

## Rení's Luggage

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Renike got to the Murtala Mohammed domestic airport in Lagos around 2:15 p.m. she should've gotten to Lagos before noon, but as fate will have it, she had her share of bad luck that day. Immediately leaving the airport, she found her older sister and uncle waiting outside. They stood under a shed, smiling, but she couldn't return their smiles; her luggage was probably stuck in transit. Her sister, Lade, hugged her, saying, "Oh, you finally wore this sweatshirt. You swore it was going to be useless". She was referring to the Adidas sweatshirt she made Renike buy as she was preparing to go for her youth service several months back. Renike had argued that the sweatshirt was probably fake since it was from a thrift store, but Lade insisted she got it. "You'll need it," she said that Friday. She's almost done with service and wore it for the first time today.

She replied, "I'm not in your mood now; the Cargo guy is acting weird. I don't know when my luggage will get to Lagos like this". Lade mouthed Pele to her and relieved her of the laptop bag on her shoulder. Renike greeted her uncle, and he assured her the luggage would get to Lagos that day and that she didn't need to worry herself.

Her phone rang as she was done greeting her uncle, and she spoke to the guy whose contact was saved as Cargo on her phone, "When I get to Dana stand, what do I tell them?" the guy barked at her that she should be calm and he would send the details soon.

"What did he say? Ehn?" Lade inquired, "Nothing tangible o, he is just there shouting the same thing about sending the details as if he has not collected a whole twenty thousand naira from me for this stupid luggage". She had called her sister when she panicked at the airport because the airline couldn't check her luggage in as the plane was already boarding. She tried explaining the details at that point, but the reception was not very good –9mobile definitely got their network connection from hell. The airport was like Balogun market at that moment, and the only thing she could get across was that her luggage would be sent to Lagos as Cargo. As she was ranting, the people sitting on a bench in front of them stood up to meet their friend who got out of the airport; Reni counted the number of boxes the person came out with. "Wow, so someone was able to check ten boxes in, but I couldn't check one in because I got there 30 minutes before the time of the flight. It is not their fault, sha; I was the one making beans at home like a slave" –she had to cook beans for her aunt that morning before leaving for the airport.

Lade and her uncle laughed at her frustration, and just then, she got a WhatsApp text from the Cargo saying, “Send the money now.” She had already paid the cargo guy, who was clearly a thief, twenty thousand naira and was shocked that he was asking for money; with frustration, she handed the phone to her sister to reply to him. Lade always had her way of handling situations like this, and they got the tag number on her luggage and the number of who to retrieve the luggage. Lade showed their uncle the information they just got, and he collected the bag Reni got as a souvenir from the airline and told her to run to get her luggage.

Reni entered the airport and ran to where Dana’s tickets were being sold. She hadn’t followed Dana from Abuja, but the person who just extorted her said he was sending her luggage to Lagos through Dana. She noticed the airport wasn’t unnecessarily full like the Nnamdi Azikwe airport in Abuja that morning; she could jog through the hall without hitting anybody. “I sent my luggage from Abuja to Lagos through Dana Cargo. I have the tag number, and I also tried calling the number of whom I’m supposed to retrieve it, but he is not picking up. Can you please direct me to where I can get my luggage?” She knew she had to say please twice; it was the Nigerian thing to do, after all. The girl at the Dana counter smiled and pointed a pencil towards the exit of the hall saying “go out to the Cargo facility, your luggage should be there already”. She turned immediately and shouted thank you as she ran out of the hall towards the direction the lady pointed to as the Cargo facility.

The buildings outside that hall were confusing, and there was no signboard or anything indicating what any of the building was. She walked briskly to a police officer; even though she hated the guts of Nigerian police officers, she needed his help to get to where her luggage was. She asked the policeman calmly where the cargo facility was; she didn’t want to upset the man who looked like he hadn’t had food the whole day. She had read several stories of trigger-happy police officers on Twitter and was trying not to be a scapegoat. Surprisingly, he got up from his seat smiling and offered to take her to the Cargo facility, and he only returned to his post when she was already inside the gate of the facility. She thought that was strange.

Reni readjusted her face mask and walked towards the entrance; many people in Abuja wore one everywhere because of the fear of COVID-19, whereas Lagosians could not be bothered. The security guy, who was probably in his 30s, called her back and asked her to check her temperature with the thermometer erected in front

of the building and sanitise her hands before going in. She did that, thanked the man and jogged to the building.

The cargo facility was full, and none of the officers wore reflective jackets, which made it difficult for her to determine who to speak to about her problem. The crowd was too much for her, reminding her of how full the airport was as she was about to miss the morning flight. A man she will later know as Jude tapped her shoulder and asked how he could help. She explained everything that had happened and showed him the tag number the person who sent her Luggage had sent earlier. He directed her to a building outside the cargo facility; it was way smaller than she expected, it was tagged Red Star Express Arrivals, and she still couldn't find her luggage there. The little happiness she had vanished, and she made a mental note to return to the hall, where she met Jude and told him she found nothing.

