

LIZARD

Written by

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Runtime: 15 minutes

Based on a true story

Potboiler Productions

An old derelict house in a shanty town somewhere in the vast Lagos metropolis.

Inside is dark and unfurnished. There's a framed faded sacred heart picture of Jesus on the moisture-stained wall.

The only outside light is obstructed by thin, dirty curtains. A noisy standing fan, missing its front grill, provides the only ventilation.

A group of men in their late 20s / early 30s are gathered in a prayer circle. Their faces are etched with hard and tired features.

A charismatic MAN WITH HAZEL EYES leads the group.

GROUP OF MEN (IN UNISON)

Our father who art in heaven.
Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory.
Forever and ever. Amen

They continue almost immediately with The Grace

GROUP OF MEN (IN UNISON)

The grace of our lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the sweet fellowship of the holy spirit, rest and abide with us now and forever more. Amen

They embrace each other in the circle as they pray.

The audio of the last portion of their prayers plays out over the visuals up until classroom laughter.

GROUP OF MEN (CONT'D)

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow us, all the days of our lives and we shall dwell in the house of the Lord, forever and ever. Amen.

There is an 8 month old BABY GIRL on the bed, looking up at them screaming and teary.

The MAN WITH THE HAZEL EYES picks up the baby to pacify her tears.

Members of the commune, women and children, embrace the men as they gather their gear hurriedly and prepare to leave.

2 INT. CORRIDOR SHANTY TOWN APARTMENT. LAGOS. CONTINUOUS 2

The men file out of the building with bulky plastic "Ghana must go" bags and funnel into a yellow and black striped *Danfo* (Lagos transit minivan)

3 INT/EXT. VAN. LAGOS. 3

The men load the bags into the van. The van door shuts.

And we cut to our TITLE:

LIZARD

4 INT. SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSROOM. SAME DAY. 4

Laughter ensues much to the annoyance of MR PETERS (late 30s). Mr Peters grabs JUWON (8) firmly by the hand and leads her out of the classroom.

5 EXT. SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS 5

MR PETERS

Oya kneel down and raise up your hands, If I hear one more sound from you..

Mr Peters reruns to the classroom. Juwon watches through the doorway as he attempts to restore order. But her view is abruptly obstructed as classroom door is slammed shut.

The distant sound of the sermon from the main church plays over a speaker in the distance.

A rustling sound. Juwon spots a small AGAMA LIZARD. They lock eyes for a beat staring each other down.

It is as if the creature is communicating with Juwon. The lizard NODS repeatedly before scurrying off.

Juwon gets up, dusts herself off and follows the lizard.

6 INT. CHURCH BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

6

Juwon follows the lizard around the church premises until she loses sight of it. Along the walls are adorned with huge advertorial evangelical posters.

These bear audacious titles detailing spiritual retreats, deliverance crusades, prophetic pronouncements and financial breakthrough vigils from previous years at Heavens Gate Ministries.

The lizard is lost but Juwon takes in every detail as she walks past.

She hears a charismatic voice rally the larger congregation into a frenzied response.

7 INT. CHURCH BUILDING, CORRIDOR. CONTINUOUS

7

Juwon heads for the bathroom. It stinks! But she needs to pee. She takes a huge deep breath and runs in pinching her nose.

8 INT. CHURCH BUILDING, TOILET URINAL. CONTINUOUS

8

The bathroom is in a sorry state. There is a huge plastic drum, filled with water, by the sink as the taps don't work and the tiled floor is wet with muddy footmarks.

Juwon rushes back in to wash her hands still holding her breath. But there's no soap. She turns a tap which lets out a tiny trickle of water, she uses the water in the drum to clean her hands.

She can't hold her breath any longer exits the bathroom, drying her hands on the back of her dress.

9 INT. CHURCH BUILDING, CORRIDOR. CONTINUOUS

9

In the corridor, Juwon can hear a bizarre fluttering sound.

She follows the sound down the corridor until she arrives at a large oak door slightly ajar.

She peers in to see a small bright room full of formally dressed people sectioned into different groups.

One group is counting mounds of unsorted cash whilst another group funnels the cash through electronic money counters. They are flanked by a third group who neatly stack the copious bounds of currency into organized piles.

