

Let me set the scene ,it is 2019 and she's about to graduate from secondary school ,a prestigious unity school administered by the federal government , it's the night before graduation and she's in the hostel , a little game night being held , she's ecstatic ,the infinite possibilities that lay in front of her , unable to focus on the trivial childish games being played at this puerile game night , she's sixteen and feels so grown up ,no time for kids games , they're playing checkers and she's playing chess , she'll go to university by September ,study law , graduate ,go to law school pass the bar exam ,by the time she's 22 she'll be a practicing lawyer, the start of her life ,she wasn't going to be this awkward child who had no charisma and was at a loss during every social encounter, not the one who hyperventilated anytime she was meant to address the class ,she would become sophisticated , have a certain elegance about her, have a holistic glow up ,mind and body, so finding out who Annie had a crush on in a game of truth or dare seemed so miniscule in juxtaposition to her enormous plans for the future ,she could feel herself dissociating from this school , dislodging her mind from all she had known for 6 years ,the bullying , the constant feeling of being an outsider it would all be over , now that she's leaving ,she audibly let out a sigh of relief ,Grace that was her name , Grace could boast nobody was happier than her to be graduating ,she was one happy camper , and the day finally came , dressed in a gaudy purple dress and an absurd amount of glitter on her face , beaming from ear to ear .

But poor Grace didn't take one crucial detail into account ,she lived in Nigeria ,she was Nigerian , Nigeria a country riddled with corruption ,she didn't take into account that courses like law , medicine and engineering ,these corporate courses as they were called in Nigeria were reserved for the crème de la crème , the very best or in this situation the very rich ,the moneyed upper class , but she had a good WAEC result , and her JAMB result was a not too shabby 269 , the cut of mark was 180 at the time and it was already promised by JAMB that anyone who got 250 and above would get into whatever school they wanted , so surely she Grace would get in by merit surely, but she didn't get in .

Well she'll take it in stride and try again next year ,won't she? and she did ,took it in stride and tried ,she tried and tried and tried and years passed ,2020 went by in a flash ,2021 was a haze ,2022 was maddening , she developed crippling anxiety from lack of social interaction with people her age and you might wonder why didn't she just hang out with her friends ,she had one friend throughout the secondary school years ,I know that's quite pathetic but let's just say Grace believed in quality over quantity to make it less sad , but this one friend went off to school in a different state far away and didn't care to call ,text , email ,send a smoke signal ,send a letter in a bottle , nothing , basically she was dealing with all the novelty of being somewhere new and inevitably she outgrew her and who could blame her in all honesty , you left your secondary school and met new people and that's the way things go .

But to Grace her whole world was upside down , the one plan she had didn't come to fruition , and you might say there's way more things worse than being held back a couple years , but not for Grace this was the absolute worst ,for someone whose name literally meant unmerited favour she was quite unlucky, wasn't she , watching everyone go to school and enjoy their formative years while she has been sixteen for four years because her parents couldn't pay her way into the school and course she wanted ,the first year she tried to romanticize being at home , "dolce far niente" as the italians say , carefree idleness or directly translated to mean the sweetness of doing nothing, she did nothing till she became nothing or at least that's how she felt, like nothing , with time she resented her parents , herself , maybe if she did better in her exams she would not have been denied, and even though she never said it aloud she resented God , because she felt God watched amused while her hopes ,her dreams, her sanity, slipped away like a bar of soap in wet hands.It's 2023 and Grace is twenty now and she just wrote another JAMB exam and nearly fell in a gutter hiding from a girl three grades her junior who was at her JAMB centre, but the desire to be this revolutionary lawyer who would help women escape their abusive marriages with a decent compensation because in Africa , Nigeria especially ,women leave their marriages with nothing and are forced to be estranged with their kids because of the oppressive nature of our patriarchal society ,that was Grace's dream ,by now you should have caught on but if you haven't , I'll spell it out, I am Grace , well not literally because my name isn't Grace , but I'm living this life , and the burning desire to change society and help women ,dulled to a flame ,then a light flicker and now it is completely gone , because if getting into school is this hard ,



how hard will it be to get a job ,or even make a change . it's safe to say Grace has given up,she is nothing, she is no one , I have given up, I am nothing I am no one.But there's still a yearning ,a soft throbbing in my head and in my heart ,a longing ,a desire to change the past few years , to go back in time , to convince my past self not to have dreams at all , anything if it help me to not feel like such a failure today .

I checked whatsapp today , because that's all I do ,be on social media , and an ex classmate just posted about writing her last exams for the semester and becoming a final year student and that devastated me for some reason ,it shouldn't I know , everyone's journey is different ,I know , but I feel awful not because of her success but because of my own failure and how damned I feel ,the years of feeling like a loser in secondary school feel like bliss compared to how excruciating it is just to wake up in the morning now .

