

Behind Your Screen

By Fisayo Balogun

Behind Your Screen:

After the week we had, it would be a waste not to document it. Let me start first.

Anu's Entry (14/02/22)

Holding my life in one hand, and spaghetti in the other, I walk into the narrow hallway using my elbows to feel for a light. The prick and small yelp I let out let me know I found it. Determined to not spill anything, I press my back against the switch, and brightness finally greets me. The distance between the walls is not as pleasing as I want, but I do not have a choice. Between hearing "Oshodi Oshodi Oshodi!" at 4:00 a.m. every day and my neighbour's generator, I choose the latter and will sleep to my aesthetic white noise.

I wiggle into my bedroom and finally place everything on my work desk. That is when I see this wooden-like object under the desk. I crouch down, and my hand meets a hard and rough confusing texture. The dark wood has a classy look which makes me think the previous tenant must have forgotten it. Out of curiosity, I pick it up and notice there is an opening in the middle. I open it and realise it is a laptop. It looks like a laptop will be the correct thing to say. It has a light green screen on one side of it, and only one white button on the other side. I press it, and the screen almost blinds me. I watch as a circle floats around the screen for about five minutes till I see a blue welcome sign. It suddenly changes into a mirror as I see the reflection of my hands on the screen. I move the screen up to my face to see how tired I look, and I am shocked to see myself.

The girl looks exactly like me, but I know she is not me. I stare at the screen, trying to figure out if I am lacking sleep or running mad, and then she suddenly says, "Hello." As if on cue, we both scream. I drop the wood on the desk and sit on my chair. She keeps saying hello and asking if I am there like I am supposed to say yes. I have seen many things in Lagos, but a virtual double ganger was not on my list.

I start laughing, silently begging the Holy Spirit to protect me. I ask for a name, and she says "Ayo". She looks at me with her eyebrows raised and asks for mine. I say "Anu".

She sits down in an unfamiliar location and asks why we look like each other. I try explaining to her how I found the wood and put it on, but it seems like she does not understand me. I really think I have lost my mind. Stress makes people go crazy right? She starts telling me how she found the wood on her daily walk through the cave, and I stare at her, wondering how my brain is creating this scenario.

Am I really talking to another version of myself through this? How is it even possible? She then tells me she must go but will like to talk to me later. The screen goes off, and I am left alone with my mind. I think I need to sleep. Goodnight.

Anu's Entry (15/02/22)

Good morning. I get up from my bed and walk to my desk to drink water. I see the wood and jump back. I remember everything that happened yesterday and try to turn it on again. It does not work. I press the button many times but nothing.

I grab my phone and start searching every and any sentence combination I could think of. I then stumble on parallel universes. This guy wrote a blog about having different versions of himself in different universes and how he cracked the concept of time. On a normal day, I would think it was another person fetching for impressions, but for today I decide to do a deep dive. After reading various articles, I figure I can only meet my other self at the same exact time each day. It was 8:00 p.m. yesterday, so I guess I will see you at night.

Once it is 8:00 p.m., I rush back into my room and put on the wood. It works! Ayo is sitting down in the same cave, smiling widely. She waves at me, and I wave back, accepting my new reality.

She talks with so much excitement. She starts telling me about her world and how things are done. It is honestly fascinating. I tell her about my world too, and she seems to like it. I guess suffering and inflation sound exciting to her.

Ayo's world can be described as very traditional. Their houses are made of sticks and clay, they grow flowers and other plants to make their clothes, and they communicate using message birds. It is like a Disney fairytale. They don't have computers, so the mystery wood is a new concept to Ayo. It makes me wonder how something like that got there and why we both have

it. Everyone in her world has a farm, so food is never a problem. Imagine a world like that? No wonder she talks about it with so much pride.

The most intriguing thing about her world is the way they tell time. They have animals that make different sounds every hour. How did they train them to do that?

As our conversation wraps up, I start smiling too. I think I made a friend. It feels nice.

Ayo's entry (18/02/22)

I guess it's my turn to write now. Let me continue our story.

I still cannot believe what is going on. I walk through that cave every day and have never seen anything like this. Over here, it's not easy to make friends as most people are too focused on having the best farms. That's why talking to Anu for the last five days has been quite fun. I have learnt so much about her world, and I love it!

In her world, they have a device or tool for everything. There are these things called cars that people use to move around, the wood is some kind of laptop, and you can see or talk to anyone wherever you are at any time. That is so amazing! I do find it boring how they use numbers to tell time. It doesn't seem as fun.

The most intriguing thing about her world is that they use paper to get anything. If you don't have this thing called money, you can't survive. Can you imagine dying because you don't have a piece of paper?

Another funny thing is the wood does not work when I am home. I must carry it to the cave to talk to her. Anu says it has something to do with connection.

I get to the cave and hear the loud sound of the cows. It's time to talk to Anu! I put on the wood and see her crying. My smile drops.

"What's wrong?" I ask.

Anu's Entry (18/02/22)

"I am tired," I say with tears rolling down my face.

Ayo looks so concerned. I think she tries to reach out to me but suddenly remembers it is a screen and stops. "What happened Anu?" She asks.

It is work. When I got this job, I was so excited. I have always wanted to work in a magazine house. Who would have thought I would regret it. I feel stressed and immense sadness every day I go to work. Even during the weekends, I am not happy. Imagine a place causing you so much pain, and you feel stuck.

I hardly get noticed, some of my co-workers take credit for my work, and my manager is an annoying tyrant. The tasks I am given constantly shock and worry me. No matter how hard I try to manage and find ways to deal with it, I am honestly sad. The worst part is that I fear confrontation and shrink when I want to fight for myself.

