

Doors are merely portals to many undiscovered worlds...

– Balogun Oladimeji

A Night That Never Happened

by

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I recently stumbled upon a hidden staircase concealed behind a rusty iron door in my apartment. That door had been locked for as long as I could remember, and my curiosity had always gnawed at me. But it wasn't until recently that I finally pried it open and glimpsed the secrets it harbored.

My landlord once told me it was just an old storeroom, and I didn't need to bother about it since I already had four rooms to myself. But that didn't quell my curiosity. One rainy afternoon, armed with a flashlight, I stood before that iron door, my heart pounding with a mix of excitement and trepidation. The air hung heavy with anticipation as my trembling fingers grasped the cold handle.

With a reluctant creak, the door swung open, revealing a pitch-black staircase that seemed to descend into eternity. I flicked on my flashlight, and the beam revealed suspended dust motes, drifting lazily in the stagnant air. An eerie breeze whispered through the long-forgotten corridor, carrying with it the echoes of long-lost decades and the musty scent of disuse.

The wooden steps beneath my feet groaned as I took cautious steps forward, as if welcoming an unexpected guest. Faded wallpaper clung to the walls, its patterns barely discernible now. Picture frames adorned the walls, displaying moments frozen in time.

My mind raced with questions as I ventured deeper.

The journey down the stairs led to an expansive chamber, a space that had been transformed into an abandoned chapel. The room stretched from the front altar to the back, with rows of benches flanking both sides and a narrow aisle in between. No roof, no windows; just walls covered in aging plaster etched with cryptic symbols.

My fingers traced the labyrinthine inscriptions etched into the walls, their meaning eluding me. A frigid wind whispered eerie secrets, and fear began to gnaw at my resolve.

The altar at the front of the chapel appeared pristine, in stark contrast to my expectations of abandonment. An ancient book, resembling an encyclopedia, rested on a white cloth between gothic-style candlesticks. Its pages bore enigmatic symbols reminiscent of those on the walls. As I turned the pages, the scent of ages past wafted into my nostrils.

A crucifix, hanging upside down against the pale gray wall behind the altar, caught my attention. To the right of the crucifix stood a door, nearly identical to the one that led to the staircase, only older and rusted.

The discovery of an abandoned chapel beneath my apartment was intriguing, yet it left me unsatisfied. The appearance of another door kindled my curiosity, urging me to venture further into the unknown.

Despite my apprehension, I pressed the frigid handle of the new door, which swung open to reveal yet another darkness, but this time without the comfort of a staircase. The door slammed shut behind me, exposing me to a starry night sky.

I had stepped into a different time.

The night air was frigid against my skin, far colder than the chapel's interior. Unlike the chapel's eerie desolation, this place hummed with life. My footsteps no longer echoed, and the emptiness seemed to have been replaced with a subtle presence.

Flickers of light danced in the distance, resembling distant bonfires. I turned off my flashlight and cautiously made my way toward the source of the light.

The scene before me was a stark departure from my urban life. I had been transported to a rustic village, akin to those depicted in Nollywood films. Simple huts dotted an open field, their presence conjuring vivid images of traditional Nigerian life. Seeking refuge, I hid behind one of the huts and watched the distant revelry around a blazing bonfire.

Around the fire, masked figures swayed to the rhythm of drums. Each mask bore a unique design, their vibrant colors and shapes concealing the identities of the dancers. Some masks were adorned with feathers, while others portrayed ancient deities.

Amid the hypnotic dance, a man was bound and placed into the fire as an offering. His agonized screams were drowned out by the relentless drumming. The masked dancers moved with an entrancing grace, their outstretched hands seemingly tracing constellations in the night sky

Fear gripped me, each heartbeat a thunderous drumbeat of impending peril. Shallow breaths quickened as my frantic eyes scanned for an escape, but only sinister shadows whispered dark secrets. Survival became my sole objective.

Hastening away from the bonfire, I glanced back to ensure I wasn't pursued and sprinted toward the door. Bursting through it, I sealed off the nightmarish scene behind me.

Gasping for breath and unable to support my frame on my quaky legs, I pressed my back against the brown rusty iron door and sank to the ground. I found myself back in the chapel.

After a moment of recovery, I reluctantly climbed the creaking stairs, retracing my steps to my apartment. I closed the door behind me, determined to shield myself from the inexplicable mysteries that lay below..

