

*What will a child do when the voices in
her head develop a mind of their own?*

THE CURSED CHILD

a short story

ANISHAGOLD

The Cursed Child

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Suddenly thrust into a strange new world, five-year-old Olivia found herself surrounded by strangers guised as family. Unable to conquer the unfamiliar demons around her, Olivia's young mind resolved to shield her from the pain the only way it thought possible.

This is her story.

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Chapter One

“I want to go back home!”

Five-year-old Olivia Sichilima cried her heart out while her two cousins, fifteen-year-old Chris and thirteen-year-old Nancy held her down. It had only been two weeks since she started living with them but it already felt like two unending gruesome years.

“Hold her still!” Aunt Hilda thundered before slapping Olivia across her face, sending her straight to the floor sobbing.

“Lock her up in the pantry before she gets the neighbours talking,” Aunt Hilda instructed her two children.

The two dragged the now semi-conscious Olivia to the pantry across the hallway.

“Why did you even bring her here if you hate her so much?” Nancy asked her mother when she joined her mother in the kitchen again.

“I didn’t have a choice,” her mother growled. “I am the only relative she has. I was Gavin’s only sibling and yet he left me to suffer while he enjoyed the high life with his wife. Now they’ve left me with this burden child.”

“If her parents were rich, doesn’t that mean she’s rich too?” Nancy asked.

“No she’s not. But I am!” Hilda thundered. “Gavin owed me for neglecting me. I also deserve to be paid for taking care of his daughter. It’s no joke raising a child.”

So does that mean we are rich now Ma?” Chris had joined them.

“Of course my children we are now rich and we’ve earned it,” Hilda said. “Whoever said this widow was going to live in poverty forever huh?”

“Mum, if she is our cousin, why does she use a different name from yours? Isn’t your maiden name Nachilima? Then why is she Olivia Sichilima?”

“According to the Mambwe and Namwanga tradition, all male children use the masculine form of the name which usually starts with *Si* and the female children have to use the feminine form *Na*. Because your cousin was born in Australia, her father didn’t want to complicate things for her so they used the masculine form Sichilima on her birth certificate.”

“So will she need to change her name now that she’s living with us?” Nancy asked.

“For what?” Hilda said. “Is she going to die just because a few letters of her name do not confine to tradition?”

When dinner was finally ready, Chris turned dancing eyes towards his mother.

“What is it?” Hilda asked, no longer able to ignore her son’s persistence.

“Should I tell her to come join us?” Chris motioned his head towards the pantry.

“If she’s not yet dead,” Hilda grumbled.

“Mum!” Nancy hollered.

“What?” Hilda said in response to her daughter’s reprobative look. “She is the weakest child I have ever seen,” She said. “...busy feeding an African child white people’s food.”

Chris got up quickly to check on his cousin. An hour had passed and no sound had come from her. This was the first time she had given up fighting so early. She usually cried and kicked in protest for hours before giving up or crying herself to sleep.

I sure hope she’s alive in there. Chris said to himself as he neared the pantry.

“Mum!” Chris shrieked from the pantry. “Mum, hurry come!”

Both mother and daughter rushed to the pantry.

“She’s not breathing, check.” Chris was shaking Olivia trying to wake her up.

“Move away,” Hilda pushed him to the side to check her pulse. She lifted her up from the cold floor and carried her outside. “She is not going to die on me and have people accuse me of murder. Bring my car keys from the bedroom, hurry!”

“Is she going to be okay doctor?” Hilda asked when the doctor called her to his office.

“Your child is malnourished, severely,” The doctor said. “When was the last time you fed her anything?”

“First of all she’s not my child, she’s my niece,” Hilda said. “Her parents died three weeks ago and I was kind enough to take her in. She just keeps crying day in and day out? This isn’t my fault.”

“I’m not accusing you of anything, yet,” the doctor said.

“I can see the look in your eyes, the judgement.”

“That’s got more to do with your conscious than anything I said, ma’am,” the doctor fired back. “I called you in here to talk about the health of the child I presume is under your custodianship right?”

“Yes.”

“I hope you are aware that as her attending physician, I am mandated by law to report any concern of child abuse or neglect.”

“Child abuse?” Hilda scoffed.

“The child has four full blazing finger imprints on her right cheek. She also looks like she has not eaten anything in weeks. As her guardian, you are responsible for her health and well-being. There is an obvious case of neglect here and its cause for alarm.”

