

CHAPTER ONE

"Sister Ada, what do you want to do now that you've finally graduated university?" I asked helping my older cousin clean out her Mum's shop

"Finally bagged my first class degree you mean" She responded jokingly making us laugh.

"I'm serious." I said as the laugh died down.

"Well my mum wants me to go for my service year and come for my master's degree. I'll probably run my PhD too then I can finally get married." She said as I chorused it along with her. There was a short moment of awkward silence and I thought, why are our lives so rehearsed? I mean without your Mum's layout for your life." I replied dropping the box of candy I was sorting out. She did the same and shut the door to ensure our privacy from the house girl. She took a seat opposite me and reduced the volume of the song.

"Back in high school, I had two friends. We always wanted to tap like Nicki Minaj. We loved her so much that we knew everything about her. There was one time we performed at an all boys school and I didn't do well so I practiced hard then performed again at another event at the same school. I did so well that even the teachers told me they loved the rap then I wondered what if I became a rapper?" She said heaving a long sigh.

"Wow, I never knew you could rap. You know I sing too, I started going to the studio when I resumed my 100 level second semester this year." I said excitedly.

"You're really lucky. I didn't have that freedom because my parents work in the same university. I'm so jealous of you. You avoided your grandma's university and went to my parents'. Here you have more freedom since they don't keep an eye on you." She replied sadly

Do I really have freedom? I thought while smiling to look like I was okay.

I always wanted to write but my mum said I was wasting my time on nonsense.

"You can still start something. As long as you have passion for it. Your brother is a finalist and he still draws. You should be motivated." I said trying to cheer her up.

"Femi doesn't draw anymore. He's been busy." She replied drawing back. I knew something was wrong.

"Well I'm hungry. Let's get something to eat. I'm sure your mum would check the CCTV footage and wonder what we were discussing." I said as I got up to stretch my back.

"Oriental noodles from the shop or semo and melon soup from the house?" She asked.

I preferred the noodles but she had to pay for it later.

"Semo. I prefer morsels anyways. It's more satisfying." I replied as she smiled.

"Abeba must be hungry now. She has been cleaning the chickens cage for hours now." She said as we went inside the house.

"Yup. I'm going upstairs to play Sims on your laptop. Call me when you warm the soup." I said rushing upstairs to the laptop.

I left her place later in the evening and went to my Mum's shop. I met her sitting with some older women. I greeted each one of them and finally faced my mum and greeted her with a wide smile.

"I see you had fun at Ada's place. What if Femi and Ada?" She asked smiling back at me. To the world we had the best mother and daughter dynamic but to me, she was the main cause of my problems.

"I left brother Femi in school. He hasn't traveled back home since I left and sister Ada is fine." I replied going into the shop to drink water from her bottle.

"She must've fed you well too. I wonder what you guys talk about. She's your best friend now isn't she?" She asked making me feel uncomfortable.

"I ate well and she's not. We're just close." I replied smiling.

"Well your dad has been expecting you. Go home and make dinner before your brothers get back from school. When I get back we'll pack your bags for school tomorrow. You have to leave early so you don't get to Ado late."

"Okay. I'm making okra soup tonight. I've really missed it. I couldn't eat it in school." I replied happily.

"I also love okra soup but your brother doesn't. What would he eat? And you can't make him a separate soup. I'm saving gas." She said going through her accounts.

"Oh okay. I'll just cook vegetable then dad also prefers it. Bye I'll head home now." I replied as I left the shop.

The day was over and everyone went to bed around 10pm. I went to get food from the kitchen and then locked myself in my room with food and enough water. Then I brought out my journal and started writing with ink and emptiness.

Am I happy? Why am I living? What are my dreams? Why do I feel empty? Ever since I got diagnosed with ADHD my response to certain triggers have changed because I understand my feelings more. But what about my anxiety and depression? I feel a great sense of emptiness and I wonder do I even have dreams?

I sighed and tore off the note then I burned it with my lighter. That was my way of journaling. The book was just filled with torn pages to any other person but to me, each page contained my hidden pains.

I tossed and turned on the bed, it always felt weird ever since my mum said I had no room in the house. I was also scared of falling asleep, all my painful memories had become nightmares haunting my subconscious mind.

CHAPTER TWO

I arrived at my hostel by 3pm and called my mum to inform her that I got back safely. I cleaned my place and managed to eat something then I jumped into my bed and rolled in it. I missed the

comfort of my bed, blanket and my personal space.

