

I had always thought that when one became a millionaire, something about them would physically change. Maybe their heads would get bigger or smaller, or their skins would glow bright like a halogenic lamp.

I also secretly wondered if their attitude would change too. Maybe they would suddenly become more charismatic or friendly or just suddenly slip into their new millionaire skins like a movie role. Knowing how to sip champagne from tall glasses, burp in people's faces knowing they'd never complain or react, and how to laugh in that low reverberating tone that sets poverty on fire.

But the first time my father had two million naira in his account, he did not look any different. I looked at him with my head slightly bent to the left and slightly squinting, checking every feature for the change that my teenage brain had expected to see. But he had looked physically unchanged to me back then.

Things started changing around the house though. Slowly, we had more food, new clothes, my skin glowed and my ass got fatter from all the extra protein I could finally afford to eat.

Also though, my father became more distant, less friendly. We still talked and laughed, but there was an aloofness that was alien and very uncomfortable. It wasn't very noticeable, but I could see it, feel it and even smell it vividly because I have always been very intuitive.

That is by the way and not where this side of my story begins though. My story begins with me sitting on a bed next to someone I love, and writing this story...

Love. What exactly is love? I think that I might have internalized the issues that I noticed in my parents' marriage, making me want perfection in people that I love. Making me unable to forgive, and making me move on from people immediately they did anything that even remotely deviated from my wants, my wishes and my desires. It just always had to be about me and only me. Making me afraid that like my father, any man who wasn't already rich by the time I knew and loved him, would become distant the moment he made some millions or billions.

Well, until I met Emmanuel. I have always dithered between the choices of believing in love at first sight and not. But I remember that afternoon on the 16th of November when I walked outside with my best

friend from the boy's quarters where I lived, feeling very strongly that her male best friend who she was about to introduce me to, was going to have sweaty palms. I vividly remember the very first moment that my eyes met him. How shy he was, and how he reached out with his soft palm clammy with sweat and took my hand gently in his.

I had expected that he would be taller after viewing his pictures, but my mind adjusted immediately to the reality of him. The mental adjustment to his physique was the very first of all the adjustments I have had to make.

There is no way that I would have known that he was going to be the absolute love of my life at that point. I remember stealing glances at him, and how immensely I enjoyed his discomfiture around me. How he looked at me, spoke to me. I felt seen, heard, truly and thoroughly felt. And I had felt lust. I wanted him to touch me. I wanted to feel his soft sweaty palms cup my breasts while he looked into my eyes with that innocent adoration on his face.

I was taken by Emmanuel, but I was so afraid. I was afraid that if I let myself love him, that he would hurt me just like everyone else in the past. I was afraid that the way his smile made my whole body come alive, and how his voice made my clit jubilate in my panties was too good to be true. All I could think about was he and I naked in a room alone and exploring each other's bodies to the fullest.

But my expectations of perfection started to manifest on that very first day. I was triggered by so many things he did. On the way home from KFC after he had fed me chicken and said a million times how beautiful I was, he made a joke about me and my best friend being short, and I was immediately triggered. And when he pinched me before playfully grabbing my hand, I decided to never talk to him or see him again. But our best friend stepped in. Sholape.

Sholape made us hug and make up after I flared up and refused to talk to Emmanuel. Something stood out to me though. He was ready to apologize. He did not launch into insults like most men would. Instead, he relaxed, understood that I was triggered, and walked me into my estate alongside Sholape.

I could not stop thinking about Emmanuel. His beautiful eyes and his amazing oral and physical hygiene were apparent to me. I could not help the sexual magnetism that I rarely ever feel with a man. I wanted

him on my bed. I wanted him beside me, inside me, all around me. It was not a desire to make love, but to fuck and he thoroughly fucked in return.

Then the long nights spent awake and exchanging texts on whatsapp began. And a few weeks later, he invited me over to his house. I panicked because I wanted him, but I also did not want him. I was still in a relationship with another man who I still lived with at the time, and who had broken me into smithereens. I was afraid that I was falling in love with Emmanuel and that it was just a recipe for disaster. But when he kissed me the first time at his house, everything felt right. I was too shy to kiss him back, so I let him kiss me until I found the courage and peace to open my mouth and let him savor me like his last meal. He turned me open and left no stone unturned. Emmanuel was quite the lover. He seemed to know exactly where to touch me, how to touch me, and I did not question why he wanted to touch me in the first place. Kissing him was heady. I felt like a teenage girl in love all over again. He took his time too. There was urgency, but also patience. Like we both wanted to tear each other apart in the best ways possible, while also preserving each other. We talked, ate, fucked a few times, and I felt sated. I felt like everything was going to be alright as long as I was with him. I believed him when he told me that he loved me. And God, I loved him so deeply that it made me cry my eyes out. After how unfair love had been to me, I could scarcely believe how completely in love with him I was. That was merely the first of such rendezvous.

Then things started to fall apart. We met again after our first sex date. It was at Chicken Republic, where we ate and tried to not tear each other up with the sexual tension that was still very present between us. We tried to meet up a few times, but it just did not happen for a while. Communication dwindled, and the honeymoon phase was quickly over because I started to see his flaws.