“I don’t think there is any need for you involve anyone here doc.” Hilda tried to warm herself to the stoic doctor. “It’s my first time raising a child with a whole different background and culture than am used to so you must understand me. I am still trying to adjust...and so is the child.”

“I am still going to file a report but only to ensure that that child does not end up here or any other hospital...or worse, a morgue before her time. If you are unable to look after the child, it’s best to hand her over to social services and they will find a home to place her. At least the kids in these orphanages are not as malnourished or underweight as her.”

Olivia was left at the hospital for observation for a week. Nothing much had changed when she was brought back home. The only thing that seemed to have changed was that unlike before when she would refuse to eat and they would all leave her alone, this time around, Nancy and Chris were instructed to shove the food down her throat wily-nilly.

Exhausted from being force-fed like a slave, Olivia resorted to quietly having her meals with the rest of the family without protest. She neither spoke nor cried since her return home from the hospital.

When Olivia was not cleaning or doing some chore under her aunt's instruction, she and her dolls were safely tucked away in her room under the bed where no one would find them. She had found the one place in her strange new environment where she felt comfortable being herself. It was the only time and place she could speak her mind without fear. She shared her dreams, her fantasies and all her wishes to the dolls that her parents had left her. They were the only tangible things she had left of their memory. She shared her dreams, hopes, fears and anger with her three pink dolls.

And as the years went by, the dolls would speak right back to her.

Chapter Two

"Will I go to school this year?"

Five years had passed since Olivia started living in her aunt's house. Each passing year Aunt Hilda promised to send her to school the following year. That year never came. Every morning Olivia watched her friends leave home for school and in the evening she watched them return. Finally, on her tenth birthday, she decided she had had enough of waiting for next year to come.

"Your mother didn't leave me any money to take you to school child." Aunt Hilda delivered her perfectly prepared response.

"But-"

"Are you going to argue with me?" She asked in her usual menacing tone and Olivia silently cowered out of the room.

"Olivia, come back here!" Aunt Hilda called out to her.

"Yes Aunty." Olivia appeared back at the door.

“There’s a woman coming here tomorrow to teach you something about being a woman in this country. The only good that will ever come out of you is being a wife. I don’t want you to embarrass me when the time comes.”

“I don’t want to be a wife.” The ten-year-old Olivia cried.

“Did I say anything about you being a wife right now?” Aunt Hilda asked. “I am only preparing you for the future. Your cousin Nancy also started right about this age so don’t think there is anything special about you. She’s coming tomorrow at 10. I expect you to be ready before she gets here.”

At 10 the next morning, Olivia locked herself in the room and refused to come out. Aunt Hilda and her children pounded on her door but still Olivia would not open. Chris was finally tasked with breaking the door down, something he happily did. Olivia was dragged out and taken to her aunt’s room where the strange lady was waiting with a plastic bag of foul-smelling traditional medicines and something else Olivia could not identify. She attempted a final escape just as her aunt was leaving but Hilda shut the door quickly and locked it.

“You are going to stay in there until Aunty Petronella finishes with you.” Hilda shouted from the other side of the door.

And to her friend she said, “Make sure you use those pegs Petty. I want to teach this child a lesson, making me run around the house and sweat like a pig at my age.... Use those pegs until I can see something today!”

Left alone in the room with the scary looking woman, Olivia was determined to keep her from touching her at any cost. She looked around the room for any object she could use to protect and defend herself. Unfortunately, Aunt Hilda’s bedroom appeared to have been especially arranged for this kind of business. Everything was perfectly in its place in the eerily usual Aunt Hilda’s style. There were no combs or anything else she could have used as a weapon in sight.

“Don’t touch me!” Olivia cried.

She was backing away from the woman towards the wall but Aunt Petronella pounced on her. She grabbed her by her sides and forced her down on the floor.

“You need to calm down and listen to your aunt.” Aunt Petronella said as she towered over the ten-year-old. “She is only doing this for your own good.” She added.

Olivia kicked her away with so much force that as she tried to hold herself steady on her feet, she fell back against the wooden stool by the dressing table. She looked up and saw the huge mirror by the dresser shake slightly and suddenly, a thought came to her. She looked over at Aunt Petronella who was still on the ground nursing the shock from her kick and she made up her mind to act.

