

LET THERE BE LIGHT

"Stop!" I yelled, kicking his hands off my legs. My heart palpitating, head pounding, my skin pebbled with shivers and cold crawling up my spine, I struggled with him.

"Let me be!" Another kick that sent him skidding across the room. He puffed, chin swelling and ready to spill out a wave of exploding shrilling cry.

This meant death; if not literal.

"Hey. Hey. Calm down, I promise I didn't mean to!" I ignored the sick feeling I had initially and carried my kid brother in my arms before he had the chance to cry.

"I'll buy you candy if you keep shut."

It worked. His crumpled face broke into a sweet smile. I huffed before letting him go.

"Mummy say morning food."

"Was that why you came to wake me?" He nodded and I rolled my eyes knowing why every meal was important to my mom.

It was hard to get us to do morning devotion but she always knew how to get us. Before she allowed any of us to touch her food, we always had to pray. During this, she gets to shoot daggers of guilt tripping methods at us. I wasn't ready for another round of guilt tripping us for not being as religious as she is. Especially not when I have a daring game date with my friends later that evening. Shola had promised to bring a Ouija board but Yemi said he had a better game.

"Good morning, mom." I greeted, dragging the dining chair backwards with a force that spoke of a newly brewed grudge.

"Good morning, Hannah."

"It's Anna, mom." I corrected with a smile.

"Thank you for the reminder, 'Hannah'. Can you give us a prayer?" I shared a surprised look with my older brother who was initially busy with his smartphone. He chuckled.

"Since when did you become a pastor, doofus?"

I hissed.

"Nobody is a doofus in Jesus name. Shut up and let her give us a prayer."

Dad joined us later and we were complete. Mom, Dad, my older brother named Chris, my kid brother named Samuel which fitted perfectly because unlike us, he delighted in Christian stuff. Then, there's me, Anna. Together we are a perfect family just as we are a disaster.

"Father Lord," I began with a feeling of distaste. "Bless this food..."

"Thank the Lord first." Mom corrected, seemingly enjoying my struggle. "Samuel can pray better than you do."

With a sigh, I continued. "Thank you for this food. Bless the provider, the hands that prepared the food and the stomachs that will consume it. Also, help me today as I will be attempting a very daring game with my friends." I quickly inserted the last one before grabbing my spoon to dig food into my mouth.

Something strange happened however to my attempt at humour. It seemed to keep me at ease. Almost as if I was being protected by some force. But it didn't last.

"Amen." Everyone choruses. Mom looked surprised.

I knocked on the oakwood door a few more times before it opened. Angel invited me in and I could see my other friends sitting around a small table. Power had been restored by the PHCN so it made this more satisfying.

Me, Eliana, Rowland, Yemi, Shola and Rachael, the only child of my mom's church pastor. We sat around the table as we discussed the game.

"Mom and Dad are away on a business trip so we have the house to ourselves." Angel came in with a tray filled with glasses of juice. "Let us hear what Yemi brought for us this time."

Yemi dropped a box that looked old and still had specks of mud on it on the table. We all gasped at the unique markings on the box. "This is even better than Ouija board or Charlie Charlie and Space Aliens intercom."

"What is this?" Eliana asked, her excited smile exposing a set of white teeth set apart from her really dark skin.

"My dad is an archeologist who works around the globe as you all know. This is one of the collections they were able to dig up in China. Fortunately, he got to keep it with him since he found it until they could find a safe museum capable of securing it." Everyone gasped again.

"Can you open it?" Shola asked and he nodded.

"This was something the Chinese used to make a wish from a particular spirit. Stupid right?"

They all nodded but I didn't. I felt the energy again but this time, it didn't feel pure. It was as if the wind had been corrupted but I didn't care. As an adrenaline junkie, this was cool.

"Hey," I called. "Maybe one day, we could have our own channel to stream all these brave things we do. As Africans, no one has ever had the bravery to dare everything we have ever dared to do. Who knows? In months, we could be millionaires."

"True."

"You're right."

Their affirmations made me feel at ease.

"Let's do this." I whispered and Yemi unlocked the box. The lights blinked a few seconds and stood still. I flinched but caught myself instantly. Everyone knows me to be the bravest. I couldn't lose my title now.

Yemi flipped the lid open and it was empty except for a small gnome inside it. Flashes of images snapped before me and I let out a yelp. By the time I'd catch myself, eyes were on me.

"Are you okay, Anna?"

"Yes...yes, I am. Come on."

"You know," Raymond started. "No one's gonna blame you if you run outta the back door now."

Right. My biggest rival is here. Another reason to not lose my guard.

"I said," I replied through gritted teeth and a forced smile. "I am fine."

Yemi brought out the gnome and placed it on the table, carrying the table and keeping it under the table. "We just have to try this in a darker place..." the power flipped off before he could finish his sentence, making us yell suddenly.

"Oh my god!" Angel shouted. "That was startling and so not fair, Nepa!"

I brought out my phone and tried to turn on the flashlight but surprisingly, it said the battery was low. "I charged my phone before coming."

"That's strange because my phone is also low."

"It was 87 percent before I got here. It's now 2 percent." Another person spoke up.

"What's going on?"

"HELLO!"

A flash of green light and we jumped in fright at what stood before us. A giant gnome with a red hat.