Overlooking all the action is a huge framed sacred heart picture of Jesus on the wall behind. Jesus looks particularly peaceful and this contrasts the frantic yet methodical with which the money is counted.

Juwon has never seen so much money! In the corner of the room, Juwon notices the empty woven offering baskets and opened tithe envelopes.

A WOMAN catches her eye and walks towards him. She flashes her a warm smile and shuts the door without saying a word.

10 INT. CHURCH BUILDING, CORRIDOR. CONTINUOUS 10

Juwon continues down the corridor. She tries to open more doors but they are all locked. Eventually, one opens and she enters.

The room filled with old church memorabilia as far as the eye can see.

11 INT. CHURCH BUILDING, MERCHANDISE STORE ROOM. CONTINUOUS 11

The merchandise is covered in dust - hats, mugs, books, cds of past sermons, flags and t-shirts from various bible retreats and conventions. All embossed with the Heavens Gate Ministries logo and the pastors face.

She tries on a hat.

At the end of one of the long aisles, she sees two people speaking in hushed tones. She ducks behind a shelf and watches as a young attractive WOMAN playfully denying the advances of a burly older man. This is PASTOR EMEKA.

She tries to retreat without being noticed but accidentally knocks a bubble head toy off the shelf.

CRASH!

The startled couple both look over in her direction but Juwon has already run away.

12 INT. CHURCH BUILDING, CORRIDOR. CONTINUOUS 12

She runs right through a large double door, shuts it behind her, taking a breathe. Before realizing she is in the main auditorium of the church.

13

INT. MAIN CHURCH AUDITORIUM. CONTINUOUS

13

Juwon walks in as PASTOR TONY delivers the end of his sermon. Juwon takes a seat in a row behind the congregation and takes in the scene in front of him.

PASTOR TONY

...And Jesus, was angry at what
they had done to his fathers house.
The bible says he went to the
temple of God and cast out all
those that sold and bought in the
temple. Is somebody with me?

The frenzied congregation respond in the affirmative.

PASTOR TONY (CONT'D)

I don't think you are with me. Is
somebody with me heavens gate?

The crowd affirm even more voraciously

PASTOR TONY (CONT'D)

Today you need to reclaim your
fathers house, your property from
the non-believers. The world
belongs to God so everywhere we set
our eyes on is our fathers house.
Somebody shout RECLAIM

CONGREGATION

Reclaim!

PASTOR TONY

Shout RECLAIM

JUWON

(joining in)

Reclaim!

The congregation get even more riled up. Some members start to jump, some stamp their feet. Somebody in the row ahead of him shouts 'reclaim' with excited ferocity, startling him.

In the midst of the shouting Pastor Tony stops prowling the stage, holds his microphone closer, and breaks into song

PASTOR TONY

Igwe, Igwe (Igbo for King)

The choir, on cue, join him and the congregation begin to raise their arms. Juwon is one step behind them as she rises to her feet. Cries of *Igwe* permeate the room.

PASTOR TONY (CONT'D)
 Lets welcome the King of Kings into
 our midst. Lets praise Jesus

The room erupts into an ocean of people speaking in tongues and praying vigorously, all entranced by praise and worship.

Juwon, with her hands clasped, is reminded of her mission and sees this as her cue to continue on her way.

As she makes her way down the aisle, Juwon soaks up the atmosphere. The scene plays out in epic slow motion.

Her attention is drawn to the resplendent maroon gowns of the choir as they perform enthusiastically. She observes Pastor Tony centre stage flanked by his wife and his team of pastors. They are all engrossed in this energetic praise and worship session that has worked the auditorium into a frenzy.

And the intensity hits Juwon like a wave.

Juwon notices the congregation TOP BRASS sitting on the front row. These are the wealthy and successful business men and women and people of status in the community. They have all the trappings of wealth - expensive traditional attire, tailored suits, Rolex watches, intricate jewelry.

As she scans the front row, all lost in their frantic supplications, Juwon notices a familiar face. A formidable woman who appears more calm and composed than the rest with her fists clenched and her eyes tightly squeezed shut.

This is Juwon's AUNTY TITI. Juwon quickly continues on her way before she has the chance to open her eyes and spot her.

She sails unnoticed, taking it all in, until her path is blocked by a CHURCH USHER who looks at her inquisitively. This snaps Juwon back to reality.

