

Be Careful For What You Wish For

"To what end would you make a futile wish?"



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The kettle whistled in the deep orange dawn. It whistled through the hostel with its eerie, wailing sound—the sound of dread and reputation. Repeat, it did, as the long line of exhausted, barely-awake hostel mates took turns boiling water. It whistled through the dark, spacious kitchen, bordered by the black, soot-coloured wall similar to a grotesque crime scene.

'Buluu'

The curtains covered almost any hint of sunlight, leaving small rays of the sunrise poking through the kitchen. Its spacious random rays illuminated the crowd in the kitchen as they solemnly and dreadfully waited in their half-minded, towel-wrapped outfit. Some lie on the mud-covered, littered floor, with an almost dead-like expression surrounding the small stove. Sounds of a baby wailing echoed along the nearby hallway, adding to the jarring, torturous beginning to the day.

'Buluu'

I see those solemn faces around me—in the hostel, the bright, bustling market, and the steaming, hot danfo bus. It's everywhere. It makes you wonder where you find the opportunity to smile.

'Buluu, your kettle is boiling!'

'Sorry.' It was my kettle, after all. Slightly chuckling to myself, I realized I saw an opportunity to smile. But I would get another opportunity

because today is a special day.

Like the small dawn rays poking through the curtains of the crowded kitchen, I have found a way out of this hell-hole. How? Through years of chaotic Danfo bus driving. Through years of slowly gaining and pouring years of income like this steaming hot water into this bucket. You know, I do feel a connection to this boiling kettle. Starting with a cold, freezing view of the world, gradually getting warmer to the hopeful possibility of satisfaction, and finally steaming hot with purpose and determination, reading to burn up the wor-

The money's gone. It is not in my secret safe in the shower. Gosh, now my water is cold.

The beating and loud clanks of the early morning shoemaker welcomed me as I walked out of the hostel. He repeatedly tapped his wooden box full of equipment, signalling the start of Lagos's chaotic, hustling nature, where anything will do just to get a sliver of edge over others.

'Good morning boss'

Turning back, I see Ade, my coworker, running towards me.

'Ah how far nah?' Smells of sweat violently choke me, causing me to cough

'W-what happened sir?'

'You smell awful, where have you been?' Looking down at him, I notice the sweat stains on his shirt and bruises on his leg.

'Ah sir, do you remember the Babalawo ritualist in the nearby village?'

'Yes?'

'Well, I finally found him, and he asked me to make a wish...

'You fool, you are not supposed to make a wish, he is very cunning and devious.'

'But I hoped that I could make sure that I got exactly what I wanted.'

'So what did you wish for?'

'Well sir, you know that you are not allowed to ask for material possessions, so instead I asked for a ram 'cause that is a living thing...'

'Ok?'

'But he laughed almost immediately, saying "*Be careful what you wish for*" and then granted my wish.'

'So how did it go bad?'

'Well the ram wasn't tamed so it immediately charged at me, probably breaking my ribs.'

'You are so dumb, let's get to the bus.'

Walking behind me, he chuckled, saying, 'Maybe you should try looking for him; I'm sure you will be the first person to get your wish.'

Gosh, I hate that word. *Maybe* you will get your wish granted. *Maybe* you will be able to get out of that hostel. *Maybe* you will find satisfaction in this lonely world. 'No, thank you. I don't want to be chased by animals'

'Can you be hopeful for once? Your head is always hanging low like a dying, abandoned plant.'

Hopeful? That word reeks of the devil. Like the persuasive voice telling the stray dog to cross the highway before getting run over by an avalanche of vehicles. It feels almost like a disease to believe in hope,

constantly encroaching in your life like a mental disorder, taking control of your life until it eventually leads to your death. Maybe I do need to get it out of me so that I can live a life free of that cancer cell.

'Where is he?'

'That's more like it sir!'

'Good night sir, and good luck!' Ade said as I dropped him off at his place.

'Yeah, I'd be fi—

'Sir, I need to warn you. Once you see something that doesn't feel right, leave immediately. Everyone says that, and I should've taken my advice. But sir, leave immediately.'

'O-Okay, have a good night,' Driving away from the house.

The road ahead was drastically different from the tiled, developed one of the city, with sand roads and potholes stretched the width of a bicycle.

Under the ever-darkening dusk eye, the road grew increasingly dark, with no street lights bordering it. Just rows of trees, increasingly growing taller, as I drove.

The road grew increasingly sandy, with the ground so red it reflected in the dim dusk, creating an almost red-litten path. However, the surrounding bush was green-green with weeds towering over the bus, occasionally hitting it as it moved, and trees so tall it covered the moonlight, occasionally leaving me in darkness.

'Maybe I should turn ba—

'Welcome!' Someone shouted.

I spotted a large mansion with the road leading right to it. There were no houses nearby. A dark figure was right in front of it, waving frantically.

'How did I hear him so clearly?'

Keeping my eyes on the dark figure, I slowly exited the bus and left it on the side of the road.

'Hello, are you who they say you are?' I shouted, slowly walking toward the figure

'I am anything you want me to be, good lad! I can be the intellectual you seek, the benevolence you desire, or the forgiveness you need.'

Approaching him, I could finally get a complete sense of him. He was wearing a bright red agbada, flowing just to his knees as he had overgrown it. His facial expression was overly expressive, with every twitch of his features easily seen.

