

It was the 6th of November in the year 2016. The grandeur of The Afrima Awards at Eko Hotel was poised to create a night etched in memory. As I meticulously surveyed my closet, it dawned on me to dial the cameraman's number, ensuring he'd arrive before me. Just as my finger pressed the digits, an inexplicable sensation rippled through my body. Tade's voice echoed on the line as he picked up.

"Hello Tade," I began, "how early do you reckon you can make it to the show? Remember, the red carpet starts at 5."

"I'll be there at 4, sir," Tade boomed, his response punctuated with determination.

As the call ended, I couldn't help but wonder about the peculiar sensation from earlier. Was it just pre-show jitters? After all, I'd been conducting red carpet interviews for years. The sensation was unfamiliar, and I dismissed it, focusing on my task at hand.

My closet revealed an array of outfits, a testament to my on-screen persona. The spotlight demanded a refined dress sense, and I, dubbed "Ebuka the slayer," took pride in it. After contemplation, I settled on a navy blue striped shirt, plain black pants, black moccasins, and a Louis Vuitton black belt. A quick glance in the mirror revealed a minor cut, a souvenir from my recent haircut. Curiously, my barber Babalola seemed to nick me more frequently lately. I made a mental note to address the issue with him.

A final touch of Tom Ford's Black Orchid perfume and I stepped out of my bachelor pad, clutching my press tag and invitation. The engine roared to life, and an odd shiver ran through me, reminiscent of an electric current. Shaking off the sensation, I switched on the radio, letting Toke Makinwa's voice accompany me. The clock showed 4:30, and I anticipated the usual Saturday traffic might hinder my punctuality. Eko Convention Center loomed closer, and the growing traffic attested to the event's grandeur. Yet, seasoned in the industry, I navigated the congestion with ease.

As I approached the gates, the TBN crew stood ahead, but I remained unperturbed. Parking my car, I emerged into a warm breeze, absorbing the burgeoning crowd. Lagos, the city of youth forever ready to revel, held me in its grip. Lost in thought, my phone's shrill ring jolted me back. Tade's voice announced his readiness. With purpose, I strode toward the red carpet, whistling Dagrin's "If I Die." The song's tune had lingered in my mind, and a tinge of irony struck me.

"Ebuka! Ebuka!" Familiar tones spun me around—Tade. We exchanged pleasantries and began microphone testing. "Testing, 1, 2..." Adjustments made, the TBN anchor Funmi and her cameraman appeared nearby. A casual greeting and she moved on, setting up just a few feet away. Celebrities would soon grace the carpet, and, as always, I stood prepared.

The evening commenced early, unfolding under the spotlight at 8 pm. Celebrities thronged the red carpet, each a unique story awaiting narration. Engaging with them, I felt my tension wane. Conversation flowed effortlessly, and time sailed on. By 11 pm, the red carpet closed, and Tade and I joined the dimly lit hall for the main show. This aspect of my role I relished—the backstage pass, the VIP seat, and, of course, the complimentary cuisine. As the night advanced, comedian Alibaba drew laughter, while artists like Timaya, Tekno, and Yemi Alade claimed their awards.

When Tiwa Savage graced the stage, fatigue seeped in, evident in my yawn. Exhaustion settled upon me, and the time had come to depart. Glancing at my watch, the hands indicated well past 2 am. I tapped Tade, signaling my intention to leave. He requested a lift, asking to wait until Tiwa's performance concluded. In a mere ten minutes, her act finished, and we stepped into the night, Tade laden with equipment. Car unlocked, we settled in. As I navigated the path from Eko Hotel, Tade chose that moment to share his family woes. The journey ahead seemed long.

I tuned the radio to muffle Tade's voice. He comprehended my message and lapsed into silence. Guilt nagged at me, but my eagerness to drop him off and reach my home in Anthony Village surpassed it. Progressing toward Akin Adesola Street, Victoria Island, police officers flagged me down. Their inquiry for a little favor hardly surprised me. I slipped 200 Naira from the glove compartment, their gratitude ringing in my ears as I accelerated. The Nigerian police—your friend after a small bribe.

After a few miles, torchlight beams ahead signaled another police stop. Tade's restlessness beside me mirrored my unease. As I approached, a group of about 20 young men, armed with axes and machetes, surrounded my car. Tade's alarmed voice broke through, "Bros Ebuka, na trap, na trap! Reverse and escape!" Alas, a second assembly of 30 black-clad men blocked our way. Trapped.

I slowed to a halt, their axes hacking at my car, screams punctuating the air, demanding we exit the vehicle. We emerged, pleading, begging for mercy, their triumphant chants drowning our voices. Their prey secured, they led us farther from my car, forcing us to sit on the ground as they bound our hands and legs.

In the face of death, time took on a different dimension. Memories cascaded like a cascade. My family's laughter around the dinner table, my mother's admonitions for sibling rivalry, my triumphs and tribulations—each fragment painted a vivid tapestry. My family, my childhood, my ambitions, they all flashed before me.

"Call the baba, let's not waste time," one of them ordered, and the elderly man approached, adorned with charms. Chants and incantations mingled as he mixed saliva, eggs, and herbs in a bowl. We were instructed to spit into the calabash, obeying with urgency. As he chanted, I pleaded with the universe, explaining my situation, my innocence, and my yearning to do right by my family. A cry of "Baale" filled the air, a plea for the chief's intervention.

Baale, respected among them, approached. Tears welled in my eyes as I beseech him. I recounted my story, the circumstances that led me to the road that night. With a heavy heart, I appealed for mercy. As Tade joined in the plea, Baale turned away without a word. I knew then, my fate was sealed.

Resigned to my destiny, I sat in silence, observing our captors. Suddenly, police vans pulled up, a faint glimmer of hope. The men remained composed, as did the officers. An exchange that suggested familiarity ensued. One officer declared, "Baale said not these ones, not tonight." With remarkable efficiency, they freed us from our bonds, ushering us into their van.

Thus, I escaped death's grasp, saved from Satan's clutches. My car lay in ruins, yet my life was intact. The experience humbled me, reminding me of the fragile nature of existence. As I write this, I plan to embrace life fully, to cherish my family, and to live with purpose. The scars may heal, the car may be repaired, but the lessons and gratitude will endure.