USHER
 What are you doing here? Are you
 supposed to be here, during
 service?

JUWON
 Errm... my... mummy sent me to the
 car. Err.. she forgot... her purse

USHER
 Okay. Be quick!

14

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS CARPARK. CONTINUOUS.

14

Juwon makes her way through the parking lot. It's full of luxury 4x4s and expensive saloon cars. Juwon seems so small in this automotive corridor.

Juwon walks amongst the cars towards the main gate. She hears another rallying cry from Pastor Tony which is met with an even louder cheer.

She stops to look back towards the church. This time there's a GIANT BLUE AGAMA LIZARD It's the size of a large car with an orange head and orange tail.

Juwon and the lizard lock eyes for a beat. It's imposing size strikes a panicked fear into Juwon. The lizard nods at Juwon and lowers its head towards her. In her unease at the action Juwon takes to running and is halted by ADAMU the church security guard, in his faded olive khaki uniform.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Wetin you dey find?

JUWON
I'm hungry, I want to buy some food. I'll come back now now

ADAMU
(shaking his head)
Wallahi I no fit allow. If anything happen to you, na my head e go dey

JUWON
By the grace of God nothing will happen

ADAMU
At all o, you know say people outside never find God

JUWON
But we are at church, its just here. What do you mean?

ADAMU
Na my job I dey do. Na wetin they tell me. Since last month, dem don talk say nobody fit comot during service. Why you no just wait make church finish? Buy the food for the shop wey dey inside?

JUWON

I don't like that one. Last time I came, I went outside. I even saw you eating there too - the food was nice abi?

ADAMU

Wallai you this boy, You too dey ask question. See ehn, everybody dey fear make something no happen to their pikin. Me? I know say nothing go happen but shikena, na wetin dey tell me. Me I fit chop there, I be security. Na my work. You be rich man pikin, you no suppose dey enter street

JUWON

But i'm not rich and ah ah didn't you just say you eat there?....nothing happened to you

ADAMU

(Laughs) Wallahi you get too much wahala (trouble). I no fit allow you go outside today. Na my job

JUWON

Mr Adamu why don't you help me go and buy it, please now.

She presents a crisp two hundred Naira note to Adamu and before he has a chance to respond, Juwon quickly adds

JUWON (CONT'D)

You can even keep the fifty Naira change

Adamu ponders for a second. He double checks to ensure nobody is watching. Then he takes the money from Juwon and instructs her to wait.

Adamu heads outside the gate and returns with a hot meat pie in a small white plastic bag and a chilled FANTA bottle.

They are both pleased at their transaction as Adamu hands over the items. Juwon bites into the pie and chugs the Fanta.

ADAMU

Oya quick quick, make dem no see you outside and make sure say you return the bottle

Juwon makes to return to church.

JUWON
(eating)
Thank you

Suddenly the church doors burst open and the congregation floods into the carpark.

Hot pie in hand, Juwon bumps into her older sister DELE (10) and her cousins LOLA (7) and MORAYO (11). Dele notices Juwon's bounty

DELE
Where did you get that?

JUWON
I bought it

Dele stretches out her hand towards the half-eaten meat pie.

DELE
Did you use your offering?! I'm going to tell mummy you used your money for meat pie... Give me some... please?

Juwon shakes her head and takes another bite. She exaggerates the taste slightly as she answers

JUWON
No...go and buy your own

DELE
I used all my own money for offering

Juwon remains unmoved and shrugs.

DELE (CONT'D)
Give me some....or I will tell mummy you were walking around during church

JUWON
I don't care...tell her

Juwon continues to eat the meat pie. She is relishing her older sister begging her for food.

But then Dele notices their mother YEMI (40s, attractive, resplendent in her *Iro* and *buya*) approaching from behind the oblivious Juwon.

DELE
I said please now

JUWON

I said no now ... church is over.
Go and buy your own

Yemi is now right behind Juwon. Dele smirks to herself as she sets her sister up...

DELE

Ok I will go and buy my own. But mummy would be upset if she knows you were walking around during church

Juwon shrugs defiantly and takes another bite from the pie.

YEMI

Olajuwon Lawal, what have I told you about walking around during service?

Juwon almost spouts out her Fanta as she hears her voice behind her. Dele laughs out loud.

YEMI (CONT'D)

It is now my own daughter that wants to embarrass me in front of the whole church?

