off. But she has told her story to a lawyer in Sapele, so that he knows who to confront if she is harassed. Onome and his sister are not quite off the hook.

Why Edo State?

Three hours drive from Lagos, Benin City, the bustling capital of Edo State proclaims itself as the "heartbeat of Nigeria." Billboards in the city center proudly celebrate 2,000 years of history and culture. But the astounding growth of prostitution tells a different story. Edo is only one of 36 Nigerian states, but it has produced most of the women trafficked to Europe. This one state has become prostitution center of Africa.

Prostitution has wormed its way into the life of Benin City. Every morning, relatives flock to the Post Office to send off parcels to Italy. The Benin office of Western Union (where remittances arrive from Europe) is said to be the company's busiest in Nigeria. Some of the largest houses in Benin were built on the proceeds of trafficking -- and everyone knows them. Few recent movies have been as popular as "Glamour Girls 2," which portrayed the sex trade to Europe in lurid and sensational terms.

Why Edo? Everyone can agree that poverty is rife after years of economic sanctions and military

rule. A young prostitute can earn in six months what she would make in ten years from toiling at a farm -- and with much less effort.

"Most people can barely afford one meal a day," says Sister Cecilia, from the Catholic Order of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which has taken upon itself to care for young women who escape from traffickers.

Yet poverty exists throughout Nigeria, and only Edo and Delta states produce most of the trafficking. They are not even the poorest states. "It is certainly puzzling," agrees Esther Onosode, a professional educator in Benin City who is also a member of the African Women Empowerment Group (AWEG). "Many of us have asked why."

Onosode thinks it has to do with the fact that Edo has no industry. This, she says, has produced a service-driven economy and a "service attitude" toward work. Sister Cecilia feels that women from the Bini tribe (the fifth and largest in Edo State) are more independent than Yoruba or Hausa women and more driven to make money to support themselves rather than be supported by their families.

WOCON's Bisi Olateru-Olagbegi, who co-authored one of the first definitive studies on trafficking in 1997, feels that the explanation is to be found in a culture that discriminates against women and girls:

"Boys are valued more than girls in this society. When a head of household dies, the inheritance passes to the oldest male child. He is supposed to support the rest of the family, including sisters -- but often doesn't. Polygamy is widely practiced, and this produces more girls. There are so many girls! What have they got to sell but their bodies?"

Whatever the social and cultural explanations, ten years of trade in prostitution has produced solidly entrenched interests in Nigeria and Italy that will not easily be dislodged.

It began in the late 1980s, when Italy was importing immigrant laborers to feed its booming informal economy. As with so much immigration, this had as much to do with the openings as with expertise. Moroccans headed for southern Italy, Senegalese and Malians went into street trading, and Ghanaians entered into factories.

Nigerian women went to the central Italian region of Campania to pick tomatoes. According to Maurizio Bungaro, the Deputy Italian Ambassador in Lagos, the first Nigerian girls were helped by an immigration law (in 1990), which attempted to regularize but not discourage foreign workers. Indeed, he says, it was exceedingly easy for Nigerians to get a visa.

Gradually, the girls were attracted to the large cities of Rome, Naples, and Florence, where they found a high demand for their charms. So high, in fact, that on one occasion Italian prostitutes publicly protested against the encroachment on their turf by Nigerians.

The trade has proved so lucrative that it has created a veritable industry back in Benin City. An astonishing variety of small enterprises now depends on trafficking: forgers; phony lawyers who

set up "contracts" between traffickers and girls; self-styled evangelists who pray for the girls from charismatic churches; traditional doctors who use voodoo to hold the girls to their promise; customs and immigration officials who take bribes to look the other way. All receive a cut. All have a vested interest in the continuation of trafficking.

The Family

The trafficking of women is often compared to organized crime. This makes it seem faceless and shadowy. But as we talked to Rachel, Berta, and Sonia, a clear portrait began to emerge of the people involved. That network starts very close to home. Amazingly, it can even begin in the family.

African families are often portrayed as large, loving, and extended groups that provide a network of support for those of its members that lapse or need help. This is not the picture that emerges from trafficking.

Several of the girls come from broken families. This meant that when the moment of temptation came, they were unable to draw on the kind of support and advice they might have expected from parents or siblings.

