

NOW

I am the voice in the dark, calling out for your help.

I am the quiet voice that you hope will not turn to silence, the voice you want to keep hearing cos it means someone is still alive. I am the voice calling for you to come and dig me out. I am the voice in the dark, asking you to unbury me, to bring me from the grave out into the light, like a zombi.

I am a killer and I have been killed, too, over and over; I am constantly being born. I have lost more things than I have found; I have destroyed more things than I have built. I have seen babies abandoned in the trash and I have seen the dead come back to life.

I first shot a man when I was twelve years old.

I have no name. There are no names in the darkness cos there is no one else, only me, and I already know who I am (I am the voice in the dark, calling out for your help), and I have no questions for myself and no need to call upon myself for anything, except to remember.

I am alone.

I am dying.

In darkness, I count my blessings like Manman taught me.

One: I am alive.

Two: there is no two.

I see nothing and I hear nothing. This darkness, it's like something solid. It's like it's inside me.

I used to shout for help, but then after a while I couldn't tell if I was speaking through my mouth or just in my head, and that scared me. Anyway, shouting makes me thirsty.

So I don't shout anymore. I only touch and smell. This is how I know what is in here with me, in the darkness.

There is a light, except it doesn't work. But I can tell it's a light cos I feel the smooth glass of the lamp, and I remember how it used to sit on the little table by my bed. That is another thing – there is a bed in here. It was my bed before the walls fell down. I can feel its soft mattress and its broken slats.

I smell blood. There is anpil blood in this place, on me and all around me. I can tell it's blood cos it smells of iron and death. And cos I've smelled blood before. I grew up in the bidonville – it's a smell you get used to.

Not all of the blood is mine, but some of it is.

I used to touch the bodies, but I don't do that anymore. They smell, too.

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I don't know what happened. I was in bed minding my own zafè, then everything shook and I fell and the darkness started. Or maybe everything else fell.

I'm in Canapé-Vert Hospital, this I know. It's a private hospital, so I figure the blancs must be paying for it. I don't know why they brought me here after they killed Biggie and put this bullet in my arm. Maybe they felt bad about it.

Yesterday – or possibly it was longer ago than that – Tintin came to see me. It was before the world fell down. Tintin must have used his pass – the one that Stéphanie got him – to get out of Site Solèy through the checkpoints. I wonder how Stéphanie is feeling now that Biggie is dead, cos she's UN and she shouldn't have been sleeping with a gangster. She must have really loved him.

Tintin signed my bandage. I told him it's only plaster casts that people sign, not bandages, but he didn't know the difference. Tintin doesn't know much about anyen.

Example: you're thinking that he signed his name on my bandage, but he didn't. He signed *Route 9*, like he writes everywhere. Tintin doesn't just tag. He likes to shout, *Route 9*, when we're rolling in the streets, too – *Route 9 till I die*, dumb stuff like that. I would look at the people we were driving past and say to him:

— You don't know who these people are. They might be from Boston. They might cap you.

— That's the point, he would say. I'm not afraid of them. I'm *Route 9*.

I thought Tintin was a cretin, but I didn't say so. Old people

like my manman say Route 9 and Boston used to mean something back in the day. Like, Route 9 was for Aristide and Boston was for the rebels. Now they don't mean anything at all. I was in Route 9 with Tintin, but I didn't write it anywhere and I didn't shout it out, either. If anyone was going to kill me, I wanted it to be for a good reason. Not cos I said the wrong name.

Anyway, when I was rolling with the Route 9 crew, I didn't want the Boston thugs to know me. I didn't want them to know me till I had them at the end of my gun, and they would have to give my sister back. I tried that in the end. It didn't work out how I wanted it to.

In the hospital, after Tintin wrote *Route 9* on my bandage, he shook my hand. It hurt, but he didn't notice.

— How are you? he asked me.

— I got shot, I said. How do you think I am?

