

ANNA'S TRIP

Contemplating my approach, I stole a glance at my wristwatch, revealing a ticking countdown of 40 precious minutes – all the time Aria had granted me. Hidden amid the familiar bitterleaf stalks cultivated by my grandmother, I observed my past self, engrossed in a novel, still in her school uniform while comfortably seated in front of her mother's shop. The uncertainty of the exact year loomed, a mystery imposed by Aria's time machine. I yearned to walk over and reveal every future life's twists but Aria's cardinal rule echoed in my mind: **DO NOT REVEAL YOUR TRUE IDENTITY**. I had to prioritize my mission, to focus on why I had embarked on a 48-hour journey after hearing whispers about a woman named Aria, who had inherited a time-traveling machine from her son. Skepticism initially clouded my thoughts, but now, here I stood, gazing at the young Anna, driven by the need to share financial Wisdom. I glanced at the watch—35 minutes left. I needed a disguise. Leaving my refuge, I ventured away from the once-majestic two-story building.

My steps led me to Vina's house across the bustling junction. Vina had been my friend in primary school. If there was anyone that could help a stranger, it would be Vina. I crossed the bustling road towards the restaurant owned by Vina's mother. Fortunately I found Vina, engrossed in a solitary game of ludo. As soon as her eyes fell on me, a puzzled expression surfaced, like a flicker of curiosity dancing across her features.

"Hello, please I need help." I said, desperately.

"Hi...,' She started in a drawl then asked, 'are you related to Anna?"

"No, I'm Faby," I replied with urgency.

Vina, still puzzled, hesitated momentarily. "You look like my friend Anna, just older."

"Really? I don't know her, but my bag got stolen while I was traveling. I just got my period and I think I'm stained. Could you please lend me a scarf or a wrapper to cover my skirt? Please." I pleaded with a desperate look. Vina thought for a moment then disappeared into the restaurant, she returned seconds later with a yellow scarf. Handing it to me, I expressed my gratitude, my voice nearly trembling. "Thank you so much. God bless you. I really appreciate this. I have to catch my bus now, but your help means a lot." I said as I tied it round my waist.

"No problem." She replied. I quickly moved away, but I could feel her curious eyes on me. At the junction, I pretended to wait for a ride. When I glanced back, I noticed Vina ushering a customer into the restaurant.

Without hesitation, I transformed the scarf into a makeshift hijab. With this disguise, I crossed over to my family house and approached the shop where Anna sat. As she noticed my approach, she instinctively set aside her book to attend to me

I theatrically sighed, pretending to feel the scorching sun. "Goodness! It's so hot today. Can I sit here until it cools down?"

"Okay... good afternoon." Anna greeted me. She settled back into her plastic chair, book in hand.

I took the seat next to her, and silence lingered for a couple of minutes. Trying to spark a conversation, I inquired, "What book are you reading?"

She looked at me with a kind smile. "The new man." Memories of that book flooded back. It was the first 'big' novel I had ever tackled back in my SSS 1, and that gave me an idea of what year I was in.

"School Project?" I asked although I knew the answer

"No." She replied

"I see, so what do you want to be when you grow up? A writer?"

"No, a doctor." She replied. I smiled, recognizing it as a lie, that was my father's dream for me. I felt bad for my younger self who was trying to live up to my father's high expectations. Little did she know that in a few months, her life would soon become even more complicated as my father planned to enroll her in a pre-degree program in medicine at the university.

I leaned in closer. "You know, I once dreamed of becoming a doctor too. But guess what I ended up studying in university?"

Anna lowered her book, her curiosity piqued. "What?"

"Botany," I confessed with a smile. "And I'm glad. Medicine is overrated, honestly. You know, I was your age when I started my pre-degree program at the university. University is a whole new world, especially when you're trying to navigate it while fearing your father, like I did. Suddenly, you have to learn how to handle people and finances without calling your dad for money all the time. Fathers can be pretty intimidating. Would you like some advice for when you leave home?" I asked.

"Okay." She responded, though her interest was veiled by her desire to be nice.

"First of all, have a budget. Plan how you spend your allowance. know what's for essentials like food and what's for miscellaneous, try as much as possible to avoid unnecessary spending. Looking back now I realize I suffered so much because I wanted to help everyone around me, meet their needs but

believe me, it won't be worth it in the end. It is a nice trait but sometimes, you must prioritize yourself. People will leave, and the amount you've spent won't matter. So don't drain yourself financially. Calculate your expenses and always try to have a little savings. Now when you save, Invest in yourself. When you go to University, there will be loads of opportunities for you to learn different skills. Don't shy away. Pick one. Learn a skill. It could be baking, catering or event decoration. Just have a skill you can rely on. Do you write?"

"A little."

"That's amazing, but don't stop there. Find a skill you're passionate about, become excellent at it, and turn it into a source of income. If you're good at baking, people will pay for it. Trust me, they will. You might not be a natural promoter, but it's easy to get started. Post on social media or ask friends for help; that's how you begin. Soon, you'll be making money on your terms, no more relying on your dad every week. With that freedom, you can focus on developing your writing skills. Imagine saving enough to publish your own book. Isn't that nice?"

"Yes." She replied, now interested.

"Good. As your business grows, open a business account and save the profits. Rome wasn't built in a day, right? It's a gradual process, and soon you'll make a name for yourself. And don't doubt yourself. You might be willing to do all these but your mind might tell you cannot. Others did it so you can. Don't let anyone tell you you're not good enough. Believe in yourself because no one else will. Do you understand me?" I asked and she nodded her head methodically, I asked, 'what did you understand?"

"That I should spend wisely, budget, develop a skill, make money, and believe in myself." She summarized.

"Exactly," I affirmed. "Now, write it down in your notebook. So you'll never forget words."

With a smile, She opened her exercise book and began to write. As she scribbled, my wristwatch beeped, reminding me of our limited time. I wanted to say so much, to tell her of the pressures in life that might make suicide seem tempting but assure her of her inner strength to overcome. But I was out of time.

"Go to the university with determination," I urged, unable to restrain myself. "Make money, and prove to your father that writing is not a waste of time. You can build a career out of it."

Realization dawned in her eyes as my words settled in "How did you know my dad doesn't support my writing?" Anna asked, her curiosity piqued. Before I could respond, footsteps approached, and we both turned in time to see Anna's mother appear.

"Go upstairs and have your meal," She mother. Anna turned to bid farewell, but the seat was empty. Confused, she turned to her mother.

"Did you see that girl?"

Her mother, looking puzzled, replied impatiently, "What girl? Hurry up and eat, so you can study."

Anna reluctantly gathered her books, stole one more glance at the now-empty chair, and left with a whirlwind of questions in her mind. One thing was certain – she would never forget that encounter.

Aria gazed at the rainbow-colored mirror in her bedroom, waiting patiently. Time was up. The mirror's colors swirled, intensifying by the second. Suddenly, Anna burst out of the mirror, landing on the floor. Aria rushed to her side, and after a few motionless seconds, Anna stirred, her eyes fluttering open.

"How did it go? Did you tell her everything you wanted to?"

Anna shook her head weakly. "No, but I shared what matters. I hope she listens. It's in her hands now."