Abby's father deserted his children years ago for gambling. Sonia's parents are separated, and relations between Sonia and her father are tense. He bought her a hairdressing shop when she left home to live alone and was furious when she sold the shop to pay for her trip to Europe. She has returned to live in his house, but he refuses to talk to her or even feed her. One would think that loving parents would have intervened much earlier -- and that they would be grateful for their daughter's return.

Some women are traded into prostitution by their own families -- without their knowledge. Esther Onosode of AWEG was shocked to take a telephone call at work from a young woman in Italy wanting to speak to her father -- a colleague of Esther. The girl sounded distressed, but when Esther put the call through to her colleague he shrugged it off and said that they would wait until her house in Benin City was completed. To these families, the safety of their daughters came second.

In one startling case that came to light late last November, a gang of six sponsors and traffickers was caught at the border, while trying to smuggle 11 girls out of Nigeria for Mali. Pat Evbuomwan, one of the female sponsors, told the court that five of the girls had been brought to her by parents, pleading to take their daughters abroad.

Close family friends are also suspect. An acquaintance of Esther Onosode recently entered her daughter's room and was surprised to find a new passport and clothes. Her daughter was evidently preparing to travel. It turned out that the mother's closest friend made the arrangements for 40,000 Naira (\$400), which the girl had stolen from her parents. The furious parents confronted their friend. Eventually they managed to retrieve the money -- but not the friendship.

Often the recruiters instruct the girls not to tell their parents, in case they object. This happened

to Rachel and Pat. They simply vanished from Benin City without a word and without trace.

Out of the blue, Rachel's parents received a phone call from a Nigerian woman in Rome, telling them that their daughter had been killed. It was not true, but it was one more illustration of the pernicious impact of trafficking, and the way it eats into family life. Suddenly, Rachel's grieving parents had reason to wish they had paid more attention to the needs of their daughter.

The School

Often the first contact comes from a school friend or acquaintance, whose task is to gain the confidence of the victim. The first approach to Abby was made by Paulette, a former school friend who wormed her way into Abby's life by pretending to be on the run from a local gang. Paulette appeared one day with torn clothes and asked to stay with Abby in Benin City. Abby agreed, giving Paulette the opening she needed.

Then one day Abby was told that Paulette had left for Germany, and asked if she wanted to join her friend. Abby thought it through and decided to go ahead. Her father was a gambler and a deadbeat. The burden of looking after her siblings had fallen to Abby, and it seemed like a chance to earn some money. But she had to agree to pay the traffickers the enormous sum of \$36,000.

The name of "Tina" surfaces in two stories. Tina knew Sonia at school, but the two had not talked for seven years when Tina suddenly approached Sonia in Benin City and asked if she would like to work in Spain. Tina had evidently been watching Sonia for some time before making her move. Once Sonia was hooked, she was handed over to another member of the gang, named Okuru, whose task it was to procure the passport and visa.

A woman named Tina also helped to recruit another young woman, Pat. Pat's case is particularly poignant because she is currently in prison in Germany. The reverend sisters in Benin City are not sure why, but they have received a string of anxious telephone messages from the group SOLWODI (Solidarity with Women in Distress) in the German town of Duisberg. It appears Pat was picked up by the German police without papers and jailed. She has told a social worker that she was introduced to a criminal named Tina by a school friend called Helen. It may well be the same one who lured Sonia into trafficking.

The fact that recruiters are starting to move into schools horrifies educators. The quality of education in Nigeria fell sharply during the years of military rule, and teachers find it difficult to keep girl students from dropping out. The insidious appeal of travel to Europe only makes it even harder.

The battle in schools is certainly intensifying. Last year, one secondary student was rescued just before she was to be sent abroad for a second time by her own mother. AWEG rented a room for her at the local YWCA, but she vanished -- presumably to be sucked into the maw of prostitution.

"Education is poor," says Sister Cecilia of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. "At the same time, it is also

expensive for poor families. They have to buy pencils, uniforms, sandals, and books. Prostitution can seem very attractive."

The Lawyer

Once a girl like Berta is hooked, she is handed over to the next link in the trafficking chain. At this stage, a "contract" is drawn up under which the girl agrees to pay a sum of money in exchange for the chance to travel abroad. The sums involved can amount to thousands of American dollars. Sonia sold the hairdressing shop that she had been given by her father and uncle to find the equivalent of \$400. She also persuaded her mother to part with \$100.