Juwon looks sheepishly at her mother who wipes some crumbs from her mouth.

YEMI (CONT'D)

Well done ehn. Better finish that before your aunty sees you! We will speak about this when we get home

She notices Lola and Morayo loitering behind Dele.

YEMI (CONT'D)

Morayo wheres your mother?

MORAYO

She over there talking to Pastor Tony.

YEMI

Ah. I cant wait oo. I have visitors coming to the house, I need to rush home. Tell her i've left

LOLA & MORAYO

Bye Aunty!

YEMI

Your aunty will bring you home
later. Be good

JUWON & DELE

Yes mom

She embraces JUWON and DELE and moves off. Over her shoulder, JUWON spots the man from merchandise room, PASTOR EMEKA.

Pastor Emeka standing with Juwon's teacher, MR PETERS, who is pointing at Juwon. Pastor Emeka walks directly towards Juwon, and places a firm hand on her shoulder.

PASTOR EMEKA

You, you this girl...

But AUNTY TITI, fresh from the top-brass front row of the congregation, appears in the nick of time.

AUNTY TITI

Good afternoon Pastor Emeka. I see
you've met my nieces

PASTOR EMEKA

Ah commissioner, this is your
niece? Such a fine young girl!

He looks at Aunty Titi as he speaks, then catches Juwons gaze

PASTOR EMEKA (CONT'D)

I pray the holy spirit uses her as
a vessel and may God wisen the
words that come out of her mouth so
she does not use her words to
offend God

He shakes Juwon's hand enthusiastically. Aunty Titi is puzzled.

AUNTY TITI

Amen

PASTOR EMEKA

Have a blessed week Mummy. Thank
you again for everything. I pray we
see you this week at the business
women's fellowship

Aunty Titi nods. And Pastor Emeka moves off.

AUNTY TITI
 (under her breath)
 What kind of prayer is that!! -
 Riu adura wo ni yen (**Yoruba**)

Juwon Shrugs.

AUNTY TITI (CONT'D)
 Oya all of you, time to go. Kafilat
 so fun Monday ko mu moto wa si
 waju. (**Yoruba**)

KAFILAT
 O tin bo ma (**Yoruba**)

A Toyota minibus pulls up. The driver is a jovial, round-faced man of 45 dressed in a police uniform. This is MONDAY.

Also present is KAFILAT, the maid.

AUNTY TITI
 Oya Morayo, Dele everybody inside
 the car

The minibus door slides open and they file into the bus. Juwon hands Kafilat the Fanta bottle and points at the kiosk with her eyes. She takes the bottle and shakes her head.

15 INT. MINI BUS, CHURCH GROUNDS, NOON. 15

The Sun, now at its pinnacle, beats down on the mass of cars trying to leave the Church grounds.

The children sit on the back row, jostling for space. Kafilat is sat a row in front of them. Aunty Titi another row ahead.

Monday adjusts the rear view mirror - off it hangs a POLICE INSIGNIA.

Monday turns up the radio volume and everyone sings along to a popular South African "Umqombothi" song by Yvonne Chaka Chaka. The car etches forward through scrum towards the exit.

16 INT. MINI BUS WITH CHILDREN. CONT 16

The kids are singing along gleefully in the mini bus.

The action plays out in slow motion. The sound is CHOPPED and SCREWED and the scene has a disorientating, fragmentary feel

FLASH INSERT: A GUNMAN putting a bandana over his face.

FLASH SOUNDS: Gunshots from automatic weapons. Screams.

17 INT. MINI BUS WITH CHILDREN

17

Through the mini-bus window, Juwon and the other children witness MASKED MEN moving between the cars jammed around the church entrance as members of the congregation flee back towards the church.

The men roam from car to car. One of them approaches the mini-bus.

Monday desperately removes the insignia from the rear-view mirror.

18 INT. MINI BUS WITH CHILDREN

18

The gunman bangs on the side of the minibus door

GUNMAN

Open this door!! I say open this door

AUNTY TITI

Leave us alone...leave us alone...there's children here

Juwon watches Aunty Titi trying to appeal to the gunman. It's not working. He completely ignores her and fires into the sky. It terrifies Juwon and the sound rings in her ears.

