

The Elevator

The moment they walked into that elevator; her life changed forever. Do you like makeup?

Stranger Danger!

AJ, as her friends and colleagues affectionately referred to her, held the position of Legal Officer at a prestigious magic circle law firm in Lagos, Nigeria. The firm occupied the 12th floor of the illustrious GBT Towers in Ikoyi. She was an enigma to those in her life; to her coworkers, she presented herself as reserved and diligent, to her parents, a “good girl”, and to her best friend, a “certified *werey*” (wild card).

On one particularly dreary Friday in July, AJ found herself locked in a six-hour battle of back-to-back meetings, a colourful berating 20-minute phone call with her relentless boss, and finally, to add salt to injury, the delivery person from *Doomia* had managed to pilfer the chicken from her food. It appears her village people were seriously chasing her. The only remedy in sight was to bury her sorrows in slumber, a prospect she eagerly anticipated.

To kick the ball rolling, she immersed herself in the melodies of Beyoncé's "Break My Soul," seeking to elevate her spirits and rekindle the flames of liberation. Did she despise her job? Absolutely. Was her boss “breaking her soul”? Most definitely. Would she quit? Hell no! Does Beyoncé know that “sapa” is real?

For AJ, the interpretation of Beyoncé's "Release Your Wiggle" involved consuming a tub of her favourite flavour of Ben & Jerry's ice cream, “Half – baked”, while binge-watching episodes of the iconic sitcom, *Friends*.

As she swayed to Beyoncé's rhythms, the elevator stopped on the 9th floor ushering in two men. She paid them no heed; she was firmly entrenched in the Renaissance album. She, however, noticed the taller gentleman's persistent attempts to capture her attention. She contemplated ignoring him but, at the last moment, opted for civility.

"Were you talking to me?" she inquired, flashing her ever polished but somewhat forced smile, revealing dimples that looked like they'd been etched into her cheeks.

"Yes, I was just saying, we started the day together, and now we're ending it together," the man replied.

"Yeah, it would seem so," she reluctantly replied, secretly praying for the elevator doors to rescue her.

"How was your day?" he continued, undeterred by her initial indifference.

"Well, I'm currently engaged in this pointless conversation with you, so what do you think?" AJ wanted to say. However, what came out of her mouth instead was, "Fine, thank you. How was yours?"

Finally, the elevator reached the ground floor, but the doors seemed to linger prolonging her misery. "I'm Ikenna" The man quickly introduced himself whilst the second stranger exited the lift.

Reluctantly, she replied, "AJ."

"Do you remember me at all?" Ikenna inquired.

She furrowed her brow in confusion until Ikenna mentioned, "We spoke about makeup the other day?" That's when it struck her.

The peculiar gentleman from the elevator a few days ago! She recalled the odd encounter when a stranger had complimented her looks and inquired about her fondness for makeup. Initially, she had doubted her hearing, but the expression on his face had affirmed that she had heard correctly. "Was this stranger implying that she was ugly?" she had wondered. Upon arriving at the 9th floor, the mysterious stranger exited the elevator and casually mentioned, "I'm good with makeup. I'll send you pictures."

The elevator doors closed swiftly, leaving her bewildered and the words "What the hell?" hanging in the air. She spent the rest of the day examining herself in the mirror, grappling with the unsettling notion that perhaps she wasn't as attractive as she had thought.

"Oh my gosh! I remember you now!" AJ suddenly exclaimed. "Are you a MUA or something? Because I honestly thought you were using style to call me ugly that day ", she said.

"No oo! How can I call a beautiful girl like you ugly? I was just promoting my work, let me give you my Instagram handle so you can check my work out." He replied.

She unlocked her phone and handed it to him. When he gave her back, the name Ikenna GBT was displayed boldly on her phone.

Ikenna chuckled. "So no," he clarified, "I'm not a makeup artist. I've seen you around and noticed you've always worn makeup. I think you're beautiful, and I'd like to get to know you better. That's my number; I'll give you a call tonight. I hope you have a lovely evening, just like yourself. Good night."

With that, he left her standing there, her mouth still agape.

Sharp guy!

It's not giving!