Many times, the contracts are drawn up by phony lawyers who operate out of shady ("jankara") practices. But they never mention the real destination, just in case a girl is courageous enough to charge for breach of contract.

The Traditional Priest

When traffickers draw up a contract, they often call on a traditional priest to give approval. This is usually done at one of the traditional "shrines" in the city, or in outlying towns like Sapele. The priest takes something deeply personal from the girl. It might be hair from her head, some pubic hair, a nail clipping or some underwear. This trophy is wrapped up with a flourish. The priest leaves no doubt that it will be used to control the victim from a distance.

This use of voodoo is a way of keeping the girl in bondage because it plays on her deepest superstitions. One campaigner described these priests as "greedy charlatans who deserve to be behind bars." But it takes courage to stand up and say such things in Benin City, where the traditional and modern coexist uneasily.

One Catholic sister shudders when she talks about the "secret societies," where new members are asked to eat the liver of those departed (one reason why she never eats liver herself). A thoroughly modern lawyer takes care when driving past the intersection between the Apakpava Road and the South Circular in Benin City. There has been a series of deadly accidents at this corner, he says. Locals are convinced that this is related to the presence of Benin's largest shrine at the corner. This lawyer is not about to disabuse them.

Christianity has made amazing inroads into Nigeria, as can be witnessed by the proliferation of charismatic churches. A mile-long street is choked with over 50 churches. But traditional culture is also enjoying something of a revival -- and exploiting the fact that it predated colonialism. One of the most popular and attractions in Benin City is the Ebehon Centre for Art, Traditional Religion, and Witchcraft, run by the Chief Priest of Benin, Osemwegie Ebehon.

Ebehon is considered a world authority on traditional African culture, but his literature also describes Christianity as an "imported religion" and Christian priests as "Satanic preachers." The much-respected Catholic sisters in Benin City steer clear of Ebehon. Some of them feel that such comments feed the kind of superstition that keeps trafficking alive and wish he would speak out more forcefully against the involvement of traditional priests.

However abusive their voodoo, the role of these priests in trafficking is taken very seriously. The Dutch authorities want to know why so many Nigerian girls in the Netherlands cite their fear of traditional religion when they ask not to be returned.

According to the Dutch Charge d'Affaires in Lagos, one girl recently became completely hysterical in the Netherlands when told she was being deported. Cases like this have prompted the Dutch to seek some serious research into the role of the witch doctors in trafficking. Given the aura of dread that they generate, this may not be easy.

At the same time, if anyone can break the taboo it may be women, because women are particularly vulnerable to the kind of voodoo that masquerades under the guise of traditional culture.

Female Genital Mutilation is practiced on baby girls in the villages of Edo State, and widows are treated like medieval witches. "When a man dies, it is assumed he was killed by his wife," says Esther Onosode of AWEG. "In order to prove her innocence, the widow is made to drink the water that was used to wash the corpse, complete with chemicals. If she dies, she was guilty." Widows are also made to sleep next to the corpse of their dead husband for several days, sit on the ground for a week, and eat from an unwashed plate with their left hand.

For groups like AWEG and International Reproductive Rights Research Action Group (IRRRAG), inveigling superstitious girls into the practice of trafficking fits the pattern. It is another example of violence against women, pretending to be tradition.

The Forger

The great mystery is how traffickers are able to take frightened young Nigerian women who have never traveled abroad in their lives through some of the strictest immigration controls in the world.

When we asked Sonia, she gave us a complicated, garbled story. According to the Catholic sisters who are looking after her, it contains some important information but also plenty of mistruths.

Tina gave Sonia an address in Benin City, where she met a "Mr. Okoro" who asked her to find a passport photo and accompanied her to Lagos. Here she met a "Mr. Wale," whose house she stayed in for several days. She was then introduced to a "Mr. Akinlami" and a woman, who told her they intended to pose as her parents on the trip to Europe.

Sonia had thought she was going to Spain, but at some stage she was told that the destination was Italy and that she would need a visa. Akinlami and his bogus wife coached Sonia on what she was to say at the Italian embassy, which they visited together.