For the rest of the scene, the sound is muffled and distant

AUNTY TITI (CONT'D)

Lola, Morayo ... everybody keep your head down!

The gunman is trying to get into the car. He stalks around the van, banging on the sides and pulling the door handles.

Aunty Titi's eyes follow the gunman closely. She tries to hide her handbag under her seat but he notices her movements. The gunman breaks the window. Glass goes everywhere.

19 INT. MINI VAN, CHURCH GATES. CONTINUOUS

19

GUNMAN

Your bag - give me that bag!! Off that watch!! Wetin you dey look...Abi you dey craze?

The gunman cocks his gun and places the nozzle on Aunty Titi's temple. Kafilat makes the children look away.

But Juwon keeps her head up and locks eyes with the gunman.

We recognize him as the HAZEL EYED MAN who was leading the prayers at the beginning of the film.

For a moment, they hold each other's gaze and, just like that Agama lizard, the gunman nods his head.

Snapping out of his trance, the man grabs Aunty Titi's bag from her and runs... The gunmen disappear as quickly as they came.

20 EXT. CHURCH GATES. CONTINUOUS.

20

The sound snaps back to normal. It's a chaotic scene. People from the church rush to the cars to check everybody is ok.

CHURCH MEMBER

Ah madam are you ok? Is everyone ok?

Aunty Titi checks all of the children for injuries from the broken glass. Juwon watches emotionless as Kafilat embraces Lola who is in tears.

Aunty Titi, looks at Monday in disdain. She reaches under the seat where she tried to hide her bag and pulls out a gun in a holster.

AUNTY TITI

(In Yoruba)

Kalifat, go inside and find Aunty Patience

CHURCH MEMBER

Ah madam we should just thank God that they didn't take anybody's life o.

ANOTHER CHURCH MEMBER

Praise God. Jehovah Jireh

The crowd concur. But Aunty Titi doesn't share their optimism. She glares at Monday the driver

AUNTY TITI

Monday, why didn't you bring out your gun? What kind of officer are you? (Yoruba)

MONDAY

Ah mummy, if they know say we be
police they for shoot us o. (**Yoruba**)

Aunty Titi hisses something under her breath. Her friend PATIENCE (40s) makes it through the crowd with Kalifat.

PATIENCE

Ah Titi, Is everyone ok? (sees
window) Blood of Jesus!!! Shey they
didn't injure anybody? (**Yoruba**)

AUNTY TITI

We are all fine, Patience I need
you to take the children (**yoruba**)

PATIENCE

Praise the lord. He is a merciful
God. Of course, where are you
going? (**Yoruba**)

Patience absorbs the full request and looks at Titi puzzled

PATIENCE (CONT'D)

Where are you going? (**yoruba**)

Monday looks at Aunty Titi through the rear view mirror and shakes his head in resignation as he knows what comes next.

AUNTY TITI

Oya kids, Kafilet go and enter
Aunty Patience car.

The girls, sensing something ominous, appeal to her

GIRLS

Mummy, no!

AUNTY TITI

Oya everyone come down, come down.
Monday, give me the keys, lets go!

Lola cries and pleads for her not leave them. Aunty Titi picks up Lola and wipes the tears from her face. Dele pulls Juwon closer to her.

AUNTY TITI (CONT'D)

Omolola, please don't be upset
(**Yoruba**) listen to me my dear,
Mummy is going to work. I will meet
you at home.

Aunty Titi enters the driver side as Monday scoots over, she starts the engine. The van screeches off.

There is a frightened confusion amongst the children as they are herded away by Kalifat.

21

INT. PEUGEOT 505, CHURCH GATES. CONTINUOUS.

21

The children, including Juwon, all clamber into the back of Aunty Patience's red Peugeot 505.

They are piled into the back with two other children. Patience looks back at the morose bunch in the car and suddenly begins to sing as they depart.

Her high energy is in stark opposition to that of the kids as she sings out the words to a popular praise worship song

PATIENCE

Oh lord my God, how excellent is
your name, in all the earth how
excellent is your name... Come on
children, sing along!

Juwon, sat on her sisters lap, feels a squeeze on her hand from Dele. The sisters look out the window at the Goliath Heavens Gate Ministries building. None of the children join in as Aunty Patience continues to fill the car with her song.

MUSIC: No white god by Oscar world peace begins to play.

The End.