Olivia got up, lifted the stool and threw it against the mirror. Aunt Petronella shrieked as the broken pieces fell to the ground. Olivia grabbed a piece from the floor, completely oblivious to the cuts and blood on her face resulting from the flying pieces of the mirror as it fell apart. She stepped forward towards Aunt Petronella wielding in her hand the new weapon she had just developed.

“Come near me and I will break this in your face.” Olivia threatened.

The woman laughed. “Do you think you are the first troublesome child I have had to deal with?” She managed to get up from the floor and nonchalantly sat on the bed. “Your aunt knew you would be this difficult that’s why she called for me. There is no child in this town that has managed to escape my grasp so just be a good girl and sit down on that *chitenge* like a well-cultured Zambian girl.”

“This is abuse!” Olivia cried.

The woman laughed again. “You think this is torture? Wait until you get married and you will be thanking me for this.”

“I don’t want to get married!”

“That’s what you’re saying now but you’ll soon be a teenager, you’ll start noticing boys and then your tune will change. When are you going to get it?” Aunt Petronella stood up, a hauntingly dark look in her eyes that dared the child to strike.

“You’re not living with the *Muzungus* anymore.” She said as she towered over the child. “No Zambian man is ever going to accept an uncultured wife. If you get lucky and you manage to fool one, he will soon leave you for a woman with the full package. Elongating your labia isn’t some form of abuse, it is our culture, our tradition. Mothers do it to their children out of love. Now come and sit down here and stop being such a nuisance child!”

“I don’t want!” Olivia cried, pointing the piece of broken glass at her and at the same time backing away from her.

Aunt Petronella looked over little Olivia’s shoulder and saw that she was about to step onto the broken glass on the floor with her bare feet and she grinned in anticipation. A few seconds later, Olivia fell into her own trap and landed her feet on the glass. She bawled out in electric pain and dropped to the floor, only to land her knees and hands in more pieces of broken glass.

The glass in her hand fell down and shattered into more pieces before her. Aunt Petronella had managed to step back in time and was now watching the show before her in gaiety amusement. With her head bowed down in pain like that, Olivia looked like she had frozen in time from the shock of it all.

Thinking she finally had her where she needed her to be, Aunt Petronella lifted the ten-year-old by her shoulders and was about to drag her towards a broken glass free spot when the child completely surprised her. Olivia suddenly propelled her upper body backward, turned and grabbed the remaining piece of broken glass still attached to the frame of the dresser and slashed it across the side of Aunt Petronella’s face. The woman went straight to the floor bellowing in pain at the top of her voice. Aunt Hilda appeared in no time. she flung the door open and rushed to her friend’s side.

“Petty are you okay? My God you’re bleeding!” Hilda took in the scene around her and finally landed on a visibly petrified but determined Olivia.

Olivia saw the look in her aunt’s eyes and immediately made for a run but yet again she was no match for her aunt’s swift movements. Aunt Hilda caught Olivia before she could

make it past the door, locked the door and then locked the girl's hands together behind her back.

"I will hold her in place while you insert the pegs." Aunt Hilda instructed her friend who immediately got up, removed the pegs from her plastic bag and approached Olivia. She yanked her pants off and threw them across the room.

"Nooo...leave me alone...mummy...nooooo...noooooooooo-" Olivia kicked and fought but she was no match for the two determined older women trying to teach her a lesson.

"Have you inserted them?" Hilda asked.

"I have but Hilda, she's not moving anymore." Aunt Petronella stepped away from the girl, fear registering all over her face.

"Olivia? Olivia!" Hilda slapped her face over and over again but Olivia wasn't moving.

Fearing the worst, Hilda dropped her to the floor and went to stand next to her friend.

"Do you think she's...dead?"

They had been staring at her lifeless body for close to a minute when suddenly, Olivia moved.

"She's moving again!" Aunt Petronella shouted.

Except, Olivia was doing more than just moving, she was convulsing, violently.

"What's happening to her?" Hilda asked.

"I don't know. Why are you asking me? Is she epileptic?" Petronella asked.

"I don't think so," Hilda answered.

"What should we do? Should we pour water on her or something?"

"How about just leaving her in here until she comes back to her senses?" Hilda suggested. "What if whatever she has is contagious?"