Tintin shrugged. He got shot a couple of years ago, and Biggie and Stéphanie arranged for him to come here to get sewn up. For him, it obviously wasn't a big deal. But that's Tintin. He's, like, so full of holes, so easy to hurt, that he stops the world from hurting him by hurting it first. If he found a puppy, he'd strangle it to stop himself liking it. He knows I got shot, too, before, when I was young. But I don't remember that so well.

— Everyone in the hood be giving you props, blud, Tintin said in English. Tintin was one of those gangsters who talk all the time in English, like they're from the hood or something, the real hood, like in New York or Baltimore. You was *cold* out there. Vre chimère.

I didn't know what to say, so I just said:

— Word.

This is what American gangsters say when they want to agree with something. I said it so that I would still sound like a player even though I couldn't care less about that thug shit anymore, for reasons which you will learn for your own selves. But that seemed to be OK, cos Tintin nodded like I had said something profound.

— Leave here, you'll get a block, gen pwoblem. Maybe be a boss one day your ownself, Tintin said. You killed those Boston motherfuckers stone dead.

Now I shrugged. I didn't want a block. I wanted all the dead people to not be dead anymore, but that's a lot to ask, even in Haiti, where dead people are never really dead.

Vre chimère.

A real ghost.

Chimère is for *gangster* in the Site. Chimère cos we melt out of nothing and we go back to nothing after. Chimère cos we die so young we may as well be ghosts already. You're thinking, strange thing to call yourselves; strange thing to have a name that means you're gonna die young. And yeah, it's a name that the rich people came up with, the people who live outside the Site, but we took that name and we made it our own. Same as *thug*. Same as *bandi*.

You wanna name me a chimère? Too late. I already named my ownself.

Anyway, now I think it's kind of a good name. Now, I think, maybe I *am* a real ghost. Not a gangster, but a dead person.

Sometime today or another day, I heard people shouting from far, far away in the darkness. It sounded like:

— . . . survived?

— . . . alive . . . in there?

— . . . wounded?

I shouted back. You can guess what I shouted. I shouted, yes. I shouted, help. I shouted those words in French and English. I shouted in Kreyòl to tell them there was an accident and I was hurt. Then I thought that was a dumb-ass thing to shout, cos this is a hospital, so of course I was hurt, and it must have been anpil obvious there had been an accident, with everything fallen down.

But nobody answered and the voices went away. I don't know when that was. I don't know when it's night and when it's day, or even if night and day exist anymore.

If I can hear people shouting, but they can't hear me, does that make me a ghost? I think, maybe yes. I can't see myself. I can't prove that I exist.

But then I think, no, I can't be a ghost. A ghost does not get thirsty, and as I'm lying here in the broken hospital it's like my mouth is bigger than me, bigger than the darkness. Like my mouth contains the world, not the other way round. It's dry and sore and I can't think of anything else. My thinking, cos of my thirst, is like this:

. . . WATER, WATER, WATER, WATER, WATER, WATER.
Am I dead? WATER, WATER, WATER, WATER. What

happened? WATER, WATER, WATER, WATER. Is this the end of the world? WATER, WATER, WATER, WATER, WATER, WATER . . .

That is how my mouth swallows everything else. Maybe my mouth will swallow me, and then this will be over.

I decide to crawl, to measure the space of my prison. I know the rubble and the hand on my left – I don't need to go there again. I don't want to touch that clammy skin. In front of me, and to my right and behind me, is just darkness, though maybe I should stop calling it that cos there's no light at all; it's more blackness. I shift forward on my hands and knees, and I scream when my wrist bends a little and the wound opens. The scream echoes off the concrete all around me.

I shuffle, and I feel like I'm not a person anymore, like I've turned into some animal. I move maybe one body length and then I hit a wall of blocks. I reach up with my hands and stand up, and I feel that it goes up to the ceiling. Only the ceiling is lower than I remember, so that's not great, either. To my right, the same thing – a broken bed, then a wall of rubble. And behind me. I'm in a space maybe one body length in each direction.

I'm in a coffin.

