

# **SEEKING CELESTIAL LIGHTS**

**(A SHORT STORY)**

**BY: ORESHADE ADEWANDE**

If you are reading this, I am probably dead, or I botched the job and I'm in a hospital or somewhere like that, or maybe the morgue (sorry about the gross imagery but I have to get your attention somehow).

When I decided to end things, I thought hard of different ways to do it, for dramatics, I could go to Yaba and walk onto the train tracks, or I could jump down from the rooftop of a building, then I thought about the person that would have to clean up my remains.

I was not always like this you know, there was a time I was normal, there was a time I had dreams and aspirations, I have never wished for this or wanted to be this way. I have never wanted to be a burden, I just wanted to be normal.

The first time I knew something was wrong was when they became louder, it was like someone else was in my head, I was fifteen, and preparing for junior WAEC. I started hearing voices in my head and they felt very real. I did not mind at first, they made me feel less lonely, I was a loner who had no one to talk to so when one day a voice started conversing with me, I really did not mind.

Then one day, we were writing a test, I did not prepare, and the questions were difficult, I was on my seat sweating when I heard someone laughing. The guy seating behind me was making weird faces at me, he was laughing at me, I was confused, 'why was he laughing?', then they started repeating in shrill voices, 'They are laughing at you, they are laughing you, they know you did not study'.

The laughter kept getting louder and closer, everybody joined him, I did not understand what was going on, 'why were they all laughing at me?' I kept screaming, 'shut up, shut up', but they did not stop.

I started panicking, trying to stop them from touching me, I was so scared, the teacher had joined them, she was not stopping them, they kept moving closer, I kept screaming at her to stop them. I had jumped off my seat and was standing on the table at this point, other teachers were coming, they kept trying to pull me from the table. Then, someone hit my ankle, and I fell.

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The next time I woke up, I see white everywhere, I was about to panic when I recognized the smell, that distinct antiseptic and bleach hospital smell, I tried standing up but the sting of the drip's needle pulled me back, I stared at the blood that dripped out for a long time, I tried to figure out how I got there. 'What the hell had happened?' A nurse opened the seclusion curtain, she noticed my bleeding hand 'Did you pull it?' I shook my head. She went out of the partition and came back with a cart; she pulled a stool next to my bed and started fixing my hand. I asked what was wrong with me. She said I had a nervous breakdown, that I would be okay. They released me the next day to go back to the hostel.

I went back to the hostel on a Sunday, I still did not understand what was going on, I tried to figure out what had happened, but I could not. There was no one in my room when I got there, my roommates had gone to the church. I sat on my bed and just kept staring at the wall, I did not know what was happening. My roommates met me that way when they got back. Sola, my bunk mate ran to my side, she hugged me tightly, then she asked what happened, 'They were laughing, why were they laughing?' I asked her, with tears in my eyes while I hugged her. She pulled back with a confused frown, 'Who was laughing?' 'Everybody, they kept laughing and I freaked out' I told her. She sat me down, and told me with the sincerest look in her eyes, "nobody laughed, the class was silent, everybody said you just started freaking out during the test" I tried telling her that they were lying, that I was sure that they were laughing, but I could not get it out. Sola kept hugging me and telling me I would be okay. You might wonder why I would trust Sola's words better than my own memory, I did not a 100 percent believe her, I just knew she would not lie to me. She was like an older sister to me.

That night, I dreaded going to my class, we had compulsory evening reading prep, so I had to go. I was so scared that they would start laughing again, what if everybody insists that I had just lost it on my own. Would the whole school gaslight me or was I truly out of my mind. When I got to class, everybody kept looking at me strangely, but nobody came up to me or said anything. I could not bring myself to do anything all night, I just sat and stared.

At the end of the class, no one had still said anything to me. People were packing their things to leave but I sat there, just staring. Then, I felt a light tap on my shoulder, it was Usman, the

boy that had started laughing. I saw his lips move like he was saying something, but I could not hear him. I felt like a bucket of freezing water was being poured on my head, and as it trickled down it became hot. A part of me was scared and the other was nervous. He kept looking at me then I realised he was mouthing the words ‘Are you okay?’ I broke out of my trance and replied “yes, yes I am.”

He turned to stand in front of me and I clearly heard him say “what happened that day?” I was furious what the fuck did he mean what happened that day, “you were laughing, why were you all laughing at me?” I busted out, the class was silent at my outburst, everybody was staring, they all looked confused, then he said the two words that I had begun to dread, “nobody laughed”. He looked expectantly expecting a reply, I stood up and left.

After my first public psychosis, I did not have one for a while, people were still avoiding me but I did not really care. Sola, my bunkmate tried to shield the whispers from me, but I still heard the murmured, “yaba-left girl”, and “possessed girl”. Their words hurt me very much but I kept chanting in my head “sticks and stones”, it became my mantra against insults.

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I know I keep going into so much detail, you are probably wondering who the people I mentioned earlier are. Well, I beg your indulgence. Cut me some slack, I mean I am already dead, it is not like you can save me or something.