"Good point," Petronella said and the two women slowly turned their back to Olivia and tip-toed towards the door.

"Where do the two of you think you're going?" A strange hoarse voice from behind them asked.

Terrified to their very core, they turned to find Olivia sitting up straight, fully awake and strangely composed for someone that had just passed out and had been convulsing like a leaf against the wind.

“Does this child have demons?” Petronella asked her friend.

Olivia laughed, but there was nothing usual about her laugh. It was throaty and deep, as if there was another person living inside her.

Chapter Three

Olivia picked up a piece of broken glass from the floor, quizzically looking at it for a few seconds longer as if it was the most complicated object she had ever seen. Suddenly, she looked up at the women in front of her, from one to the other before finally stopping at Aunt Petronella whose hand was pressed on the doorknob. A smile lit up Olivia’s face as she looked from the glass in her hand to the hand holding the knob. Tilting her head from side to side, Olivia raised the hand holding the glass and brought it close to her face.

Aunt Petronella felt the walls around her close in on her as she stood before the child...except, there was nothing child-like about the one standing in front of her. A cold chill went down her spine as her eyes met Olivia’s. In them Petronella saw a shade of darkness she had never before encountered. Before long, the cold chill filled up the whole room. Olivia opened her big round eyes wide and stretching her neck all the way to the back, she looked up at Aunt Petronella. The woman quickly shut her eyes as if to defend herself from whatever demons she imagined resided in the little girl’s eyes.

“Drop it, now,” Olivia commanded the hand that was still holding the knob.

A shivering Aunt Petronella let go of the doorknob. She surreptitiously moved closer to her friend who was standing just a few feet away, also shaking in fear to her very core. The two women locked arms together as they faced the enemy that had obviously invaded the body of Hilda’s niece.

“On your knees.” Olivia commanded in her new hoarse and tightly controlled glacial tone.

Hilda and Petronella instantly obeyed without protest.

Olivia laughed, a loud, hard and lasting laugh that had the two middle-aged women wincing in both pain and fear. Olivia then turned and avoiding the broken pieces of glass on the floor, she picked up the stool by the dresser and went to sit in front of the women who were now kneeling on the floor next to each other.

“Olivia...have you...lost...your...mind?” Aunt Hilda stammered. She still could not bring herself to look up at her niece lest she caught her evil eyes.

“Do I look like Olivia to you?” The girl asked, running her finger over the rough edges of the broken glass and smiling as she watched her blood spill to the floor.

“What do you think would happen if I shoved this through your throats, huh?” She looked from one woman to the other.

The women looked at each other and immediately hollered out in screams.

“Help! Help! Someone help us!” They chorused.

Olivia chortled, shaking her head in amusement. “Just shut up you two.” She said nonchalantly. “Do you think anyone will hear you? Have you forgotten that you sent everyone away just so you could torture Olivia in peace? It’s just us right now.”

“Are you sure this child is ten years old?” Aunt Petronella whispered to her friend.

“What have you done to my niece you demon?” Hilda asked.

“Let me officially introduce myself,” the girl said. “My name is Beth. I am fifteen years old. *Comprende?*”

“Huh?” Aunt Hilda said.

“I told you, this girl has demons.” Petronella said. “I hear white people have the worst kind of vadoo. Who knows what your brother was engaged in before he died?”

“Shut up Petronella. My brother was not that kind of person.” Hilda said.

“Shut the fuck up!” The girl named Beth hollered.

The two women kept quiet.

“Today I will only give you a warning but next time it won’t be like this.” Beth said.
“Leave Olivia alone. If you try this nonsense again, I will set this whole house on fire while your children are sleeping in it. And then I will go to this ugly woman’s house and do the same thing. Do you understand me?”

Hilda and Petronella were too petrified to give a response.

“Why am I not getting a response?” Beth asked, getting up from the stool and pointing the glass directly at their faces.

“We understand!” They both answered, nodding profusely at the same time.

“I didn’t hear you.” Beth said, squatting down in front of them and lifting their heads up so she could look them in the eye.

“We won’t ever do this again.” Aunt Petronella muttered and quickly looked away.

Beth pointed the glass at Aunt Hilda.

“I won’t ever force you to do this again.” Aunt Hilda said and quickly shut her eyes.

“That’s a good woman. Now scram before I change my mind.” She pointed to the door.

