

Oba's Enchanted Train Ride: Ola's Magical Odyssey

Today marked a pivotal decision in my life—I resolved to be a better friend and fulfill the promises I had made to Taylor. Taylor and I were more than just friends; we were kindred spirits who had shared life's journey since our primary school days in Ikoyi. Our bond was unbreakable, evident from the moment we first met. We yearned to stick together like glue, our determination so fervent that we even resorted to failing our other entrance exams to ensure we'd end up in the same secondary school. Our parents, wise to our cunning ploy, indulged our scheme with one condition: we had to agree to attend a boarding school together.

This condition didn't faze me in the slightest, for I knew that with Taylor by my side, I could brave any challenge that came our way. Our unbreakable friendship was a force to be reckoned with, and it shaped our choices throughout the years.

It was no surprise to anyone when we decided to embark on a new adventure together, this time to Chicago. However, what set this move apart from our previous escapades was the fact that we opted to attend different universities. I enrolled at the University of Chicago, while Taylor ventured to Northwestern.

Lately, Taylor had expressed her concerns, claiming that I had grown distant. Today, I was determined to prove her wrong, to show her that our friendship remained as vibrant and meaningful as ever. It had been the third time this week that I assured her I would drop by and spend quality time together. The brisk Chicago wind tugged at my coat as I embarked on the journey to the Kimball train station. As I drew nearer to the station, an odd sensation gripped my body, and faint echoes began to reverberate in my ears. With every step closer to the train, those

echoes intensified, creating a disconcerting symphony around me. Needing a distraction from the whirlwind of my day, I decided to give my boyfriend, Ben, a call. Ben and I had met during my very first day at the University of Chicago, during orientation week, and we'd been inseparable ever since. Our connection? Well, it was built on a shared love for video games, books, and even tennis, of all things. Funny enough, I mostly tuned in for the women's matches, while he was all about the men's games. These days, I couldn't stop talking about Coco Gauff's incredible wins on the court.

As for my parents, I hadn't spilled the beans about Ben yet. I was a bit unsure about how they'd react to me dating a white guy. Instead, I'd decided to keep it under wraps and planned to surprise them on my graduation day. Hopefully, they'd see what Taylor eventually did – a loving and supportive partner who meant the world to me.

I pulled out my phone and dialed Ben's number. He picked up on the third ring.

"Hey," he greeted, his voice warm and comforting.

"Hey," I replied, the tension from the day beginning to melt away. "I've got so many projects piling up; it's driving me crazy."

"Don't worry," Ben reassured me. "I'll order us some food for when you're back from Taylor's."

His words instantly put me at ease, and I couldn't help but smile, finding comfort in his thoughtfulness amidst the craziness of the day.

Walking onto the train, I chided myself for the habit of cranking up my music to deafening levels, a quirk my mother had always warned me about. Settling into a seat, the echoes suddenly

ceased. Across from me sat a woman who appeared to be in her forties. Her eyes possessed a mesmerizing shade of green, and a natural, enigmatic smile graced her lips. Amidst the hubbub, I accidentally dropped my ticket without realizing it. Startled by the earlier auditory barrage, I hadn't even noticed. To my surprise, the woman graciously retrieved my ticket and handed it to me. I offered my thanks, and she replied with a serene, 'You're welcome, Ola.' I furrowed my brow, perplexed, for there was no conceivable way she could have known my name.

The train doors closed swiftly, and thus began an inexplicable journey. Two stops had passed, and three more remained—or so I thought. 'Rockwell is the next stop; doors will open on the left,' the announcer's voice declared, but the train paid no heed. Instead, it accelerated, doubling its previous speed. The world outside darkened swiftly, and through the window's glass, I saw my own reflection, distorted and eerie.

Paralyzed by an unknown force, I couldn't move a muscle, and the other passengers had vanished into thin air. Panic welled up inside me, and before I could release a scream, consciousness slipped away.

'Wake up,' a soft voice whispered, sending chills down my spine. I struggled to open my eyes at first, my vision blurred by the disorienting journey. After blinking repeatedly, clarity returned. To my astonishment, the woman who had previously occupied the seat across from me had transformed into a snake. Its triangular head, wider than its body, featured distinctive facial pits on each side, just in front of its eyes. Intricate diamond-shaped markings adorned its body, outlined in sandy beige and filled with a warm, earthy brown.

I had always been deathly afraid of snakes, but this one emanated an inexplicable familiarity. Instead of fear, I felt an overwhelming sense of comfort, as though I were reuniting with an old

friend. 'Ah, Oba, you're awake,' the snake said in a soft, tranquil voice as it gracefully slithered towards me, resting its head on my left shoulder.

'What is going on?' I managed to ask, though a pounding headache from the rough ride made speaking a challenge. 'We don't have much time. I'll explain as we go, Oba, but first, you must disembark from this train.' The snake coiled itself around my body, its presence strangely reassuring.

'Why should I trust you at all?' I inquired, torn between instinctual fear and an inexplicable trust that seemed to emanate from the creature.

As we disembarked from the train, we found ourselves in a desolate landscape devoid of any signs of life. Not a single soul was in sight, yet the air held a refreshing scent, and the silence offered an unexpected comfort.

'Are you going to answer my questions now?' I inquired, addressing my newfound companion.

The snake, with its patient demeanor, replied, 'You have always lacked patience, Oba, but yes, I will answer your questions. Many decades ago, you created this place—a realm where anything was possible, where all creatures, even the trees, shared a common language. It served as an escape from the pain and sadness that weighed on you in the real world. However, it was designed to provide only temporary solace, for as soon as you boarded that train and returned to reality, your memories of this place would be wiped clean until your next visit.'