Moving on, like I mentioned earlier, Sola was my rock, she was the reason I just kept persevering. Then, one day, I woke up to pain all over me, brooms were flying all over me, someone poured water on me, but they did not stop, I could hear prayer words as they kept beating me with the brooms. The thing about the design of bamboo brooms is that they are designed to be very thin and sparse at the end, so dirt can pass through them easily. But what the designer did not think about is how suitable a torture device it is; anytime I thought the beating would stop, it would intensify.

At this point, I was curled up in a ball on my bed. This went on for about thirty minutes, I thought that was the end, that I would be beaten to death by a bunch of sixteen year-olds who thought they were delivering me from evil spirits. But they eventually stopped.

This time, I did not wake up in the hospital, I woke up on my bed. I woke up to Sola, sobbing and praying over me. She said they had done it for me, that I would see that I would not be

crazy anymore. That I should trust her and I did trust her. I trusted her words that she was looking out for me.

It was all a lie, the voices became more intense. At this point, the whole school knew I was crazy, so as you would expect teenagers to behave, they all basically ran away from me. Rumors had also gone around that I was possessed by demons.

I had begun to speak to them in public. I had to do whatever they told me or they would not stop bugging me, I could not ignore them. I was having psychotic episodes almost every day. And somehow, it was always in public. They called me names, made me do ridiculous things and threatened to kill me if I did not do whatever they asked of me. I just wanted to be normal, I just wanted to be like everybody else. But I was not. I did not know what was real and what wasn't.

The school had to call my parents. My mum sobbed while the nurse told her everything, I couldn't hear them through the window of the isolation ward. My dad patted her awkwardly while listening intently. The nurse said something and he shook his head and walked towards the door of where I was. I watched him walk purposely toward me, I wanted to run to him, I wanted him to hug me tightly and tell me everything would be okay. But instead, I turned my back at him. I felt the bed dip as he sat beside me. I didn't turn. He just sat there barely touching me. My mum came in still sobbing just repeating "My daughter is not mad", under her breath. Even after we'd left the school premises and got home.

I found out much later that the school had given my mum a referral letter to a psychiatric hospital. They said I showed signs of schizophrenia. My mum of course never mentioned this. At this point, I had lost all urge to do anything, nobody mentioned school, I never mentioned the deliverance and my mum cried every day.

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The day she took me there was a very ordinary one, it was a Sunday. She told me a friend had invited her to a service and she wanted me to come along. I did not think too much of it.

We left home early, I found it weird that she did not drive. We took a danfo bus there, the overstimulation of the ride distracted me from my thoughts. From the smell of sweat mixed with cologne and exhaust smoke to the loud sound of the conductors calling to passengers, it was all overwhelming in a very good way.

I heard the church before we even got close to the building. The sound of tambourines and drums were like voices calling me to come forth. The building was nothing special, it was a white and sky-blue storey building, the white parts were turning yellow and the blue had faded into an ashy shade of blue. The inside smelled like incense and the service was loud. Every point that was preached was punctuated with songs from the choir, the energy felt weird and I could not wait to leave.

At the end of the service, I stood up ready to leave but was stopped by my mother's hands pulling me back into the chair, "we aren't leaving yet", she whispered into my ears. I looked at her confused, wondering what was going on. "Don't worry, everything will be fine", she said reassuringly.

That was the beginning of the end.

I think during the course of writing this, I was hoping I would find a reason to live. Because contrary to what you might think I am so scared. I am really scared of dying. But it's not like I have a choice. I just cannot keep living my life not knowing what is real and what isn't. Sometimes, I wonder what if I had gotten the help I needed, what if my mum had not trusted the wrong people, what if I did not end up here, what if, what if, what if.

Now back to the story, my mum and I waited for about ten minutes before the pastor came, he was a big tall man with a bushy black beard peppered with white everywhere. He looked at me with a reassuring smile. I did not really create any impression on him. Then he came in after, he was wearing white the first time I saw him. His white shirt was creased and had yellow stains at the armpit, his white trousers' cuffs stained brown with caked mud, and he was sweating. Notwithstanding his shabby appearance, he came off as very charismatic.

He was part of the first prayer circle that formed around me to find out what was wrong.

He was there when another pastor said I would have to stay in the church for forty days while they battled the spirits for my soul.

His penetrating eyes crept on my naked body as the church women used the warm blood of a ram to 'buy back my soul', he watched me so intently that I had started avoiding him. 'Why would a middle aged man watch a sixteen year old so intently?'

Then on my tenth day there, something woke me up from my sleep, I recognized his face through my sleep laden eyes but my brain had not registered what was going on. Then it hit me, he was fondling my breasts, he was touching me. He covered my mouth before I could scream and he raped me. Before he left, he whispered "if you talk, nobody will believe you", I laid there limp staring at the ceiling.

At the crack of dawn, I started screaming, I screamed my allegations while the whole church listened, he also came in and with a pitying look said I was delusional that he was not in the church last night. The gateman also said he had left last night and just came in this morning. I wielded my bloody pants like a weapon, showing the evidence of his act. But nobody believed me. They all said it was all in my head. I started this letter after that incidence. He came back several times after. This is the fortieth day and my mother is on her way to get me. His bloodied body stares back at me from its weird angle. I have no regrets. I stare at the pills on my hand, this is the end.