The women wasted no time running out of the room. Looking very satisfied with the outcome, Olivia chortled heartily, the sound following the women as they ran through the hallway. And right then, the convulsions started again and Olivia fell to the floor.

Minutes later, Olivia opened her eyes to find herself lying on the floor. There was blood and pieces of broken glass all around her. She was covered in cuts and what appeared to be her own blood all over her hands and feet.

“Aunt Hilda!” She cried out, checking the bruises on her hands and freaking out all the more. She got up and ran out of the room following the sound of the voices coming from the kitchen. She busted through the door and flew into the room unceremoniously.

“Stay away from me you child of Satan!” Aunt Hilda ran away from the child the moment she appeared through the door.

Olivia stopped in her tracks and looked at the two women who appeared petrified at the sight of her. One was wielding a cooking stick in her hand looking about ready to fight and the other was holding a frying pan.

“What did you do to me?” Olivia cried as she examined herself.

“I am going home Hilda,” Petronella said, moving back towards the door. You will never see me here again. You need to take this child to a pastor.” She said before disappearing.

“Why are you crying after what you did to us?” Aunt Hilda said.

“What did I do?” Olivia asked.

“Huh?” Hilda could not believe the girl’s pretentious act. “Are you asking because you don’t know or because you’ve now remembered who the owner of this house is ah?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about I swear. I didn’t do anything. You and that woman were trying to force me to open my legs. I didn’t want. I said no. I kept telling you no but you kept forcing me. I didn’t want.” Olivia cried. “I only threw the mirror at her because she wouldn’t let me go, I swear. I didn’t mean to hurt anyone.”

“Is this child crazy or what?” Aunt Hilda asked. “Don’t you remember what you just did to us a few minutes ago? You pointed a glass at us and threatened to cut our throats!”

“I did no such thing.” Olivia sobbed. “You’re lying. You did something to me. Why did I wake up on the floor? What did that woman do to me?”

“Now that your demon is gone maybe I should whip you back to your senses and you will remember.”

She came after her but Olivia ran past her and out the yard.

Chapter Four

Olivia returned home late in the night when she was sure her aunt would be sleeping. She knocked on Chris's window, the only person in the house who wasn't completely hostile to her. He was bad just like the others but he was always the one to ask them to stop when things got too much.

"Are you kidding me?" Chris said when he lifted his curtain and found Olivia there.

"Please let me through your room. Aunt will kill me the moment she hears me enter through the door."

"You want her to kill me instead?" He said.

"Please Chris, help me."

Chris thought about it for a moment and looking at her with renewed interest he said, "Under one condition."

"What?" Olivia asked.

"You will do whatever I tell you to do."

"I promise. I will wash your clothes and even clean your room if you like."

He laughed and opened his window to let her through.

"Thank you so much Chris." Olivia said.

"Not so fast." Chris said. "Get on the bed." He motioned his head towards the bed.

"Do you want me to wash your beddings?" Olivia asked.

He laughed. "Such innocence...." He shook his head and walked to the door to confirm if it was locked and walked back to where she was standing. "You promised to do something for me and now I want you to get on the bed and take off your pants."

"No-" Olivia was about to shout but Chris rushed to cover her mouth with his fat hand.

"Be very very careful what you do from this point forward." He said. "Is it better for you to be here in my room or be out there with my mother, huh?"

Olivia tried to say something but his hand was still covering her mouth.

"I can't hear what you're saying so just listen to me like the good child that you are. Even if you scream, no one is going to believe what you say. You are just a demon possessed girl that came to my room to seduce me. I will tell that to my mother and she will

believe me and send you out of this house. Now get on the bed and open your legs wide.”

He pushed her onto the bed.

“Please Chris, I am your cousin, I am begging you.” Olivia got up from the bed.

“Please don’t do this to me.” She implored her twenty-year-old cousin. “I am like your sister...you are not supposed to do this to me.” She cried.

“You know what, you talk too much.” Chris pushed her back on the bed. He positioned himself on top of her, quickly putting his hand over her mouth again.

“If you even think about kicking, breathing, or crying I swear I will kill you.” He warned her. “My mother and sister will help me bury your body in the backyard and no one will miss you.” ‘

Chris slowly removed his hand and waited to see if she was going to scream again. Olivia surprised him by putting her own hand over her mouth to stifle her cries. Looking very satisfied, he smiled and yanked her pants down. The five minutes that followed were the worst five minutes the ten-year-old had ever experienced. Chris kicked her out of his room the moment he was done.