A deep sense of realization began to dawn on me as I absorbed the revelation. 'The last time you were here was five years ago in human time,' the snake continued, its voice carrying a hint of sorrow. 'Unfortunately, during that visit, five years ago, your grandmother passed away in the real world, while you were here. You blamed yourself for her death.'

My heart ached as I recalled that painful memory. The burden of guilt had weighed heavily on me for years, and now, in this surreal world, it all began to make sense.

The snake's tone shifted, becoming more urgent. 'I summoned you here today because a grave divide has emerged. The lions, who have always been the guardians of this realm, are stirring up trouble. Normally, I would handle this situation myself, but you made me promise long ago that I would call upon you if such a crisis arose.'

I paused, taking in the enormity of the situation. 'Hmm, that's a lot to take in,' I admitted, my mind racing with the implications of my return and newfound responsibilities.

As we continued our journey, the trees lining our path seemed to possess faces, their gnarled bark forming intricate expressions. A multitude of animals leaped and danced around us, adding a whimsical quality to our surroundings. The snake guided me towards a modest store nestled amidst the enchanting landscape.

'You must change now; time is of the essence,' the snake urged, its voice carrying a note of urgency. Without hesitation, I complied, the day's surreal events having already overwhelmed me.

'Why do you keep calling me Oba?' I questioned, puzzled by the name.

The snake explained, 'You once rejected the title of 'King,' instead creating the moniker 'Oba,' which everyone now uses to address you.' The snake continued to explain that there wasn't a particular reason for me requesting not to be called King, but rather it was my belief that "Oba" carried more power and resonance, deeply rooted in Nigerian tradition. As we walked through the enchanting streets of this extraordinary world, the snake's words echoed in my mind,

reminding me of the significance of the name "Oba" and the weight it carried. It was a name that connected me to the rich tapestry of Nigerian history and tradition, and I carried it with pride.

With each step of our journey, I embraced the power and responsibility that came with the name "Oba," determined to use it to bring harmony and unity to the world we had entered, just as it symbolized in the traditions of Nigeria.

As I gazed into the mirror, taking in my new outfit, memories of this place flooded my mind, as though they had been buried in the deepest recesses of my consciousness.

'We must retrieve the potion that will restore your memories, enabling you to communicate with the lions before it grows late,' the snake declared, resuming its lead. As we passed by various animals, each one bowed in reverence at the mere presence of my shadow. As we continued our surreal journey, the trees lining our path took on an astonishing transformation; their gnarled bark contorted into intricate, expressive faces, and the air was alive with the playful antics of countless animals. The snake, our enigmatic guide, led me to a quaint, unassuming store tucked away amidst this fantastical world.

Our journey led us to a peculiar establishment, its façade emblazoned with the words 'Oba's Book Cellar.' Stepping inside, I was greeted by an overwhelming sight—a vast sea of books stretching as far as the eye could see. 'How will we ever find the potion amid this labyrinth of books?' I wondered aloud, my apprehension mounting.

The snake responded calmly, 'We seek not the potion but a key. You once instructed me to remind you that this key dwells within your most cherished book, one that only you could identify. I shall await you outside while you seek it.' I contemplated my choices, and in that moment, a realization dawned upon me. My recent reading had been primarily focused on

African literature, leaving me with only one book of exceptional significance. It had to be more than just any book. Recalling my grandmother's treasured gift, I determined that 'The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe' held the key to this mystery. It took me a mere fifteen minutes to locate the book. Upon opening its pages, a key tumbled forth, gleaming with purpose. 'I've found it!' I exclaimed, my heart racing.

The snake returned and led me to a door, its surface painted an imposing black with a golden handle. Inserting the key into the lock, the door responded by glowing brilliantly before swinging open, revealing a chamber within.

Inside, I discovered the potion, its hue a soft, inviting pink. Uncertainty gnawed at me as I hesitated, questioning the wisdom of consuming it.

'Are you certain I should drink this?' I inquired, seeking reassurance.

The snake replied, 'I do not possess that knowledge; you are the creator of this potion.'

With trepidation, I uncorked the potion and swallowed it down. A shiver coursed through me as my memories flooded back, cascading like a torrent of images and sensations. It felt as though I had experienced a thousand lifetimes in the span of thirty seconds.

'We must depart now to converse with the lions,' the snake urged, its patience unwavering.

'Very well,' I replied, 'It is good to be back.'

Together, we set forth towards the awaited encounter with the enigmatic lions.

As we traversed the mile-long path, our destination, the palace of the lions, gradually loomed into view. Upon arrival, I took my place on the ornate throne, a sense of purpose surging through me.

'I must see all the lions immediately!' I proclaimed, my voice ringing with authority.

What followed felt like an interminable meeting, as we deliberated, negotiated, and sought common ground. In the end, a resolution was reached, and harmony was restored to this enchanting realm.

The time for departure had come once more. I retraced my steps to the train station, my thoughts heavy with the weight of the world I had just encountered. As I glanced over my left shoulder, a pang of gratitude welled up inside me.

'It was truly wonderful to see you again, my dear friend,' I murmured.

The snake's reply came as a whisper, 'I will always be by your side, Oba, even when you do not know it.'

With those parting words, I reboarded the train, and it set into motion. Once again, I succumbed to unconsciousness, the passage of time slipping through my grasp.

When I awoke, the harsh reality of the human world greeted me—30 missed calls and a message from Taylor, inquiring about my arrival. I checked the time, discovering that almost eight hours had passed. It left me pondering the possibility that I had fallen into a deep slumber, lost within the train's enigmatic embrace for an entire eight hours. Another message appeared on my phone, and it was from Ben. His words read, "Hey, I left the food out because I hadn't heard from you. I'm guessing you and Taylor were having a blast. Also, your location says you never left the train station, so you might want to get that checked out. Love you."