At one point in our interview, Sonia said they flew to the capital Abuja, but the Italian embassy in Abuja does not give out visas. More likely, they received visas in Lagos. Sonia says she was

asked by the consular official for the name of her school and principal, but that otherwise the interview went easily and the three left the embassy with visas for Italy. Clearly, there are important details in this story that the Italian authorities should investigate if they are at all serious, even if it also contains important inconsistencies.

Western embassies in Lagos are at a loss to explain how traffickers are able to acquire visas so easily. Last year, the organization Terre Des Hommes published a critical report on trafficking in Europe, which claimed that officials at the Dutch embassy in Lagos were even accepting bribes to forge visas.

The report caused a storm and forced the recall of the Dutch ambassador. But a subsequent inquiry by the Dutch has concluded that most of the passports used to smuggle Nigerian girls into Europe belong to Ghanaians who are living legally in the Netherlands and who sell or rent their Dutch passports to traffickers.

By replacing the photo, say the Dutch, a trafficker can enter Europe without trouble. Once inside Western Europe he can travel anywhere -- to Italy or Germany. The actual cost to the trafficker rarely exceeds \$1,000. To justify the enormous sums charged to the girls -- as high as \$40,000 -- he may claim to have bribed embassy officials.

Documents can make the difference between freedom or deportation. Dutch law prohibits the deportation of a minor (under 18) who has no support in his or her country of origin. As a result, fake birth certificates are in particularly high demand.

Forgery flourishes in Benin City, and the skill of the forgers has astounded Western diplomats. Maurizio Bungaro, from the Italian embassy in Lagos, says that initially the forgers made crude spelling errors. But they quickly latched on, and many of today's forgeries are almost impossible to detect. The Italians have hired a firm in Benin City to investigate. They have reportedly found whole "factories" of forged documents.

The Trafficker

In theory at least, the best place in Nigeria to intercept a trafficker would seem to be the Lagos airport. According to newspaper reports, about 50 Nigerian girls have been denied permission to leave the country in the last six months.

More often than not, however, a bribe can see them through. Sonia says that when Akinlami and his bogus wife tried to pass through emigration at Lagos, they were turned away on the grounds that they had taken a different girl out the previous week. But, she says, this was witnessed by Akinlami's friend Wale, who intervened and bribed the immigration officials. A couple of days later, they were allowed to depart.

Sonia's account is full of inconsistencies and suspect on several grounds, but her adventure at Lagos airport does not seem to be in dispute. Traffickers are forever trying to co-opt immigration officials (who are seriously underpaid). But their critics are also building important contacts. When Sonia and Berta returned from Italy at Lagos airport in mid-April, Bisi Olateru-Olagbegi

from WOCON and Sister Regina were alerted to the presence of traffickers by friendly officials. This allowed them to rescue the two girls.

As the risks increase in Nigeria itself, so the traffickers turn their attention to neighboring countries. Rachel and Berta both went through Ghana where they were issued with passports before continuing on to Paris via the Ivory Coast. Rachel stayed in Ghana for three months, while the traffickers waited for an appropriate moment to smuggle her into Europe. In Ghana, too, they purchased clothes and luggage for her.

The traffickers are not always so considerate. Sonia said that she only packed two shirts when she left Nigeria, thinking she was going to another warm country. She was shocked to arrive in France in midwinter. Often the girls are made to change clothes on the streets, in freezing weather.

Some of the accounts make the traffickers seem almost benign. Akinlami, for instance, is evidently a smooth talker and he does not come across as a vicious, abusive man. The fact that Sonia lived in his house for a week, and can presumably identify him, makes him appear naïve rather than evil.

It is much harder to sympathize with the Tinas and the Paulettes who inveigle their friends into prostitution in Benin City for a profit. But even they seem more like small-time crooks than the ominous-sounding organized crime. Small-time crooks, of course, are also vulnerable to a determined prosecutor.

The Enforcer

It takes a case like Abby to confirm that trafficking is ugly and violent. Abby was the eldest child in a family that was receiving support from the Catholic sisters in Benin City when she left in 1998 -- supposedly for Germany. On arrival in Italy, she was beaten and starved by her Madam, before being rescued by an Italian couple who found her weeping at the corner of a street. (The next issue in this series will report on life on the streets.)

