

“This love is a lot o, shey you will not follow her to her husband’s house.” An aunty jested, while patting me on my back in an effort to console me.

“Clean your face now, you know makeup is expensive.” Another said, I could hear the irritation in her voice as if she couldn’t fathom why I was crying on the best day of my best friend’s life.

“Why she dey cry?”

“Na tears of joy.”

I stared at Ayanfe, in all her white glory. My Ayanfe stood before me, looking like an angel, my angel, in the soft, golden glow of the stage light, a vision of ethereal beauty in her white wedding gown. The fabric of the gown delicately cascading around her like a flowing river, the bodice hugging her elegant figure, doing justice to her curves. The curves I touched so much that I memorized every part, every nook and cranny, every flaw and every perfection.

I wanted to rip it off her, I wanted to tear at the fabric till there was nothing left. I wanted to tear the pieces off the same way she ripped my heart to shred. I also wanted to be the one beside her, smiling and holding her hands, reciting the vows to be with her through sickness and health, till death do us part.

“Don’t worry, you are next. We will attend your own wedding too” Her mother consoled me, thinking my tears was that of jealousy of not finding a life partner.

The tears on my face weren’t that of joy; they were tears of anger, rage, sadness, regret and maybe even jealousy, her mother was only half right. I was jealous; jealous of the man beside her. My lover was choosing another person, my Ayanfe was no longer mine. She stared back at me knowingly; knowing exactly how I felt.

The Beginning

I met Ayanfe three years ago at one of those Lagos house parties where we all jammed into a room, the air clouded with smoke, the smell of weed almost suffocating you with its familiar smell. I almost changed my mind that day, I almost didn’t go. I almost didn’t pick out the shortest skirt I could find in my wardrobe, I almost didn’t pair it with a black top that showed my cleavage but I had already paid full price for the ticket and I was going to enjoy my money.

When I arrived at the party, I felt a mix of excitement and nervousness. So many unfamiliar faces around, I scrolled through my apps, opening and closing it to quell the nervousness I felt in the pit of my stomach. I heard a loud laughter and whipped my head around, following the sound. Ayanfe stood tall, wearing the prettiest pink dress ever, my eyes roamed to the top of her breast and back up at her face. Our eyes locked; she had caught me looking.

I looked away, feeling the urge to bolt like I had been caught doing something horrible. I moved to the kitchen, maybe what I needed was liquor courage.

As the evening progressed, my nerves started to ease, the liquor was doing its job and the atmosphere was getting cheerful. Somehow my nerves still as I noticed her coming my way.

“You’ve been staring at me for a while, do you know me from anywhere?” She asked me. I didn’t detect any tone of defensiveness, she just looked amused.

“I- You’re beautiful.”

Oh no the liquor.

I was thankful that I was impossible of turning red because I would be the colour of a tomato. She laughed.

"Thank you, you don't look bad yourself." She replied, winking at me and moving along when she sighted her friends.

I wanted her to stay, I wanted to say funny things just to watch her throw her pretty head back in laughter, exposing her delicate neck.

Throughout the night, we found ourselves gravitating toward one another. The more liquor I took, the more loose my tongue felt and I found myself talking about just anything and everything with her. That night was the beginning of a beautiful friendship and a path down a disastrous heartbreak.

The Middle (The Date)

"This or this?"

She asked, holding up two dresses. Ayanfe backed her full-length mirror, hoping I could do a better job of showing her which outfit she should pick.

The first dress was a sage green satin dress with a form-fitting silhouette that accentuated Ayanfe's figure. There was a little drape at the top of the gown, showing her cleavage but elegant enough for it not to be too much.

The second dress, in contrast, was a short frilly pink gown with a heart with a heart-shaped neckline. I often said she looked like a princess wearing that dress, especially when she did little twirls.

The pink one my princess.

"Where are you going?" I asked instead.

She turned her back to me, a familiar move I knew too well when she was trying to avoid confrontation.

"Ayanfe look at me." I demanded. Anger coiling in my belly.

