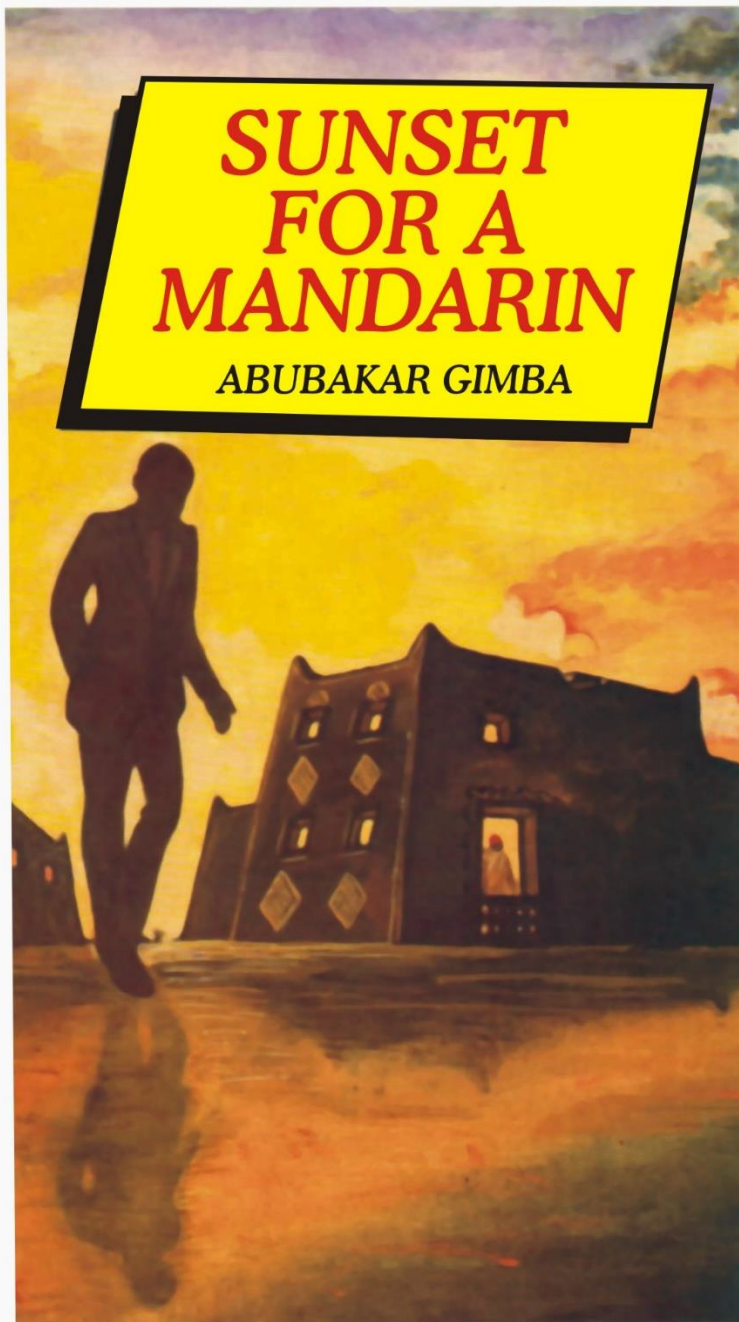


SUNSET FOR A MANDARIN

ABUBAKAR GIMBA



Sunset for a Mandarin is an account of a bureaucrat's enmeshment in a contrivance. A charge of gross financial misdemeanour is woven around his life like a spider's web.

Hamzah enjoyed the romance of office until the table was turned against him in an escalating crisis with his boss. High level intrigues ensured that his boss, Commander Abbud, remained adamant and the crisis saw Hamzah out of service, into yet more troubles...

This Abubakar Gimba's latest title, though shares the same thematic identity with his earlier novel - ***Innocent Victims***, is unique in itself. It has the elegant simplicity of his masterpiece ***Witnesses to Tears***, but with such profundity that it readily passes as a social commentary of our time; a rivetting story with an eye on the moral growth of man and society.

With this novel - the fourth of the thrillers, Abubakar Gimba has firmly established himself as one of Nigeria's leading novelists of our time.



Printed by Ahmadu Bello University Press Ltd.,
P.M.B. 1094 Samaru, Zaria, Nigeria. Tel: 0806594
E-mail: abupresslimited2005@yahoo.co.uk ;
Website: www.abupress.org

ISBN 978153017-0



SUNSET FOR A MANDARIN

ABUBAKAR GIMBA

Again,
for David,
and all my friends
who were around
during the darkness
that followed the sunset.