Olivia limped to her room and stopped at the door to take in the huge hole in it from Chris’ kick earlier in the day. There was no more safe haven for her in this hell her parents had left her in. Aunt Hilda could pounce on her whenever she wanted and now Chris was going to keep coming for her every night. Olivia pushed the door to the side and stepped into her bedroom. She grabbed a blanket from her bed and went into a corner to sob under it.

Olivia slept in that position, curled up into a ball under the heavy blanket. However, when she woke up the next morning, she was comfortably laying on her bed, neatly covered by the same blanket.

When did I get here? Olivia wondered to herself.

She lifted the blanket off of her and it was then she noticed the dry blood under her fingernails. She jumped out of the bed, screaming.

Is this my blood? She had washed off the blood she was covered in earlier in the day in Aunt Hilda’s bedroom at a friend’s house so it didn’t make sense that she would have

blood on her again. She lifted the beddings to check but there was no sign of blood anywhere. But just as she pulled the blankets back over her bed, images of the events that transpired the previous night flashed across her face.

The first image was of her trying to fight Chris away in his room. *Is this his blood?* Olivia wondered. She ran towards Chris' room but she was forced to stop when she saw the trail of blood running from his room to the living room. His door was wide open and it didn't appear as if he was inside. Gripped by fear, Olivia followed the trail of blood all the way outside where she found a few of their neighbours camped and talking amongst themselves.

"You didn't go with your aunt to the hospital?" It was the woman that lived two houses away from them that asked.

Olivia shook her head. "Did something happen?"

"Are you telling me you slept through all that commotion?" Another neighbour asked.

Olivia didn't answer. She could already sense that whatever had happened in the night had a lot to do with her.

"How did you not hear your brother screaming the whole neighbourhood down?"

Asked an elderly woman she could not recognize.

"I drank a cough syrup last night." She lied. *Why was she feeling guilty?* She wondered.

Mrs. Ndlovu, the next door neighbour walked over to her and put her hand over her shoulders. "Some man broke into your brother's room through the window and cut off his...." She left her sentences hanging as she could not bring herself to say the word. She turned to her friends for assistance.

"What should I call it for the sake of the child?" She asked.

They all stared at each other blankly.

Olivia did not need to wait for the neighbours to come up with the appropriate word. The answer was written all over their flustered faces.

Chapter Five

“Where have they gone?” Olivia asked the neighbours.

“The University Teaching Hospital,” Mrs. Ndlovu said. “You know my Emily is a medical student right?” The woman said proudly. “Well, she told your aunt that if they rushed to the hospital, the doctors might be able to fix him back.”

Olivia ran back into the house, got some money from her piggy bank hidden in one of the drawers in the closet under her clothes and hurled a taxi outside.

After searching the hospital for close to thirty minutes, Olivia finally found her aunt and cousin Nancy in the waiting room.

“How did you get here?” Nancy asked her cousin.

Aunt Hilda who had been resting her head on her laps looked up. “What are you doing here?” She asked.

“I came to see Chris.”

Aunt Hilda got up and walked over to her. “Your bedroom is right next to my son’s and yet you were sleeping soundly while strangers broke into his room and did that to him?”

“I am sorry.” Olivia cried. She didn’t know why she was apologizing but the words just kept coming out.

“Why do you keep saying sorry like you are the one who did this to him?” Nancy remarked. “Stop whining and come sit down. You’re stressing me out.” She patted the space next to her on the bench. Olivia sat down.

“She knows she is bad luck that’s why she’s apologising,” Hilda said. “Nothing like this would have happened if she wasn’t here. Bad things have been happening to us ever since she came into our lives.”

It would take a whole other hour before the family was allowed to see Chris after surgery. Aunt Nancy started crying the moment she laid eyes on her sleeping son.

“Who could have done this to you, my child?” She cried.

“Mum, stop crying. The doctor said the surgery was successful so why are you still mourning?”

“I just want to know who hates my son so much that they would do something like this.” The mother of two lamented.

“Mrs. Chanda from next door said that there’s a group of people harvesting parts for rituals. We are just lucky they didn’t get away with his stuff. That’s something to be grateful for.” Her eighteen-year-old daughter said.