Her weekend flew by like a lightning bolt, disappearing in the blink of an eye. Amidst household chores and late-night calls from her demanding boss, her plans for a peaceful weekend of rest went straight down the drain. Just when she thought she might finally have a moment to herself, Ikenna called. At first, she contemplated ignoring his call, but as a devoted member of the single ladies' club of Lagos for five years, she decided to swallow her pride.

"So, have you missed me?" his voice interrupted her thoughts.

"Miss ke? Isn't it a bit early for that?" she thought, "so how is your weekend going?" she replied, changing the topic.

After several *hmm*, *Ohh wow!* and *are you serious?* she decided she had, had enough and concocted an excuse to escape the humdrum conversation.

"Oh, I have to prepare dinner now and get ready for work tomorrow, so we'll chat later," she said.

" You can cook? I love women that can cook not all these yeye Twitter feminists!" he replied, a tad overly enthusiastic.

"How do you respond to this? " She thought, staring at her phone for what felt like ages.

"Hello, are you still there?" he asked.

"Got to go, bye!" she replied quickly, promptly ending the call before he could bid his farewells.

After a week of WhatsApp texts and increasingly annoying calls from Ikenna, she decided it was time to let him know that he was coming on too strong. In just one week, he had invited her to his house twice and made several inappropriate comments about her body. From the onset, she knew she wasn't attracted to him, but had considered the possibility of friendship. However, given his misogynistic views and hate for feminists, even friendship seemed out of the question.

Ikenna couldn't seem to grasp how uncomfortable he was making her. "I like you, and it is irrelevant that we just met," he said confidently.

"Do you even know what I do or where I work in GBT Tower?" she asked, attempting to gauge his level of interest.

"None of those matters. When I see something, I like, I go for it," he declared.

"Agbako nla! (misfortune)" she muttered to herself. Without hesitation, she blocked his number, putting an end to the overly assertive advances.

ewww!

The Elevator again?

Several weeks had passed since she had blocked Ikenna. During this time, she had imagined various scenarios of him cornering her in the elevator, questioning why she had blocked him. However, it seemed her ancestors answered her prayers, as she hadn't seen him since then, or so she thought.

On another Friday evening, AJ was leaving the office late at night to enjoy a "blissful weekend" at home (*delulu!*), when suddenly, the elevator let out a shrill noise and came to a jarring halt between two floors. After about five long minutes, the stark reality of her predicament began to dawn on her. She was trapped in the elevator with a stranger on a Friday night, well past working hours. What intensified her unease, was how unbothered the strange man seemed to be about their predicament. Hadn't he heard about the young doctor who had tragically fallen to her death in an elevator just last week?

The thought of plunging to her death was enough to wake her flight or fight responses. Determined to survive, she was ready to bang the elevator doors when the elevator roared to life and began to descend. This time, both she and the stranger screamed at the top of their lungs until the elevator screeched to a halt once again.

Staring at each with fear etched across their faces, they instinctively began banging on the door. "Somebody Help! Help!" They screamed. After what felt like an eternity, someone heard their desperate cries and managed to pry open the door, pulling them to safety. Their rescuer, they would later discover, was the maintenance worker who had stepped out to buy *agbo* (*herbal concoction*) from a customer and had become distracted.

"Ahan! Una no see say lift dey unda maintenance?" He exclaimed with disgust. She was too relieved to confront the man about the lack of a sign when she boarded the elevator on the 12th floor.

She and the stranger, now bonded by their shared near-death experience, sat on the floor, reflecting on the fact that they could have lost their lives just moments ago. Then, in a surprising turn, they both burst into laughter.

"My name is Kunle," he managed to say amidst the laughter.

"I'm AJ," she replied.

Love wan tin tin...

AJ and Tunde would occasionally run into each other on the stairs, sharing a laugh about their harrowing experience before going about their respective days. Following their brush with death, both had secretly vowed never to use the elevator again. Of course, they would eventually break this promise, but at least they tried for a few weeks.

During one of their chance encounters on the stairs, AJ discovered that Tunde was a colleague of Ikenna's and had been the second man accompanying Ikenna in the elevator weeks ago.

"I knew I had seen your face somewhere!" she exclaimed.

"So, what happened between you and Ikenna?" Kunle inquired.

"Nothing, really," she replied.

"Really? You guys didn't go out or something?"

"God forbid!"

"Ahan! That bad?" He chuckled

"Ehnnn, worse than bad!" AJ exclaimed.

