

PUBLIC TRANSPORT DIARIES

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The day your father told you that you would start taking public transport you genuinely thought he hated you.

He had to be a weapon fashioned against you.

You had gotten an opportunity to intern during the holiday. You had gotten this opportunity last holiday as well but there was a significant difference. Last time your dad dropped you off in the morning and picked you up at the close of work. When he couldn't make it, he would send his driver or send some money for a cab, or better still you wouldn't go to work.

Now he had informed you of this new "arrangement" and you were simply appalled. How could he do such to you!

"Wait what? What do you mean public transport like bike or what?" Sharon said to you over the phone.

You had called one of your friends to validate your feelings so you wouldn't seem so unreasonable.

"I honestly don't know" you sighed.

"What if you have an accident or you see someone you know" she laughed.

"Right!" you exclaimed because subconsciously the latter part of her statement was what worried you the most about the entire arrangement. You were well aware and terrified of the possibility of being kidnapped, robbed, or getting into a horrible accident but you dreaded the possibility of being recognized while actively struggling.

"But it's not that crazy though, my dad has asked me to start taking bike as well but I get you".

After the call ended, you started to feel a bit unreasonable considering the fact that your friend was equally yoked with public transport.

"Binyelum can you stop complaining" your sister Ozioma laughed, you could sense she was a little irritated.

"Honestly, you know the prices of things have increased mostly especially fuel" your sister Catherine added.

In your search for validation, you had called your sisters but that wasn't going as you imagined it would. You knew of the increase in fuel prices and didn't need a reminder, as a matter of fact, you were devoted to checking the rate of naira to one dollar daily. What you wanted was someone to listen to you complain and completely agree with every word.

You pulled your last card by trying to read out to them the statistics of all the public transportation dangers that you had researched. The accidents, the kidnappings, the deaths, and all sorts of gory scenarios. Your information to them was nothing new, however, you were hoping it would push them to plead your case to your father.

“We have all taken public transport and we aren’t dead,” Ozioma said.

“Just chill out and stop being such a spoilt brat” Catherine added.

“Haba, don’t say that thing” you replied.

How could she have called you spoilt you, being spoilt has nothing to do with not wanting to risk your life. You were certain now more than ever that it was your sisters who gave your father this crazy idea.

On your first day of work, you were not as excited. In a bid to look professional, you put on a black dress falling slightly below your knee. Luckily for you, your dad drove you to work as per usual. You were sitting in the car all dressed up, passenger princess with no stress as it should be.

“You will start taking public transport from tomorrow” your dad reminded you. You grumbled in your mind.

He began to show you all the routes, the junctions, and the stops. He told you what you would have to say to get you to your destination. He told you the amount of money to give after each ride and he encouraged you to haggle because “everyone in Nigeria is trying to outsmart you”.

As you looked out the window of the car, you could see how people would come down from a motorcycle “bike” and hustle to enter a tricycle “keke”. At some stops, you noticed how four people struggled to fit into the back of a small car.

This man can’t be serious you thought to yourself. How could you possibly do this in your properly ironed fit?

You started considering learning how to drive, which is a lot seeing as you have a crippling fear of driving.

Your dad picked you up from work, further sustaining your delusion that you would not be taking public transport.

The next day, you woke up with a frown. Your dad told you he was going to drop you at the junction for you to take a keke so you would skip the part of taking a motorcycle. His reason was that he was scared of the ghastly accidents that occasionally occur with motorcycles.

If you are scared for my life, why not drop me at work, you thought to yourself.

Your dad reminded you to keep your phone in your bag and only pick up important calls, cautioning you not to put in your headphones to listen to music. He told you to hold your bag close and be smart. “Don’t get into any car that your spirit does not accept” he said in a very serious tone. You wanted to tell him that your spirit only accepted his car but you decided against it and instead deepened your frown.

He dropped you at the first junction and gave you some money. He reminded you to haggle “Price well,” he said before he drove away, you could swear that you heard him laugh.

What the hell is going on right now, you thought to yourself.

Everyone was moving so fast, the keke drivers were urging you to come over to them as well as screaming the directions they were heading to.

You knew this day was coming but that did not make it any less shocking. You were violently snapped out of your trance, a Toyota Corolla was relentlessly honking at you, you quickly moved to the side of the road but not before the car raised chunks of wet sand which splashed at the hem of your grey work trousers. A bike man in no words threatened to knock you down, he was moving with the speed of light. Ignoring your disgust at the situation, you decided to get moving by following the crowd. You were able to sort yourself out and quickly entered a keke, holding your bag close to you. You were the last to enter which meant you had to sit with the driver.

He began to move and you held on for your life, you kept imagining how you could easily fall out onto the coal tar and break a limb or even worse ruin your skin!

You imagined a scenario where someone you knew would see you and laugh at your struggle.

You were scared and at the same time fascinated by the tricycle. It kept on swerving past cars not caring about the traffic lights being on red. You tried to suppress how much you enjoyed the air hitting your face because you were dedicated to your anger.

You finally dropped at your first junction, you paid with a clean naira note and the note you got in return looked like it had passed through the hands of thousands, you could not make out the colour of the note, it was an odd shade of brown. From that moment on, you made up your mind to always pay with the dirtiest naira note you had.