'O-k, I need your help'

'Oh, why?'

'I want to—

'Wait!' He shouted, so loud it may have shaken the trees' 'Come inside, I have food.'

'I-I'm not hungry s-sir,' But he was already walking towards the mansion, leaving me trailing along.

The smell of rich incense instantly choked me, reminding me of the rich odour of Ade. It made my eyes water, making me unable to see through

the smoky hallways of the mansion.

'Come, come, it is better in the kitchen,' he said, walking briskly. 'Do you know how long it takes the body to succumb to smoke inhalation?'

'W-what'

'Less than 15 minutes,' he said, walking to the enormous kitchen, almost as long as a garden.

'So what do you need, good lad?' smiling as he watches me

'I-I want to remove the feeling of hope from my body.'

'Hope? Hmm, why?'

'I hate it. It is going to lead to my death, and I need to get rid of it

He immediately laughs, with his entire expression moving in such an uncanny way. 'Be careful what you wish for.'

He grabs my head with his full palm, pulling it up, causing me to dangle above the floor. I began to scream as the pressure felt like a car driving towards my head. He dropped me towards the other side of the kitchen, with my head hitting the tiled wall.

'Now, good lad, I want you to meet Hope,' he said, pointing to a figure with the same body as me.

'Hope?'

'Yes, good lad, I have removed hope from your body, but now you must kill hope.' He opened the door to the rest of the mansion, leaving fumes of smoke to enter slowly. 'And you'll have less than 15 minutes to do so. I will be watching.' He laughed as he walked away.

I began to run after Hope as he watched the Babalawo leave the room. Still, I noticed the bleakness of the situation. With Hope's distraught face looking towards the door, the rapid rush of the smoke coming in, and how weak and tired I felt, I stopped myself from running after him.

'I give up,' lying down on the floor, watching the smoke enter the room

Hope frantically turned around, 'What?! No, no get up there has to be a way to escape

'There's no way, just kill me'

'I'm not killing you. There is a way to get us out

He had a glint in his eyes while sharing a hint of a smile.

'Why can't you be realistic! We are stuck here; there's nothing we can do

Laughing, he picked me up, carrying me away from the kitchen

'No, we aren't,' he said

It was getting harder to move along the hallway. The sounds of our coughs echoed through the smoky mist. Hope rapidly lost strength from his staggered walk and a near-fall, but he kept going. Why does he keep going?

'B-uluu, don't..worry we are going to find a way out of here.' Coughing between each word, he nearly falls, almost dropping me. 'And once we are out of here, we are going to get out of that hostel.'

'How?'

'What do you mean by how?' Glancing back at me. 'By saving?'

'So that another person will steal our money, and we'll continue to do the same thing over and over again while we rot in that hell-hole?'

'Buluu'

'No, no let me go!' Staggering, I manage to stand up after getting off his back. 'No, you want me to continue saving and saving, to somehow leave the neighbourhood that our parents were born and buried in?'

'See this, 'I shouted, shoving Hope towards the hallway. 'This is why I came here, hoping to get rid of you so that maybe I could be happy in the rotting mess I'm in.'

Hope suddenly bursts into laughter, struggling to contain himself, as I scowled at him. 'Isn't that ironic, *Ọkunrin kan fẹ lati da awọn ode ninu igbo duro, nitorina o ẹ ọdẹ ode.*

'W-what'

'You were *hopeful* that wishing to remove hope would satisfy you. Listen, I know that I'm literally Hope, but I genuinely believe we can get out here.

Chuckling to myself, 'How are *you* going to get us out?'

He chuckled, walking into the mist, shouting, 'Babalawo, I want to make a request.'

A cloud of mist surged away from us, revealing the Babalawo in his bright red agbada.

'I want to make a wish,' Hope said, grinning. 'I mean I am a whole entirely different person right?'

'Yes?' the Babalawo agreed, looking increasingly angry, staring at his grinning face.

While staring back at me with his eyes full of glint, he said, 'I wish to be taken back into Buluu's body and to be let free out of this mansion.'

'Wait, what no! You should go!' I pleaded

'Buluu, I'm literally you,' he smiled

The Babalawo laughed immediately, revealing an Ida sword and saying, 'I will not let you go out of this mansion, but I will let you go to the afterlife!'

As Hope enters my body, the Babalawo frantically swings his sword towards me, moving the mist around the hallway. Fallen from the sheer force of his swings, I notice the boulder-high stack of rotten bones and some scattered around the house.

'Get up, you fool! How dare you try to cheat your way out of here?' he continues swinging his sword, slightly cutting my right thigh as I try to get up. Swing after swing. It was hard countering it. But I feel different. With every second, there is a surge of excitement—an eager excitement to walk through that main door and meet the bright night sky.

I grabbed a long bone from the floor, using it to knock his balance, causing him to fall on his back. Now disarmed, I immediately grabbed his sword, stabbing him in his chest, instantly spewing out blood blacker than his expression, leaving him motionless.

Not willing to see another second of him, I ran to the Danfo bus waiting on the side of the road. I drove into the hostel, wishing to start another day of saving. Maybe I will get it right this time. Who knows? But I'm hopeful.

This story was originally written as the final assignment for a Gothic short story course. It incorporates several gothic elements, themes, and

devices discussed throughout the course. If you spot any, please share your thoughts in the comments below! Thanks for reading!

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