"A date, okay? I'm going on a date."

Was she serious? I flipped open the duvet. My body still slick from sweat of our love-making session that ended a few minutes ago.

"With who?"

"You don't know him, babe please let it go. It's just one date night, besides it's free food." She added the last part, hoping to lighten the mood.

"If it's food you want, I can take you out Ayanfe." I said, my voice taking on a pleading note.

She avoided my eyes, fiddling the helm of the pink dress.

"Talk to me." I groaned in frustration. I hated it when she was like this.

"I just can't believe you are going on a date with a man and you did not tell me."

Ayanfe dropped the clothes on the bed, crossing her arms defensively, her brow furrowed. "I didn't think it would be such a big deal."

My frustration bubbled to the surface. "Sometimes, I think you forget that we are lovers."

"Lovers? Yes, we are but you are not a man, okay? I wish you were but you are not!"

The room seemed to grow smaller as she uttered those words, sharp and unfiltered, every word striking me, like an arrow to my heart.

The silence hung heavy, as the weight of her words enveloped me.

She dressed up angrily, wearing the pretty pink gown. I was too hurt to tell her how beautiful she looked and how I wanted it to be me she was dressing up for.

“Don’t stay up, I’ll be back late.” She said, not sparing me a glance before slamming the door. I collapsed in bed, letting out a strangled sob, burying my face into the sheet as angry tears cascaded down my face.

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“Oh my god, he’s so sweet.” Ayanfe squealed, showing off the necklace her date got her. It was a silver piece with a heart pendant. Very boring, I would have done better.

“It looks cheap.”

I regretted those words when the smile faded off her face.

“Ayanfe, I’m sorry, I was ki-”

“Why are you never happy for me? Why does everything have to be hard with you?” She threw at me, cutting off my apology.

Everything was hard with me? I had to listen to her day after day, gushing over a man she barely knew.

“Don’t blow it out of proportion, I didn’t m-”

This time, the sound of her ringtone cut me off. From the smile that formed on her face, I knew exactly who it was.

“Hi, yes thank you so much.” She chipped, ignoring me, forgetting I existed.

The Middle (The Engagement)

In a small cozy restaurant on the island, Ayanfe stood before her kneeling boyfriend, sparkling engagement ring held out between them. Everyone in the room hooting and clapping, urging her to say yes. Everyone except me. I wanted to throw up.

“Yes, lfe mi, yes.” She uttered those words, oblivious of what they did to me.

lfe mi. She used to call me that, she would whisper those words to me while trailing kisses down my body, while playing with my hair, when she was calling my attention to something.

I bit back a strangled sound threatening to escape my lips and plastered a fake smile on my face, clapping along with everyone else.

He slipped the ring into her finger gently, a smile on his face as he sealed the deal to the love that promised him a ‘forever home’.

Ayanfe laughed with glee, a carefree melody that I hadn’t heard in a long time, the one that drew me to her like bees to honey. I could see the emotions flutter across her face; the joy radiating and glowing as she admired her ring.

Our eyes locked as she looked at my direction and quickly looked away as our friends flocked around her, congratulating her and asking to be invited to the wedding.

The pasta I had eaten earlier threaten to forcefully eject itself out of me, my mouth watered and my stomach clenched, I found myself rushing to the restroom, getting on all fours and retching into the toilet bowl. I retched and puked till I started to taste bile, till nothing could come out of me anymore.

I tasted saltiness on my tongue and it took me a while to realize that I was crying, tears were streaming down my face, my makeup smudged beyond redemption. I didn’t want to get back to the party, I was tired of faking the smiles and squealing. I wanted to be in bed, crying my heart

out.

I opened my bolt app and requested a ride home, sitting on the toilet seat, waiting for my ride to arrive.

The Middle (Bachelorette Party)

“Please come, I can’t do this without my best friend.”

I scoffed.

I had read that line over and over again, wondering how she reduced what we had to ‘being best friends’, what best friends did the things we did?

