

Because of the Light

Ext. Middle of nowhere - night

The sounds of drumming swell as feet pound the ground faster and faster.

A small fire cuts through the chill of the night air as Celia, mid 20s, dancing rhythmically whips herself into a frenzy.

The men surrounding her beat their "instruments" an assortment of pots, pans, and whatever else will make a sound. Celia moves faster and faster, trying to lose herself in the rhythm.

The men beat as fast and as hard as they can finally reaching a crescendo. Everyone's movements begin to slow, then Celia slows until all is quiet.

Celia sits on the ground, with her back to them, drenched in sweat. A man slowly approaches resting his hand on her shoulder.

JOHN

We will try again.

CELIA

Leave me be.

JOHN

Don't wait to long to head back.

Celia ignores him, not even turning around, as they all go.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - EARLY MORNING

Celia lays on her pallet, eyes wide open, staring into the darkness. Slaves sleep, snoring softly around her.

The sun rises and slowly the people begin to stir. One by one they awaken and head out of the door for Sunday service.

Grumbling Celia sits up, her feet hitting the ground hard. The door bursts open, as Ruthie, mid 20s, comes through.

Celia brightens at the sight of Ruthie. Ruthie stops halfway through the door to take in Celia's appearance. Celia looks at them both: Ruthie, clean, decently dressed. Celia grimy, in filthy rags. Celia chuckles.

Celia stands and the two lock arms and head out of the door.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

The small Church is full, mostly with slaves, but a few masters sprinkled in here and there. The Pastor, older and tired looking, is in the midst of his message.

PASTOR

Serve your masters. Don't steal  
your master's turkey.

Celia and Ruthie slip into a back pew quietly. Celia groans softly at the message. Ruthie sits primly, but Celia slouches down and tilts her head back slightly, preparing for sleep.

PASTOR

Don't steal your master's hawgs. Do  
whatsomever your master tells you  
to do. Work hard for your master,  
as if you are working onto The  
Lord.

Celia begins to snore lightly. People in the church begin to turn and look. Soon The Master turns, glaring at Celia. The Pastor stops preaching, he stands looking out into the congregation, trying to figure out where the sound is coming from.

The Master stands and heads Celia's way. Soon he is standing over her, he snatches her up by the collar.

THE MASTER

Do you know the punishment for  
disrespecting the church?

Celia stares at him contemptuously. He reaches out to strike her and she tears herself away, violently ripping open the back of her dress with her hand. Several lash marks are imprinted into her skin. Some overlapping the others, a total of fifteen.

CELIA

Five lashes.

The Pastor approaches hesitantly.

PASTOR

Perhaps, some other arrangements  
can be made. It is clear that  
these punishments aren't quite  
working. Maybe there is another way  
to reason with her...

(CONTINUED)

THE MASTER

Reason? With a *slave*?...The rules  
are the rules Pastor.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - DAY

Celia lays on her pallet as Ruthie cleans the wounds on her back. They are the only two in the room. Apart from Celia's occasionally whimper, both women are silent. After Ruthie cleans the last lash mark she sits down on the pallet letting the silence engulf them.

Ruthie reaches to the side of her and picks up a small green book. She pauses for a moment, then sides the book over into Celia's line of vision.

Celia glances at it, takes a double glance, then with great difficulty throws the book across the room as hard as she can. She screams out in pain, but looks satisfied when the book is nearly split into two.

Ruthie runs over to retrieve it.

RUTHIE

You want my back to look like  
yours?

Celia doesn't respond.

RUTHIE

You said you wanted to work on your  
reading.

CELIA

Not with that.

Ruthie sits, putting the little green Bible as far from Celia as possible.

RUTHIE

Did the spirits answer?

Celia tries to turn to stare her down. She whimpers in pain. Ruthie stands to leave.

RUTHIE

It's because they don't exist.

Ruthie says softly before heading out of the door.

EXT. DEEP FOREST - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

The group head to their clearing, confident that their voices and movements are drowned out in the thick of the woods. Celia lags behind trying to keep pace, her back oozing through her shirt.

She is surprised when the group stops. They all look to one another waiting for someone to speak. John steps forward.

JOHN

How long we been calling on the guides?

No one responds. Celia looks around.

CELIA

What you sayin'

JOHN

How long Celia?

They are all staring at her now. Celia sighs. Mumbles.

CELIA

Four years.

JOHN

And how long since they responded?

Celia pauses. She takes in the darkness of the trees, the blackness of the sky. Feels the oozing from her back. Avoids the faces of the others.

CELIA

Three and half years. I suppose.

Someone hands Man 1 something small and dark. He hands it to Celia. She looks it over slowly in her hand, reads the cover, glares at the others tears filling her eyes.

JOHN

Maybe we been doing it wrong.  
Going to the wrong God.

CELIA

So this the right one?