I tell her all this, and she gives me a sad smile. She tells me she does not relate to my kind of work style but has an idea of how it is. "Why not leave then? If it's affecting you this bad, why put yourself through that?" She asks.

"I need to pay rent. The rate of unemployment in the country is too high. Most people are honestly just looking for jobs these days, and only a few are lucky to get one that truly makes them happy. So even if I want to, I can't leave till I get something better." I say.

"Sorry about that Anu. I would have vexed for them sha, but I get." She says.

Ayo's Entry (18/02/22)

"Let me tell you what happened this morning," I say. She looks like she needs something to relax her mind.

I start telling her about my day in an exaggerated manner with sound effects. She starts laughing and urging me to go on.

"How was the thief able to enter the farm and steal so many chickens without getting caught?" She asks, almost falling off her seat, laughing.

Honestly, I do not know. That is because the story is fake. I just wanted to say something to make Anu laugh. Thankfully, it worked.

“I wish I could come over there and help you fight at work,” I say.

Suddenly, a message pops up on the screen with a loud noise. It reads: ‘You can do that tomorrow’. The message disappears.

We look at each other in confusion.

“I think we’re meeting tomorrow?” Anu asks.

“I think so too,” I say.

Once we process what just happened, we scream. I guess I am going to see Anu. I do not know how it will happen, but the universe will let us know. It brought us our mystery wood and will soon bring us together.

Anu’s Entry (19/02/22)

I cannot remember the last time I felt this happy. Ayo is coming over! She is that voice I need. The person inside of me who wants to yell and express my feelings. She is that spirit that knows when to relax, how to have fun, and brings so much joy. She’s the inner me fighting to come out. I think that’s why I am so drawn to her personality. She’s me. The me that I want to be.

I check my phone and it is 7:00 pm. One hour left. Should I set up a bed? Make some dinner? Get some snacks? I don’t know.

What do you do first when someone is coming over? I decide to do all. Once it's 5 minutes to 8, I run to my room. I settle down on my desk and put on our mystery wood. I see Ayo in what appears to be a top and skirt that looks like what I wore the first day we met but with flowers. We smile at each other.

“I hope you’re prepared for my grand entrance?” She says.

“Of course. I have the red carpet out already.” I say.

“I dressed the part then.” She says giggling.

“So, how does this work?” I ask.

A message suddenly pops up. It says: ‘Put both your palms on the screen. You will have five minutes to crossover before it closes.’ It disappears.

A crossover? I guess we will be switching after we meet. We look at each other and scream excitedly. It's happening.

We both put our palms on the screen, and a bright lilac light bursts out. When it all becomes clear, I see myself standing in the middle of my empty street. I see Ayo fully, and I am taken aback again by how much we look alike. This tall glass line separates our two worlds. Her world is so pretty. A floating clock suddenly appears to my right, and I see the countdown.

"Well, don't let it get to the last minute. Come over!" I say with a big smile. (4 minutes left)

"Ayo?" I say with a half-smile. (2 minutes left)

"You're not coming, are you?" I say with a sad smile. (1 minute left)

She's just looking at me. Her hands haven't moved from the glass. It's like she is frozen. The only signs of movement are the tears flowing down her cheeks. We keep looking at each other. That's when I understand that she is not coming.

As time starts running out, I cry as I look at Ayo.

"You got this Anu. I believe in you. It's been the best week talking to you. I don't know if we'll be able to meet again, but I hope someday I can visit. I am so sorry." She says.

The glass begins to fade away, and so does Ayo. Before I know it, I'm back in my room, and our mystery wood is gone. I cry as I hug myself on the floor. This week has been incredibly fun. I will never regret meeting Ayo; she was a great friend. I am sure she has a good reason to stay.

I get up from the floor and pick up my phone. I start researching resignation letter templates. I find one I like, save it, and smile. It is time to be more active and expand my job search. Choosing my sanity is important.

Now it's time to face my reality with her experiences in my heart.

Ayo's entry (19/02/22)

As the bright lilac light becomes clear, I see myself in an empty forest. The flowers are so beautiful, and the pond beside me looks magical. I see Anu in a floral-green dress that looks like what I wore when we first met. Her world looks so different. The tall glass separates us as our palms are touching each other.

Time starts passing, and I don't move. I can hear her talking to me, but I don't know what to say. I start crying. I see the smile on her face lessen as she calls out to me. That's when I understand I can't go.

I truly want to help Anu, and she is such a great person, but I can't leave. I honestly like my life here, and I do not think I am ready for a big switch yet. What if I am gone for long? What if I never come back?

I know Anu has got that inner fighting spirit. She needs to work on letting it out. I know she can.

Anu starts crying.

"You got this Anu; I believe in you. It's been the best week talking to you. I don't know if we'll be able to meet again, but I hope someday I can visit. I am so sorry." I say.

"Thank you, and I hope I can visit too." I hear her say in a faint voice.

The glass begins to fade away, and so does Anu. Before I know it, I am back in the cave, and our mystery wood is gone. I cry as I hug myself on the floor.

These last few days have been an exciting experience for me. I never imagined experiencing something so surreal. I will never regret meeting Anu or my decision to stay. I get up from my position and walk out of the cave.

Although our relationship was behind our screens, I felt the warmth of having a friend. I believe we needed to meet to make each other better. After all, you are your own best friend and biggest supporter. Wouldn't you agree?

Now it's time to face my reality with her experiences in my heart. I hope they remain in yours too.

THE END.