“It’s my fault,” Olivia said, crying whilst holding Chris’ hand.

“Mum wasn’t serious when she said that silly,” Nancy said. “What could a ten-year-old have possibly done even if you heard the attack?”

I wanted him to hurt so badly and it happened. I did this to him. Olivia thought.

When the anaesthesia finally waned off, Chris opened his eyes to find his mother and sister hovering over him. His cousin Olivia was carefully hiding behind them in unexplained guilt.

“It’s okay my son. You’re going to be perfectly fine.” His mother assured him.

“What happened?” Chris laboured the words out.

“You don’t remember being attacked?” Nancy asked.

“Attac-“ His memories quickly came in place and played before him.

Chris forgot about his pain for a second and bolted up in bed. The last image to play on his mind was that of Olivia wilding the biggest steak knife he had ever seen in her hands while he lay hopelessly on the bed, both his hands and legs tied in place. She was unflinching in her attack. There was nothing about her blazing fiery eyes in the dark that looked like a ten-year-old’s. When the knife finally came down, she was smiling while he painfully gnawed on the piece of cloth she had shoved into his mouth.

“Get her out of here!” Chris was pointing at Olivia, grabbing his mother so she could shield him from the girl.

“What is she doing here? Get her out of here now!” He was screaming on top of his voice that all the nurses and doctors close by came in the room.

“Nancy, take her out of here.” A visibly perturbed Hilda instructed.

Sobbing, Olivia followed Nancy outside.

“Why doesn’t he want to see me?” She asked.

“I don’t know,” Nancy answered. “Maybe like mum he blames you for not hearing anything. It’s easy to want to blame someone in these situations. My God you are shaking like a leaf!” The ever so clueless Nancy laughed.

Back in the ward, the doctors sedated the inconsolable Chris.

“Why is he acting like this?” Hilda asked the doctor outside the ward.

“This kind of behaviour is not strange after this kind of surgery.” The doctor said. “It’s nothing to worry about. He will be just fine after resting.”

When Chris woke up hours later, it was to tell his mother;

“I am not going back home until you have that girl prayed for. She has demons. She is full of bad luck. She is the reason this happened to me.”

“What do you mean she is the reason-“

“Just listen to me mum, PLEASE.”

“What if I send her away-“

“No!” Chris said. “You will do no such thing unless you want me to die.”

“What do you mean die? Why are you talking like this, my child?” Hilda asked. She leaned closer to examine his eyes. “Are you sure you’re okay, really okay?”

“I am fine mum just do as I say,” Chris said. “Have that girl prayed for. I feel like she is such bad luck that’s all.”

“You might be right about her having demons you know,” Hilda said.

Chris looked at his mother curiously. “Did something happen?”

“It’s nothing important,” She said, brushed that morning’s incident off. “It’s nothing. I just keep sensing that something is wrong with the child. She is different...weird. I am definitely going to take her to church and have all the pastors there pray for her.”

As promised, Aunt Hilda took Olivia the very next day to her church where a group of six pastors surrounded her and prayed for her. They sprinkled bottles and bottles of Holy water on her and cast out demons and the only thing the ten-year-old could do was stare blankly at the faces of all the strange men surrounding her. She couldn't wait for them to finish whatever they were doing so she could go home to her dolls.

"How're you feeling?" Aunt Hilda asked Olivia as she drove them back home after two hours of prayer. She was watching the girl closely for any change in behaviour.

"I feel perfectly fine," She answered nonchalantly, smiling and playfully running her hands up and down the hem of her skirt.

"Aren't you feeling strange or anything like that?" Hilda asked.

"I don't think so. I feel very normal, as usual...maybe better than usual."

"Listen, Olivia, about what happened to Chris...."

Olivia froze.

"Chris refuses to tell me the details, just kept insisting that I bring you here for prayers," Hilda continued. "Tell me, did you see or hear anything that happened that night?"

"I didn't hear anything," Olivia said. "I was fast asleep I swear."

"Are you sure?" She asked.

"I promise, I don't know anything."

"Alright, there's no need to sulk. I was just trying to understand my son's strange behaviour. Wipe your tears, people will think I beat you up or something. Geez."

A few weeks later, Chris was whisked away to study in Russia. That was the last he would ever see Olivia.

Or so he thought.

The End.