Glancing at the wall clock, I noted the time—just after 3 p.m. The enigma deepened, and a torrent of unanswered questions flooded my mind. How could it be night beneath while day persisted here? Was this reality or the product of a deluded mind?

Unable to bear the burden of this confounding knowledge alone, I dialed my landlord's number, urgently imploring his presence.

An hour later, he arrived, his expression a mix of curiosity and annoyance. I recounted my bewildering journey, explaining how the iron door had revealed a chapel and a village untouched by time.

Leading him to the door, I anticipated the sight of the staircase leading into the depths. Yet, to our astonishment, we found a room filled with cobwebs, discarded furniture, and boxes laden with forgotten belongings.

My jaw hung agape, and I felt an overwhelming sense of foolishness.

“Sir, I swear there was a staircase,” I stammered, my voice a mixture of surprise and confusion. “I’d swear on my late father’s life, there was a staircase that led down.”

“And why can’t I see it now? Kunle, I didn’t take you for a man that smokes. I thought you were responsible.” His stern gaze bore into me.

“Smoke? No, sir. I have never smoked in my life,” I protested, the bewilderment intensifying. “But...”

“But what? But there is a staircase inside this bungalow that leads into the ground. A house I built myself.” He hissed and walked away. “I must be a joke to you.”

“I’m really sorry, *oga* landlord. I didn’t mean to...” I muttered to myself, still feeling stupid. “What is going on? But I saw it. Or am I going mad?”

With tangled thoughts and emotions, I settled into a chair across from the perplexing door after my landlord departed, my gaze locked upon its enigmatic facade. I pondered whether my previous encounter had been reality or a phantasmagoric creation of my mind.

With trepidation guiding my steps, I approached the mysterious door once more. My quivering hand reached for the frigid metal handle, its surface sending shivers up my arm. Before daring to turn it, I offered a silent prayer to the universe, hoping against hope that my sanity remained intact.

My heart raced as the door inched open, and I held my breath. Slowly, it swung wider, and to my astonishment, the room no longer contained forgotten furniture and relics. Instead, the staircase, which had vanished in the presence of my landlord, had miraculously returned.

A shiver of fear coursed through me. "What *juju* is this?" I wondered aloud, recoiling from the door. It was as though reality itself had taken an unexpected, eerie turn.

Driven by an insatiable curiosity or perhaps an inexplicable force that eluded my understanding, I reached for my flashlight and descended the creaking stairs once more. Each step groaned ominously beneath my weight, echoing ominously in the profound silence. Doubts clawed at me, urging me to reconsider, but an irresistible force pushed me onward.

Upon reaching the base of the staircase, the chapel lay before me, just as I had left it, except now, the altar was dimly lit by a few flickering candles. Their shadowless flames danced with an ethereal grace in the surrounding darkness.

A man knelt at the center of the flickering candles, his back turned to me, his posture radiating deep reverence, as if engaged in profound prayer. Another enigmatic tableau that bewildered my senses.

I extinguished my torchlight and began to retreat on tiptoe, intending to retrace my steps up the staircase. Just as I neared the door, a deep and commanding voice filled the chamber, its echoes reverberating off the chapel's aged walls. "And why are you in such a hurry to leave, drummer boy?"

Drummer boy.

I froze, as if an invisible hand had seized me. The voice exuded authority and yet carried a strange familiarity.

The man rose from his kneeling position, gesturing for me to draw closer. "Come."

Perhaps it was the irresistible force or the beguiling cadence of his speech, but I found myself compelled to obey. I moved forward, a potent blend of fear and fascination guiding my cautious steps, drawing me closer to the enigmatic altar.

As I approached, the man became more visible, a towering figure garbed in a flowing black cassock adorned with a clerical collar. I surmised him to be a reverend father, his presence radiating an aura of authority and enigma.

I observed his features with a mix of awe and trepidation. His beard, impeccably groomed, bore traces of silver woven amidst the darkness. His bald head exuded the polished gloss of wisdom and experience.

“Omo Āyān,” he addressed me as I reached the altar.

Omo Āyān (the progeny of the drum god). How did he know I was from that lineage? How did he have an idea of who I was at all? A torrent of questions came on me like an unending downpour, drowning my mind in a tornado of wonder.