Tears fall down her cheeks. She laughs, but it comes out sounding more like hysterics. The others uneasily look at each other.

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JOHN

Read it to us Celia. You the only  
one of us who can read.

Celia nods. Resigned.

CELIA

Imma pray first. That's what Ruthie  
wud do. Pray.

Celia walks forward towards the clearing, she pauses before she enters scanning the opening. Everyone waits for Celia to move forward. A rock mostly hidden by shrubbery yet slightly illuminated by the moonlight stands out. They carefully move towards it while staying hidden in the darkness. When it is safe enough to appear they come out of the darkness and sit besides the rock, hidden from view.

She slaps the Bible down and a loud smack erupts causing some of the people in the group to jump. Man 1 stares at her. She begins with a smirk.

CELIA

White man's god, We called on *OUR*  
gods but they don't answer. What we  
doing wrong? What you done wit em?

Man 1 sits glaring at her.

RANDOM PERSON

That don't sound like no prayer to  
me.

They sit waiting.

RANDOM PERSON

Well?

Celia runs her fingers over the pages. She lets them slip through her fingers, then stops at a page. Her finger runs along the page randomly, stops at a verse: Isaiah 45:5, she reads it and stares.

JOHN

What it say Celia?

Celia begins to read it slowly.

CELIA

I am The Lord and there is no  
other. There is no God besides me.  
I will g-g-ead you, though you  
have not known me.

A hush falls over them. They sit there looking at one another.

WOMAN 2  
What gear'd mean?

CELIA  
I don't know.

WOMAN 2  
Ask Ruthie

Celia nods, she shivers.

MAN 1  
We should go.

And they all stand to leave.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - EARLY MORNING

Celia lays on the pallet in the darkness. Eyes staring at nothing but occasionally glancing at the mound of dirt in the corner of the room. She slips off of her pallet and quietly unearths the small dark Bible John gave her. She dusts it off and whispers.

CELIA  
I can feel it in my spirit. You got  
a message fa me. Tell me.

She pauses, looking around.

CELIA  
Lord.

Again she runs her fingers through the pages of the Bible. Her hand lands on a page. Her fingers move until one stops at a verse. Ecclesiastes 5:19.

CELIA  
As for every man whom God has given  
riches and wealth, and given him ,  
the power to eat of it, to receive  
his hertiage and rejoice in his  
labor-this is the gift of God.

Celia stares at the words in front of her. She slams the Bible shut and throws it back into the hole, rushing over to quickly cover it with dirt.

She moves to her pallet, lays down, and stares at the darkness.

EXT. SLAVE FIELDS - MIDDAY

Celia works hunched over a row, hoe in hand. The sun bears down on her and her pace slows. , Timothy the Overseer, watches in the near distance.

TIMOTHY

You best not be slowing girl

Celia begins to work faster, grumbling through gritted teeth:

CELIA

Riches and wealth.

She grips the handle until her hands bleed.

TIMOTHY

You say something girl?

CELIA

No sir.

EXT. FOREST - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Celia stands behind a large oak tree. She hides the dusty Bible against her skin in the folds of her clothes. Her finger is marking Ecclesiastes. Ruthie hurries towards her bundled up against the cold night air. She stops next to Celia but doesn't speak. Celia thrusts the Bible out towards her, finger on the verse page open. She scans the words quickly.

CELIA

What rej-, rejoi..

RUTHIE

Rejoice.

CELIA

What it mean?

Ruthie pauses as if rolling the word around in her brain.

RUTHIE

It means...to be happy.

Celia's eyes narrow. She begins to cry.

CELIA

The Lord has given me nothing.  
Nothing.

Ruthie sits down at the base of the tree. Celia follows.

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CELIA

Even my life ain't mine! How can I  
ever be happy?

Ruthie wraps of arms around her friend. Holding her close.  
Celia cries until her eyes are nearly swelled shut.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

Celia stands in the doorway of the church. Her hands goes to  
the top of the lash marks on her back. She pauses before  
entering. The Master stares at her pointing her in the  
direction of where she is to sit.

PASTOR

The Lord tells bondservants, that's  
what you all are, to be *obedient* to  
their Masters, to be well pleasing  
in ALL things, not sassing, not  
sabotaging, not rebelling.

Celia sits in the pew, staring ahead. Fists in tight balls  
in her lap, nails digging into the wounds on her hands.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

Celia lays on her pallet. Eyes closed, though she is wide  
awake. She hears sobs, cries of despair. The person mumbles,  
the sounds rise and fall, though the words never become  
clear. When all falls silent, Celia slips off of her pallet  
and out the door.

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Celia runs towards the forest as fast as her legs can carry  
her, the Bible hidden under her clothes and against her  
skin. She looks around frantically, hoping no one has  
spotted her. She runs into the forest.