I started to see what looked like lies and what certainly was avoidance. How he seemed to just disappear after a conflict between us, and how he was laid back and chill. Too laid back and chill. I wanted love that was racy. I wanted love that possessed every fibre of my existence. Love that would speak for itself. Love that was alive enough to get up on its own legs and walk, jump, run and fly without my ever having to do too much.

And I had that with Emmanuel for a while, until I didn't. And as the overthinker that I still am, I thought about it excessively. It did not help that I have had really ugly experiences with love and people in the past because I told myself the worst things about Emmanuel. He was breadcrumbing me, and I was ready to move on from him. And even the thought of that did not make it any easier to move on and shut him out of my heart for my own protection.

I talked about it, complaining bitterly. And he apologized each time promising to do better, but it didn't happen exactly how I wanted it. And then, I started to notice a pattern in my romantic life. I was placing men on the same pedestal as my dad, and treating them like they had made his mistakes. Rather than allow myself to love, live and make my own mistakes, I was trying so hard to get the people I loved to follow the scripts I had in my head of how they were supposed to love me.

There is nothing wrong with knowing how you want to be loved as a person, but even in friendships, I demanded and expected my idea of perfection even though I was nowhere near perfect myself. My expectations in love and friendship was my desperate attempt to use other people's love to atone for my own self love deficit.

One evening, I blocked Emmanuel on WhatsApp following an altercation. I felt attacked by him and the world. Looking back now, it could have been resolved better. But with everything else going on, I had jumped into the conclusion that I was being attacked by him and I had defended myself ferociously, blocking him in self defense. I unblocked him some minutes later, but he had blocked me back and that was it. Emmanuel and I were over.

My brain could not process the entire thing completely. I felt like I was losing my mind but I was also very calm at the same time. I buried myself in work and focused highly on myself. I tried to get under a few other guys in order to get over him, but nobody was Emmanuel. His sense of humor. His laughter: the openness and sincerity of it. How he was my best friend and my confidant. I could tell him almost anything in the world without feeling stupid or naked. I trusted him.

I always used to say that my conversations with him had end-to-end encryption because he would never betray me. I found a friend, playmate, lover and even got sibling vibes sometimes from him but I was willing to let it go because of my past unhealed trauma that was manifesting in the relationship, as well as his. I pumped up my pride and ego, refusing completely to try reach out or talk to him about it.

Every virtual date I had with a new man, I saw more clearly that no one is perfect. I slowly began to pump more love into myself. I allowed myself to meditate more, listen to more affirmations and just focus on healing my inner child and my past trauma. I could see that Emmanuel and I both came from different types of dysfunctional families and both wanted to create something with each other that was beautiful and safe. We both shared dreams of being naked and unshamed with each other. Dreams of healing, and learning for ourselves primarily, and each other by extension.

We did not talk to each other for over two months, and I did so much work on myself while I processed the heart break of losing someone who was an extension of the home that I had come to find and experience inside myself. I was determined that it was actually over and as hard as it was, I was struggling to move on even though I secretly wished that we could get back together and give it another shot. That did not happen though...

Thinking back at how far we've come in such a short time, I can't help but feel a bittersweet twang like the chime of a guitar in the pit of my belly. I am ending this story sitting on a couch in Emmanuel's house and looking at a picture of his mother and himself hoisted opposite me.

How am I here right? Well, my love for Emmanuel and his love for me was bigger than both our egos. It is really not every day that a person walks into people that are as good for them as Emmanuel and I are for each other.

On an unremarkable night in June, I drank way more alcohol than anybody ever truly needs. And even then, Emmanuel was the last person that I thought about texting or calling because my ego comes first before anything and/or anyone else. But my friends fell asleep after hours and hours on the phone and I dialed my brother's number but somehow, it showed up as Emmanuel's number.

I was surprised that I still had his number on my phone because I had blocked him and deleted everything that would remind me of him from my phone just so I could move on.

The phone rang, and he didn't pick up the call before I realized my drunken mistake and ended the call. I then sent a text telling him that the call was a mistake. I was so ashamed of myself for having called and texted him when I woke up the next day, but what could I do?

He texted back that he missed me, and little by little, conversations ensued, I overthought everything driving myself almost to insanity, but finally decided to try again. Besides my pride and ego, I wanted to. Emmanuel was everything that I had ever prayed for and manifested and his flaws were not going to be my reason for not trying especially when I still believed in us so strongly.

I have decided to stay with Emmanuel and to grow with him. We have come such a long way in under a year, evolving, healing, learning to understand each other better. For two people who have been so brutalised my life and love in the past, we make a pretty formidable team.

I am so happy with him that I sometimes catch myself with my eyes closed, waiting for morning and to face my reality. I am learning that some people deserve a million chances because they are just that special. And that love is not always as sweet and romantic as the books and movies thought me. I have learned that if I will love anyone, I might as well go as hard as I possibly can and allow myself to be vulnerable. I don't even mind looking foolish for Emmanuel. And I don't because he never makes me feel that way.

I have spent the past week with him after he got a varicocelelectomy, and even wounded and healing, he is the sweetest, most supportive and emotional mature man that I have ever loved. Every day in the passing week has been like a long date and a sleepover. He is always laughing. He touches me so much and it makes me realize how starved of loving physical contact I have been for the past years.

I am still trying to not expect perfection. I am still trying to keep healing so I don't bleed on him especially because he never bleeds on me. I am still learning that there can be an us if we both work hard enough and then let it...