Reni called the Cargo guy back and begged Jude to speak to him. Maybe she didn't know what to do with the information he had been giving, and a worker at the cargo facility would probably understand the "scammer" better. In his usual manner, he barked orders as if he could not speak clearly, and after he realised the person with the phone was not ready for a shouting contest with him, he said calmly and gave different details entirely. Jude asked if he sent the luggage through a particular "mail and freight," and he replied affirmatively. Jude directed Reni to look for someone in the departure hall who could help. As she was leaving the hall, her sister called, and she sounded worried. Reni met her outside the cargo facility and they proceeded to the departure hall together.

"You should have ordered Bolt instead of waiting for that free ride this morning. We would have gotten out of Ikeja by now."

"I know o, this one is a lesson for me. If I had paid Bolt or Uber that five thousand for a trip to the airport, I wouldn't have wasted twenty thousand and my time today."

Her Aunt had told her a day before not to bother booking any taxi and that she would drop her at the airport herself; weirdly, she lent her car out to someone who did not bring it back until 2 hours before the boarding time. Reni should have known this would happen, but in good faith, she trusted her Aunt's words.

It was already 4 o'clock when they left the departure hall without getting the luggage. Their mom had called a lot of times, and their dad was already getting angry that they had wasted too much time at the airport already; he got the cargo guy's number because "I want to speak with him directly". The person Jude

directed them to at the departure hall was unable to help; he just said they should keep calling the number of the person that the cargo guy said was in possession of the luggage –the guy was not even picking up throughout the time they were in the departure hall, it seemed as if the box was gone forever and they dare not leave the airport without it –a whole twenty thousand was at stake here.

They walked back to where their uncle was sitting tiredly, and he suggested that they go home and continue with the search tomorrow as it was getting late, and they still had a whole two-hour journey ahead of them to get home. They informed him about all that happened, and he seemed to have lost hope of the luggage getting to them that day.

After their father spoke to the guy, he lied that the luggage would get to Lagos before 4:30 pm; their uncle suggested giving the guy at least fifteen minutes grace before calling him or going back to the cargo facility to check for the box. The three of them were used to his lies now, and they knew the package would likely not be there at 4:45 p.m. At almost 5 p.m., they left their uncle at the car park and tried their luck again, but their effort proved abortive.

Usually, they wouldn't spend up to two hours at the airport roaming—they would have had something to eat. Lade dragged Reni to the Chicken Republic shop and ordered a few snacks and drinks, “We will sha eat something before we figure this out”. Reni never understood how her sister never let food go no matter the situation, she could be crying her eyes out, and Lade would still offer her something to eat because “one needs strength to cry”. It was as if the bad energy that day wasn't enough –the Chicken Republic attendant gave them hot bottles of Soda after they paid and insisted that the drinks could not be returned. They sat at a table where they could see the attendant and occasionally gave him weird looks or hissed at him –it was so subtle to the other customers in the restaurant. Still, he got their message every time he looked their way.

The devil probably kept recruiting more hands every hour that day, and those hands weren't getting off any shifts. The scammer added more to Reni and Lade's worries after he sent a bizarre logo to Reni; he claimed the company was holding her luggage. With little hope, they strolled back to the cargo facility to try their luck one last time –no one at the facility had seen that kind of logo before. They decided to sit with the Red Star Express staff handling the arrivals; he assured them that one of their staff had gone to sort their arrivals at the other airport terminal.

At that point, the cargo guy had stopped taking Reni's calls. "I don't tire," he had said after Reni asked him about the strange logo he sent. She couldn't even cry at that point –her money and maybe her luggage were gone too. As Lade tried to converse with people who could help them retrieve the luggage, Reni stared at her phone; nothing was interesting anymore, not even Twitter, which she was addicted to as she would use a VPN to access it. At that point, she couldn't call or text him on WhatsApp again; he had blocked her line.

Lade was able to talk to Jude, and he was surprised that Reni had not left the airport at around 6 p.m. he offered to go to the tarmac to help her check if the box came with the flight that had just landed at the airport. Reni misdescribed the bag because of the stress –she called her luggage brown instead of black, and the only description she got was the colour of the padlock on it. She wondered if she hadn't locked the luggage, maybe the cargo guy who now had her line blocked would've taken the valuables in her luggage and discarded the rest. Silly thoughts just filled her mind.

Jude sent various pictures matching Reni's description to her WhatsApp, and of course, none of the luggage captured was hers –they did not even look like anything she had ever owned. At around 6:30 pm, Jude returned to the Red Star arrivals stand with other airport officials, dragging three trolleys carrying all kinds of luggage from Abuja.

Tiredly, Reni and Lade walked around the trolleys, scanned through each one and found the missing luggage inside the last trolley; happily, they ran to where they left their uncle. He was furious when they got to him, but at least they did not leave the airport without the luggage.