I hold my half of the necklace, and it's sharp in my hand where the heart is cracked in two. I think of my sister, who had the other half of the heart and who I lost when I was a piti-piti boy.

I try to say the invocation, the words to the Marassa, cos

they might be able to bring my sister back to me, but I'm too thirsty and I don't remember them.

Listen.

Listen.

You're the voices in the dark, so the world can't all be gone. There must be people left.

You're the voices in the dark, so listen, mwen apè parlay. I'm going to speak to you.

I'm going to tell you how I got here, and how I got this bullet in my arm. I'm going to tell you about my sister, who was taken from me by the gangsters, by the chimères. This was 2,531 days ago, when my papa was killed. At least, I think it was. I used to know how many days cos I marked them in my head. Now I don't know if it's two or three days I've been in the darkness, so I don't know how long ago my papa was chopped to piti-piti pieces and my sister was taken. But I know this: it hurts every day as much as the last, as much as the first.

It hurts now, even, and you would think I have other things to worry about, what with being trapped with no water and no food, and no way out.

Maybe, maybe, if I tell you my story, then you'll understand me better and the things I've done. Maybe you'll, I don't know, maybe you'll . . . forgive me. Maybe she will.

My sister, she was my twin. She was one half of me. You have to understand: a twin in Haiti, that's a serious maji; it's

something powerful. We were Marassa, man. You know Marassa? They're Iwa, gods, the gods of twins – super-strong, super-hardcore, even though they look like three little kids. They're some of the oldest gods from Africa. Even now in vodou, the Marassa come right after Papa Legba in the ceremony. Marassa can heal you, can bring you good luck, can make people fall in love with you. Marassa can see your future, double your money, double your life. People from where I come from, they believe human twins can do the same and can talk to each other in silence, too, cos they share the same soul.

So you see? Me and my sister, we were magic. We were meant to be born. We were special. We shared the same soul. People gave us presents, man – total strangers, you know. People would stop us in the street, want us to give them our blessing.

We shared the same soul, so when she was gone I became half a person. I would like you to remember this, so that you don't judge me later. Remember: even now, as I lie in this ruined hospital, I am only one half of a life, one half of a soul. I know this. That is why I have done the things I have done.

But you don't know them yet, of course – the things I've done, the reasons why I am half a person, the reason why I was in this hospital when everything fell down. You don't know the hurt I've caused.

So I'm going to tell you everything.

First, I must explain the blood.

Some of it is mine. My bandage got all torn up when I was

crawling around, looking for my half of the necklace, and I cut myself on some broken glass, I think. I already got shot, you know that, and there's blood coming from there, too. The way the hospital fell down, it hasn't been so convenient for my healing.

I can't explain all of the blood, though. I think some of it comes from the dead bodies. This was a public ward before the ceiling and the walls fell down. There was a curtain around my bed that the nurses could pull if I wanted to use the toilet, but that was it for privacy. Those bodies are the other people who were in here. When the walls fell down, they fell down on them. I can tell cos there's a hand near me, and I reached out and touched it, and followed it to the wrist and then the arm, feeling to see if it was a man or a woman. I don't know why. And I couldn't tell, anyway, cos after the arm there was no shoulder, just rubble.

Me, I was lucky. I was on the far end of the ward and the walls didn't come down here.

Though maybe I'm not so lucky, cos I'm still trapped.

Maybe I'll just die more slowly.

After I've thought about dying for a long time, I stop, and I eat the blood from the floor.

I figure it's food and WATER, WATER, WATER, WATER, WATER, WATER, WATER at the same time. I mop it up with my fingers and lick them. It's disgusting but, like I said, some of it's mine, and it makes the hunger in my stomach cool

down a bit, and my mouth gets a bit smaller, like maybe the size of a city. Only now that I've eaten the blood I'm not thinking so much about my mouth; I'm thinking more about how hungry I am.