At this point, you were confused and overwhelmed. Your dad had told you that you needed to cross the road to get a vehicle going straight to your office. You knew how to cross the road of course, you’re a big girl, yet you followed closely behind two men who were crossing the road at that time for some “guidance”.

There was a line of small cars and some men screaming their stops while urging you to get into their vehicles without even knowing your actual destination. You saw a man that had a striking resemblance to a Sunday school teacher you had when you were younger, you were convinced that he was the one. He was one of the drivers announcing their destination, “Small world” you thought.

You went towards him in an attempt to get into his vehicle, you believed you would be safer with him and there would be a slimmer chance of being a victim of a heinous act.

“Do you have change?” he asked you in a tone that made you realize that he did not recognize you.

How could you have expected him to recognize you, as a teenager you always sat behind the speakers in church, you never made an attempt to contribute to the general discussion and when you were picked to answer a question, you feigned ignorance to discourage anyone from further engaging you. You felt silly for wanting him to recognize you as you had been dreading recognition all day.

He shook his head in disapproval when you showed him your five hundred naira note. You were disappointed but quickly moved to the next vehicle where you had to squeeze in the back with three other people. You envied the man in the front seat because he seemed comfortable. This mode of transportation was the infamous “along”.

You held your bag close to your chest and kept looking outside to avoid missing your stop.

The driver was getting closer to the back of your office and for the first time throughout the ride, you spoke. You didn't respond to the good morning greetings from some passengers, neither did you add to the small talk. You asked the driver to drop you at the back of your office because he wouldn't drop you in front of your office “Ah ah, I no dey go that side na” he said when you had earlier asked if he could drop you at the front.

Conveniently, there was a gate at the back of your office building which served as a shortcut, even shorter than going through the front. You climbed up to your office floor and you walked in panting, not a very graceful entrance.

You couldn't rant about how you had gotten to work because you knew all too well that almost everyone who didn't have a car had gone through the same process or something more tedious.

Work hours went by fast and you had to go home. You mentally prepared yourself for the journey. You called your dad to let him know that you were on your way so he would come to pick you up at the junction where he dropped you off in the morning.

You went out of the office and stood at the stop where a lot of people were already waiting. You waited at that point for over twenty minutes, your annoyance increasing by the minute because none of the vehicles were going to your next stop.

Someone from your office joined you and you greeted her.

“Where are you headed?” She asked.

You told her your next stop.

“Ah ah, you're supposed to cross the road to get a vehicle heading that way”.

“Oh, thank you so much” You felt stupid as you crossed the road. What was the difference between the both sides of the road?

She was right because in less than five minutes you got a vehicle. You sat by the window which was a much better position than earlier during the day. You stared out the window watching the buildings come and go out of sight.

“Your perfume is nice” the man beside you said, he sounded like he had smoked a pack of cigarettes every day for the past year and smelled like it too.

“Thank you” you said forcing an awkward smile, you hoped he would not say anything further.

“What is the name of the perfume?” he said to your disappointment and discomfort.

“I actually don’t remember” You still had your awkward smile plastered on your face. You genuinely did not know the name of the perfume because it was your dad’s perfume that you hurriedly applied on your way out.

The man kept speaking and you were mindlessly nodding while occasionally adding “Oh”, “yeah” and “Wow”. You know not to be rude to strange men because you can never truly tell who is criminally insane.

You were finally in your dad’s car; he had bought some snacks which he signaled to as soon as you got in.

“How was it?” he asked smiling, a mocking smile you believed it to be.

How do you think it was, you thought to yourself but of course you didn’t say that because it’s rude.

“It was fine”.

You got home and you couldn’t be happier. At least I don’t have to go to work every day, you thought.

The next day, you went through the same dreadful journey, matter of fact you went through it for two more weeks. At some point, you assumed you were being punished like your father was trying to teach you a lesson that you had refused to understand.

You gradually began to realize that most people were using public transport. Your friends had been telling you about their movement experiences as well. You recalled seeing a beautiful lady with practically the entire Apple ecosystem, only missing an iPad and a MacBook which you convinced yourself she had in her bag. You also recalled the man who was making a serious-sounding business call and he seemed to be dishing out orders.

However, you definitely would not forget the day you saw a crowd gathered staring at something on the floor. You asked the driver what was going on, “na person fall for there” he answered. ‘God abeg’ you prayed internally.

By the end of the month, you were in a much better place. You understood that the fuel issue was affecting everyone in one way or the other and the world wasn’t choosing to punish you alone, this is simply what the ‘giant of Africa’ had become.

On some occasions, your dad would drop you off and pick you up, which further solidified your point that he was just trying to teach you something you might need in the future.

You still hated having to jump from one vehicle to the other and would rather sit in an air-conditioned car. You hated the smell of burning coal tar. You would also never understand why people you have never met would randomly be rude to you neither would you understand why strange men would insist on collecting your phone number, which you gave them because you have been scarred by the stories of girls who dared to reject such men, of course you blocked them once you were in the comfort of your room.

All factors aside, you are reasonable enough to understand now that public transportation is not an attempt on your life.