But while the story may yet have a happy ending for Abby, it has caused her relatives back in Nigeria plenty of pain and anguish. Abby agreed to pay her traffickers \$36,000 before she left Benin City, and when she did not return the traffickers sent thugs (known as "area boys") to collect their debt from Abby's family. Abby's mother was dead and her father was a gambler, so they went for her siblings.

Abby's brother runs a small store (which he set up with donations from the church). He is, by all accounts, a nervous type who had been arrested and roughed up by the police several years earlier during military rule. One can imagine his panic when a group of area boys from Lagos barged into the store late last year, waving guns and demanding \$36,000. When word of this reached the Benin police, they arrested one of the boys and held him for a week.

The young thug was released on bail and spirited back to Lagos. If this showed the influence and money behind trafficking, there was worse to come. In an extraordinary display of gall, the

traffickers claimed that Abby's family had broken the contract and issued a civil suit to reclaim the \$36,000. For a time, it looked as though Abby's siblings would all be arrested and taken to Lagos.

Desperately concerned that Abby's family would never reemerge from prison, the Catholic sisters in Benin City appealed to the governor at the time. Four times they waited at his office, but in vain. Close to tears, Sister Blandina finally succeeded in convincing the Benin City Police Chief that a travesty of justice was about to occur.

The Police Chief issued instructions to Lagos and opened the way for Eric Okojie, a local lawyer in Benin City who helps the church with free legal aid, to take over the case. Eric struck a deal under which the traffickers would appear in Lagos to present their case. He hoped that this would flush them out and might even lead to an unprecedented counter-suit. But they called his bluff and never showed up.

It is clear that formidable sums of money are involved in the Nigerian end of trafficking, and that this purchases silence and bribes on a massive scale. On September 22, 1999, an Italian national named Mauro Trocchi was arrested with his Nigerian wife and a 60-year-old Nigerian Madam named Titilayo Ojo, and charged with trafficking. The charge was issued by an Italian judge in the Italian city of Modena who was investigating racketeering. One Nigerian girl who was called as a witness was able to describe Trocchi's house in a Lagos suburb, and Trocchi was arrested with the help of Interpol.

Some hope that the Trocchi case will shatter the aura of invincibility that surrounds trafficking and protects those involved. The first sitting was adjourned, and the case is expected to resume this summer. Meanwhile, Trocchi is free on bail. He turned down an offer of help from the Italian embassy, preferring to entrust himself to unseen benefactors. One official at the embassy said that Trocchi's bail was "fantastically large" and clearly beyond the means of a poor specimen like Trocchi. It is one more reminder of the power and wealth behind trafficking.

A Father's Lament

Our saddest meeting occurred on a main street of Benin City, outside the factory where Sunday O works as a gateman.

Sunday's daughter Pat has been in jail in Germany for several weeks, and her parents only learned she was in Europe when she telephoned three months ago. Sunday was completely astonished to learn his daughter was in Europe. "How did she get there?" he asks. "We had no idea." At this stage, he loses composure.

Sunday did not know that Pat's Madam was almost certainly at her side when his daughter phoned, telling her what to say. Shortly afterwards Pat had a falling out with her Madam -- perhaps because she refused to prostitute herself. Pat was sent to work in a bar, but the German police found her without papers and arrested her as an illegal immigrant. It is thought that the Madam tipped them off.

Pat was able to tell her story to a social worker, who contacted a Catholic sister in the SOLWODI (Solidarity with Women in Distress) network in Germany. That sister alerted the group of sisters in Benin City who are working with girls. They in turn found Sunday and broke the bad news. Not only was his eldest daughter missing in Europe, she was in jail.

It is almost more than he can bear. His second daughter has broken both her legs in an accident, and he has been forced to borrow 200,000 Naira for doctors. Now the loan sharks are hounding him. His wife is pregnant with their eighth child. He makes 5,000 Naira a month as a gatekeeper.

Poor Sunday O. He is completely numbed by the crisis that has overwhelmed his family. "What is happening to me?" he mumbles, as the tears well up behind his dark glasses. "I'm so bothered. How did I get here? Where is my daughter?"

It's a cry from the heart. Finally, here is a parent who cares.