EXT. FOREST - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Celia sits down behind a tree that has low thick bushes  
surrounding it. She pulls the Bible from her clothing.

CELIA

White man's god.

Celia pauses.

CELIA

God. Lord. Why is we here? Why is  
we suffering? Do you want spilled  
blood?

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She forcefully opens the Bible. Slams her finger to a verse. Isaiah 55:8, For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

Celia frowns, shaking her head. She flips through the Bible landing at a page. Slams her finger to another verse.

Proverbs 3:5-6, Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Celia sits there, breathing slowly, deeply. Calm. She stands and heads back to the quarters.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - EARLY MORNING

Celia sleeps soundly. The bell rings out. She opens her eyes. Gets up and heads to the fields.

EXT. SLAVE FIELDS - EARLY MORNING

Celia is the first of the slaves to arrive. She receives a tool from the Overseer, goes to her assigned spot. Hoes the land, back straight. Humming softly to herself.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - EARLY MORNING

Celia rises before anyone else. She slips to her knees and begins to pray.

EXT. SLAVE FIELDS - NIGHT

Celia works the stretch of land. The bell sounds and the slaves begin to leave. But Celia stays working. Hoeing the land. Humming.

TIMOTHY

Get to your cabin.

Celia hands him her tool and heads to the cabin.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

Celia lays down on her pallet, closes her eyes, whispers a prayer of thanks, and goes to sleep.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - EARLY MORNING

Everyone sleeps. Celia opens her eyes. Makes her way to the Bible. Opens it up under the light of the moon and begins to read. After a moment she closes the Bible and slides onto her knees. Celia smiles. It's Sunday. The sun rises and Celia opens her eyes. It is like she is noticing the cabin for the first time: The dirt stained walls. The filthy

pallets. The filth caked people. The dirt floors. Celia stands and heads out the door.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - DAY

Celia and Ruthie wash the walls of the cabin. The other slaves stare at them in disbelief. Then at each other.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - EARLY MORNING

Celia rises in the darkness of the morning. She reads her Bible by moonlight, and slips to her knees and begins to pray. A slave woman creeps up behind her. Celia opens her eyes and turns. The woman, young, kneels beside her.

YOUNG WOMAN

What are you doing?

CELIA

Talking to the Lord.

YOUNG WOMAN

Can I?

Celia smiles.

CELIA

Anytime you want.

The Young Woman closes her eyes. And Celia begins to pray softly.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - EARLY MORNING

Celia, Ruthie, and the Young Woman clean the pallets in the slave quarters.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - EARLY MORNING

Celia and the Young Woman kneel together praying.

EXT. SLAVE FIELDS - EARLY MORNING

Celia and the Young Woman move towards the fields, before anyone else, alone. The Overseer hands them their tools. They get to work.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - EARLY MORNING

Celia and the Young Woman kneel together praying. A man walks up to them. Celia looks up, inviting him to join them.

EXT. SLAVE FIELDS - EARLY MORNING

Celia, the Young Woman, and the Man head to the fields. The bells rings out. The Overseer hands them their tools.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - EARLY MORNING

All of the slaves in the cabin kneel, praying with Celia.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - MID-DAY

The slaves work together laying thin pieces of wood on the packed dirt floor. The cabin is clean. Adorned with a small crate. Atop sits fresh flowers.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

Celia sits in the pew with Ruthie and the Young Woman. The Pastor preaches.

PASTOR

'Servants,' the Lord says 'be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ.'

Celia shifts in her seat.

CELIA

Pastor, does it say that in the good book, or is this what you think?

PASTOR

This is what it actually says Celia.

CELIA

Then what it say about how Masters should treat their-

The Master slams his fist into Celia's face with all his might. Celia flies back but the Master pulls her forward, dragging her off the pew and out of the church. The slaves and the Pastor follow.

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He throws her face first into the dirt, kicking her again and again. Celia looks up and sees the darkness surrounding him. Celia cries out to the Lord. A bright pale golden light cuts through the darkness. The Master stops beating her.

He stands there, with everyone watching him, then hurries away.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - DAY

Celia lays on her pallet barely conscious. Ruthie, the Young Woman, the Man, and the other slaves form a circle around her praying. John enters room.

JOHN

Still praying to the white man's  
god?

Celia's opens her eyes. They flutter. She closes them.

CELIA

There ain't no 'white man's god.'  
Or our god, or their god. Only one  
God John and he live in the good  
book.

He nods. Grabs her hands. They are caked in her blood.

CELIA

Bring me my Bible.

John turns to the others. The Young Woman grabs it, puts it in Celia's hands. Celia opens it, turns the pages with her eyes closed. Blood smearing covering ink.

CELIA

He speaking to me. Telling me where  
he want me to go...

Her hands stop. Her finger presses into the page. Ruthie reads the page out loud.

RUTHIE

The Book of Exodus.

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