I went through my messages and all I had were a bunch of random texts. I didn't have friends and I never had any for as long as I could remember.

I posted a picture on my status and it was like I sent out a beacon calling for messages. I started getting texts, even from my ex lover.

"Hey beautiful, you look so fresh, I love your shape, I wish I had freedom like you, are you back to school?" I read out scrolling through the long list of replies I got.

I still felt empty. They probably have no idea how many demons I fight. I lit up my smoke and started into empty space then I asked myself a question that had always bothered me, what is the meaning of life?

I got a notification and saw that my class governor announced the release of our results. I logged in my account on the school portal and scrolled through my results. I was unimpressed but I knew telling my parents would make them extremely happy for the whole day. I decided not to show it yet, I wanted peace and quiet.

I spent the next two days inside studying, writing, smoking and singing. I only went out a few times to charge my power bank.

I got a call from Hibo, a student I recorded a song with. He wanted us to meet at his place so that we could write a song together and I agreed. I finally got to meet someone. I dressed up and headed to his place.

"Hey. Sorry I called all of a sudden." He apologized as soon as he opened the door for me.

"Oh it's fine. I'm glad you called. I just have to leave soon, I have a party tonight." I replied taking my seat.

"So do you want me to get you anything?" He asked staring at me.

"No it's fine. I already ate." I replied feeling uncomfortable under his intense stare.

"I already got two cans of alcohol. We can have it while we drink." He said going to get the drinks.

why did you ask me then? I thought as I smiled and collected the drink while thanking him.

"You're welcome. So let's write our verses for the song. We can come up with a chorus later." He said playing the beat we wanted to work on with his speaker.

I sipped the alcohol and wrote. The lyrics kept flowing and in no time I was done with the alcohol and song. He was surprised.

"I haven't gotten anywhere yet. I guess I'll work on it and update you when I'm done. I don't want to delay you." He said changing the beat to a rap song.

"Okay then. You can go through my lines to see if you'd find anything." I replied.

"Sure. You're a heavyweight drinker, I'm surprised." He said wondering why I wasn't drunk.

"Well, there were times where I used to be a lightweight I just learned how to drink and increased my tolerance level." I replied drawing back as he tried sitting close to me..

"I have to leave now, I have a party to attend." I said as I hurriedly got my things and stood up.

"Oh okay. I'll text you when I'm done with the song." He replied as he got up to see me off. I headed to the party. It was an house party organized by students and I wanted to perform one of my songs.

I got to the party just when it started and i wasn't even surprised by the fleet of cars parked by the party guests. I just wonder where they got the money for.

I had no friends at the party so I just sat outside enjoying the moon and my smoke.

A guy walked up to me and i could tell that he was rich judging from his outfit but then again, it could all be fake.

"Are you alone tonight?" He asked.

"Yeah." I replied trying to keep the conversation short.

"Great, me too. My friends invited me over but I'm bored . Would you like to join me?" He asked again.

"No. I'm okay on my own. Sorry I have to head inside now." I replied as I discharged myself from the situation.

Getting into the party, I remembered why I hated events. Sweaty people, loud music, unhygienic atmosphere and the most annoying part, boys who just come to flaunt their wealth to girls. They sprayed money and the girls there rushed to pick the Naira notes. Fighting and stepping on themselves, I was embarrassed for them. I would never go crazy for money, money should go crazy for me.

The girls there stared at me with hatred in their eyes. They perceived me as proud and I soon caught the attention of the boys, like a bright light attracting moths. They wondered "who is that girl that won't get swayed by our money."

I didn't have much money but I wasn't there for the money. I was interested in the experience I would get that night.

The party was over and I went home immediately. It was a waste of time and I couldn't get to perform.

My dream that night was vivid and the interpretation was what bothered me

CHAPTER THREE

I woke up around 11am and freshened up then I went to plug my power bank. I felt people staring at me and it was like I knew what they were thinking.

"She's so mysterious. She always walks alone. She has no friends. She probably does low key hookups. Why is she so proud and secretive."

But I get that. I would think the same about myself if I met me from someone else's point of view. I look like I have everything in my life together. I dress well, I smile to everyone and I never get into fights but my life taught me not to judge a book by its cover because deep inside me is a girl longing for help and love.

The next day was my birthday and I wasn't really big on birthdays. Back home, a birthday is just a day with extra work for me because I have to cook ceremonial meals. I have never gotten a gift nor a cake for my birthday. Although my brothers got bicycles, cakes and even a VR box headset for their birthday gifts, I never got jealous. At least I got to be alone and finally have the peace and quiet I always wish for.