"What the hell is that?"
Rachael screamed.

"Language, Rachie." Angel snapped. "You of all people should know that."

"There's a giant Gnome in front of us and all you could pick out was Rachael's language!?"
Raymond freaked.

"I thought you were the tough one."

"Silence!" The gnome roared so loud I wondered why the neighbours were not knocking on our door to ask what the commotion was about.

I was wrong. There was indeed a knock. I rose to get it but like a magnet, I was pulled to the other side in the air, my back hitting the wall with a powerful force. I screamed.

"What is going on there!?" The voice asked in pidgin.

Angel tried crawling to the door but he saw her too and threw her against the wall. Unlike me, Angel passed out immediately.

The gnome said something in a Chinese language but when we looked on in fear, he cackled and repeated whatever it was in English.

"You only get one wish. Make it or I'll kill you all."

"I wish to get out of here alive, you ugly beast!" Raymond snapped.

"You idiot! What have you done?" Eliana pushed Raymond to the floor. "You couldn't ask us what we wanted first."

"Who the hell cares? I just want to get out of here safely."

"You don't get to decide, Raymond." Yemi chipped in.

"Oh, because you brought the box?" The two boys were now facing each other, eyes locked in a touchdown. "You forgot you didn't bring a manual, a technical know-how and lastly, a constitution to guide the use of the stupid gnome."

"I grant your wish, boy."

With a smile, Raymond walked to the door and flipped a salute before going out. However, all we heard after he stepped out of the threshold was a painful cry.

"But he made his wish to leave here safely!" I confronted the gnome which laughed at my words. "What's funny?"

"He said to leave here safely and not outside." Then, a cackle. I was boiling within me.

We need to find a way to defeat this gnome without getting hurt. But it seemed impossible with its size, wit and powers. "Yemi," I called. "Where is the box?"

He stuttered but in realisation quickly went to the table to check under. I looked at him expectedly but he looked back at me in shock and sadness.

"It's not here."

"What do you mean it's not here?" I was stopped mid sentence as a force lifted me off the ground, my throat twisting in pain. I wanted to shout but it only caused more pain.

"You seem to be the wiser one here and the bravest." The gnome remarked, its ugly face facing me. Its body emitted a green glow but if one looked harder, a cackle of electricity travelled between each speck of light. Where did it get the electricity from?

When I saw light from the window, it only meant one thing. There was no power outage in other houses except ours. I knew instantly that he had caused the lights to go off here. But our phones?

There was only one explanation for this. He was feeding off our power.

I was in anguish so I couldn't brainstorm further. I could only kick my legs in worry. Worried that I would die without apologising to my mom for taking spirituality with levity, worried that I wouldn't buy my kid brother the candy, worried that if I truly stand before God, I wouldn't be able to account for my life.

I could feel him snuffing life out of my body, his energy mixing with mine. Something cracked and by the way I wheezed, I figured that was my rib. Tears flowed out of my eyes, speaking words I couldn't say with my mouth. Knowing there was nothing or nobody to help me, I prayed to God in my mind.

As my fragile breaths waned, I felt my resistance crumble. I had scoffed at faith my whole life, but now, in the throes of mortality's embrace, I whispered in my mind desperately, tears mingling with surrender, "If anyone's listening, God, please save me. I'll believe, I'll change, just give me one more chance."

There was silence with no glimmer of hope coming from anywhere. Instead, I got thrown against the wall. Eliana and Yemi rushed to my side but they got paralyzed and eventually fell, blood gushing out of their mouths.

But inside my mind, I resolved. "Even if you don't save me, I believe in you, God. I know you are alive and you're strong."

The gnome laughed and approached me. "I don't know why but I can't kill you." He pointed at me as I struggled to stand amidst a swollen face, broken arm, broken ribs and weak limbs.

"And I doubt you ever will." I retorted. "For the Lord said, "Let there be light" and there was light."

The power was restored and the gnome stupid laughed in excitement but as he gulped the excess energy, he increased in size until he was too filled and he broke apart.

I passed out after but I knew in my heart that we won even though three mornings after, my friends denied such a thing happened. Rowland was alive and well. Same as Eliana and Yemi. Nothing else changed except my belief.

"I'm not sure you haven't started taking Alcohol, Anna." Rachael had said when I decided to confide in her. "And you're not even 18 yet. I'll pray for you."

"You don't need to. I'm fine." I yelled after her.

With a frustrated sigh, I left the school hall and resolved to stay away from Angel's house for a long time. What could possibly go wrong if I simply stayed away from my friends. Maybe a lot could happen but I was ready to face it. I had God and that puts my mind at rest.

A knock sounded on the door one evening when I was preparing to follow my mum to a Bible study program. When I opened the door, my friends stood before me.

"Hi. I understand your mum is going to be in church for a long time, your dad is not home and Samuel and Chris have gone to play football. Why don't we try another daring game?" Angel said excitedly.

"What game?" I asked curiously, not aware my mom was listening from behind.

When Yemi brought out the game it was the same old box. "It's a wish box that my daddy brought from China."

"I'm sorry but no."

Before they could say another word, I shut the door to their face and turned to my mum who had a proud smile on her face. She gave me a tight hug but nothing felt as relaxing as her last words.

"Don't worry. You have a friend in Jesus."