Kunle laughed so hard he nearly choked. "Better don't choke and die," she teased. "It would be a shame if you died on the stairs after narrowly escaping death in the elevator just two weeks ago."

"So, you've been counting the days too?" He commented. She nodded, lost in introspection.

"Do you want to celebrate our cheating death?" he playfully suggested.

"Ahan, smooth guy!" she thought to herself, her cheeks reddening. "Are you asking me on a date?" she asked, managing to maintain her composure.

"Hmm... I didn't exactly think of it as a date," he replied. "We can call it our *deathversary*, you get it?" He quipped.

"That was dry!" she said between laughs. "Alright, sure."

"Cool. Can I have your number so I can plan something and send you the details?" he asked.

"Yeah, sure," she said, handing him her phone.

"So, you just come with your beautiful self, and I'll take care of the rest," He said, making his exit.

And just like that, the Chairlady of the single ladies' club of Lagos, took her first step out of the forsaken club.

Drum roll ladies and gents, please queue, Sunny Neji's Oruka!

Makeup

Their "deathversary" had evolved into a series of intimate dates, each brimming with late-night conversations and laughter. By the end of November, they officially became a couple, and AJ found solace in Kunle's presence, casting aside the weight of her dreary job and toxic boss. Their bond flourished, and as AJ's birthday drew near, she harboured plans for a quiet movie night, oblivious to the elaborate surprise life had in store.

For her birthday, Kunle planned a special dinner date at her favourite restaurant in Victoria Island. He surprised her with her favourite perfume, Lady Dior, along with flowers and a dress; (*love is sweet ooo!*). The dress he got her fit like a glove, accentuating her curves. "She wondered how he had gotten her perfect fit and made a mental note to question her best friend about this later".

As she prepared to leave, she got a call from the gate, "Aunty you get anoda package oo! E be like say na our new oga send am!" the security guard exclaimed.

"Another gift again? This was becoming the best birthday ever!!" She danced.

In haste, she tore open the package, anticipation turning to dismay as she unveiled a framed photograph of herself, with a large red 'X' marked across her face with a note "*I hope you still like makeup,*" written in bold crimson ink. She was horrified by the unsettling gift. "Why would he send this?" She considered cancelling her date with Kunle, but that would only grant him the satisfaction of ruining her day, - and that she wouldn't allow.

At the restaurant, Kunle noticed something was amiss. "What's wrong? You don't like the food?" he inquired, sensing her discomfort.

She had tried to hide her anguish and failed. "No, it's lovely. I'm fine, don't worry," she lied.

"Babe, you and I both know you're not, talk to me. What's wrong?" he implored.

There was no point in hiding it anymore. She recounted the disturbing incident with the gift, and as expected, Kunle was furious. "What? Who the hell sent you that?" he exclaimed.

"Lower your voice," she whispered, noticing people at the restaurant staring in their direction. "I think it's Ikenna," she said hesitantly.

"Ikenna? I swear I'll kill that guy. " He said angrily.

"Babe, please don't do anything rash," she pleaded sensing a storm brewing.

But as it often goes with men and their egos, Kunle couldn't let it slide. A brawl erupted between Kunle and Ikenna in their office, resulting in their suspension. The following week, Ikenna submitted his resignation letter after receiving a police invitation regarding his ominous gift. AJ was relieved that she no longer had to deal with him and redirected her focus to her work and her loving partner.

One fateful evening at work, AJ found herself inundated with tasks when she received a call instructing her to pick up a package. She swiftly headed for the elevator, as she couldn't spare the time to take the stairs. With a tight deadline looming, the last thing she could afford was to incur her boss's wrath that evening.

Stepping onto the ground floor, she anticipated the courier with her package, only to find the space eerily dark and vacant. True to her Yoruba roots, she was never one to be caught off guard, she instinctively dashed toward the elevator.

Just as the doors were about to close, an arm appeared from the dark, halting the progress of the doors. Suddenly, a hooded figure emerged, and fear gripped her heart. Panicked, her fingers desperately pressed the buttons to seal the doors, but it was too late.

"I hope you still like makeup," the menacing figure said, sending shivers down her spine. Before she could react, she felt something hot searing her face. As the elevator doors sealed shut, she heard Ikenna's sinister laughter whilst her horrified screams echoed as the elevator slowly began its ascent.