“How...?” I started, my words fading like leaves caught in a sudden breeze.

“I know who you are, drummer boy.” He said, his smile carrying the weight of ancient wisdom. “The people, they have waited a long time for you. They have yearned for this day to come, so they can celebrate and be happy once more.”

“Sorry, what people?” I asked, my curiosity piqued.

“The village,” he answered.

With a sweeping gesture, he extinguished all but one of the candles, plunging the chapel into dimness.

“The village?” I repeated, my gaze drifting towards the door behind the altar. “The same village where I witnessed a man being sacrificed in a gruesome manner?”

“That is why they need you. They need you for all that to stop. You are the answer to their prayers,” he said.

I struggled to grasp the unfolding revelation. The enigma that had shrouded my existence only grew more complex, and my grip on reality seemed perilously fragile.

“How? I don’t have any business with these people,” I protested.

“Indeed, you do. You see, those people are Æyã descendants like yourself, and the only way they speak to their god is only through drums. Every year, Æyã passes a message across to these people through the talking drum. He tells them what they need to do for their village to flourish and be protected. But for the past few years now, they have lacked a good talking drummer that would help them convey Æyã’s messages. So, as a way of punishing themselves, they sacrifice a first child from any family every year. Although, Ifa told them a man would walk through this door and he will be the one to save them from their troubles,” he explained.

My words faltered. I tried to speak, but found myself utterly speechless.

“I think you have the wrong person, because I don’t even...” He cut me short.

“You are the right person, Ayankunle. The chosen one.” he declared, his outstretched hand guiding me toward the door. As he held the handle, a glimpse of light pierced the darkness, and my heart quickened. I began to regret every decision that had brought me to this juncture. “The people are waiting for you.”

At the other side of the door was a boisterous crowd cheering on my arrival. The women, adorned in vibrant outfits fashioned from a kaleidoscope of “Adire” textiles, stood amongst men that dressed in “Aso ofi” attire and “Kembe” trousers, whose collective presence was a symphony of colors and culture.

Amid jubilant festivities, two brawny men lifted me onto their shoulders, leading a spirited crowd through the village's vibrant streets. We reached the king's palace, where the reception was like a royal audience with the Kabiyesi himself, enveloping me in warmth and attention.

Kabiyesi's voice, rich with history and longing, filled the air as he spoke of the countless years they had waited for my arrival. He then summoned a group of men dressed in all-white garments

to bring out the sacred drum that was destined for me. Panic swelled within me, a fervent urge to explain that I had never touched a drum in my life, unlike my father who did his entire life.

Ignoring my pleas, they handed me the ornate drum, its enigmatic symbols foreign in my grasp. I trembled, and the crowd, engulfed in a hush, watched as I clung to the drum. They waited in silence, expecting me to begin.

In that moment, time and destiny converged, and I found myself standing at the precipice of a choice that would forever alter the course of my life. I admitted my inexperience. Disappointment rippled through them, and Kabiyesi's anger demanded my immediate execution.

The two hefty men who had carried me earlier seized me with an iron grip, dragging me toward a towering tree. There, they bound me tightly, my back pressed against the rough bark, while archers poised themselves at a distance, arrows nocked and ready to deliver the sentence of death.

Arrows leapt from their taut bows, a sinister whisper of death in the air. In that moment, time paused and contorted like a playful specter. The inevitability of my demise loomed, and with a heavy heart, I surrendered, closing my eyes in the anticipation of a fatal end.

My body bolted up and my eyes burst open as one of the arrows struck me. Sweat glistened on my trembling skin as I found myself in my apartment chair, opposite the Iron door.

A dream?

I hoisted myself from the chair, wobbly, and approached the door. My fingers trembled as I clenched the door handle. Slowly, I twisted it open, and what lay beyond left me utterly astounded. The staircase was gone, and what remained was just a room coated in cobwebs, old furniture shrouded in dust, and abandoned boxes.

Had it all been a dream, then? The question hung in the air, unanswerable. My eyes wandered the dimly lit storeroom, and it landed upon a tattered piece of paper with cryptic symbols etched on it.

THE END?

Oga Landlord - Mr Landlord

Juju - sorcery

Àyān - the drum god in Yoruba mythology

Omo Àyān - the progeny of the drum god

Kabiyesi - King

Adire, Aso ofi, Kembe - Yoruba traditional wear.