About the Author

Born in 1952 at Nasarawa in Lapai Local Government of Niger State, Abubakar Gimba attended Government College, Keffi, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (B.Sc. Econs, 1974), and the University of Cincinnati, U.S.A. (M.A. Econs, 1977). He joined the Civil Service in 1975 as a Planning Officer, first in the North-Western State, then later Niger State, rising to the position of the Permanent Secretary in 1981. He served in that capacity till his retirement in 1987. The Federal Military Government appointed him an Executive Director of Union Bank of Nigeria Plc in February 1988. Gimba has published three novels, *Trail of Sacrifice* (1985), *Witnesses to Tears* (1987) and *Innocent Victims* (1988).

1

Too cold for comfort. Literally. And too discomfortingly stuffy with the mixed smell of cigarettes and exotic cigars. Perhaps, the cold he was suffering from helped to compound the situation. So exasperating! Especially the smell: the smokers in the room did not seem to care a hoot. They just puffed away at their cigarettes and cigars as if they were the only fellows in the Oval Office. The smokers numbered just about a third of about twenty — odd people in the waiting room. Such an inconsideration! Yes, tyranny of the minority. And they puffed away with such relish and abandon that Hamzah wondered what the hell the warnings on cigarette packets were there for: cigarette smoking may be dangerous to your health, according to the Surgeon-General.

Quiet but dangerous absolution, he said to himself, as he reached for the nasal decongestant in his trouser's pocket: a mentholated inhaler. *May be dangerous*, he repeated the words to himself, with emphasis on the first two words. Typical evasiveness of bureaucrats! An attribute that they have developed into a high art. He shook his head gently, with a faint smile: he was himself a civil servant. A bird of the same feather.

But his smile disappeared as quickly as it came. *May be*: again, Hamzah repeated to himself. He readjusted himself in his seat. The danger lay in the non-committal

phrase. *May be not*; the die-hard smoker could quickly, and almost rightly, counter argue. And thus, they have indeed argued, both in words and in deed: he was now face-to-face with the deed, an unwilling spectator. A very irritating role Hamzah has found himself in. Particularly irksome to him were the smoking styles of some two gentlemen in the room. One was sitting at the farthest end of the room from where he sat. The smoker had covered his face with a newspaper which he seemed engrossed in reading. But he kept letting out such heavy clouds of smoke from his corner that one would have thought he was engaged in a repair work on an old-fashioned, miniature locomotive train engine. The other, not quite three chairs to the right of Hamzah, seemed joyously lost in his own acrobatics: the faint smile on his face suggested the satisfaction he was deriving from the multiple rings of smoke that flowed from his mouth in an unbroken continuum.

Hamzah put his inhaler in his right nostril and sniffed: a cold, peppery, minty sensation shot through to his head. He felt some discomfort that was immediately annulled by the relief the sniffing brought. He put the inhaler into his left nostril to sniff: this time his eyes were fixed on the chain of circles of smoke from the acrobatic smoker to his right. The man was obviously oblivious of the discomfort he was causing the other non-smokers in the room. Hamzah felt like yelling at him but restrained himself: people might think he was nuts. Besides, no one else was complaining or seemed to be bothered about the stuffiness and the smell. With a resignation of helplessness, he sank deeper into his chair.

And the near-freezing coldness of the Oval Office! Well, the room was centrally air-conditioned. But... yes: a temperature regulatory device must be somewhere. He began to throw his glances from one angle of the room to another, in search of a thermostat. He saw none. Instead,

his search led to the discovery of a set of spookish eyes, strategically installed so as to have every segment of the waiting-room covered. These surveillance devices made him uneasy. He shifted a little in his chair: so, he said to himself, someone somewhere is watching us.

Well, no matter. He had not said or done anything untoward. And those non-blinking eyes could not scan the thoughts of men. Sweet limitation. But somehow, Hamzah now wished they could: so that at least someone somewhere could know that he was in discomfort. Someone to readjust the thermostat, to inject some warmth into the room. And put a bold 'No Smoking' sign somewhere in there.

Wishful thinking!

He knew that the comfort of visitors to the National Lodge was not the concern of those electronic eyes. Security of its tenants was their prime task. Each waiting-room and sitting-room in the National Lodge, Hamzah had learnt, had not less than two pairs of these alert eyes. Constant. Ever-watching. And why not? The security of the life of the country's number one citizen could not be taken for granted. History was replete with cases of occupants who had their tenancy abruptly terminated, especially in the last quarter of the twentieth century, on account of their negligence of their personal security. The security agents could therefore not afford to be too complacent.

Hamzah looked fixedly at one of the eyes. *The raison d'être* for those eyes all over the National Lodge was acceptable. But as he sat there in full focus of one of them, at which he had fixed his gaze, his personal detestation for them increased: someone somewhere must be looking at him now, he thought. Why? He felt that his privacy was being invaded. He felt naked. He could not pick his nose, or lick his lips, or rub his eyes or even break the pimples on his face without someone somewhere watching him. Why?