I wondered why I hated noise. Was it because I grew up with people who only communicated with loud arguments?

The day started and I prayed before getting out of bed as usual. I freshened up and cooked myself a delicious meal. My mum called me on a video call and wished me a happy birthday then she went on to complain about how slim I was.

She was never worried about why I was slim because she never really cared. She was just worried about her image, she didn't want people to think that I was suffering.

The call ended and there was a long silence again. Did I really want peace and quiet or do I crave an intimate and deep connection.

I walked up to the mirror and started at myself. I had a haircut because braiding my hair was expensive and I couldn't afford it. But people praised the haircut, they said I looked better with it.

Yes I did look better but no I wasn't happy. I was satisfied with it but if I could afford it why not? I found myself giving excuses like braiding was painful and stressful and wigs just feels uncomfortable and itchy on me.

I didn't get a birthday text from my boyfriend so I decided to call him.

"Hey Clea, I'm with my friends right now and it's really loud here. I'd call you back or is there something urgent you want to say?" He asked hurriedly.

"No. I just wanted to tell you today is my birthday." I replied trying to sound grounded because my voice started getting shaky.

"Oh okay. Have fun then and let me know how your day goes." He said as I ended the call.

I cried and finally my birthday was complete.

It always ended in tears. Sad? Happy? Even my mum wished I wasn't born. I was a result of bad decisions so I was unwanted. She always said she stayed with my dad because of me and it made her lose better options and my dad always called me a mistake. So I was glad my birthday, the day that ruined my parents life was finally over.

I broke up with my boyfriend that night. He had always been oblivious to my feelings but that day I just had to let him go. He didn't even know I didn't like to be called by my name, it brought back memories that sent shivers to my spine. It was the same name I was called in my toxic

home.

The next day was a Monday so I went to class. I wondered what I was doing there because I already studied the entire syllabus on my own.

During class, a group of theater and media arts students passed by. They were loud and playful but every other person called them a nuisance. I envied them. My mum never liked the idea of me in that department, she wanted me to study a foreign language so I would work at the embassy and there I was making her happy with straight A's and a promising first class.

The lecture ended and I packed my things and left immediately. My course mates hated me for one reason or the other but I didn't have the strength or motivation to try to make friends with them. I tried in my first year but the girls were mean. Always gossiping and trying to loot me. I was already used to it. Back in high school I got bullied throughout and even got beaten up in senior year. My childhood memories, I wonder where that went. The only memories I had were of me getting scolded or flogged for doing something wrong.

The next day I woke up to a commotion going on outside. I was unbothered so I didn't ask. I later found out that a girl was raped. I wondered why rapes still happened. I've been a victim thrice and I almost lost my life during the third time and since then I always wished that I was the last. I reported one of the rape cases to my mum and when we reported to the police, the policewoman called me an animal. Apparently I the victim was in the wrong.

I've been through my fair amount of injustice and all I want is just a good life. I want to afford the food that I like, to discover my hobbies, to know what a real relationship feels like, to have good friends, to wear good clothes and to be loved for who I am.

But I wonder what I did so wrong since birth. I've been such a good person but why hasn't life been good? Surgeries after surgeries, heartbreaks after heartbreaks, trauma from a narcissistic mother and emotionally absent father, abusive childhood and whatnot. I never blamed my parents. My mum grew up as an house girl with a strict mistress even though her father was rich. She got pregnant with me in her first year in university and my grandma took responsibility and funded her education. Then my dad, he was the least favored child of his parents and had always lived under stress due to high expectations the family has for him as the first child. His younger brother always disrespected him but his mum never saw anything wrong with it. He let out his anger on me as a child and it gave me a couple of scars but at least, it got the stress out so he could feel relieved. I've always been a therapist and I wonder when I'd get my own therapy.

I never bothered them for money because they were also funding my siblings education and the economy has been tight. I try my best for myself, freelancing, helping students with assignments and backing up or getting featured by school artists but it has never been enough considering the cost of living.

I'm only eighteen but I've survived three suicide attempts and have gotten setup for things I have no knowledge of.

I'm tired of it all but I can't be suicidal
My only dream has become survival
I try so hard but I can't be social
I've loved so much but I never get the love back
The story goes on but I hope for revival
I need help so I'll wait for the universe.
And then I'll wonder if I can dream again.