I should ignore her text, I should sit in my newly gotten apartment, trying out new hobbies and maybe looking up therapists online. Why was I dressing up and putting the restaurant’s address on google map?

The night started innocently enough with dinner at the restaurant, everyone smiling and laughing, sharing stories of how they met Ayanfe and how they are happy she had found the love of her life. I forced out smiles and laughter, biting back remarks of me telling them that I was the love of her life, not the man she chose to marry.

We moved from the restaurant to the club; the music was loud, and the dance floor packed. Looking at Ayanfe was bitter-sweet, she was all smiles and laughter, dancing and drinking so much alcohol. Knowing how light-weighted she was, her getting tipsy was inevitable. I tried my best to ignore the sash around her waist that said ‘bride-to-be’. I tried to ignore how my heart leapt when I thought of her getting married the next day. My breath closed around my throat and anxiety filled me up. I needed to leave.

As if reading my mind, Ayanfe walked up to me.

“Are you leaving?”

I nodded, not trusting myself to speak.

“Please don’t, I don’t feel too good.” She said, she was swaying on her feet. She had too much alcohol to drink.

“I’m going to throw up.”

With that I took her hands and led her to the rest room, excusing us from her friends and promising to bring her right back.

“Here let me hold your hair.” I said, reaching for her hair. Without warning, she grabbed me and planted a kiss on my lips.

“I love you.”

My world stopped; did this mean I had hope?

“Then be with me Ayanfe, be with me!”

“I can’t,”

“Why not?”

“I just can’t, you don’t get it. If you were a man, it would be different.” She cried.

Those words again. I was tired, I was drained. I needed to leave.

“Ayanfe, I’m going home. I’ll see you at your wedding tomorrow.”

I left.

The End (The Wedding)

Ayanfe had asked me to be her bridesmaid. I couldn't say no, even though it meant standing her side as she married him, the man who had stolen her heart. Being so close yet so far from the girl I loved.

All these years I had harboured deep love for Ayanfe, I watched her cry, laugh, sleep, eat, sing... I had been there for her and seeing her on the altar, staring at another person who wasn't me was heart-wrenching.

As the ceremony progressed, the officiant spoke of love, commitment, and the journey ahead. I watched her nod, listening intently and smiling at her husband-to-be. My heart ached with emotions; I wanted it to stop.

As the time came for anyone with objections to speak, my throat tightened. I wanted to scream, to tell everyone that Ayanfe was mine; as if she could read my mind, she glanced at me, her expression filled with fear. Fear of what I could do, fear of ruining her life.

I swallowed my words and pushed it deep down into my belly, burying it forever. The ceremony went on without disruption.

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The Reception

"It's time for the bridesmaid speech."

Panic seized me as I made my way to the stage, my eyes still red from crying. My makeup had been reapplied but I couldn't shake the feeling that I was making a mistake. I looked around at the guests, they were smiling and expectant. I swallowed hard, feeling like the far walls of the hall was closing on me.

Grabbing the microphone with shaky hands, I cleared my voice.

"Ayanfe." I said, my voice coming out shaky.

"From the day I met Ayanfe, I knew she was heaven-sent. She is the most gorgeous, selfless, understanding human I've ever met. I don't think I'll be here today without her; I mean literally since it's her wedding."

Laughter erupted.

"She's my lov- I mean best friend."

I glanced at her and look on her face disapproved of my slip-up; my hands shook.

Then, without warning, I turned to guests, "I'm sorry, I can't do this." My voice wavered.

My heart pounding, my eyes welling up with tears.

"I can't stand here and pretend Ayanfe. I can't."

I dropped the microphone and ran out.

Outside, I stumbled to a halt, my tears flowed freely, my voice ragged. I flagged down a bike, crying as I gave the bike man directions.

"Madam are you okay?" He asked, concerned.

"I'm fine, just go."

Ayanfe had made her decision, she abandoned me and picked a man over me. I wasn't a man; I would never be one. I couldn't stay back and watch the love of my life be happy with someone else.

I was leaving, for good.