You were sitting down at the departure gate and twiddling the ticket between your fingers. A year ago, when you arrived back in Nigeria, you had told yourself you were here for good. Yet there you were preparing to board a plane at Lagos airport. All that was going through your mind was how things in Nigeria fell apart.

When you had come back to your small house in your small town, your friends and siblings wanted to know about the big car and big house you now had. They wanted to know why they hadn't heard from you and why they hadn't received the shoes and perfumes you said you'd get them. You greeted each of them one by one, and apologised that you were unable to keep your word.

Your mother had managed a smile when she saw you. You could see, even 5 months later, the toll your father's death had on her. You saw how vulnerable she was without your father by her side. You could see how life had drained out of her eyes, how she wasn't the same cheerful person that she had farewelled you before you boarded the plane to America.
You knew she wouldn't be able to support your siblings on her wage so you decided that you would stay- that you so your siblings education could be paid for.

Over the next few months you found it difficult settle back into Nigeria. It made you uncomfortable the way men would comment on your figure in the markets. You didn't like when shopkeepers would ask if that brand was the one your husband wanted, and when you said you didn't have one, they asked if it was because you couldn't cook or couldn't clean. Your mother told you it was quite normal and you were being silly, and that it didn't seem to bother you before you left for America. You knew you had now been looking at Nigeria through a different lens. America had changed you, no matter how much you tried to convince yourself it hadn't.

Autumn had come before you started working for a Big man living in a gated community just outside of the city. You would pick up his 8-year old son from school and take care of him until his father returned from work in his Peugeot 504. The pay was much better than any other work for women in Nigeria, but it was not nearly enough to make ends meet. After your first month, the big man came a little too close to you, as your uncle had done. He told you how beautiful you were and how he had not seen such beauty in years. He told you that his wife was no longer making him happy and that if you could help him, he would be able help you. You broke out of his grasp and rushed home.

Your mother was distraught when she heard you hadn't taken up the Big man's offer. She called you selfish and said you should have thought of your family before making such a rash decision. She reminded you that we needed a man to bring stability to the family, that we wouldn't be able to function as a family if we didn't have a man to take care of us. Your blood boiled and you yelled at her. That night, the all too familiar thing wrapped itself around your neck.

It was the day the lightning cast a white sheet in the sky that you finally had enough. You had told your mother that you wanted to go to university in Lagos. You wanted to have an education so that you could get a good job with a good wage. Your mother said that it was more important that the money be spent on your brothers going to university. You told her you'd be able to get your siblings an even better education should you be able to become a nurse or a schoolteacher. You said you'd be able to get them into a nicer house closer to the universities. Your mother was adament that such use of money would be a waste. You were in her house and under her rule and the thing around your neck tightened. The next morning, while your family was sleeping, you packed up and left.

You would still send the long brown envelopes just as you used to. You knew that if you could seize your opportunities in America the enveloped would get thicker and thicker. You would eventually be able to send them the perfumes and shoes you had promised them all that time ago. You boarded

the plane, found your seat and slumped into it. You closed your eyes and remember your boyfriends' fair skin and the mustard that nauseated you when you first were in America. You remembered your uncle's words- that america was give and take- and you knew that this time you were prepared to do just that. The trees and the runway blurred as the plane rumbled down the airstrip before the wheels lifted off the ground. And the thing around your neck began to loosen.