In Site Solèy when you're hungry, you say you got battery acid in your stomach, that's how bad it burns. In Site Solèy you can buy a cake made from mud and water, baked in the sun with fat. Right now, I think, in Site Solèy they know nothing about hunger. If you gave me a mud cake, I would kiss you.

But then I get to thinking. If I'm hungry, that means I can't be dead. Does a ghost eat blood? I don't think so. A zombi, maybe.

I hope I'm not a zombi. I hope I'm not . . .

No.

I dig my fingernails into my palm. I don't believe in zombis and the darkness can't make me. Zombis scare me. And cos I'm scared, I say some words from a song to myself. They're from *MVP Kompa* by Wyclef Jean, which was the song that was playing in Biggie's car when I first met him.

Wyclef Jean was from Haiti, but now he's a high roller in the US – big rapper, producer, businessman. Biggie was always listening to his music. Wyclef was a hero to him – a kid from Haiti who had made it in the music world. I guess Biggie thought that might happen to his ownself one day, which shows you how stupid Biggie could be.

Anyway, there's this bit in the song where Wyclef Jean says that his friend Lil' Joe has come back as a zombi. It's midnight

and Lil' Joe is supposed to be dead, but he's not. He's back and he's a zombi, and he has all his zombi friends with him. Wyclef sings this chorus where he tells everyone to catch the zombis, to grab them. And it's good in the song cos you can catch zombis, you can hurt them and they can't hurt you.

I like that idea, with the dead hand next to me.

So in the darkness I shout out to any zombis that I'm gonna catch them. I shout it till my throat hurts even more with dryness and thirst. And yeah, it makes me feel a bit better.

Yeah.

I don't believe in zombis. I don't believe in all that vodou shit. That's kind of a lie, though, cos I saw a houngan turn into Papa Legba right before my eyes. So, yeah, maybe I do believe in vodou. But that doesn't mean I have to believe in zombis, does it?

No.

Anyway, I think, what did vodou ever do to help me?

Vodou, it's the old religion of Haiti. The slaves brought it over from Africa. In vodou, you got lwa, who are like gods, but sometimes they can be ancestors, too. Haitians, they believe that the lwa can come down and possess their bodies during ceremonies, talk through them. We call it *mounting* – the lwa mounts you and uses your body. See? It's not like in the Kreyen religion. We talk to our gods; our gods talk through us. Manman talked to our gods, I should say. Me, I didn't have a lot to do with them, apart from when me and my sister used to pretend in the ceremonies Manman organized. They didn't seem very interested in me, either.

Manman, though, she loved all of it, and she believed in it all, even if she knew me and my sister were frauds, were bullshit. She had a houngan she went to. That's a kind of priest who knows all the songs to bring down the lwa, and the foods they like to eat, and the veves – the symbols to paint on the ground to draw them to you. Like, if you want to be possessed by Baron Samedi, the lwa of death, you got to give him whiskey and cigars, stuff like that.

Right now, I'd be happy if Baron Samedi came for me and took me away from this place to the land under the sea where the dead go. At least then I wouldn't be thirsty and hungry anymore.

But Baron Samedi is not coming.

Manman used to go to the houngan, but none of that stopped us losing the farm and ending up in Site Solèy. None of that stopped my papa being chopped up with machetes, my sister Marguerite being stolen.

Biggie said his houngan took a bone from Dread Wilmè after Dread was shot by the UN soldiers. He said the houngan ground that bone up and sprinkled it on Biggie, and that meant bullets couldn't touch him, cos Dread died for Haiti, like Toussaint. So Biggie was proof against bullets, immortal, cos he had Dread's bone powder on him. That's what he thought, anyway. I even saw the bone dust in a jar when Biggie took me to see the houngan. Sure, I saw Biggie live through shit that no person should be able to. But I also saw Biggie take a full clip from a machine gun and those bullets tore him to dog food in the end, bone powder or no bone powder.

I don't see what I got to thank vodou for. Anyway, Dread Wilmè didn't die for Haiti. He died cos they shot him. I don't think he wanted to die at all.

I don't want to die, either.